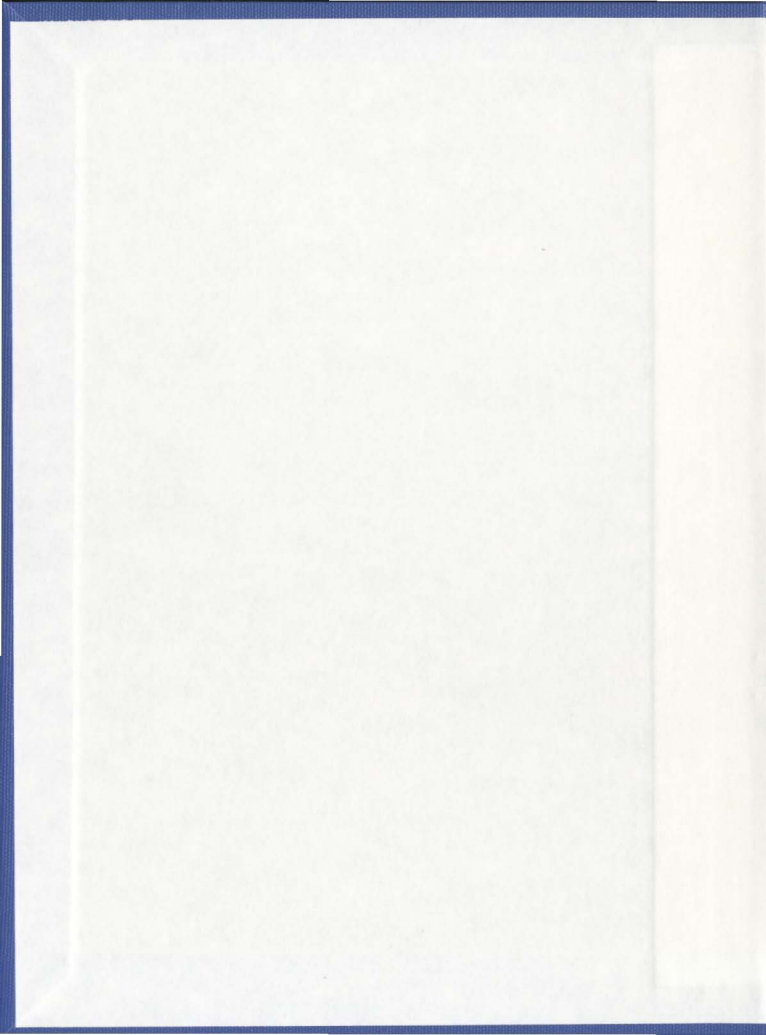


"TO OUR HOPELESS AFFAIR":  
A VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY STUDY ABOUT WOMEN  
OF THE RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE  
POST-SOVIET ERA

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**“To Our Hopeless Affair”: A Visual Anthropology Study about  
Women of the Russian Intelligentsia in the Post-Soviet Era**

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

September 2010

St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador

### Abstract

This Master's thesis focuses on the narratives of four Muscovite women belonging to the Russian intelligentsia, using life history, social memory and visual anthropology methods. The Russian intelligentsia was often seen as having served a contradictory position as both conformist and oppositional to the Soviet regime. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many academic publications have questioned whether the role of the intelligentsia remains politically relevant in post-Soviet Russia. Using life history techniques to probe participants' memories of various Soviet and post-Soviet eras and focusing on the period of the *perestroika* between 1985 and 1991, the author problematizes various binary definitions of the role of the intelligentsia, proposing to view membership as a negotiation of meanings, memories and contestations of belonging. A feature-length ethnographic film produced during the period of fieldwork in Moscow and based on participants' memories is appended to the thesis.

### Acknowledgments

Although my name appears under the title, fundamentally, this thesis could never have been possible without the dedication, insight and intelligence of a number of individuals. I am extremely grateful to all seven participants that agreed to participate in the research and the film. I am indebted to Susanna Solomonovna Pechuro for opening up her home and exposing me to the true meaning of humanism, and in turn, to Malva Noevna Landa for showing the true meaning of courage. I have appreciated every moment shared with Anna Mihaylovna Lavrova and Elena Vasilievna Yecheistova and I thank them for their candour, wit and hospitality. And most of all, I want to thank the three sisters who appear in the film: Irina Pavlovna Gavrilova, Tatiana Pavlovna Gavrilova and Svetlana Pavlovna Gavrilova, for being graceful in their wisdom, humble about their achievements, and exceptionally loving as a family. This thesis is dedicated to them.

I feel extremely lucky to have been graced with the support, wisdom and tireless efforts of Professor Sharon Roseman, who was much more than a supervisor and a mentor. Both a source of constant inspiration and motivation, Dr. Roseman dedicated what seemed at first to be an unfair amount of attention to educate me in rudimentary ethnographic texts, expose me to ethnographic film and vastly improve my writing. All the while, Sharon delicately showed inconsistencies in my early thesis drafts, proofread endless versions of my chapters, and guided me intellectually along the entire thesis-writing process. In the meanwhile, I found out that this was the attitude that Dr. Roseman adopted for mentoring each one of her students. Sharon, I am very grateful to be amongst the small army of graduate students that have shared in the privilege of your supervision: you have been a phenomenal intellectual influence, and I can only hope that I was attentive enough to try to apply your guidance in my future.

It is difficult to find words to express my gratitude to the person who has positively motivated every important decision in my life: my Mom. I wish to thank Olga Gan for every moment of her vigorous and unselfish support that has undoubtedly allowed me to both start and finish this thesis. As banal as it sounds, thank you for instilling in me a love for anthropology through our travels and for cultivating me as a person through constant exposure to performing arts, literature and cinema. Your respect for others and your personal strength were an inspiration for this thesis, since you are unquestionably the embodiment of the spirit of the Russian intelligentsia. I am also grateful for your careful and erudite proofreading of the final draft.

The initial idea for this thesis project was borne out of a warm conversation sitting on a summer patio in Toronto with Professor Michael Lambek. I am grateful for his initial enthusiasm that allowed the idea to ferment over the course of the next several months. As I moved to Newfoundland to start my Master's at Memorial, I was awestruck by both the personal attention and the congeniality of each faculty member at the Department of Anthropology. I am grateful for the guidance of Dr. Robin Whitaker, Dr. August Carbonella, Rex Clark and Professor Wayne Fife. I am especially grateful to Dr. Reade Davis for often blurring the lines of mentor and

friend. Reade, your intelligence, wit, and an unceasing willingness to help have steered me away from many potential crises.

Without the generous financial support of a Master's level SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship and the graduate fellowship from the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial University, this thesis would never have been possible. I was also lucky to have intellectually stimulating graduate assistantships with Dr. Tana Allen in the Department of Classics, Professor Stuart Durrant and Dr. Erwin Warkentin in the Department of German and Russian, and to hone my writing skills as a tutor, thanks to Virginia Ryan at the Writing Centre. During my time in Moscow, I was fortunate to have had the assistance of *Memoriál: Historical, Educational, Human Rights and Charitable Society* and the use of their "Memory of the Victims" archive the "Dissident" archive, and the photo and video archives. I am especially grateful to Oksana Mihaylova and Tatiana Bahmina for introducing me to two of my key informants, Malva Noevna and Susanna Solomonovna.

It is too easy to bask in the comfort of close friends, often forgetting to express appreciation for their wonderful company and willingness to come to aid at any moment. I am especially grateful to Maggie Shreiner for meticulously and intelligently proofreading a draft of this thesis, and to Nicole Wilson for her keen eye and her aid in every kind of bureaucratic thesis formality while I was away, but especially to both, for their warm and sincere friendship. I was lucky to have offset many sleepless nights at the department with much laughter in the company of Todd Kristensen and Andie Wilson. I am grateful to Alanna Felt, Meagan Harnum, Christina Hilborne and Krista for reminding me to take the necessary breaks at different stages of the thesis-writing process, thus making it an enjoyable endeavour. I am indebted to Chris Tzozos, a true intellectual; I will always cherish our poetic walks in Flatrock. And to Julia: you replenished my life with the most precious gift of all. Words will never do justice to express how lucky I feel, so allow me at least to fill the rest of this page with one of our comfortable silences.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Abridged Timeline of Soviet and Russian History of the 20th century	vii
1. Chapter One—Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.1.1. Research Participants	3
1.1.2. Research Focus	8
1.2 Situating Participants in Space, Time and Social Location	10
1.2.1 Moscow: A City Seen Through Lenses	11
1.2.2 A Summary of Russia's Transition (1985-1991)	16
1.2.3 Social Location, Contradictory Meanings and Gender in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia	21
Part I: Gender Studies	23
Part II: Gender in the Soviet Union	24
Part III: Gender in the post-Soviet Era	28
1.3 Methodological Approaches	31
1.3.1 Research Schedule	32
1.3.2 Interview Schedule and Focus	34
1.3.3 Ethnographic Filmmaking	38
1.4 A Note on the Researcher	41
1.5 Chronicle of Chapters	43
2. Chapter Two—Defining the Russian Intelligentsia	47
2.1. Belonging to the Intelligentsia: Scholarship, Past and Present	47
2.1.1 Use of "Discourse" and "Narrative" in this Thesis	52
2.1.2 History of the Intelligentsia	56
2.1.3 The Intelligentsia after Perestroika	58
2.2. Self-definitions of Belonging	64
2.2.1 Sub-categories of the Intelligentsia	65
2.2.2 Ferguson's Concept of Diglossia	71
2.2.3 Herzfeld's Concept of Disemia	76
2.2.4 Herzfeld's Concept of Social Poetics	80



2.2.5 Herzfeld's Concept of Cultural Intimacy	85
2.3. Chapter Conclusion	89
3. Chapter Three—Life History and the Anthropology of Memory	92
3.1 Life History Methods	92
3.2 Anthropology of Memory	95
3.3 Life's Memory	103
3.3.1. Our Ancestors: A Pre-revolutionary Legacy	105
3.3.2. Childhood and the Great Patriotic War	111
3.3.3. Youth and the Death of a Dictator	115
Part I: Joseph Stalin's Dictatorship	116
Part II: "Do not Forget, Many Great People Have Taken the Same Path"	120
Part III: Paradoxes of Soviet Cultural Policy	122
3.3.4. Adulthood: Between the Thaw and Stagnation	124
Part I: 20 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress and Khrushchev's Secret Speech	125
Part II: The Rise of the Dissident Movement	127
3.4 Chapter Conclusion	131
4. Chapter Four—Turning Back the Waves: Memories of Perestroika	134
4.1 Introduction	134
4.2 Studying Transition	138
4.3 Paradoxes of Soviet Socialism	142
4.4 Continuity or Rupture? From Stagnation to Perestroika (1966-1985)	145
4.4.1 Shortages, Scarcity and the Economic Downturn	146
4.5 Gorbachev's Era: Reform, Perestroika and Glasnost' (1985-1991)	148
4.5.1 Reflections on Gorbachev's Era	150
4.6 Putsch, Defence of the White House and the Collapse (August-December 1991)	160
4.6.1 Reflections on the Putsch	163
4.7 Yeltsin's Era: Market Reform and Presidential Power (1991-2000)	167
4.7.1 Reflections on Yeltsin's Epoch	170
4.8 Seeing the Present in the Past and the Search for Personal Integration	173
4.9 Chapter Conclusion	180
5. Chapter Five—Ethnographic Film	183
5.1 Introduction	183
5.2 Ethnographic Film	184
5.3 Theoretical Directions of Ethnographic Film	191
5.3.1 Filmic Structure: Visual Metaphor	196
5.3.2 Film as Translation	204

Part I. Anthropology of the Senses	204
Part II. Anthropology in Translation	207
5.3.3 Representations of Mind: Sensory, Lexical and Enactive Categories	210
5.4. Films and Memory	214
5.4.1 Films of Memory	215
5.4.2 Film as Memory, Camera as Witness	222
5.5. Film, Feedback and Collaboration	227
5.5.1 Film as Elicitation and Film as Feedback	227
5.5.2. Collaboration in Ethnographic Film	232
5.6. Chapter Conclusion: The Goals of Visual Anthropology	234
6. Chapter Six—Conclusion	238
6.1. “Western Audiences Just Wouldn’t Understand”	233
6.2. Final Remarks	247
Appendix A (film): <i>Turning Back the Waves</i>	256
Appendix B: Glossary of Russian Terms	257
References Cited	263
Ogonek articles (in Russian)	273
Memoir Literature (in Russian)	273

## Abridged Timeline of Soviet and Russian History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup>

- 1905 – Russian Revolution of 1905; political terrorism and strikes led to an establishment of a new legislative body, the State Duma of the Russian Empire, and a new Constitution in 1906
- 1917 – February Revolution of 1917; Russian provisional government was formed after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II.
- 1917 – October Revolution; on October 25, Bolshevik Red Guards captured the Winter Palace, overthrew the Provisional Government and gave power to the Soviets dominated by Bolsheviks, led by the principal figure of the Russian Revolution Vladimir Illyich Lenin (1870-1924)
- 1921 – March, Stepan Petrichenko leads the famous, unsuccessful uprising of sailors against the *Bolsheviks* known as the Kronstadt rebellion.
- 1921 – Lenin established *NEP* (New Economic Policy), allowing the existence of some private enterprises.
- 1924 – Joseph V. Stalin [1878-1953] rose within the central party ranks after Lenin suffered his final stroke on January 24.

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<sup>1</sup> This timeline is intended to guide the reader through particular events I focused on with participants during fieldwork interviews, and does not purport to provide an all-encompassing history of Russia and the Soviet Union.

<sup>2</sup> The definition of terms marked by the double asterisk is provided in the Appendix B: Glossary of Russian Terms

- 1927 – Stalin began to pursue a policy of *collectivization*\*\* – a seizure of peasant property, enforcing peasants to work on collective state farms. The policy achieved its full effect by 1929.
- 1928 – Stalin implemented the first of the *Five-Year Plans*\*\* aimed at the rapid industrialization of the Soviet economy.
- 1929 – Between 1929 and 1931, a simultaneous policy of *de-kulakization* took effect, which began persecuting property-owning peasants who were able to employ workers, considered class enemies.
- 1930 – On April 15, the *GULag*\*\* (Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Colonies) was officially established.
- 1934 – Sergei Kirov, a prominent Bolshevik Leader was assassinated.
- 1936 – Moscow trials; a series of show-trials of prominent Bolshevik leaders.
- 1937 – *The Great Purge*\*\* was instituted by an order of the *NKVD*\*\* (National Committee of Internal Affairs) to combat anti-Soviet elements. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens were incriminated based on charges of anti-Soviet activities, executed or sent to the *GULag*.
- 1939 – The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed between the Soviet and German foreign ministers, promising non-aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union.

- 1941 – German troops invaded the Soviet Union in a surprise attack unanticipated by Stalin, despite warnings from the Soviet intelligence. The Germans captured major cities in the western parts of the Soviet Union in the first months of the invasion, leading to tremendous Soviet casualties.
- 1941 – Many consider the turning point of the war to be a successful defense of Moscow from invading German armies, presently named the *Battle of Moscow*.
- 1945 – May 8, Victory of the Allies over the Axis ended the Second World War
- 1952 – After a widespread anti-Semitic campaign, the *Pravda* [“Truth”] state newspaper published an article on a “Doctors’ Plot” accusing Jewish doctors working for the Kremlin of a conspiracy to poison Soviet leaders.
- 1953 – On March 5, Stalin died after a paralyzing stroke he had suffered four days earlier. Several days later, hundreds were crushed in the crowd at a poorly organized funeral procession.
- 1953 – In September, N.I. Khrushchev [1891-1971] was appointed the head of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Khrushchev’s 11-year rule was nicknamed “The Thaw,” [*Otpepel*] because of relative allowances of previously forbidden literature.

- 1956 – During the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of party delegates, Khrushchev delivered a widely circulated “secret speech” denouncing Stalin’s “cult of personality,” in which he softly dismissed Stalin’s abuse of his authority, as being in contradiction to Communist principles.
- 1956 – Hungarian Revolution: After a revolution attempt meant to institute social-democratic reforms, Soviet troops invaded Hungary and violently crushed the uprising.
- 1964 – Khrushchev was ousted from the Central Committee, replaced by a conservative leader Leonid Brezhnev [1906-1982], effectively ending the period of “The Thaw.”
- 1965 – Sinyavsky-Daniel Trial. Two writers, Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel were accused of publishing anti-Soviet propaganda abroad, triggering a wave of dissent amongst prominent intellectual figures.
- 1965 – A protest action was organized to lobby for the release of the two writers on December 5, springing the birth of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union.
- 1968 – “Prague Spring” \*\*: the Soviet Union halted reforms led by liberal leader Alexander Dubček by invading Czechoslovakia with tanks.
- 1975 – The Helsinki Final Act was signed by 35 countries hoping to improve relations between the Communist bloc and the West.

- 1976 – The Moscow Helsinki Group was formed by Yuri Orlov to monitor the Soviet Union's compliance with the Helsinki Act's clauses on universal human rights.
- 1979 – Cold war tensions culminated during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which lasted until 1989.
- 1982 – Leonid Brezhnev died. He was replaced by Yuri Andropov [1914-1984], a former head of the KGB. Andropov died fifteen months later.
- 1984 – Konstantin Chernenko, who replaced Andropov, served as the Head of State until his death a year later.
- 1985 – Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed to be the next Head of State. Seen as a reformist at the beginning of his term, he instituted policies of democratization, and a controversial anti-alcohol campaign.
- 1986 – A nuclear reactor exploded in Chernobyl, Ukraine on April 26; Soviet authorities attempted to cover-up the severity of the nuclear disaster.
- 1987 – Gorbachev instituted parallel policies of *perestroika* (literally, “rebuilding”), to implement market reforms, and *glasnost* (literally, “voicing”), signaling a discontinued censorship of the press by the state.
- 1989 – Memorial Society was founded to commemorate victims of Stalin-era repressions, expanding to play the role of an advocacy and human rights organization in the 1990s.

- 1991 – Boris Yeltsin was elected as the President of the Russian Federation in the first democratic Russian presidential election, held on June 12.
- 1991 – August 19-21, Putsch: while Gorbachev was on vacation in August, high-ranking Party officials staged a coup to replace the President of the USSR; Yeltsin led a successful counter-coup gathering thousands of supporters in front of the Moscow White House. After a three-day standoff, Yeltsin declared the counter-coup successful.
- 1991 – Gorbachev resigned his post as the President of the USSR; the Soviet Union was officially disbanded in December.
- 1993 – Constitutional Crisis – in a dispute over parliamentary and presidential power, Yeltsin led a blockade of the Parliament building, and Parliament was dissolved.
- 1994 – December. Seeking independence, Chechnya was invaded by Russian troops, which led to a violent conflict claiming thousands of civilian lives. Russian troops withdrew after a peace treaty was signed in 1996.
- 1996 – Yeltsin was reelected as the President of Russia
- 1999 – After Yeltsin abdicated from his post as President, Vladimir Putin became Acting President. One year later, Putin was democratically elected as the succeeding President of the Russian Federation. He was reelected in the 2004 presidential elections, and supported his successor Dmitry Medvedev for



presidency, himself becoming Prime Minister after the 2008 presidential elections.

2008 – August 3; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn died. The author of *GULag Archipelago*, a widely known work for exposing the atrocities of Stalin-era work camps, Solzhenitsyn was a former GULag survivor, a public intellectual and an outspoken dissident during the Soviet era. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he espoused an ultra-nationalist philosophy, and remained a controversial figure until his death.

## Chapter One—Introduction

“To our hopeless affair.”<sup>1</sup>

—Famous Soviet dissident toast

### 1.1 Introduction

These were the words heard to a clink of wine glasses raised by Soviet-era dissidents of late socialism. This toast reflected on the passion and the resignation, the urgency and the challenge, and the ironic pessimism of a generation. There were few prognosticators at that time that could have predicted what would happen to the Soviet state within a span of their generation; that after 75 years of communist rule, on 31 December 1991, the Soviet Union would cease to exist. Memories surrounding this moment, and the period prior to the collapse, remain strong amongst Muscovites who participated in various ways in these tumultuous events. In contrast to the late 1970s and early 1980s that were characterized by the economic stagnation and political tensions of Leonid Brezhnev’s seemingly immutable system, Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, instituted progressive policies of *perestroika*<sup>2\*\*</sup> (literally, “rebuilding”), a complex economic policy that was to usher Soviet society towards a market economy, and *glasnost*<sup>\*\*</sup> (literally, “voicing”), a policy that discontinued censorship of criticism towards the state. The subsequent ascent of Boris Yeltsin who found

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<sup>1</sup> [“*Za nasho beznadezhnoe delo*”]. All translations from Russian into English are by the author, except where otherwise indicated

<sup>2\*\*</sup> - the definition of terms marked by the double asterisk is provided in the Appendix B: Glossary of Russian Terms

support amongst the nascent democratic movement, characterizes this period as an era of hope. Three days in August 1991, when thousands of Muscovites came to defend the Moscow White House from a military putsch and usher in Yeltsin as their new leader, stand out particularly well in people's memories.

Almost two decades have passed since those three days in August, and consequently much has changed. One of the central general questions that informed this thesis, was what had happened to the feeling of political hope, the anticipation of a brighter future, and the collective enthusiasm for political, social and economic reforms? Because if the present period of Russian history were to be characterized in a single word by the intelligentsia, it would likely be a more self-conscious and opposite sentiment to the feeling of hope—it would be shame—collective shame for a collective failure. And wine glasses of the remaining dissidents clink today to commemorate the present period with the same toast, “to our hopeless affair.”

Scholarly interests have been wide-ranging on the topic of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many of those in the social science disciplines immediately became interested in researching the Soviet transformation to post-socialism. Anthropological involvement in the study of political transition has a long history. As early as 1919, Edward Sapir wrote, “every profound change in the flow of civilization, particularly every change in its economic bases, tends to bring about an unsettling and readjustment of cultural values” (Sapir 1985:317). Anthropologists studying the transition to capitalism throughout Eastern and Central Europe were afforded a

particularly thorough look at the way these transformations affected people's understandings, social conditions and views of the societies in which they lived. The discipline of anthropology is unique in that it hinges on localized and intimate encounters with particular groups of people through the methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing. I have continued in this tradition, in order to access a unique group of people in Moscow, Russia's capital.

During four months of fieldwork, I talked to four women belonging to the Russian intelligentsia, asking them about their experiences during the period of transition, their backgrounds as Muscovites, and their present experiences after the fast-paced social and political transformations of the 1980s and 1990s. These research participants, Elena Vasilievna Yecheistova; Malva Noevna Landa; Anna Mihaylovna Lavrova and Susanna Solomonovna Pechuro, all resided in Moscow, were from 75 to 90 years old, and were representatives, as I argue in this thesis, of the Russian intelligentsia.

#### *1.1.1. Research Participants*

Elena Vasilievna Yecheistova was born in 1926. She comes from a merchant-class ancestry in Yakutsk in Northern Siberia. Her family moved to Moscow after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Her father was an engineer in charge of many of the "great buildings of communism" during the years of Soviet industrialization in the 1930s, but he passed away during the Second World War. After living through the war

in Moscow, Elena Vasilievna enrolled at the Moscow Architecture Institute. After her university education as an architect, she was commissioned to build several structures in the first-ever mountain ski resort in the USSR located in the El Brus Mountain region between Russia and Georgia. This series of projects were the focal point of Elena Vasilievna's professional life until the late 80s. In the early 1990s, Elena Vasilievna witnessed the *putsch*\*\* in Moscow, and the shelling of the White House during the Constitutional Crisis in 1993. Having retired in the late 90s, she spends her time caring for her grandchildren and tending to her garden while living at the *dacha*, her family's vacation cottage, during the summers.

Malva Noevna Landa was born in Odessa in 1918. She was seven years old when her family moved to Saratov. When collectivization started in 1929, Malva Noevna witnessed forced seizures of property and mass hunger in the villages. She recalls that beginning at 12 years of age, these events made her distrust the Soviet system. In 1937, the year of the Great Purges, her father was arrested and executed as an "Enemy of the People" under Stalin's campaign of terror. Malva Noevna moved to Moscow to pursue her studies in various technical institutes, but later she switched to geology, for, the way she describes, "the romance of it all." Malva Noevna gave birth to a son in 1941, at the beginning of the Second World War. During the "Thaw," a period of relaxed censorship after Stalin's death in 1953, Malva Noevna became acquainted with a small, but active group of dissidents. She worked on several underground publications by retyping, writing and submitting information to foreign

media. She actively participated in the publication of the *Hronika Tekushih Sobitii*\*\* ["Chronicle of Current Times"] and in the *Moskovskaya Helsinskaya Gruppya*\*\* [Moscow Helsinki Group], both underground organizations that documented human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. In 1977, she was incriminated under "anti-Soviet propaganda" charges, and sent into internal exile for four years. Continuing her dissident activities after her return, she was exiled for another term after the KGB staged a fire in her apartment in 1981. After her second exile, she lived outside of Moscow's city limits (by a legal decree), until her prominent dissident friends bought her an apartment on the outskirts of Moscow. In the 1990s, she published in an activist journal *Pravozashitnik* ["The rights-defender"]. Presently, she continues writing, and recently published a Russian translation of Moishe Zaltsman's memoir of Stalin-era repressions titled "I Was Rehabilitated."

Anna Mihaylovna Lavrova was born in Irkutsk, the capital of Western Siberia in 1936. She is able to trace her genealogy on her father's side to 16<sup>th</sup> century Polish ancestry. Her great-grandfather was a millionaire fur and a mammoth bone trader in Yakutsk in the mid-1800s; her grandfather founded a journal in Moscow called *Russkaya Misl'* ["Russian Thought"], which published Russia's luminary writers including Fyodor M. Dostoevsky and Anton P. Chekhov. Political contention followed the family after the Russian Revolution, and state authorities forced both her grandfather and father to flee Moscow, although for separate reasons. Anna's father settled in Irkutsk, in Western Siberia. Working as a geologist, he would frequently take

his daughters to geological expeditions in rural Siberia. After the Second World War, Anna finished university and became a limnologist—a lake biologist—working on Lake Baikal. She married, and gave birth to a son. Three years later, in 1959, she moved to Moscow and established her career as a nature writer. In 1975, Anna divorced. Anna Mihaylovna went through several hardships following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Her property was under threat because she was a single mother; she had to scrape together funds while working on several jobs to help several family members who met misfortunes during this time. Today, Anna Mihaylovna continues to write about her Siberian past, while working for a periodical. She divides her time between traveling abroad, working, and spending time at her *dacha* located outside of Moscow.

Susanna Solomonovna Pechuro was born to Jewish parents in Moscow in 1933. Her parents were adamant supporters of the Bolshevik Revolution. When Susanna was nine years old, the *Otechestvennaya Voyna*\*\* [Great Patriotic War] began. She was evacuated with her extended family to the Ural region, providing nursing care to wounded Red Army soldiers in a hospital. After the war, she joined a literary club at the House of Pioneers, a youth organization meant to foster Communist ideals. She developed an intimate friendship with two boys, Boris Slutsky and Vladimir Furman. Together, they left the club following a conflict with the club leader and formed an underground political organization to fight for Leninist ideals of the Russian Revolution. The organization was called “The Union for the

Affair of the Revolution." In 1949, all of the members of the group were arrested. After a year-long investigation, her friends, Boris and Vladik were sentenced to execution, and Susanna received a 25-year sentence in the Gulag system of prisons and labour camps. She was rehabilitated during Khrushchev's times, in 1956 after having served over five years in eleven prisons and seven labour camps. After her release, Susanna went through a difficult transition to civilian life, but she enthusiastically pursued her university studies in history. She found work at the Institute of Ancient Acts and Archives, and then at the African Institute as a bibliographer and archivist. She married in 1958, and gave birth to two daughters. In 1982, she took a job as a night security guard in order to care for a family member in ill health during the day. During the *perestroika*, she was active in establishing the Memorial Society, an organization that archived the history of Stalin-era repressions and soon expanded to document human rights abuses in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Suffering ill health, she left Memorial's board of directors in 2003. Presently unable to walk, she does not leave her home, but regularly receives visitors in her downtown Moscow apartment. Once a month, she organizes get-togethers between her old friends, former political prisoners, and musicians who recite poetry and sing protest songs of previous eras.



### 1.1.2. Research Focus

The main focus of this project was to investigate the ways in which positioned actors experienced the *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union; what the transition symbolized for them in light of changing social values; and how it currently affects their social condition and their position as members of the intelligentsia. It is unquestionable that the *perestroika* changed people's relationship with the state. But how can we analyze the implications of that change today? What processes impacted people's experience at that historical moment? What strategies did people adopt in order to explain and cope with the transforming society, and which social elements persisted beyond this period of transition? In answering these questions, we may contribute to a greater understanding of the causes, coping strategies and reactions specific to the *perestroika* era, and to political transitions in general.

Inseparable elements of my informants' lives were investigated through several anthropological perspectives such as those of life history and visual anthropology. Using life history approaches allowed me to explore my participants' envisioned past and their perceived present, while contextualizing the period of *perestroika* within larger historical and social transformations. This research was also conducive to using visual anthropology, allowing for a more in-depth focus on representation that could not otherwise be communicated through text. Although this will be further analysed in subsequent chapters, I envision representation as a collaboration in which both the

filmmaker and those being filmed exert some degree of creative control during the filmmaking process.

This is an attempt to do what Jean Rouch calls a "shared anthropology," which encourages the development of mutual understanding between the anthropologist and participants (Rouch 2003). Several visual anthropologists such as David MacDougall (1991), Faye Ginsburg (1991), Sarah Elder (1995), Carlos Flores (2004), Pat Aufderheide (1995), and Jay Ruby (2000) have theorized on the notion of collaboration in ethnographic filmmaking. Each author discusses collaboration as an ethical dilemma for anthropologists concerned with representation. For example, Carlos Flores questions the "self-consciously interventionist anthropological enterprise" (Flores 2004:35), concluding that collaborative ventures are dependent on the "ability of projects to establish a common ground where those involved can pursue different sets of interests and negotiate, combine, and materialize them in a collective fashion" (Ibid.: 40).

The intent of this study is to investigate the relationship of positioned actors to the broader bases of power, including those inherent in anthropological research itself. Primarily, I am interested in the way women of the intelligentsia understand their participation in Russian society today, and the way they have explained their participation in the past. In order to gauge this involvement, I collaborated on several areas of research with my participants. During my fieldwork, I recorded audio and video interviews focusing on various stages of my participants' life histories. This

material was edited, and portions of our interviews were screened back to participants during fieldwork. I incorporated their comments into the visual product, resulting in the production of an anthropologically informed ethnographic film titled "*Turning Back the Waves*," (see Appendix A enclosed) focusing on my participants' life histories.

### **1.2 Situating Participants in Space, Time and Social Location.**

In the subsequent sections of the introduction, I situate my research within some spatial, temporal and social parameters. First, I include some remarks on Moscow, the location of my research. Then, I briefly describe the main political and social events surrounding the period of the *perestroika*, which made the capital of the Soviet Union a focal point of world affairs in the summer of 1991. In order to situate my participants within the appropriate range of scholarship, I briefly introduce work on gender in socialism and post-socialism. In the second part of the introduction, I describe my methodological approach and my research schedule. As is noted above, an appendix to this thesis is a feature-length ethnographic film based on fieldwork conducted in Russia with seven women who agreed to participate in remembering particular aspects of their lives on and off camera. To complement my ethnographic methods of oral and written research, I include a preliminary discussion on my use of audio-visual material in this thesis. In the last sections, I situate myself within the research context, and summarize the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

### *1.2.1 Moscow: A City Seen Through Lenses*

What is the city to those who inhabit it? How do the personal lives of citizens and the broader life of a city intersect? These are questions that cannot be answered objectively; a person's experience of a city is informed both by an individual impression and by a sense of collective participation. For the women who took part in this research, Moscow defines their daily life. They recall the neighbourhoods where they walked with their parents as children, and those neighbourhoods where they may now stroll with their grandchildren. They recall the city by the places to which they were relocated; and by their daily commutes to and from work on the bustling Moscow metro. When some participants were forced to relocate from the centre, they lamented the fact that they remembered every crack in the sidewalk, every cobblestone.

Victory parades, May Day demonstrations, political banners, speeches from the Kremlin and other symbols of thriving Bolshevik ideology were tenaciously displayed or heard, albeit to different degrees, on those city streets, on the sides of buildings and entranceways, in the public and private realms of everyday life under socialism. Hearing bells of the Kremlin ring or watching fireworks on New Year's Eve were infectious symbols permeating every Muscovite's life, despite differing sentiments towards the socialist state. Moscow's history has, to some extent, defined all participants' sense of pride for the cultural heritage they came to inherit. Participants can recall specific paintings hanging in the famous Tretyakov Art

Gallery, or remember street names in the city centre, albeit sometime by their Communist denomination. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, many street names were dedicated to honour Bolshevik leaders; Tverskaya became Karl Marx Avenue; Nevsky became Gorki street. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, street names were changed back to their pre-revolutionary designations. Still, Muscovites often give directions, or refer to certain destinations by their Soviet names.

Today, Moscow may be a political and economic centre of Eastern Europe, but there are many different ways of describing the city, which defies easy categorization. One of the ways to conceptualize any city is through a set of metaphors proposed by Setha Low (2002). She provides a way to glean through Moscow's history with short, impressionistic, and by no means conclusive descriptions. Low (2002) proposes to imagine a city through the metaphor of neither all-encompassing, nor mutually exclusive "lenses," outlining the "city" through reference to several images. I use seven of these images: the divided city, the gendered city, the fortress city, the religious city, the postmodern city, the global city and finally, the contested city.

*The Divided City.* Symbolic manifestations of style and dress offer a sharp contrast on the sidewalks of modern-day Moscow. Men and women wearing vogue fashions may pass pensioners in kerchiefs and worn out flannelette jackets asking for change. At night, casinos, clubs and bars outshine the dark alleyways and gloomy apartment courtyards that serve as the passageway home for most Moscow residents.

Perceived in movement, the city's streets, its arteries, offer a congested glimpse of its population. Ladas and Volgas, prestigious cars during the Soviet epoch, seem starkly antiquated in a cat and mouse game with Mercedes Benzes on the busy city streets. The transformation of the city in the last two decades has been paramount. Several participants express their disappointment at the loss of former coordinates they used to navigate the city, since many older buildings have been demolished, the collage of advertisements drawing attention to Western products obscure historic facades, and modern architecture is considered to be ostentatious in the historic centre. These sentiments are strong enough that one participant revealed that she never travels into the city core anymore, because she experiences a physical reaction to seeing the transformation of her previously beloved streets. Another participant lives in the centre, but only walks along her favourite boulevards. Another participant never leaves her home, but can recall specific historic scenarios on city streets unfolding with photographic precision. From these different viewpoints, participants must understand the city and their history within it on both a collective tier of being a "Muscovite," and an individual, personal tier. This relationship is an accurate description of what the "divided" city is; embodied, and at conflict with the collective and the personal self.

Often the site of lament and nostalgia amongst my participants, examples of architecture were visible symbols of the cultural transformation of Moscow's 850 year-old history. Low describes how urban anthropologists explore the *Gendered City*

through the perspective of 'silencing'—invisible markers of women's contributions to city planning and architecture; and sites of resistance that may not be immediately apparent to the viewer (Low 2002). Elena Vasilievna Yecheistova was an architect who worked in the Soviet Union, and was an invaluable commentator on helping to interpret "invisible signs" of women's contribution to the Moscow landscape. This was important since the era of the *perestroika* changed the city landscape dramatically. However, architecture is not the only way to describe a "gendered" city. I want to consider what it is like for an elderly woman to inhabit the various gendered spaces of the city. This is necessary to ponder in light of increasingly more criminalized public spaces of post-*perestroika* Moscow; or the perception of self in an increasingly patriarchal private sphere.

The city can also be visualized spatially as a series of expanding concentric rings. This allows us to imagine Moscow as the *Fortress City*. The focal point of the city is the Kremlin, a fortified complex that dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, serving as the seat of government of imperial, Soviet and present-day ruling powers. Many well-to-do Muscovites have taken up this model of fortification, and the gated communities with high fences and security guards similar to those described in Teresa Caldeira's ethnography of São Paulo (2000) are an ever-increasing element of the city landscape.

The fortress city may be supplemented by the metaphor of the *Postmodern City*. A boulevard ring encircles the downtown core; boulevards are named after the

luminaries of Russian literature—Gogol', Pushkin and Chekhov Boulevards. Much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century low-rise architecture has been preserved within this boulevard ring. However, beyond the boulevards, many neighbourhoods welcomed new architectural developments after the collapse of the Soviet Union allowing for a pastiche of 19<sup>th</sup> century classical buildings, modern offices, Khrushchev-era panel homes, and Stalinist architecture.

*The Religious City.* Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks were uncompromisingly atheist in their stance towards the Russian Orthodox Church amongst other religious institutions. Due to this atheist ideology, most churches in the city core were demolished in the early 1920s and 1930s. Historically, Russian orthodox churches served as architectural landmarks—they were the highest visible buildings of a city landscape. Interpreting city architecture symbolically, a city landscape devoid of visual beacons is disorienting. Dictator Joseph Stalin who was the head of state between 1924 and 1953 decided to restore the city's architectural landmarks. He commissioned the building of seven skyscrapers, known as the "Seven Sisters" (*Sem' Sester*), built in the now infamous "Socialist Realist"<sup>3</sup> style. For many years, these skyscrapers functioned as the geographical beacons of the city. After the *perestroika*, many Russian Orthodox churches were rebuilt, making a

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<sup>3</sup> *Socialist Realism*—[Rus.: *Sotzrealizm*] an aesthetic or artistic production imposed by Joseph Stalin. The aesthetic of socialist realism was mandatory in all fields of art, music and literature. Katerina Clark (2003) describes that as an analytical category amongst scholars it was thought to be erroneously self-evident, but "common stipulations for socialist realism were widely applicable—for example, mandatory optimism, aesthetic conservatism, moral puritanism, and *partinost*, the last somewhat barbarously translated as "party-mindedness" and generally meaning enthusiasm for all things Bolshevik" (Clark 2003).



sometimes-conflictual collage of various ideologies more apparent.

*The Global City.* Moscow, as a modern-day metropolis, is the commercial centre for many Eastern European, European and Asian and Middle Eastern businesses and enterprises. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a mass migration from former Soviet Union republics into the city and its surroundings; millions of undocumented migrant workers, and unregistered inhabitants make it difficult to pinpoint the population of the Russian capital, although the Moscow government gives a figure just over ten and a half million (registered) inhabitants as of June 1, 2009 (City of Moscow 2009). Most Muscovites acknowledge that the number may be twice as high, because of the city's reliance on services from unregistered migrant workers who come to Moscow to seek wage labour.

I describe the final image, that of the *Contested City*, in the next section. This metaphor was most apparent during the events leading up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Moscow became an ideological battleground between various political camps.

#### *1.2.2 A Summary of Russia's Transition (1985-1991)*

In situating participants within a particular social milieu, I also want to describe the events of the *perestroika*, the putsch of August 1991, and the collapse of the Soviet Union to locate the focus of this research in a point of time. Again, I do this to ponder one of the main questions of this research: what was it like to live through

the events of the rapid social, political and even cultural transformations of the early 1990s? In the late 1980s, all the research participants had children, and in some cases grandchildren. They were in their 50s and 60s, and continued working through political and financial hardships. Retirement was not a feasible option for many, and some participants continue working to this day. The women participating in this research were acutely aware of, and concerned with, the social and material conditions surrounding this epoch. Therefore, because of the wealth of historical context necessary to approach an understanding of the way these situated actors experienced these events, I want to provide a brief historical overview of the history of the *perestroika*<sup>4</sup> and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Leonid Brezhnev's death in November 1982 brought an end to almost two decades of his leadership of the Soviet Union. This period was generally characterized by economic stagnation and a conservative *Politburo*<sup>\*\*</sup> membership that persecuted many vocal opponents to the regime. Yuri Andropov, a former head of the KGB, and then Konstantin Chernenko succeeded Brezhnev in two short-lived terms each lasting about a year.

Mikhail Gorbachev, a Moscow law student who rose through party ranks in his home province of Stavropol, became a Central Committee secretary and a *Politburo* member by 1980 (Kotz and Weir 2007:52). Seen as a representative of

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<sup>4</sup> In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to the *perestroika* as a process instituted by Gorbachev in parallel to broader social reforms such as *glasnost*, while the *perestroika era*, refers to the epoch roughly between 1985 and 1991 that encompassed these changes.

reformist sentiments in the Party, he was named the General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 (Ibid.). Fighting Brezhnev-era stagnation, he introduced two reformist principles: “democratization of Soviet economic institutions ... [and the] introduction of elements of a market economy” (Ibid.: 54) calling these initiatives *democratizatsiya* [“democratization”] and *perestroika*. Gorbachev did not intend these policies to undermine the Soviet system; on the contrary, his view was pro-Soviet, and his attempts were geared to improve the public trust in the Soviet system.

Along with political and market reforms, Gorbachev introduced the policy of *glasnost*\*\* (literally, “voicing”). In contrast to the repressive measures used to control the dissemination of free speech in previous Soviet eras, *glasnost* signaled discontinued censorship by the state. Some scholars such as David Kotz and Fred Weir view his political, economic and social policies as having been interrelated in their goals of reforming society:

The decision to tackle the cultural and political repression of the Soviet system as the first step in his reform agenda may have come from a belief that economic reform could not succeed, or even get an effective start, if the population remained passive and fearful. (Kotz and Weir 2007:61)

The policy of social reform both resonated with, and was fully supported by, liberally inclined members of the intelligentsia. Thomas Sherlock, in analyzing the symbolic narratives of late socialism, explains that, “through *glasnost* the intelligentsia was to serve as the motor of *perestroika*, helping to generate the ideas that would shape the reform program” (Sherlock 2007: 36). Most of my participants evaluate *glasnost* as being Gorbachev’s most noteworthy achievement, one that according to

Malva Landa, "let the genie out of the bottle."

*Glasnost* signaled a relaxed censorship towards the press. Previously underground literature known as *samizdat*\*\* (literally, "self-published"), was now either openly circulated or published, and previously banned authors were resurfacing again. Progressively oriented editors were appointed to periodicals, such as *Novy Mir* and *Ogonek*\*\* . Many relied on these sources and on newly appearing current-affairs television programs such as *Vzgliad* ["The View"] and *Piatoe Koleso* ["The Fifth Wheel"] and radio stations such as *Eho Moskvi*\*\* ["Echo Moscow"] as their sources of current events and political commentary. Participants describe that during this time, they had to line up in front of newspaper stands at five in the morning in order to buy the weekly issue of the *Ogonek* periodical before it sold-out.

In 1990, Gorbachev appointed influential party members to high-ranking positions in the Central Committee. This decision backfired in August 1991, while he was vacationing in Crimea. Among these members, Gorbachev's Vice-President Gennadi Yanaev, and the Minister of Defence, Dmitry Iazov, formed a State Committee for a State of Emergency (*GKChP*\*\* ) and led a military coup to overthrow Gorbachev's cabinet. Tanks entered city streets, and Yeltsin, then the president of the Russian Republic, along with tens of thousands of supporters led a counter-coup clustering around major administrative institutions, most prominently around the Moscow White House. After three days in the standoff, known as the "putsch," Yeltsin declared himself as aligned with the defenders of the Moscow White House.

This event was immortalized in the imagination of many Muscovites through iconic photographs of Yeltsin throwing pamphlets and making speeches standing on top of a tank. After his victory, Yeltsin dismissed the government of the USSR. Gorbachev resigned his post, and as of December 25, 1991, the USSR was officially disbanded (Lane and Ross 1995:3).

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a profound economic and political rift in the Russian Republic. A radical economic plan known as “price liberalization” was initiated by Yeltsin’s newly appointed finance minister Yegor Gaidar. This policy hyperinflated prices, causing many people representing the former Soviet “middle class” to lose their entire life’s savings, while wages did not match the rising rate of inflation, if they were being paid at all. During this period, many people struggled to subsist (Lane and Ross 1995:12). A strong presidential power dominated Russia, and conflict escalated between Yeltsin’s reform platform and Parliament (Ibid.: 10). Some have argued that the conflict stemmed from Yeltsin’s desire for greater power (Hedlund 1999:150). Tensions escalated in October and December 1993, when Yeltsin ordered a blockade of the parliament building, effectively disbanding Parliament.

At 7 a.m. on Monday 4 October, tanks began to fire on the White House and by 4:30 p.m. virtually the entire leadership of the Parliament [...] had been arrested and taken to Lefortovo Prison. Approximately 144 people had been killed. The battle between the Parliament and the presidency had ended with a victory for Yeltsin [...] a two-week state of emergency was declared in Moscow under which 90,000 people were arrested (Lane and Ross 1995:17-18).

The number of people killed was never reported, since these events remained largely hidden from public view. Several moments during 1993 and in the following year caused most participants of my research to regret having supported Yeltsin's campaigns. Several attributed this change to the 1993 blockade, and the violent clash at the Moscow White House. This was especially true for Susanna Pechuro, one of my informants, who stated that "when the authorities hide the number of murders in this country, you know this signals the end of hope." By December 1994, when the war in Chechnya started participants remember having lost all hope in the vision Yeltsin's democratic reforms had represented less than a decade earlier.

### *1.2.3 Social Location, Contradictory Meanings and Gender in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia.*

While I find it imperative to introduce the temporal and spatial co-ordinates of my research, I also find it important to situate the participants with respect to their social location. Each participant grew up in an environment where some facets of their everyday life were ideologically influenced by a political system which was vastly different from Western democracies. Consequently, those ideologies may have translated to influence choices of personal lifestyle and political or social outlook. This is a difficult assumption to assert without giving a specific example. Consider Malva Noevna's tenuous response concerning my question of how she negotiated her Jewish identity in the Soviet Union.

During collectivization, the passport system was introduced. Peasants didn't get passports. You could walk into the passport office, and name any nationality. I said I was Jewish, because I knew that Jews were discriminated against. But I was never discriminated against. The first time it happened was in 1949 when I wanted to get into graduate school, but it was never said in the open.

What could be made of this obvious contradiction? In this example, Malva Noevna refutes her experience of being persecuted on the basis of her ethnicity, despite offering an apparent example of anti-Semitism. There may be several explanations for this contradiction; she *may* be reiterating communist maxims about ethnic pluralism, while excepting her own experience as an anomaly. However, the reason she retold this account of accepting Judaism likely stems from her mission to advocate for the powerless, while excluding herself from the stigma associated with Jewish heritage, in order to avoid self-victimization. This example is a powerful tool for future reflection, but its ramifications go beyond the scope of the present analysis.

Consider another example of the position of a member of the intelligentsia during the post-war period in Soviet Russia. Before the war, in campaigns aimed at liquidating supposed Trotskyite conspirators, according to an *NKVD* order of 1937, Joseph Stalin ordered the persecution of millions of people, through exile to work camps, imprisonment and execution, which included many members of the intelligentsia. After the war, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he began creating influential professional positions for persons with a higher education, creating a class of the "professional intelligentsia" (Gessen 2000). Thus, literature analysing this topic recognizes that the intelligentsia played a dual role as both conformists to, and

dissidents against, various regimes over time. This lengthy introduction is meant to pinpoint various ideological contradictions to which a person living in the former Soviet Union may have been subject. The preceding discussion on the social location of the participants in my research is a way of introducing the challenge associated with studying gender in Russia, especially from the perspective of women of the Russian intelligentsia.

*Part I: Gender Studies.*

There were several reasons why I chose to study the intelligentsia from a gendered perspective, and why I focused entirely on women. In preliminary research on this subject, I had found that in academic literature, women's social role in the Soviet Union was discussed as being complex and contradictory. Certainly, some of my participants have served contradictory political goals as intellectuals. However, the analysis of their social role as women was similarly imbued with ambivalent goals and contradictions: various political regimes would have discussed their emancipation, while simultaneously strengthening their subordinated positions in a patriarchal society. Revolutionary aims regarding gender equality in the Soviet Union often had paradoxical meanings. While official Soviet discourse guaranteed their equality, women were essentialized as mothers who must hold up particular ideals of femininity. As Susan Gal and Gail Kligman suggest, women had to play dual roles as workers and mothers, and as leaders and subordinates (Gal and Kligman 2000:5). I find it essential



to locate the anthropology of gender in the Soviet Union in order to understand the nuances of gendered identity in present-day Russia.

*Part II: Gender in the Soviet Union*

The ideas of gender equality in the Soviet Union stem from pre-Revolutionary theoretical insights of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) and Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) who argued that communism was the only possible economic system that would guarantee the achievement of full human potential by abandoning classes, private property and alienation. Marxist theories on historical materialism posit that society moves through a series of social stages in relation to a society's mode of production. Although the theory has been refined, the Marxist basis for the equality of the sexes stems from the idea that the capitalist system oppresses women as domestic labourers, and that communism would emancipate them. As Mary Buckley suggests, Engels posited that,

The key to women's liberation rested in economic self-determination, in a system in which ownership of the means of production was not concentrated in the hands of a capitalist class. A prior condition was that women had to participate in the labour force en masse if they were to become the equals of men (Buckley 1989:22).

Engels' notion of gender equality became relevant in Soviet political ideology, as it was endlessly reiterated from the inception of the communist state onwards. Some feminist scholars have often criticized this position. Lissyutkina (1993) analyzes the politically loaded Soviet-era ideals of gender equality in the workforce,

Full employment of the female population in the former Soviet Union never meant the realization of the right to work. It was a compulsory duty that gave the government the ability to use the entire population as cheap labor for the realization of the senseless utopian project of rebuilding society (Lissyutkina 1993:275).

Similarly, the analysis of pre-revolutionary ideas on gender equality adopted by Soviet leaders led Mary Buckley to conclude that their goals focused less on an analysis of gender roles, male-female relations, or women's subordination to men, and more on seeking a "collective or social solution to domestic labour rather than a radical restructuring of gender roles" (Buckley 1989:48). Thus, we need to look beyond the original Marxist models of gender equality to analyze and conceptualize gender at particular moments of Soviet and post-Soviet history.

Anthropologists such as Marilyn Strathern (1987) analyzing gender relations in Melanesia, urge readers to destabilize notions of innately human, or well-established patterns of behaviour, suggesting that if gender is looked at as a social construction, we may also approach an understanding of how the status quo is legitimized or contested through constructions of the past (di Leonardo 1991:29). To understand this historical trajectory, it may be useful to survey the chronology of feminist thought emerging about, and out of, the Soviet Union.

The period of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed more heterogeneous discourses on women's equality in the Soviet Union, stemming from Western feminist influences. However, as discussed earlier, the equality of the sexes in the Soviet era was a matter of political ideology that in turn shaped the way academics conceived of the feminist project. The dissemination of Western feminist research throughout the Soviet Union

provoked an attack on Western feminism. According to Mary Buckley, the conflict was situated politically in the historical fear of feminism, triggered "by the pervasiveness of traditional ideas about gender roles, and fears that 'bourgeois feminism' would flourish and divide the working class" (Buckley 1989:19). She asks the reader,

Why, in a socialist state officially committed since 1917 to equality of the sexes, have we not seen a rigorous analysis of gender roles? Why is it that 'feminism' is condemned in the USSR as counter-revolutionary and denigrated as an example of bourgeois self-indulgence? [...] Moreover, why when we pose these questions in the USSR, do many Soviet women in factories, offices and universities look at us with quizzical sympathy as they dismiss their importance, or laugh good-humouredly with us, all the time making clear that they just do not see the world this way (Buckley 1989:1)?

Several authors are puzzled by the Russian incomprehension of Western-style feminism. This lack of understanding leads to confusion amongst scholars:

Western feminists' bewildered, sometimes alienating contacts with Soviet women – the "real confusion of purposes and activities" manifest in various official meetings between the two groups, Western women's one-track insistence on the value of their own agendas, the problem with effectively translating the most basic Western terms like, "feminism," "emancipation," and "gender" for a slogan-weary Soviet audience (Lipovskaia in Holmgren 1995:15).

Lipovskaia is not the only scholar working in Russia to look critically at Western feminist assumptions on the values esteemed by Russian women.

The Russian anthropologist Larissa Lissytukina points to the differences between post-Soviet women's discourses and Western women's feminist priorities. Contentiously, she states, "the most violent opponents of feminism in Russia are actually women themselves" (Lissytukina 1999:171). She highlights the contradictions

between Western and Russian feminist projects: for example, “emancipation for Soviet women is not based upon a demand to work. On the contrary, liberation is perceived by many as the right not to work” (Lissyutkina 1993:274) and “feminism provokes a negative reaction among the majority of Soviet women. As a rule, they do not want to indenture themselves to feminism” (Ibid.) In order to analyze these values, Larissa Lissyutkina points to historically constituted definitions that influenced women’s perceptions and values: “the peculiar combination of emancipation and discrimination is a historical constant which has defined the position and the role of Russian women since at least the eighteenth century and which finds a clear echo in the situation today” (Lissyutkina 1999:173).

Recognizing institutionalized policies on gender equality as constructions influenced by social and political factors, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman argue that during the Cold War era, Western scholarship was not devoid of its particular biases either. The authors point to Cold War discourses in analyzing the influence of politics on scholarship: “predicated on underscoring difference, American social science during Cold War implicitly limited the sorts of questions considered appropriate in discussions of communist countries” (Gal and Kligman 2000:8). Scholarship on women in the Soviet era suffered from both sides of the Cold War divide. The period of transition, the *perestroika*, was a decisive moment that broke with the political censorship of previous eras, and opened the possibility of a multiplicity of discourses.

*Part III: Gender in the Post-Soviet Era*

Much of the following theoretical discussion is inspired by Micaela di Leonardo's (1991) introduction to the edited work entitled *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge*. Reflecting on past feminist approaches, di Leonardo problematizes the development of feminist scholarship in the 1970s, which suggested that women could not be studied in isolation (di Leonardo 1991:30). The author argues that "the embedded nature of gender involves as well an understanding that women must be seen not only in relation to men but to one another" (Ibid.). Because of this understanding, much research conducted on the communist era by both Russian and Western scholars emerged in a new light in the post-Soviet era. These discourses often highlight the contradictory goals between Western and Eastern European feminist projects, positioning gender embeddedness as the focal point of analysis.

Lissyutkina suggests, "Russian women have not the slightest wish to acknowledge to themselves, still less to outsiders, the discrimination against them. But they are perfectly conscious of it, and clearly formulate it..." (Ibid. 185)

Contrastingly, Lissyutkina suggests that,

It cannot be said that women in Russia have no grounds for regarding themselves as emancipated. The struggle for rights which forms the entire basis of Western feminism does not appear so important in a state where there is no rule of law, where no one has ever taken legislation seriously (Lissyutkina 1999:184).

Lissyutkina concludes that "the lines between those areas in which Russian women are emancipated and those where they are in the thrall of conservative and patriarchal

views are ... unclear" (Ibid. 181). Feminist scholars are still debating whether masked gender inequality permeates discourses on gender identity, or whether the political shifts of the transition have emancipated women. Kathleen Kuehnast suggests that:

The formerly predominant Soviet image of women as mother-workers has given way to a welter of competing ideas, from the re-emergence of traditional, procommunist ideals of women as mothers and transmitters of national culture to newly voiced feminist ideals of women as full participants in the social, economic, and political life of their countries (Kuehnast 2004:18).

These ideas indicate that debates about gender identity are symptomatic of the contested politics of transition. However, I am cautious in employing such arguments to assess the period of transition which leads one to believe that women's positionalities can be classified according to binary categories; feminist or not feminist.

Gal and Kligman comment on the binary categories that fuel gender discourses; "The question too often has been: Which is better for women, communism, or capitalism?" (Gal and Kligman 2000:10-11). They acknowledge that these discussions led to an oversimplification of the period of transition, implying a unilinear historical trajectory by which all forms of society undergo similar change in a sequence, failing to acknowledge different developments, ruptures and continuities (Gal and Kligman 2000:11). This implies that the top-down view is inadequate in studying transition from a gendered perspective. I want to suggest that in recognizing women's agency in Eastern European contexts of transition, scholars will be able to foster a more critical discourse for looking at gender inequality in post-Soviet Russia.

Galina Lindquist (1994) analyzes the life story of a Russian intellectual woman who converted to Orthodoxy at the time of the *perestroika* and who left her professional position as a scientist to pursue her "duties" as a homemaker. In her final analysis, Lindquist questions the dichotomy between her own impositions of a feminist politics and her informant's identity, which this politics seems to denounce. She concludes that her informant views feminism as a threatening ideology that undermines the material conditions and social practices which characterize her social position (Lindquist 1994:33). Lindquist suggests that it is not her role as an anthropologist to impose her social reality on her informant, but to seed the idea of a feminist politics in order that this idea may someday flourish (Ibid.). This example is relevant to research conducted by Nanette Funk (1993) who describes her misunderstanding of feminist goals of a well-known Zagreb writer concluding that "Western women, in speaking their own language of feminism, do risk imposing standards of discourse, as I did, provoking intellectual and political resentment, and sometimes shattering the possibilities of political cooperation" (Funk 1993:319).

In this section, I looked at the way gender and gender equality have been viewed in Western, Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. In looking at this modest sample of feminist anthropological scholarship emerging out of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, it is nonetheless possible to identify the tensions inherent in Western and Russian discourses on gender. Building on diLeonardo's analysis, I developed several themes which both directly and indirectly shape further anthropological

analysis in this thesis. These themes are revealing a trend of antiessentialism, which conceptualizes gender as a social construction (di Leonardo 1991:29); the embedded nature of gender, which proposes that neither women nor men can be studied in isolation (Ibid.: 30); an analysis of patterned inequality, in all its forms (Ibid.: 31); and social location (Ibid.), or the awareness of the position between the researcher and the researched. It is my hope that this project may orient itself towards women's biographies, experiences and narratives as a way to remain in dialogue with the trends in the anthropology of gender.

### **1.3 Methodological Approaches**

This research project comprises the written portion, which is the thesis. There is also an ethnographic film which I have directed and produced as part of this research and is included as a DVD in the appendix. Both of these documents are meant to stand alone; yet, both may also inform one another. The timeline of this research project follows the two-year scheme of a Masters of Arts degree at Memorial University. During the fall and winter terms in 2007/2008, I completed a number of theoretical, methodological and practical courses, aimed to assist me in my fieldwork and subsequent thesis writing. During the winter of 2008, I defended my research proposal at the departmental level, and my ethics proposal with the University's ICEHR (Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research) which approves ethics proposals based on their adherence to the Canadian Tri-council



Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2003[1998]).

### *1.3.1 Research Schedule*

I began my fieldwork in Moscow in June 2008. I selected four participants to participate both in the written and filmed portion of my research, two of which were selected based on previous contacts that I had made in Moscow, and two of which were selected based on the recommendations of the staff at *Memorial*\*\* Society. The decision was made to expand the number of participants to seven for the film. Three additional participants appearing in the film are not quoted in the thesis.

Each of the participants of this research was asked for their free and informed consent to participate in both the visual and written portions of the thesis. Every participant received a consent form that described the intentions of the research with an explanation that they will be quoted in the written text, and that their visual image will be used in the filmic portion of the thesis. It is an ethical obligation of every anthropologist researching living populations to protect the identity of his or her participants, so each woman who agreed to participate in the research was given a choice of whether to disclose her real name or use a pseudonym. It should be noted that in books and films on historical memory, participants often very much wish to be identified. This is both ethical and desirable, and promotes inclusivity in the historical project. Moreover, as participants were public intellectuals that spent a large portion of their life in the public eye as academics, as dissenters, or as social activists, they

welcomed the idea of being able to express their experiences and concerns publicly. Despite the option to use a pseudonym, every participant desired that her real name be used in the written and visual research.

In the course of the summer, I conducted from six to eight filmed interviews with each of the seven participants, adding up to about 40 hours of recorded footage. Each interview lasted from one to two hours, and focused on the participants' biographies using a variety of techniques. These techniques can be delineated by breaking up the interview portion of this project into three parts; the first and second parts were based on interview techniques; the third, was based on visual anthropology methods of elicitation. In Part I, I conducted and videotaped semi-structured interviews asking participants to retrace their experience of the specific historical period of the *perestroika*. In Part II, I conducted and videotaped a series of unstructured interviews in order to situate my participants within the particular historical context of their lifetimes, and locate their family and intellectual backgrounds. For Part III, I edited some interview material while in the field, showed it back to several participants, and recorded their opinions regarding this footage. This section comprised of only two hours of recordings, because of the time commitment required to edit interview material in the field.

### 1.3.2 Interview Schedule and Focus

I chose to focus on several historical eras in dialogue with all seven informants. These eras reflect both their enthusiasm in talking about certain events, and my initiative to ask them about their memories of several periods I found to be important. All the participants taking part in the film ranged from 70 to 90 years of age at the time of filming. The age range was consistent with the goals of my research, because it situated my participants as witnesses to several distinct political transformations, including the Second World War, Stalin's death, Khrushchev's Thaw, Leonid Brezhnev's era, the *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In this research, I am touching on two generations with distinct experiences: those over 80 years old are considered the Stalinist generation, or the Second World War generation. Those participants had lived through World War II, and had come into adulthood around the time of Stalin's death in 1953. Participants in their 70s are nicknamed *Deti 20go Siezda*\*\* ["The Children of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress," or "The Children of the Thaw"]. During their adolescence, they were witnesses to Khrushchev's speech deligitimizing Stalin's cult of personality<sup>5</sup>, and came into adulthood during a period of relaxed censorship in the Soviet Union.

Lisa Rofel comments on generational experiences, "...the shared experience of coming of age during a particular period may also contribute to sharing understandings

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<sup>5</sup> Stalin's cult of personality – Stalin used his authority as the General Secretary to build an idealized and heroic public image of himself. After Stalin's death in 1953, various leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964) and Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991) attempted to lead campaigns of de-Stalinization, with varying degrees of success.

and meanings, and the processes through which they are reproduced" (Rofel in Yurchak 30:2006). Analyzing the "last Soviet generation" before the collapse of communism, Yurchak comments on the common trend in Russia to compare generational experiences,

to use specific names to identify them, to mention events and cultural phenomena that are seen as important for a formation of a common generational experience, to describe the continuities between generations, and so on. These discourses not only reflect generations but also contribute to their production (Yurchak 2006:31).

Both groups witnessed the period of the *perestroika* when they were in their early to mid-50s , or their late 60s, early 70s. Although I do not aim to interpret the differences between generational experiences, it is plausible to suggest that one generation that lived through various Soviet periods within a different overall span of time, will have experienced the period of transition very differently from another.

During the first interview phase, I asked participants about their experiences of the *perestroika* era. Susanna Solomonovna Pechuro was extremely active during this period: she was working with some of the public intellectual leaders responsible for many democratic reforms. At this time, Anna Mihaylovna suffered through financial hardships, and despite initial enthusiasm for *perestroika* reforms, placed her energy toward helping her family. Malva Noevna was living outside of the Moscow city-limits, because formerly exiled political prisoners were not allowed to live in the capital city; every time she travelled to the capital, she broke her curfew, which was punishable by law. Finally, Elena Vasilievna lived in the city centre, and saw the

events of the putsch in 1991, and the shelling of the White House during the blockade of 1993 from her living room window that faced the Moscow White House. Despite the differences in participants' experiences, it was entirely possible to draw certain comparisons about this period between various participants' accounts. I analyze these four narratives in the fourth chapter detailing the events of the *perestroika*.

The bulk of the project focused on my participants' biographies using life history interviews. These experiences were more consistent across all participants. I dedicated an interview session to asking informants about their parents. Most informants eagerly described their relationship with their mothers or fathers in their early lives. Some of my participants' parents came from the villages to settle in or near Moscow, (Susanna Solomonovna; Elena Vasilievna), while others were persecuted and either had to flee Moscow (Anna Mihaylovna), or disappeared altogether (Malva Noevna). All the parents were born before the Russian Revolution of 1917, and our first interviews revolved around the sentiments they related to their children about the Revolution and the nascent socialist state. The next interview session was dedicated to my informants' childhoods. Interviews with younger informants combined their childhood recollections with the hardships associated with survival strategies during the Second World War (Susanna Solomonovna, Elena Vasilievna and Anna Mihaylovna). In the next phase of interviews, I asked participants about their student experience – usually spanning several periods, before the war (Malva Noevna), the end of the War in 1945 (Elena Vasilievna), or after Stalin's death in 1953 and during

Khrushchev's era (Susanna Solomonovna and Anna Mihaylovna). In the next phase of interviews, I asked participants about their professional life, their experiences as mothers (since all the women in this research have children) and other aspects of their lives during the Brezhnev era (1964-1985). Most participants detailed their professional and family lives, with the exception of Malva Noevna, who was actively involved in the dissident movement during this period. The last interview session was dedicated to the participants' present-day experiences in Russia. Despite similar historical trajectories, the differences between my informants' interpretations of these events are significant. I have attempted to select a portion of those narratives that best represent participants' accounts, and I analyze the bulk of these narratives in the third chapter.

While participants offer compelling accounts detailing their personal biographies, they are also relating a reflection of a significant portion of the history of twentieth century Russia. I saw this as an opportunity to allow the audience interested in this research to connect with their biographies through a different medium. For this reason, I chose participants who consented to have our interviews recorded using audio-visual equipment, later to be edited into a feature-length ethnographic film. In the next section, I detail my methodological and ethical approach towards making an ethnographic film as part of my Master's thesis.

### 1.3.3 Ethnographic Filmmaking

When I began filmmaking several years ago, I was challenged by the potentially confrontational nature of video and audio recording. There were times when I was hesitant to film, because I was unsure about the rapport between myself and my interviewee, and I did not want my participants to feel uncomfortable. However, the longer I have been involved in making films, the more I understood that this antagonism exists mostly in the subjective gaze of a filmmaker sensitized to the representational power of a moving image. In order to allow participants to express themselves fully, it cannot be up to the discretion of the filmmaker when to film or not to film during an interview; these must be decisions made by the participants. Having said this, it is the absolute final responsibility of the filmmaker to include or not to include material into the final presentation even when participants have consented to such, a decision made complicated by the personal nature of ethnographic interviews and the dissemination of potentially sensitive material.

I began my video-recorded interviews in Moscow with four women participating in the written analysis, and later included three additional participants who I felt compelled to include in the film, but who are not quoted in the written thesis. With each of the seven participants, I conducted the six interview sessions outlined in the preceding section. During the course of our interviews, I was usually the only person present in the room with the participant. I started our sessions by setting up the camera and sound recording equipment. I would prepare for semi-

structured and unstructured interviews by writing out themes I wanted to focus on in my field notebook, and as I was filming, I periodically glanced at the notebook on my lap. Between pulling focus and listening to audio levels through headphones, I would also engage in conversation and ask questions pertaining to the interview. Despite the difficulty of multi-tasking, this system worked well for me, because participants were in a setting that neither distracted them, nor detracted from the intimacy of the encounter, while being fully aware of the presence of the camera. The camera also gave an artificial timer for the length of the interviews, as tapes lasted for exactly an hour. When the tape ended, I would ask whether the participant wanted to continue with the interview, since I did not want to intentionally tire out participants who were engaged in our discussion. Occasionally, we would continue filming for up to two hours, if the interviewee felt compelled to continue.

As a way to highlight a particular aspect of the narrative that my participants wanted to focus on, I asked them to allow me to film an event they wanted to highlight in the film. For example, one participant invited me to film at her birthday party; another wanted to retrace her walking route from her home to her elementary school. In total, I made seven short vignettes, which were representative of my participants' interest to convey a particular aspect of their lives. I also asked several participants to allow me to film them reading letters, or looking through old photographs in front of the camera. I used this technique in the last phase of fieldwork research. In this elicitation phase, I showed data from previous interviews



and recorded my participants' feedback. This allowed participants to articulate what they viewed as important elements in our interviews, such as recollections they wanted to be included in the film, or criticism directed towards my editing decisions. This proved especially useful with two participants. I edited short clips of a particular phase of our interviews, and showed these clips back to the participants, while filming their reactions. This allowed me to direct my attention towards their concerns, and it proved effective in my analysis of this elicitation. Returning to Moscow in 2009, I screened the full edited film to all of the participants, while recording their reactions. Sharing a visual document of their narratives in the form of an ethnographic film was an appropriate way of making a reciprocal gesture to the time my participants had donated to my research.

I recorded an additional two hours of footage with two supplementary participants; a historian and archivist at the Memorial Society who commented on the dissident movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and a bard musician who gave his consent to record several songs that would serve as the soundtrack to the ethnographic film. I also recorded approximately eight hours of background visual material in the city of Moscow to use as a backdrop to the interview material. This footage served as "B-roll," or background material needed for cutaways<sup>6</sup> that replaced discontinuous lines of dialogue in the film. These included shots of the city of

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<sup>6</sup> "Cutaway - A shot, edited into a scene, which presents information that is not part of the first shot. The cutaway shot is usually followed by a return to the original shot, and is often used to condense time in a scene by eliminating undesired action or to cover a loss of continuity in the action." (Beaver 1983:80-81)

Moscow and everyday activities of my participants (such as picking berries at the cottage, or writing on a typewriter). I also filmed for five days out of a window of a train traveling eastbound from Moscow along the Trans-Siberian railway. All of this material was essential for the construction of the film.

Upon returning to St. John's after the completion of my fieldwork, I dedicated four months to ethnographic analysis—the transcription of the interview data recorded as research film, and the thematic coding of it. This work was aimed at both the written analysis and the ethnographic film, which allowed me to simultaneously assemble and analyze the footage for the written thesis, and create a “rough cut” (a draft) of the ethnographic film. I spent approximately ten months writing and editing the film project. I took another six months to assemble a rough cut—a draft version, or a roughly edited version of the film. Several other technical steps, including working with a continuity editor, a colour corrector, and a sound mixer took another two months.

#### **1.4 A Note on the Researcher**

Much has been written in the last several decades in anthropology about the role of the anthropologist and the voice of the author. In addressing this concern, I find it important to contextualize my position in this research, since it has undoubtedly influenced the direction of my investigation.

I was born in Russia in 1984. I attended kindergarten and elementary school in

Moscow until the third grade. I vaguely remember my family's impressions of the events surrounding the putsch in 1991. I left Russia with my mother in December 1994 and eventually settled in Canada, where I have lived for the last 15 years. It is difficult to write about my experiences of Moscow because of conflicting but not mutually exclusive tendencies; one, an all-encompassing nostalgia for the sights, smells and sounds of a city of my childhood, and the other, an escalating and inadvertent process of forgetting those same memories. I return to Russia on a yearly basis. Despite speaking Russian at home, I recognize that my language has changed. My Russian friends or relatives often comment on the way my intonation has been "Westernized," and that I use many more Anglicisms in everyday speech. During my formative years, I battled with how I identified myself: as a Russian-Canadian, or a Canadian-Russian? Today, I am still unable to answer this question.

In addressing the reader like this, I am also keen to make explicit that this research is not void of autobiographical interest. I visit my aging relatives in Russia each summer. My grandmother and her two sisters, my great-aunts, live in Moscow. There is no doubt in my mind that they are representatives of the Russian intelligentsia. My close connection to them inspired this project several years ago, when I returned to conduct anthropological fieldwork in the summer of 2008.

As Sergei Oushakine writes in the opening lines of "We're nostalgic but we're not crazy," (2007), "in the scholarship on cultural changes in postsocialist countries it has become a cliché to single out nostalgia as an increasingly prominent symbolic

practice through which the legacy of the previous period makes itself visible” (Oushakine 2007:451). The author argues that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a “radical multiplication of interpretative strategies” (Ibid.: 481), and that this “post-Soviet polyphony” (Ibid.) had not produced “an effective symbolic framework able to meaningfully integrate the Soviet and post-Soviet parts of one’s biography” (Ibid.: 482). In a similar vein, this research attempts to reconcile the history that I never lived through, with the cultural heritage with which I nevertheless identify. As Oushakine would have me say, “I’m nostalgic, but I’m not crazy.”

## **1.5 Chronicle of Chapters**

### *Chapter Two—Defining the Intelligentsia*

Before turning to the central ethnographic focus of this thesis, which centres on the contemporary world-view of certain situated actors who participated in the political transition of the 1990s in Russia, it is important to set the parameters of an often elusive definition of the intelligentsia, and to discuss academic literature relating to the intelligentsia’s social and political influence in various historical epochs in pre-revolutionary Russia, the Soviet Union, during the period of transition and in the contemporary era. I begin by describing the historical context which gave birth to the term “the intelligentsia,” and discuss its perceived and often contradictory role in the Soviet Union, during the transition and in post-Soviet Russia. In parallel to this analysis, I will provide concrete examples of the way the participants of this research

have affirmed their personal identity as members of the intelligentsia through an analysis of Michael Herzfeld's concepts of "disemia," "cultural intimacy," and "social poetics." By looking at the way participants of this research view their relationship to broader bases of power, I analyse the way these social actors instigate and negotiate a particular identity that questions their notion of belonging to the intelligentsia.

### *Chapter Three—Life History and the Anthropology of Memory*

I continue my analysis with the basic premise that, in order to understand my participants' present-day social and political position, we need to understand how they formulate their past. I do this by employing life history methods and analyzing the memories of continuity and rupture during several historical periods in relation to my participants' biographies. I analyze these periods chronologically, based on interviews that focused on my informants' ancestry, childhoods, student years, professional lives, the experience of the *perestroika*, and their present-day concerns and understandings. Simultaneously, I link these biographical details with historical events: for example, the way that my participants' childhood correlated with the hardships suffered during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945); the way this relationship transpired during their student years in correlation with Stalin's death (1953) and Nikita Khrushchev's delegitimizing speech on Stalin's cult of personality (1956), and so on. This approach allowed me to establish connections between various continuities and ruptures in the participants' past. I argue that participants

strive to “personally integrate” their present-day experiences with their past using Barbara Myerhoff’s analysis of life history methods. I do this to explore how the memories of political participation, social position and political beliefs of the four informants who participated in this research correlate with their present outlook on life in contemporary Russia.

#### *Chapter Four—Turning Back the Waves: Memories of Perestroika*

I build on my analysis in the previous chapter in order to understand the way that participants experienced the period of transition followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. I argue that previous classifications of membership to the intelligentsia become analytically unproductive during this period because of rapid social, economic, and political shifts. The *perestroika*, an era heralded by Mikhail Gorbachev’s period of reforms between 1985 and 1991 engaged every participant of this research. Previous binary categories of “conformism,” or “dissidence,” “elitism,” or “ordinariness” in describing Soviet realities lost their relevance during this period. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, another characteristic in describing social actors prevailed, seemingly that of political disengagement, hopelessness in the political process, or political apathy. I attempt to position participants of this research within this period, in order to explore the change in their present, personal attitudes.

*Chapter Five—Ethnographic Film*

A component of this project is an ethnographic film focusing on seven women of the Russian intelligentsia who have experienced various epochs of Soviet and post-Soviet life. I have directed, filmed and edited a feature-length ethnographic film based on my fieldwork interviews in Russia. In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications of using ethnographic film as a project of memory, and the techniques I have used to achieve an ethnographic representation of the life histories of my participants. Representation and collaboration are key features of this project, since the aim of the film is to communicate the experiences of the women participating in this research project to both Russian and non-Russian audiences. In this chapter, I argue that a carefully crafted ethnographic film that incorporates ethical methods in its structure can be useful as both as a work of ethnography, and as a tool of advocacy and empowerment for those participating in the project.

## Chapter Two—Defining the Russian Intelligentsia

I am prefacing the complex history and contested definitions of the Russian intelligentsia by discussing the relevant uses of the construct of the intelligentsia. Firstly, I want to introduce the way two important thinkers, Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu have theorized the intellectual, and secondly, I want to define the way “discourse” as a term of analysis will be used in subsequent discussion. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I will discuss the historical context of the intelligentsia, and its treatment in academic literature in present-day Russia. Next, I will ground my discussion on the intelligentsia by linking the theoretical perspective offered by Michael Herzfeld’s (2005) concept of “cultural intimacy,” with an analysis of the categories of belonging of the participants of this research.

### 2.1. Belonging to the Intelligentsia: Scholarship, Past and Present

Writing the “Prison Notebooks” between 1929 and 1935 while incarcerated under Mussolini’s fascist regime, Antonio Gramsci elaborated on the concept of “hegemony,” or the way that dominant classes maintain their leadership by exerting consent or coercion (1971). Central to his argument is the now famous discussion on the formation of intellectuals. He argued that “all men are intellectuals... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (Gramsci 1971:140). He made a distinction between “organic” and “traditional” intellectuals, adding that there are no intellectuals independent of class. First, the author describes “traditional” intellectuals



as a self-perpetuating stratum rooted in class relations, which nevertheless attempts to portray itself as autonomous of class,

Every "essential" social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of a development of this structure, has found (at least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms (Gramsci 1971:137).

These "traditional" intellectuals may implicitly or explicitly organize the support of the masses for the dominant class. However, there also exist "organic" intellectuals, who exist within *any* social group, and articulate the group's goals or function,

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields (Gramsci 1971:133-134).

While Gramsci was attempting to explain the way that capitalism and other power systems attempt to reproduce themselves, his argument establishes several key elements on the formation and negotiation of intellectuals as a "social stratum," namely, their political function, and their contested social position. While I distance myself from analyzing the Russian intelligentsia mainly through the prism of class formation, and especially in relation to the Soviet period of communism, both of these components are important aspects for my analysis.

Pierre Bourdieu was an important French sociologist of the second half of the 20th century, also, in part, influenced by Marxist ideas. He made a massive intellectual contribution that still resonates strongly in the social sciences today. A

potential starting point to frame Bourdieu's work on the "intellectual" is to understand the author as an intellectual himself. As an academic, Bourdieu was nevertheless critical of the Academe as an institution. Through an original analysis of forms of capital, he understood forms of cultural knowledge, or the strength of social networks as forms of cultural or social "capital"—valuable resources that can reinforce forms of power or exploitation (Bourdieu 1986). In a 1969 article, entitled "The Intellectual Field and Creative Project," Bourdieu discusses the terms of membership to the category of the intellectual, calling this construction the "intellectual field" (Bourdieu 1969). Through a historical analysis, starting in the 19th century, Bourdieu grounds his discussion on the intellectual as a creative artist dependent on the financial backing and approval of a patron. Only during the Romantic era, did creative artists begin to exert financial and intellectual independence,

This revolutionary redefinition of the intellectual's vocation and of his function in society is not always recognized as such, because it leads to the formation of the system of concepts and values that go to make up the social definition of the intellectual which is regarded by society as self-evident (Bourdieu 1969:92).

Deconstructing the definition of a member of an intellectual, Bourdieu proposes the concept of the "intellectual field,"

The intellectual field, which cannot be reduced to a simple aggregate of isolated agents or to the sum of elements merely juxtaposed, is, like a magnetic field, made up of a system of power lines. In other words, the constituting agents or systems of agents may be described as so many forces which by their existence, opposition or combination, determine its specific structure at a given moment in time (Ibid.: 89).

Bourdieu describes the system as a constant contestation for legitimacy of one or another form of expression by the intellectual, or the creative artist, supported by

particular social institutions. And so, while certain institutions acting as legitimating authorities (such as universities and academies) can legitimate certain spheres of artistic production, such as literature, or painting, other institutions such as critics or clubs, compete for the position of the legitimating authority in giving such spheres of artistic production as "cinema" or "photography" the status of legitimacy (Bourdieu 1969:105). In this way, Bourdieu suggests that the definition of the intellectual is always contested, since the "relationship between a creative artist and his work [...] is affected by the system of social relations, [...] and by the position of the creative artist in the structure of the intellectual field" (Ibid.: 89).

Therefore, identification with the intelligentsia is always a contested notion. To add to the complexity of a working definition, it is important to recognize that in the Russian case, there is a historical antecedent to the terms "intellectual" and the "intelligentsia," and the distinctions between them are important. For example, the word *intelectuál*, [интеллектуал], which describes an intellectual individual with an intellect, *inteléct* [интеллект], describes an individual who is erudite and who has received a higher education; whereas an *intelligént*, [интеллигент] describes an individual who may also have the above characteristics in addition to claiming membership amongst the intelligentsia. Moreover, as was often explained to me during interviews, a member of the intelligentsia is necessarily an intellectual, but an intellectual is not necessarily a member of the intelligentsia. In cases like these, an "intellectual" [интеллектуал] was used as a derogatory term, describing a person trained as a narrow specialist who is interested solely in his or her well-being.

This distinction between these terms is not always apparent in academic literature. Gary Saul Morson elaborates on the definition, by making an interesting distinction between different strata of the intelligentsia:

In the term's most inclusive meaning, the intelligentsia consisted of anyone broadly literate or anyone whose career demanded education, but such a definition was itself often polemical, an attempt to say that the "true" intelligent did not require lineaments of a "classical" intelligent (Morson 2009:262).

In my interpretation on the distinction made by the author, the "true" intelligentsia in the broad sense of the word refers to intellectuals. The "classical" intelligentsia which the author describes as the narrow definition, is the historically situated and culturally constituted group:

We get the word "intelligentsia" from Russia, where it came into circulation around 1860. The term never had a single fixed meaning and it named overlapping groups. But everyone's definition included one group, which was often known as the "classical" intelligentsia or the intelligentsia in the narrow sense of the word (Morson 2009: 261-262).

I am boldly making the distinction between intellectuals and the intelligentsia here, since without this distinction, the definition is paradoxical: membership can be claimed by anyone as long as they can verbalize their membership within the group. However, they may also exclude anyone who attempts to broaden the definition.

Considering the above discussion about both the contested function and definition of belonging, membership in the Russian intelligentsia requires a proper historical and cultural context and an in-depth analysis, which formulates the goal of this chapter and more broadly, the goal of this thesis.

2.1.1. *Use of "Discourse" and "Narrative" in this Thesis.*

In the social sciences, the terms that we use are not merely descriptive, but analytical. Therefore, elaborating on the history and the definition of the intelligentsia in Russia, I want to explain my use of "discourse" in this thesis, since it is by analysing the discursive categories that include or exclude a person as a member of the intelligentsia that I attempt to arrive at a working definition of the group. I use the definition of "discourse," as articulated by Joel Sherzer (1987) in his summary of scholarly debates on the intersections of language and culture. He begins his argument by describing the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. In a widely quoted 1929 article, Edward Sapir argued that language may influence the way humans organize thoughts and thus categorize the world around them,

The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group [...] We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Sapir 1985).

Along with Sapir, his student, Benjamin Whorf elaborated on the connection between language and culture, giving prominence to the linguistically deterministic theory that language determines culture called the "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis." Sherzer argues for an understanding of discourse that draws from this model of language and culture:

Taking a discourse-centered approach to the language-culture relationship enables us to reconceptualize the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Instead of asking such questions as does grammar reflect culture or is culture determined by grammar, or are there isomorphisms between grammar and culture, we rather start with discourse, which is the nexus, the actual and concrete expression of the language-culture-society relationship. It is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies, and fine tunes both culture and language and [it is at their intersection]... that the potentials and resources provided by grammar, as well

as cultural meanings and symbols, are exploited to the fullest and the essence of language-culture relationships becomes salient (Sherzer 1987:296).

Following this conception, Sherzer proposes to treat discourse as a component of language, "related to but distinct from grammar. It can be oral or written and can be approached in textual or sociocultural and socio-interactional terms" (Ibid.). In other words, it is not language that gives salience to culture, but discourse, which is at the intersection of the language that we speak and culture that we embody.

Formulating "discourse" in a similar way in the book *Discourse analysis* (2002), Barbara Johnstone employs the term discourse as "instances of communication in the medium of language" (2002:3). Describing the way Michel Foucault employs discourse in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Johnstone analyses discourse as a way thought processes influence language processes and vice-versa, how language influences thought processes. She elaborates on Foucault's conception of discourse, by describing how conventional forms of discourse create and are created by discourse itself, and this linkage constitutes ideology, or what Johnstone calls "sets of interrelated ideas" used to "circulate power in society" (Ibid.). Johnstone argues that, multiple "discourses" in this sense "involve patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language" (Ibid.). Although I acknowledge the way "discourse" is used in the Foucauldian sense to describe the intersections of power and knowledge, I use discourse as a way to describe the tools at the disposal of a cultural being to reference prior cultural knowledge. For example, using "discourses on the intelligentsia," I may reference the way the concept of the intelligentsia is treated in

academic texts as well as in popular cultural definitions.

In this thesis, I use both broad cultural descriptions, as well as more precise terms of analysis, for example, life history narratives. Narrative is usually treated as a spoken or written account of connected events. For example, James Wertsch looks at the narratives of national histories in contemporary Russia through an analysis of historical accounts of the Russian civil war in high school history textbooks. He concludes: "narratives do not exist in isolation and do not serve as neutral interpretive instruments. Instead, they are embedded in concrete discourse characterized by dialogic and rhetorical processes and introduce an interested—and constraining—perspective" (Wertsch 2001:516). The treatment of the Civil War is drastically different between Soviet textbooks, and those published during the period of transition. For example, while Soviet textbooks described the Russian Revolution as a collective class endeavour, post-Soviet textbooks described it as an event motivated by singular players using internal strife to their benefit. Both narratives draw from the repertoire of officially sanctioned sources that attempt to construct national identity. The latter narrative, however, is not based so much on the "truth value of statements" (Ibid.: 526), as with the rebutting the former narrative's ideology. Wertsch suggests that the presentation of events in these narratives is influenced as much by previous narrative accounts, as by archival information (Ibid.: 511). Interestingly, in this argument, narrative is treated as a cultural tool in sociocultural analysis.

However, the proposition to treat narrative as a cultural tool, and therefore, as a dynamic dialogical process, limits the possibility of seeing narrative as a strategy in

which it is not just inscribed or reinvented in identity-formation, but in the way it is performed, as well. Another model for narrative analysis is the dramatic model proposed by Richard Burke. The author argued that "all verbal acts are regarded as symbolic action or symbols in action" (Burke quoted in Watson 1973:249).

Karen Ann Watson proposes to unify the sociolinguistic and the dramatic models of narrative analysis. The author references Richard Burke as a representative of the "dramatist" theory of narrative, and William Labov, who pioneered the sociolinguistic approach to suggest that "the joining of the rhetorical (dramatic) model of literary criticism and the sociolinguistic method of narrative analysis, would be a fertile union for anthropology" (Watson 1973:248). Because the "dramatist" theory views language as modes of action, rather than a means of conveying information, Watson argues that, "Burke's theory of symbolic action is also a theory of drama, for drama is a means of transforming—e.g., separating, incorporating, defining—identity" (Ibid.: 249). Labov, on the other hand, argues that in order to understand narrative, "the fundamental structures of narrative can best be isolated in oral versions of personal experience, elicited from ordinary speakers of the language" (Ibid.: 251). In combining these two approaches, the author arrives at analyses that "indicate both the tolerance of narrative structure for being reshaped according to social situation and the strategies followed by narrators in addressing their audiences" (Ibid.: 261).

Although narrative can be analyzed as discourse, narrative will be presented in this research as a personal account of participants' recollections. There are several



reasons that Watson's approach to narrative is compatible with the way narrative is treated and analysed in this thesis. From a sociolinguistic perspective, participants of this research remember their personal biographical experiences throughout several key epochs of the history of the Soviet Union. This is compatible with "oral versions of personal experience, elicited from ordinary speakers of the language" (Watson 1973:251). However, the presence of a camera; the interview situation itself; the probing of the anthropologist for delineating participants' positions throughout various eras, is compatible with the dramatist approach to narrative analysis.

### *2.1.2. History of the Intelligentsia*

Marc Raeff (1966) ascribes the roots of the Russian intelligentsia (интеллигенция) to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian nobility. But it was in the atmosphere of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that a new generation, exemplified by the likes of Herzen, Bakunin, Stankevich and Khomiakov, was borne out of the participation in the war of 1812 against Napoleon, and inherited the moral characteristics of the Decemberists<sup>7</sup> (Raeff 1966). During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Tsarist rulers inspired by the ideas of the European Enlightenment attempted to modernize many Russian institutions. Peter

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<sup>7</sup> The Decemberists were a group of Russian revolutionaries who unsuccessfully rebelled against the tsar in 1825. The leaders of the revolt represented a small, oppositional fraction of the tsarist army borne out the Napoleonic war of 1812. They were all army officers of an aristocratic background, attempting to garner army support to stage a coup against the tsar. They strived to abolish serfdom, establish citizen liberties and introduce a new constitution condemning nepotism. After the sudden death of Tsar Aleksandr I in November 1825, Tsar Nicholas, who was despised amongst army ranks, was to take the throne. On the morning of 14 December 1825, a group of armed soldiers gathered at the Senate Square in St. Petersburg to stop the appointment of the tsar to the throne. Within hours, Tsar Nicholas managed to quell the rebellion. He ordered the resisters to be executed or sent to exile to Siberia. Despite its failure, the Decemberists' revolt remained an important symbolic gesture of Russian revolutionary history inspiring poets such as Pushkin; writers such as Herzen and Bakunin, and political revolutionaries such as V.I. Lenin. (B.S.E. 1972:38)

the Great (1672-1725) founded St. Petersburg in 1703 modeled on the cities of the Italian Renaissance; Empress Catherine the Great (1729-1796) invested in bringing many Western art masterpieces to Russia, and Alexander II (1818-1881) led political reforms to abolish serfdom in 1861. European influences on these modernization efforts set the precedent for the intelligentsia of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This intelligentsia consisted of, according to Robert Service, “conservatives and radicals, believers and atheists, nationalists and internationalists, economic materialists and aesthetes, liberals and terrorists, gradualists and revolutionaries” (Service 2002:65). According to John Gooding, the word “intelligentsia” had “appeared in the 1860’s to describe a fervent and extremist radical class whose goal it was to overthrow the tsarist state and with it, the whole economic, social and cultural order” (Gooding 2002:5). However, some revolutionaries cleaved off from this movement because of their disagreement with the anarchic outlook of some of these radicals. Their goal was to live without a state but their means to that goal were to be achieved by the use of state power; this position was characteristic of the Marxist intelligentsia. Gooding (2002) suggests an early quality of the group, “The mixture of being both repelled and attracted to the state was a mixture characteristic of the intelligentsia” (Ibid.: 6).

Another early discourse centered on the moral qualities of the intelligentsia. Consider this early characterization by M.O. Gershenzon, appearing in *Istoricheskie zapiski* in 1910,

[When] we consider an average member of the Russian intelligentsia, a characteristic trait immediately catches our eye: more than anything else he is a man [sic] who, from youth, lives in the literal sense *outside himself*, i.e. he

recognizes as an object worthy of his interest and participation only something lying outside his own personality—the people, society, the state (quoted from Raeff 1966:240, italicized in original).

Interestingly, both of these discourses persisted throughout the Soviet era, and are still present in descriptions today. Inna Kotchetkova points to two themes central to discussions about the intelligentsia: “the first describes the complicated relationships between the intelligentsia and power (the authorities), the second defines intelligentsia as a group responsible for its people and needed by them, and reaffirms its role of acting in the name of the interests of the people” (Kotchetkova 2004:2.8). However, how can we attribute these particular characteristics to individual actors? In other words, is it productive to ask what *qualities* define the intelligentsia?

In response to my questions in our interviews, participants repeatedly problematized the notion of the intelligentsia and the position of an intellectual within wider society. In subsequent chapters, I examine what the shifts of values in light of transition have symbolized for the women who participated in this project by analyzing whether they feel the role of the intelligentsia is still relevant in contemporary Russia, and what they feel the intelligentsia can or may contribute to the current social and political situation in Russia. In the next section, I introduce contemporary debates on the position and relevance of the intelligentsia in contemporary Russia.

### 2.1.3. *The Intelligentsia after Perestroika*

There exist contentious discourses in the present-day scholarship on the

intelligentsia. Scholars employ two central metaphors suggesting either the intelligentsia's relevance or irrelevance in present-day Russia. One stream of scholarship argues that the intelligentsia as a social stratum is "dead" and irrelevant (Gessen 1997; Ryvkina 2006; Sinyavsky 1997; Zubok 2009). Another body of work argues that the social group "lives" and remains relevant (Nakhushev 2007). This debate is framed by the events of the *perestroika*, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After 1991, the newly sovereign Russian Federation abandoned centralized economic planning, ushering in an era of market reforms. Several authors suggest that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the blossoming of pro-capitalist initiatives such as the market economy and ownership of private property, social values have shifted from moral themes, such as respectability and education, to materialist values associated with wealth and commodities (Patino 2005; Ryvkina 2006). Because of this transformation, some argue that the role of the intelligentsia has become historically obsolete (Sinyavsky 1997), or that it has disappeared altogether as a social group (Ryvkin 2006; Zubok 2009). The discourse on the death of the intelligentsia correlates political and economic events with the lack of influence of the intelligentsia in the political and cultural spheres of modern-day Russia. Rozalina Ryvkina (2006) argues, on the basis of two premises, that the intelligentsia as a social stratum had completely disappeared,

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the intelligentsia's endeavors were no longer needed, and the foundation that had defined its social position

disappeared. That was the first and chief cause of the expiration of the Soviet intelligentsia as a social stratum. A second reason was more complex: the intelligentsia turned out to be a "bad prophet." It called for the renovation of the Soviet system but failed to predict the consequences (Ryvkina 2006:9).

This critique positions the intelligentsia as a social group that supported Boris Yeltsin's democratic reforms. The author reinforces the argument that the intelligentsia was at least partly to blame for the failure of promised reforms.

Similarly, Andrei Sinyavsky suggests that members of the intelligentsia have grown complacent with the social and political disorder of present-day Russia, even though they were constitutive players in the reforms (Sinyavsky 1997:29).

Ryvkina (2006) presents an economic condition that signaled the demise of the "social stratum": "the intelligentsia's departure from the historical scene was also prompted by changes in its material condition. It was no longer a 'spiritual guide' for society but was turned into a humbled stratum of budget-funded workers" (2006:10). Others contradictorily suggest that new branches of the intelligentsia have accepted positions of power and have become members of the successful business elite known as the *Novie Russkie*<sup>8</sup> (Gessen 1997:101).

A parallel scholarly discourse treats the intelligentsia as an undying (or "living") social stratum. Scholars partial to this discourse criticize the position that the intelligentsia is no longer relevant. Nakhushhev (2007) addresses the argument that the

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<sup>8</sup> *Novie Russkie* ["New Russians"] - The term has become part of the Russian folklore in the last two decades. The caricature of a *noviy Russkiy* is that of a young entrepreneur who has acquired riches (usually through dishonest means) after the market reforms of the 1990s. He or she owns a luxurious home and expensive cars, vacations abroad, and may be characterized as having a vulgar manner of speech, and a tasteless, over the top fashion sense; in other words, the opposite of, and antagonist to, the intelligentsia.

market economy is displacing both the function and the role of the intelligentsia:

This tendency is based on the conviction that as the market economy becomes more developed the intelligentsia is disappearing, is breaking down into specialists and professionals who make up the nucleus of a middle class, as well as into a *déclassé* segment moving down into the lower strata of society. These two latter tendencies are connected with the notion that is becoming firmly established in the public consciousness that the intelligentsia is supposedly doomed to self-liquidation (Nakhushev 2007:34).

But Nakhushev argues that the *raison d'être* of the intelligentsia is precisely that of moral agents who must uphold their principles and strive towards social justice:

The materialization of social justice is within the powers only of that portion of human beings who are the best prepared intellectually and morally, who are capable of taking upon themselves the responsibility for the way that life is lived in society, while not, at the same time, expecting any privileges in return. This is the essence of intellectuality (Nakhushev 2007:24).

This author argues that the term continues to carry a socially significant meaning linked to “memory of the past” and responsibility for the future (Ibid.), essentially claiming that the role of the intelligentsia is both a moral and a historical one.

Finally, Michele Rivkin-Fish evaluates the way contemporary social transformations in health care have realigned the position of morality with that of material well-being in evaluations of the intelligentsia:

In the case of paying patients assumed to represent the intelligentsia, the use of money for quality health care was read as a sign that class privilege for those with educational and cultural capital was reviving—a process perceived as moral restitution for Soviet violence to the intelligentsia over 70 years (Rivkin-Fish 2009:88).

Unlike earlier analyses that made material wealth of the new entrepreneurial class in post-Soviet Russia incommensurable with definitions of the intelligentsia, Rivkin-Fish

connects the way the ability to afford, and choice to purchase, private health care is now being seen as a responsible and moral decision.

I enter this debate by suggesting that many discourses surrounding power, morality, and material embodiments of values have become analytically problematic in our evaluations of the intelligentsia. Similarly, I suggest that the debate on the “life” or “death” of the intelligentsia needs a reevaluation. My research, based on conversations with members in this group, focuses on individuals as agents who negotiate their categories of belonging in sometimes nuanced ways. During my interviews, I became aware that despite being familiar with the critical debates on the definition and role of the intelligentsia, participants did not easily identify with these critiques.

Contrary to the argument that members accepted influential positions of power after the *perestroika*, several members argue against this conclusion. Using precisely this logic, Susanna Solomonovna asserts the opposite, that positive moral qualities espoused by the intelligentsia are related to the current disempowerment of the group. If the intelligentsia is *responsible* for the way life is lived in Russia, Susanna reflects on this point:

The question is, what is the intelligentsia? Is it people involved in thought labour? The intelligentsia could do anything, but they must be concerned with the larger problem of social conditions (*bitiya*). [This is the] intelligentsia for whom self-comfort is not important. Substance is not in self-realization, but in realizing what is happening outside of your window. And those people who are concerned with the substance are suffering right now, especially after the lost hope of the 90s. We felt powerless after the *perestroika*.

In this statement, Susanna pinpoints the historical moment when the potential for social reforms shifted against supporters’ aims, leading to present-day

disempowerment amongst the intelligentsia. Similarly, Malva Noevna critiques those who have claimed membership as “educated” or “moral” leaders in the past, as having abused their privileged position in order to usurp power. She provides a critique of her own identification with this social category:

I don't think I am the intelligentsia... Here, we call those with a higher education the intelligentsia. Before the revolution, we called those who finished the lyceum the intelligentsia, but our first Soviet leaders did not even finish secondary. It's easy to distinguish between redheads and brunettes, but I don't know what is the intelligentsia.

Malva Noevna problematizes the notion that being educated was sufficient to claim to be a member of the intelligentsia within the social hierarchies in the Soviet Union. She describes her own position, “I knew I was unfree but I allowed myself to think freely. I didn't have any ideological constraints.” Criticizing the ideological and political affiliations of many individuals widely considered to have been members of the intelligentsia, she implies that membership should involve espousing values and acting in ways that do not compromise one's political position. It is not that the intelligentsia has lacked power, she laments, but rather it has been associated with an excess of it. Both participants address the critiques targeted at members by reversing the relationship between the perceived past and present qualities of the intelligentsia and their relationship to broader bases of power. In light of this, I now examine how participants relate to their identification with the category of the intelligentsia during various Soviet periods, and in present-day Russia.



## 2.2 Self-definitions of Belonging

The goal of the second part of this chapter is to decipher various codes that may contribute to the way members of the intelligentsia define themselves. Primarily, I begin with what Michael Herzfeld terms “practical essentialisms,” to explain the way categories of the intelligentsia are perceived and stereotyped, and thus, how they remain salient in the Russian context. In other words, I attempt to describe how various legitimating authorities have imagined or constructed social distinction of the intelligentsia within what Bourdieu would have called the “intellectual field” (Bourdieu 1966). In Russia, the intelligentsia may be subdivided into at least four categories, each with a particular relationship to the legitimating authorities that acknowledge each category’s presence.

The theoretical discussion in this chapter is grounded in the application of several concepts developed by Michael Herzfeld (2005) in *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. In a similar way that Herzfeld begins his analysis of identity in the nation state, I begin with an analysis of participants’ self-identification with the intelligentsia using Charles Ferguson’s (1959) concept of “diglossia,” describing the way language varieties shape a particular identity amongst women who participated in this project. Following this, I discuss Herzfeld’s elaboration on Ferguson’s analysis of speech varieties, which the author terms “disemia,” describing how identity is inscribed not solely in language, but in narratives, gestures, actions, and so on. Next, I return to Herzfeld’s concept of “practical essentialism” to discuss “social poetics,” the central theoretical perspective of this research, to describe how

an identity can become negotiated or contested within social and political discourses. Finally, I apply the concept of “cultural intimacy” (2005) to my research, using it as a theoretical model to explain the way positioned actors with a particular collective identity interact within broader bases of power.

### 2.2.1 Sub-categories of the *Intelligentsia*

Of the four women, who participated in this research and whose life histories are the focus of this thesis, each has a particular claim to belonging to the intelligentsia. In the Russian context, the intelligentsia is often given a nickname signalling their generational, cultural and social status. There exist a multitude of titles such as the “classical,” “true,” “kitchen,” “cultural,” “creative,” “professional,” “oppositional,” and “moral” intelligentsia.

These categories are not extrapolated from scholarly publications; nevertheless, they circulate freely in various discourses surrounding the intelligentsia. Consider Malva Noevna’s elaboration on the intelligentsia:

Our state called the working class the professional intelligentsia. Any writer was part of the creative intelligentsia. Students were raised to ideologically influence people. Saharov [Andrei Dmitrievich]\*\*<sup>9</sup> is an *intelligent*. His parents were middle-handed intelligentsia... But he was working for a government that was worse than the fascists and was the most honest scientist. He honestly thought we should have parity with the Americans [during the Cold War arms race] Did he become an *intelligent* after he became a dissident? Formally, no. Is Shafarevich [radical, anti-Semitic Orthodox

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<sup>9</sup> Andrei Dmitrievich Saharov (1921-1989) was a prominent Soviet nuclear physicist. In the 1960s, he became active in the human rights movement and campaigned internationally against nuclear proliferation. Despite receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he was exiled to Gorki under Leonid Brezhnev’s regime. He was returned from exile during Mikhail Gorbachev’s leadership, and was a key member in drafting the new constitution during Duma reforms in 1989.

nationalist] an intelligent? I wouldn't shake hands with him, but formally, yes. Although Malva Noevna never defines her personal classification of the intelligentsia, she delineates several formal definitions of the group; they are professional, creative, educated. Each claim does not rely on a singular definition, but employs various, oftentimes contradictory meanings.

The basis for this social distinction can be summarized using Michael Herzfeld's concept of practical essentialism, which analyses the salience of "stereotypes" in various social relationships. Although, according to Herzfeld, "most anthropological discussion of stereotypes have addressed them from the perspective of group boundaries and mutual hostility[,] these approaches are liable to the charge of static binarism unless they are contextualized as social action" (Herzfeld 2005:26). Stereotypical categories may at once essentialize, as well as enlighten our perspective on, people's priorities and prejudices:

Social life consists of processes of reification and essentialism as well as challenges to these processes. This is the corollary to recognizing the strategic character of essentialism. Distrust of essentialism in social theory should not blur our awareness of its equally pervasive presence in social life (Ibid.: 26-27).

Therefore, in this discussion, I locate participants using several of these categories as "stereotypes" to analyse my participants' social situatedness. I do this by employing Michael Herzfeld's approach of "social poetics," which offers a way to analyse various use of these stereotypes, or practical essentialisms: "a social poetics makes no assumptions about the structure of human condition but asks where people find the binary oppositions that they actually deploy and examines how they use them in

their negotiations of power” (Herzfeld 2005:27). Herzfeld argues that recognizing the impact of essentialisms used to an equal degree by the weak and the powerful, may at once subvert original stereotypes, and give social actors a certain degree of autonomy to challenge the original ascriptions.

[E]ssentialism is always the one thing it claims not to be: it is a strategy, born, no less than these subversive tactics, of social and historical contingency. The agents of powerful state entities and the humblest of local social actors engage in the strategy of essentialism to an equal degree, if not always with the same visibility or impact. Social poetics can be precisely defined as the analysis of essentialism in everyday life (Ibid. 33).

I isolate four categories of belonging to the intelligentsia, similar to the way I have described Moscow through a set of metaphorical lenses: neither should be seen as all-encompassing, or mutually exclusive. These are, a) the professional intelligentsia; b) the dissident, or oppositional intelligentsia; c) the cultural intelligentsia, and d) the moral intelligentsia. Each of these categories, which may be named after Bourdieu’s “legitimizing spheres” within the intellectual field (1966), is not meant to be mutually exclusive. For example, a person who may have been incarcerated as a political prisoner, but without any reasonable ideological cause (as was often the case during Stalinist persecution campaigns, when quotas were set for the number of incarcerations and executions of the “enemies of the people”), may have been targeted as a member of either the professional intelligentsia (persecuted because of their ideological occupation such as that of a writer or pedagogue), or the cultural intelligentsia (persecuted because of a non-proletarian background, such as that of the former aristocracy or merchant-class), depending on the whim of the *Politburo*.

Similarly, if someone showed active opposition to the Soviet regime, and she or he was imprisoned on an ideological basis (as was the case during Brezhnev-era show trials against dissidents), he or she may be the oppositional intelligentsia, or *uznik sovesti* ["prisoner of conscience"], representing membership amongst the moral intelligentsia, or both.

Despite these nuances, these categories delineate the intelligentsia's cultural distinctions that resonate with participants as well as the general Russian public. As mentioned earlier, I will attempt to problematize the contemporary validity of such classifications later on in this research, but in order to introduce the way participants conceptualize their role in Russian society, I discuss these imagined "categories" of the intelligentsia mentioned above.

Primarily, the intelligentsia may be imagined as a group of educated professionals. Elena Vasilievna exemplifies the category of the *professional intelligentsia* – educated members of former Soviet society with a professional position, and involved in making cultural products. Elena Vasilievna was an architect who worked in the El Brus region between 1964 and 1987. As John Gooding (2002) suggests, this category of the intelligentsia is often seen as having an ambivalent relationship towards the state. On the one hand, these individuals may have had a critical stance towards the state; on the other, they received influential, privileged positions as professionals during various Soviet periods.

According to Masha Gessen (1997), the intelligentsia is always oppositional

to a particular regime because it is their job to humanize relations between citizens and the state. As an active member of the Soviet dissident movement, Malva Noevna is a poignant example of this category. Having witnessed the effects of collectivization, the Great Purges, and the Great Patriotic War, she became an adamant critic of the Soviet Union. One of the most effective tools used by the dissident movement was an oppositional discourse that focused on the Soviet Union's abuse of human rights. Malva Noevna's persistent resistance to the ideology of the former Soviet Union exemplifies her position as a member of the *dissident intelligentsia*, the second sub-category of the intelligentsia.

According to Marc Raeff (1966), the intelligentsia can claim its historical precedent to the Russian aristocracy, nobility, merchant, or educated classes of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Exemplifying this claim, Anna Mihaylovna is able to trace her origins to the 17<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic and merchant roots. Because her parents were a big influence on her during her childhood, Anna describes their impact on the traits of language, manners, and worldview espoused by the turn-of-the-century intelligentsia, which she inherited. She critiques the colloquialisms of the Russian language that she hears in public places, such as the Metro, or her place of work. Even Anna's gestures may be interpreted as movements of cultural refinement, referencing Anna's aristocratic past. During the Soviet era, the cultural role of the former aristocracy was deliberately diminished in an ideological battle against the bourgeoisie. Many cultural traits of one's aristocratic past had to be hidden, or expressed, for example, through

gesture. Anna Mihaylovna may be viewed as a representative of the third sub-category—the *cultural intelligentsia*.

The last definition of the intelligentsia charges the group with a moral imperative (Nakhushev 2007). Susanna Solomonovna told me several times that the category of belonging to the *moral intelligentsia* is based on one's "existential" position, a position that is imbued with a feeling of social responsibility. Susanna underlines her stance that class, origins or occupation are irrelevant for a member of the intelligentsia; what is important is a moral outlook that places responsibility for political advocacy and a renunciation of material possessions in favour of generosity towards others. This definition espouses a collective ethic of responsibility towards other members of society; where membership is based on the ability of an individual to espouse social responsibilities beyond national boundaries, while simultaneously accepting responsibility for the actions of the state.

I aim to open a debate on whether the categories of cultural, professional, dissident and moral intelligentsia, which resonates with the scholarship quoted above, were relevant in my research on the intelligentsia in post-Soviet Russia. In light of the political transformations of the *perestroika*, can these diverse classifications be expressed using a singular definition of the intelligentsia, and if so, will the singular definition not mask the diverse ideas and goals expressed by participants? Or is it better to think of the type of subcategories I outlined above?

### 2.2.2. *Ferguson's Concept of Diglossia*

To begin to answer these questions, I develop my subsequent analysis on what Joel Sherzer (1987) describes as, the intersections of "grammar, thought and culture," the main preoccupation of early linguistic anthropologists. I am interested in the way language is utilized to reinforce or weaken certain social categories or forms of patterned inequality. Consider the way I described discourse based on Shertzer's elaboration of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sherzer 1987:89). Building on the idea that language frames thought, which in turn influences, or according to Sapir, sometimes determines culture, linguistic anthropologists have analysed not only the relationship between languages from a cultural perspective, but also the way different language varieties are spoken within a single community.

In a 1959 article, Charles A. Ferguson drew a distinction between two or more varieties of the same language, which he called the high and the low registers, used by speakers in speech communities (Ferguson 1959:66). The high register (H) is a dialect (or language) held in high esteem, and is usually devoted to written and formal communication. Since the high register requires an individual or a group to have resources such as university instruction in order to acquire fluency in it, this register excludes a particular group of people who cannot access these resources. In contrast, the low register (L) is a vernacular, or mainstream form used in informal and interpersonal communication. Both registers require a certain degree of specialization, "one of the most important features of diglossia is the specialization of function for H



and L. In one set of situations only H is appropriate and in another only L, with the two sets overlapping only very slightly" (Ferguson 1959:68).

As Ferguson suggests, mistaking the variety appropriate for the occasion can make the speaker an object of ridicule. Moreover, the author states, "it is certainly safe to say that in diglossia, *there are always extensive differences between the grammatical structures of H and L*" (Ferguson, 1959:72 [emphasis in original]).

In the context of my research in Russia, speech varieties do indeed exist within the same language community. There are several varieties easily distinguishable by Russian speakers. For example, "*blatnoy iazik*" (literally, of "language of string-pullers," adopted from convicts and thieves); "*maternity iazik*" ("mother language" based purely on profanity, which has an extensive vocabulary in the Russian language). These varieties are evidenced in recent publications, such as Barron's *Dictionary of Russian Slang & Colloquial Expressions* (Shlyakov and Edler 1979).

An intriguing contention surrounds the variety "*dorevolyucionniy iazik*" ("pre-Revolutionary language," or a speech variety employed by the former nobility, epitomized by the Russian literature before the Revolution). The reforms to the Cyrillic alphabet took place in 1918, abandoning the pre-revolutionary use of several redundant Cyrillic letters of Greek origin, such as the *yat'* [ѣ]. (*Izvestia*: online resource 1918). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the *yat'* is still occasionally used to reference the pre-revolutionary language, such as the periodical "*Коммерсантъ*" [The Businessman].

Anna Mihaylovna, who currently works in a publishing house, describes her notions of speech characteristic of the intelligentsia:

Nobody likes the intelligentsia. I could see it in my publishing house. They are less educated. I cannot bear to hear, “*oh, kak mne v tufliah ploho hodit*” (“Oh, how it hurts to walk in my *shooze*”). “*V tufliah!* (In shoes! [intonation difference]). I don’t care myself, but what if they say it in front of another person. Tsaritsa Ekaterina used to say, “If I get *tvorog* [cottage cheese], I will send it back; I will only eat *tvorog*” ... See, *nobody* reads anything. No, that’s not true. They read, but detective novels. I read one detective novel, since then, never. I don’t understand that type of language.

In this case, the distinction between the low and the high register is as subtle as the matter of intonation, and its significance is that of social cohesion or disruption. As Charles Ferguson suggests, “in all defining languages, there is a strong tradition of grammatical study of the H form of the language. There are grammars, dictionaries, treatises on pronunciation, style and so on. There is an established norm for pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary which allows variation only within certain limits” (Ferguson 1959:70). Anna Mihaylovna is indignant that her writer colleagues working in publishing are not knowledgeable of the “proper” (H) way of speaking. She extends this to other popular endeavours – detective novels use a different speech register she has trouble “understanding,” because she finds them too colloquial. As Ferguson reminds us, “the social importance of using the right variety in the right situation can hardly be overestimated” (1959:68).

In 1989, Suzanna Solomonovna began her 20-year involvement with the Memorial Society. The staff at Memorial participated in the putsch in 1991, and were strong supporters of Boris Yeltsin’s reforms. The organization printed pamphlets to

promote and organize meetings in support of the nascent democratic movement. Suzanna was asked to write a pamphlet, and as she started drafting it, she inadvertently switched registers (from her usual H to L), writing in a *blatnoy* dialect—the low register mentioned above, and laden with colloquialisms adopted from the dialect of thieves and convicts. When she became aware of this, she complained to her colleague. He replied that the pamphlet was written correctly in what Susanna recalls was “the language of the times.” The low register does not just “overlap very slightly” (Ferguson 1959:68) in this case, but completely replaces the high.

These examples suggest that having access to both the high and low registers, participants may switch across registers fluently, a phenomenon called code-switching. There exist extensive scholarly texts on code switching in sociolinguistic anthropology. Ronald Wardhaugh's *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2002) and Peter Auer's edited volume, *Code-Switching in Conversation* (1998) are quoted here at length.

Wardhaugh elaborates on code-switching as a choice that speakers make as a reflection of how they want to appear to others,

The interesting point here is that some topics may be discussed in either code, but the choice of code adds a distinct flavor to what is said about the topic. The choice encodes certain social values. Code-mixing occurs when conversants use both languages together to the extent that they change from one language to the other in the course of a single utterance (Wardhaugh 2002:103).

The author also makes a distinction between code-switching and diglossia: “in diglossic communities also, the situation controls the choice of variety but the choice

is much more rigidly defined by the particular activity that is involved and by the relationship between the participants. Diglossia reinforces differences, whereas code-switching is generally used to reduce them" (Ibid.).

Ronald Wardhaugh describes two kinds of code switching, "situational," which occurs "when the languages used change according to the situations in which the conversants find themselves: they speak one language in one situation and another in a different one. No topic change is involved" (Wardhaugh 2002:103); and "metaphorical," when "a change of topic requires a change in the language used" (Ibid.). John Gumperz, an American sociolinguist, elaborated on metaphorical code-switching as reinforcing either solidarity, or distance in linguistic contexts: "one language expresses a *we*-type solidarity among participants, and is therefore deemed suitable for in-group and informal activities, whereas the other language is *they*-oriented and is considered appropriate to out-group and more formal relationships, particularly of an impersonal kind" (Gumperz in Wardhaugh 2002:103).

Peter Auer suggests that research on code-switching has found at least two scholarly tendencies of describing code-switching: one focuses on group membership in particular bilingual communities, and the other, known as intrasentential code-switching, refers to syntactic and morphosyntactic<sup>10</sup> choices that speakers make (Auer 1998:3),

Accordingly, the dominant perspectives on code-switching taken in research have been either sociolinguistic (in the narrow sense of the term, i.e. as

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<sup>10</sup> In general terms, syntax is the study of sentence construction; morphology is the analysis of morphemes, or units of language such as words. Morphosyntax refers to the relationship between syntax and morphology.

referring to relationships between social and linguistic structure), or grammatical (referring to constraints on intrasentential code-switching). The central research question of the first type of research is how language choice reflects power and inequality, or is an index of the 'rights and obligations' attributed to incumbents of certain social categories. The second tradition usually addresses the question of syntactic constraints from within the framework of a particular grammatical theory (Auer 1998:3).

In light of this discussion, it is instructive to notice that while Anna Mihaylovna privileges the one code, or register, while discussing cultural endeavours such as writing and literature, Susanna Solomonovna switches between codes or registers while writing a political pamphlet. In recollecting these events, both participants thought that these registers were appropriate for their respective occasions. As Herzfeld argues about diglossic registers, "at times, the high register may merge with the low, in which speech becomes a source of popular irony at the expense of the powerful" (Herzfeld 2005:3). Based on this definition of shifting registers, Herzfeld develops the concept of "disemia," which I analyse in relation to my fieldwork interviews in the next section.

### *2.2.3. Herzfeld's Concept of Disemia.*

Using Michael Herzfeld's (2005) concept of disemia, I explore the paradoxical relationship between tools that may at once give social actors an avenue of social privilege, and which may simultaneously serve against their interests. In continuing with my analysis of the self-definitions of the intelligentsia, I analyze the way national sentiments figure in the definitions of the intelligentsia, in order to see how participants negotiate their categories of belonging. In the context of his own research

in Greece, Herzfeld (2005) reworks Ferguson's bilingual model of high and low registers in relation to diglossia. In Herzfeld's analysis of national languages, the high register may be a more arcane form (ancient Greek), whereas the low is a vernacular form (spoken Greek) (2005:14). Herzfeld notices the flexibility of these forms, when "arcane languages merge with vernacular forms," becoming a source of "popular irony at the expense of the powerful" (Ibid.). Moving beyond the linguistic model of diglossia, Herzfeld explains the concept of "disemia," which encompasses among other semiotic codes an analysis of gesture, silence, music and architecture. Disemia is "the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection" (Ibid.). Elaborating on the definition, Herzfeld attempts to distance himself from a binary split between elite and ordinary categories apparent in the diglossic model. In disemia, "that division is part of the code itself, not of the social world that uses it: anyone can claim elite or humble status" (Ibid.). In *Anthropology Through The Looking Glass* (1987), Herzfeld problematizes disemia in light of binary cultural definitions,

It is thus not a static cultural condition, nor yet a simple listing of alternative codes, but a pragmatic contest between radically different ways of understanding life. While its two poles are those of official discourse and daily usage, this does not mean that it simply organizes all cultural forms in two discrete registers, an upper and a lower (Herzfeld 1987:133).

This may be exemplified best using a short example from my fieldwork, describing a participant who moved seamlessly between several complex expressions of selfhood, all in relation to a fairly simple activity: reading.

Suzanna Solomonovna shares her school experience shortly after the Second

World War.

At the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion of the class, everyone said that our school made us people. Because everything around us, was not it [...] As a group, we sang songs, *‘po Donu gulaet kozel s borodoy’*<sup>11</sup> [“A goat with a beard walks along the Don”], we sang folk songs, national songs and Soviet songs. Everything. We liked poetry. We *understood* poetry. That was from our literature teacher.

Folk, nationalist, and Soviet songs, along with their parodies, were amongst Susanna’s repertoire, but it was a combination of this repertoire and an understanding of poetry imparted by her literature teacher that influenced Suzanna’s intellectual and social self-definition. Suzanna’s love for poetry persists until the present day. On a monthly basis, she invites musicians and friends to her small one-bedroom apartment to read poetry and sing bard songs—protest songs sung to commemorate various injustices of the Soviet era. Similar to the sentiments expressed during the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion, Susanna shares her resentment towards previous social injustices through poetry with a group of like-minded intellectuals.

However, the same self-definition that allows Susanna to claim membership in the intelligentsia has previously created an inherent conflict between her and state authorities. In 1947, shortly after the end of the Second World War, Susanna Solomonovna began her affiliation with a literature club at the House of Pioneers. Soon after its formation, she gathered with several friends and split off from the club, forming an underground political organization. We are reminded of the beginning of the contention surrounding her involvement with the literary club,

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<sup>11</sup> This is a parody of the Communist Party sanctioned folk song, the lyrics of which are an alliteration of the above, *‘po Donu gulaet kazak molodoy’* (“A young Cossack walks along the Don”)

Someone started to pressure our leader about what we were reading. She forbade us to read on our own—we had to check it with her first... We decided we would not allow censorship; we're not learning if we're not exercising; we're not being educated. We started to organize ourselves. We left for Boris' apartment... And there, we started to learn.

In this case, the same language that allowed Susanna to develop her sense of "understanding" poetry and "becoming a person", leaves her indignant at the imposed censorship from the club leader. Susanna denounces proper Soviet self-presentation, opting to learn poetry independently. Susanna explains, "conversations about poetry soon turned to conversations about politics." After forming an underground political organization with her friends, Susanna started being shadowed by the *MVD*\*\*, which she suspected happened because the leader of the literary club informed on her.

Suzanna Solomonovna was arrested and confined as a political prisoner in the infamous Lefortovo prison. In a further elaboration of Herzfeld's "radically different ways of understanding life" (1987:133), in prison, literature became Susanna's survival tactic,

Prison libraries are wonderful. A few months after beginning our sentences, we were allowed to use the library. Books used by other prisoners remained in the prison library—convicts weren't allowed to take these books when they left. The guards thought that we would never leave, and our bosses understood that in there, no one cares what we thought. The librarian picked a book and brought it. If a good book is given, you can live!

Again, there is a sense of collective belonging created through the prisoners' shared interests in reading "wonderful" books that were undoubtedly forbidden to the general Soviet population. Simultaneously, these books reinforced the convicts' self-education and the idea of belonging to the Russian culture separate from Soviet life.



The incongruity of reading a good book while experiencing the dire conditions of Soviet prisons is not void of irony. Susanna explains that in order to exercise her mind, she assigned herself tasks such as memorizing any given book from cover to cover. She attributes her survival to this mental exercise.

In this narrative, it is apparent that the participant was both privileged and persecuted for her access to forms that defined her position as a member of the intelligentsia. Although this is not an exceptional case of ironic tensions between the state and its citizens, in defining particular interests that set apart the intelligentsia from other social actors in Russia, there needs to be a more inclusive category for analysis.

#### *2.2.4. Herzfeld's Concept of Social Poetics*

Self-definitions of members of the intelligentsia are a useful marker for highlighting another concept developed by Michael Herzfeld, precisely because members of the group shift and negotiate their position as the intelligentsia according to interests expressed in this shared membership. Michael Herzfeld (1985, 1987, 2005) suggests that personal identity can be analysed through a concept of "social poetics," that transcends ordinary categories of belonging,

it is clear that the successful performance of selfhood depends upon an ability to identify the self with larger categories of identity. In any encounter, the skilled actor alludes to ideological propositions and historical antecedents, but takes care to suppress the sense of incongruity inevitably created by such grandiose implications; as with virtually any trope, the projection of the self as a metonymical encapsulation of some more inclusive entity rests on the

violation of ordinariness (Herzfeld 1985:10).

How do we understand the shifting definitions of the intelligentsia? Is it productive to say that each member prioritizes certain qualities above others using a fluid definition: an encompassing feeling of social responsibility, an oppositional attitude towards the state, a claim to the cultural memory of the past, or a professional affiliation stemming from education? Do members thus personalize their own set of criteria to enter the membership of the intelligentsia, in which case, does an overarching definition become evermore elusive? That may be the case, but my data suggest that at times, participants may entirely reject their own membership amongst the intelligentsia. Consider the scenario whereby by maintaining a somewhat open definition of the intelligentsia, participants are able to negotiate their social position as "ordinary citizens" or "members of the intelligentsia" in a meaningful way, responding to the constantly changing reality and renegotiated values of the post-Soviet environment. I argue that this is precisely what happens in my participants' present situation.

How then, do participants qualify the position of the intelligentsia in their accounts? Consider Malva Noevna's definition of the intelligentsia cited earlier. She begins by saying "I don't think I am the intelligentsia..." This statement accurately captures the elusive definitions of the intelligentsia. Malva Noevna rejects a definition of the membership in the intelligentsia centered on access to education and contradictory affiliation with Soviet powers. Her narrative places the intelligentsia as close collaborators with a state whose legitimacy she rejects.

In 1992, Suzanna Solomonovna was working on drafting the first-ever

legislation to abolish the death penalty:

I saw this as a very important accomplishment in a country where the authorities killed more than anywhere else... I would go to the White House; I would walk through the doors; no one asked me for identification. If I needed something done, I would go to the offices – Sasha! Dima! It seemed they were *nashi* (ours). It appeared that we weren't the plebs, but the owners (*hoziayeva*) of it all.

Suzanna's involvement in state politics during these years led her to be on a first-name basis with prominent politicians describing her sense of proximity to White House representatives as "ours" (*nashi*). *Nashi* is a possessive pronoun in Russian, in this case, it is the plural of a nominative declension, thus easily translatable as *ours*. However, in this context, it is a pronoun that signals participation as well as belonging, as "*our own*". Alexei Yurchak explores the term's broader cultural significance in an analysis of "*svoi*" (2006:102-108), a possessive pronoun of "*one's own*." According to Yurchak, being "*svoi*" served to establish a collective identity of belonging to something outside of authoritative discourse, meaning, outside of the canons of the way Soviet life was meant to be lived. This position meant occupying a certain symbolic region "outside of" the Soviet system, which Yurchak describes as being "*vnye*," ("out of," "outside"):

Late socialism became marked by the emergence of lifestyles and communities that, like the publics of *svoi* had a particular relation to authoritative discourse defined as "being *vnye*"—that is, occupying a position that was simultaneously inside and outside of the rhetorical field of that discourse, neither simply in support nor simply in opposition of it (Yurchak 2006:288).

Analyzing the tensions between seemingly contradictory relations to state power, these definitions of belonging can be seen as a moralistic stance reflective of the

historical responsibility of the intelligentsia towards others; of being responsible for the abuse of power, while not being in power itself. As Nakhushev reminds us,

the materialization of social justice is within the powers only of that portion of human beings who are the best prepared intellectually and morally, who are capable of taking upon themselves the responsibility for the way that life is lived in society, while not, at the same time, expecting any privileges in return. This is the essence of intellectuality (Nakhushev 2007:24).

Seen in this way, Susanna's collaboration with the state is that of a moral, but powerless social agent. However, I think that this is too simple. Consider Suzanna Solomonovna's narrative, which begins with the question "what is the intelligentsia?" While supporting Nakhushev's definition, she offers a contrasting description of the intelligentsia's relationship to broader bases of power. "The intelligentsia could do anything, but they must be concerned with the larger problem of social conditions (*bitiya*)."

There is both a moralistic component to the intelligentsia, and a tension with power, for which familiarity is both asserted and reviled in relation to various periods preceding or following the *perestroika*. This discourse allows participants to seamlessly travel between definitions of belonging or not belonging, especially transparent in Elena Vasilievna's statement: "I don't know what category I belong to: the intelligentsia... Or a simple, former Soviet person. We had a very narrow scope of social and professional life. Professionally, we took everything with humour. We critiqued the state, and we did it with irony." This type of irony reflects on an argument elaborated on by Michael Herzfeld,

When officialdom clings to ideals of literal meaning and attempts to link it

indissolubly with the external trappings of syntactic and lexical formalism, ordinary citizen—forever suspicious of the state and all its ways—find in irony an inexhaustible source of alternative explanation and representation (Herzfeld 2001:81).

Irony, in the case of Elena Vasilievna's statement, is used in the same sentence in two very different ways. First, to playfully remind the researcher not to overstep his power to categorize ways of belonging, and secondly, as a way to assert a break with these categories of belonging.

All of these narratives show instances of questioning definitions of belonging by simultaneously shifting between moral definitions, or definitions of actors positioned in a constantly negotiable relationship with the state. This is an example of "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2005), or the way that identity may be reconstituted with the shifting definition of, or relationship to, the state. The matter-of-fact admission that it is a Soviet identity that (in)forms a member of the intelligentsia, is a stark revelation of the flexibility of forms of self-identification.

Inna Kotchetkova reminds us of the prevalence of two types of discourses which voice the intelligentsia's present-day frustration and uncertainty in Russia: "one proclaiming the intelligentsia is dead, the other, alive" (Kotchetkova 2004:1.4). The author argues that "each category defines persons who preserve the ability and the right to address the rest of their society (other parts of the educated elite included) in the name of reason and universal moral principles" (Kotchetkova 2004:5.1-5.8). As I have argued before, it is unproductive to generalize the position of the intelligentsia; my participants do not attempt to legitimize their identity through access to

education, or superior moral qualities. They do question the definition that runs across several categories of identity: profession and education; tension and state ideology; social responsibility and social recognition. Michael Herzfeld suggests that a successful performance of identity depends on the actors' "ability to identify the self with larger categories of identity" (Herzfeld 1985:10). Based on the notion of social poetics, it is possible to see how participants negotiate their definition of the intelligentsia to encompass more, or less, social responsibility; establish a larger or smaller connection with the past; utilize or render less or more meaningful their own intellectual backgrounds; or show agreement or disagreement with the actions of the state. While all these factors inform performances of selfhood, my main contention in this section is that participants question where, and whether, their own position fits into their perceived definition of the intelligentsia based on the reality of their own situation reflected at them via interactions through social networks, discourses heard through various media, and interactions with persons such as myself, who define the questions that classify them as a particular "type" of person.

#### 2.2.5. Herzfeld's Concept of Cultural Intimacy

One of the central goals of this research is to understand the way the intelligentsia, having a particular collective identity, has reacted to various social and political transformations, and to understand its present relationship to broader bases of power. In order to clarify how I conceive of the relationship between people and larger power structures, I introduce Michael Herzfeld's (2005) concept of *cultural*

*intimacy.*

Herzfeld's motivation in moving away from the concept of disemia is based largely on the desire to break from simplistic binary categories. The author adopts the term "cultural intimacy," as opposed to disemia, "to avoid the temptation to multiply the refractions of binarism" (Ibid. 45). Whereas many theoretical approaches describing social actors in relation to the state conceive of this relationship as "top" or "bottom", "conformist" or "dissident," and "ordinary" and "elite," Herzfeld introduces his model in relation to the idea of contrast between the top and the bottom, which he argues is,

but two of a host of refractions from a broadly shared *cultural engagement* [...] Simplistic talk of "elites" and "ordinary people" conceals the common ground (as well as the fact that these terms are themselves instruments in the negotiation of power) and so inhibits analysis (Herzfeld 2005:3).

This proposition resonates well with studying the intelligentsia, since Herzfeld is seeking a "common ground that ultimately dissolves the possibility of clearly defined, immutable levels of power" (Herzfeld 2005:3).

In my research I was continuously confronted with the problem of classifying the intelligentsia: participants belonging to the intelligentsia are neither ordinary, nor elite, and their continuous flexibility between positions of empowerment in their professional or political lives are in tension with their social positions as professionals, pensioners or low-income workers. Approaching the intelligentsia using Herzfeld's model of "cultural intimacy" provides a solution to this problem. *Cultural intimacy*, as defined by Michael Herzfeld is,

[T]he recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation (Herfeld 2005:3).

To contextualize this definition, it may be helpful to discuss it in light of a specific episode of Soviet history: dissident activism during Brezhnev's epoch.

After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that amplified Cold War<sup>12</sup> tensions in 1968, Leonid Brezhnev attempted an effort at *détente* by signing the International Helsinki Agreement in 1975. The Helsinki Act was a provisional document meant to ease Cold War tensions that Brezhnev intended to sign in order to be heralded at an international level as a leader who had resolved the Soviet-U.S. conflict. However, the document had several clauses for respecting human rights. Events surrounding human rights abuses in the Soviet Union provoked a small, but vocal group of dissidents to voice their criticism in response to Brezhnev's repressive regime. These members of the intelligentsia were arrested and charged for disseminating anti-Soviet propaganda, provoking others to voice their dissent against the persecution of their colleagues and friends, thus, effectively giving birth to the dissident movement in the Soviet Union. In reference to the clause on respecting human rights, the dissidents organized an underground advocacy group to document Soviet infringements of the Helsinki Act. The organization, called the "Moscow

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<sup>12</sup> The Cold War is a description of a period of political hostility that lasted between the Soviet bloc and the Western bloc between the Second World War and events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.



Helsinki Group” and headed by Yuri Orlov, started working shortly after the Soviet public was made aware of the Helsinki Agreement in major Soviet newspapers. One of my participants was an active member of that group. The group typed *samizdat* treatises on human rights abuses documenting the condition of political prisoners in the Soviet Union, replicating the pedantic style of official Soviet publications. This material was sent through covert sources to foreign correspondents. Journalists would collect this information, and distribute it to foreign long-wave radio stations, such as *Radio Svoboda*\*\* or the BBC whose signal was picked up by radio transmitters in the Soviet Union. The transmitted broadcasts both ensured the group of their success, and embarrassed Soviet authorities on the international political scene. Furthermore, these public broadcasts allowed state powers to track down the dissidents, and incriminate them on further charges of anti-Soviet propaganda. This episode highlights recurring ironic contradictions that make cultural intimacy an apt term for my analysis. The presence of the Moscow Helsinki Group was a source of “external embarrassment” for Soviet authorities; these insiders were assured of a “common sociality” through their attempts at ensuring Helsinki Act agreements were followed by being “creatively irreverent,” transmitting information about human rights infringements to foreign correspondents. Simultaneously, the dissidents’ eventual persecution by the state was among many methods used as a weapon of intimidation, rather than legitimate punishment for illegal activity.

### 2.3 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed several key writings on intellectuals and the intelligentsia. Antonio Gramsci made the distinction between “traditional” intellectuals, whose role is often to reinforce class distinctions and with it, not only their own position in society but also that of those more powerful than themselves, and “organic” intellectuals, who articulate the function and interests of their particular social group. Gramsci’s analysis is useful in its acknowledgment that the social function or role of an intellectual is always contested. Pierre Bourdieu argues further that defining intellectuals would destroy “a central property of the intellectual field, namely, that it is a site of struggles over who does and does not belong to it” (Bourdieu in Kurzman and Owens 2002:80).

Discussing the intelligentsia’s emergence in the Russian context, it is apparent that historically, at least two discourses, on the moral qualities and oppositional nature of the intelligentsia, existed since the inception of the term in Russia in the 1860s (see Gooding 2002; Raeff 1966). This characterization persisted both in popular and academic discourses until at least the collapse of the Soviet Union. Based on a definition that is over a century old, scholars still argue today that the intelligentsia (as oppositional, or moral leaders), has become more (Nakhushev 2007) or less (Gessen 1997; Ryvkina 2006; Sinyavsky 1997; Zubok 2009) relevant in post-Soviet Russia. Authors such as Michele Ryvkin-Fish (2009) and to a lesser extent, Rozalina Ryvkina (2006), argue that the political transformation has realigned social

values to encompass social and economic privilege amongst the qualities espoused by the intelligentsia.

I argue that participants of my research did not identify with these objects of critique. Several categories of the intelligentsia have remained relevant to participants, however, and I use four of them as “practical essentialisms” to analyze the interests expressed by participants. I analyze the self-definition of participants within the sub-categories of professional, moral, oppositional and cultural intelligentsia to understand how participants negotiate their categories of belonging. Using Michael Herzfeld’s analysis of the concepts of “disemia,” which expresses selfhood through the mastery of different codes, and “social poetics,” which is a performance of selfhood in relation to broader bases of power, I argue that participants adopt different strategies of “cultural engagement” (2005) to negotiate their identity in relation to various transformations of Russian society.

Using the model of cultural intimacy, Michael Herzfeld argues against an analysis of the state as a monolithic authority, describing forms of subversion exemplified by the shifting positions of social and political actors in their relationship to broader bases of power. While the state “is ideologically committed to ontological self-perpetuation for all eternity, silence and irony, too, both provide a shield for subversive mockery and set limits to its capacity for generating change” (Herzfeld 2005:21). In order to conceive of the intelligentsia in Soviet and post-Soviet life, I follow the author’s lead in declassifying various binary models used to describe the

Soviet system as a dichotomy between official and unofficial; conformist and resistant; and public and private accounts. Employing Herzfeld's theoretical direction, I want to acknowledge that the ideals of the Soviet system were held to be genuinely important for several of my participants. Inversely, many vocal dissidents did not conform to simple oppositional attitudes. Malva Noevna argued that even the dissidents who were the most vocal opponents of Soviet policies, "did not consider themselves to be enemies of the Soviet Union. They said so themselves: they just wanted the Soviet Union to respect its own laws." Through an analysis of the life history narratives of all of my participants in the next chapter, I look at the circumstances that allowed Malva Noevna to reach this conclusion. The next chapter "Life History and the Anthropology of Memory" will also link with the subsequent chapter, which provides an in-depth analysis of the way participants of this research experienced the tumultuous events of the *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### **Chapter Three—Life History and the Anthropology of Memory**

In this chapter, I introduce my focus on life history approaches in order to situate each participant within her particular experiences in relation to the Soviet and post-Soviet states. Through life history interviews, I asked participants about certain aspects of their lives in light of several key events in their personal biographies. My data suggest that analyzing recollections of several historical periods demands an evaluation of either their relative rupture or continuity with the past. Depending on individual experiences in various stages of their lives such as a parent's early influence, student activism, motherhood or professional experience, participants experienced these shifts differently as children, as students, as mothers and as professionals. Their experiences are as varied as their biographies, but comparisons may be drawn across generations and historical periods. I do this in order to correlate patterns of individual narratives about the past with present-day accounts of the way people conceive of their relationship to the state.

#### **3.1 Life History Methods**

As Lewis L. Langness reminds us, "The biographical, or life history method, can by no means be considered unique to anthropology. It has, however, a distinctive history of development and use in this discipline" (Langness 1965:1). Langness chronicles the history of "life history," connecting the term to biographical writing. In anthropology, there was little interest in biography as a tool of analysis until the mid

1920s; nevertheless, certain forms of life history unconsciously permeated early ethnographic writing.

It was not until the 1920s that Langness describes life history beginning to emerge as a tool of analysis: "in historical perspective, unquestionably the greatest and most enduring influences on the sophisticated use life history material were made by Edward Sapir and Paul Radin" (Langness 1965:8). Edward Sapir was a significant figure in his contributions to both anthropology and modern linguistics: "employing aspects of psychology and psychiatry as well as anthropological techniques, he greatly affected what is now called the culture-and-personality school" (Ibid.). Paul Radin was interested in the "individual-in-culture" approach (Ibid.) and as a student of Franz Boas, strived to be "scientifically objective," focusing more on ethnographic classification, rather than an analysis of ethnographic writing as a way of conveying life histories. In the middle of the century, Langness argued that Oscar Lewis had been the greatest life history advocate to date. "He has produced by far the most detailed, lucid, and, from a literary point of view, the most moving and aesthetic biographies to date" (Langness 1965:13).

Writing in the mid-1960s, Langness encouraged anthropologists to abandon their bias towards introspective data and "objective" methods (Langness 1965:53), arguing that all anthropological data is fundamentally biographical. Life history practitioners have taken the author seriously since, mostly because, as Margaret Blackman describes, the method "has particular relevance as we confront the issue of ethnographic authority" (Blackman 1991:57). In a seminal paper published in 1977,

Vincent Crapanzano challenged the position of ethnographers who purport to represent their participants through life history writing, asking "What space does the ethnographer himself come to occupy?" Crapanzano elaborates:

The question must be asked—and continually. We must not succumb unquestioningly either to the generic and literary conventional models at our disposal—and the ontological and epistemological assumptions embedded within them—or to the theoretical models. These latter too must be seen as possessing a rhetorical force not simply in our texts but in our encounters as well—a rhetorical force which may be more important to us than any truth we describe. The message of the ethnographic text may, in other words, be less important to us than the fact of its communication (Crapanzano 1977:5).

Crapanzano argues that every ethnographer employs a set of literary conventions that contradict the purpose of life history as a representation of reality, and urges readers to interpret and analyse life history writing as a text (Ibid.). Unlike Crapanzano, Blackman argues that since the life history approach confers a measure of ethnographic authority on the participant, it can be a method of empowerment and a way of giving voice to the marginalized.

The possibilities of "shared anthropology" within the genre of life history writing are also being explored [...] The life history process itself increasingly can be viewed as shared anthropology in varying degrees [...]. Life histories become shared anthropology in a broader sense, as native experts add their voices of interpretation to anthropological ones (Blackman 1991:58).

The vision of a shared anthropology is to some extent the goal of this research project, reflected in the use of various techniques to ensure an open dialogue between researcher and participants, and elaborated on in the last chapters. However, before digressing any further, I hope that this introduction has adequately described the "history" of life history, in giving the basic background to my use of these methods.

### 3.2 Anthropology of Memory

One important theme in some anthropology that uses life history approaches focuses on “memory practices” as a method of interpreting the past. Historian Luisa Passerini describes her analysis of memory in oral history approaches:

This subjective dimension does not allow a direct reconstruction of the past, but it links past and present in a combination which is laden with symbolic significance... These testimonies are, first and foremost, statements of cultural identity in which memory continuously adapts received traditions to present circumstances (Passerini 1987:17).

Of course anthropology as a discipline has always employed “oral history” methods; however, Passerini highlights the key notion that memory is not a reconstruction of the past, but a socially constructed practice or a statement of cultural identity. Indeed, the anthropologists Marilyn Silverman and P.H. Gulliver discussing memory production in the context of historical anthropology, remind us that “[p]eople’s own versions and evaluations of their past are a retrospective product of their present... Thus, they are important for the anthropological understanding of a people and of changes in their sociocultural contexts” (Silverman and Gulliver 1992:19).

In my interpretation of memory in this project, it is essential to recognize that memory as narrative describes an event from the perspective of the present. Hence, for example, while conducting certain interviews with my participants, I deliberately left our conversations open-ended, in order to allow participants to engage in their descriptions of certain memories in more detail than others. In subsequent analysis, these inclinations towards privileging one type of memory over another guided my interpretation of events that my participants wanted to highlight in their present lives.



On the other hand, there were personal memories that participants wanted to omit from our interviews from the data I would analyze for my thesis and film. As my field research progressed, I became more and more sensitized to the types of information participants did not want included in the final research products, either through their explicit directions, or implicit suggestions, such as body language. Despite being in an interview setting, participants often directed the flow of questions based on the themes they found important and were comfortable sharing. As might be expected, the data was a representation of participants' specific biographies. I argue that this was an advantage of open-ended interviews, since this approach allowed for significant themes to emerge during analysis. Had the interviews been artificially balanced in order to give equal weight on each historical period in the case of each participant, editing of this material would have been *less* representative of participants' reflections, since the researcher would have had to make more arbitrary editing decisions.

Sharon Roseman (2003) reflects on the reinvigorated anthropological interest in interpreting memory practices. The author suggests that anthropologists have always conducted:

intensive, unstructured interviews with selective groups of people or individuals. We draw on people's memories extensively in our documentation of their genealogies; in our collaborative creation with them of "life stories" (or life histories); in our compilation of examples of myths, jokes, proverbs, and other narrative genres; and in our retelling of their social histories (Roseman 2003:437).

However, it is only recently that memory practices have begun to be vigorously

analysed. In discussing memory practices, the author suggests that “[m]emories, as narratives, are also discourses. They can be analysed with regard to their rhetorical strategies, aesthetic components, performative contexts, and other linguistic and metalinguistic aspects” (Ibid.: 438). It is not that people remember, and simply reiterate their experiences, but that memories of certain experienced events can help us understand the anthropological significance of those events. Roseman elaborates on memory as practice,

As language practices embedded in fields of social relationships, memories are often interlinked with the contours of social power. This process is perhaps illustrated most clearly in some instances, such as when the recounting of memories by members of dominant groups can be seen as direct attempts to control or suppress the knowledge, feelings, and behaviour of others or may entail justifications of these actions. The memory practices of members of subordinate groups may in turn revolve around assertions of the contestable nature of the past and, by extension, of the present and the future (Roseman 2003:438).

If memory is understood as an indicator of social power at a particular historical moment, it can be suggested that the “contours” of memory can also shift with the changing social relationships over time. Indeed, Olick and Robbins interpret the malleability of memory as “work which documents the ways in which images of the past change over time, how groups use the past for present purposes, and [the use of the past as] a particularly useful resource for expressing interests” (Olick and Robbins 1998:128). If memory is understood as a dynamic, contested and identity-forming social concept, it can be an apt tool for analysis as well.

With this understanding, I will introduce a schema proposed by Olick and Robbins, in order to outline the significance of my informants’ narratives of several

periods in relation to their personal (individual) memories and their political (or social) memories as members of the intelligentsia. Before this can be done, however, I need to elaborate on the concept of social memory. The sociological beginnings of the term begin with the concept of "collective memory," first introduced by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 as a way to distinguish individual and collective memories. For Halbwachs, it is an individual that contributes to a collective memory, but individuals draw on collective contexts to remember (Coser in Halbwachs 1992:22). Halbwachs, Émile Durkheim's student, was interested in a structuralist method of analysis that linked aspects of human behaviour with society. The concept of "collective memory" has been critiqued as expressing too universal a claim. Fentress and Wickham warn that Halbwachs' concept is one of a "collective consciousness curiously disconnected from the actual thought process of any particular person" (Fentress and Wickham in Olick and Robbins 1998:111). The authors elaborated on the concept of social memory, which is broadly, the way the past is shaped by memories shared between social actors (Fentress and Wickham 1992).

Indeed, other researchers, such as Jacob Climo and Maria Cattell (2002) have supported the complex delineation of "social memory," by drawing attention to several themes surrounding social memory as a collective remembering of the past. Climo and Cattell have problematized the accuracy and truth in representing the past (Ibid.: 27); forgetting and silencing memory in cases of historical revisionism (Ibid.: 28-20); meaning and contestation of memory (Ibid.: 30-31); memory redress and

reconciliation (Ibid.: 31-33). Finally, Olick and Robbins (1998) address the topic as "social memory studies," which is:

a general rubric for inquiry into the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged. We refer to distinct sets of mnemonic practices in various social sites, rather than to collective memory as a thing. This approach, we argue, enables us to identify ways in which past and present are intertwined without reifying a mystical group mind and without including absolutely everything in the enterprise (Olick and Robbins 1998:112).

I will remain consistent with the way Olick and Robbins connect several themes elaborated on by Climo and Cattell with practices that acknowledge the past. I am interested in the way individual memories, expressed by each of my participants, are connected in space and time: across various social sites and time periods, through an analysis of continuities and ruptures with the past.

This analysis also directs attention towards the shifting and negotiated social positions and diverse interests expressed by participants when recounting their past. Olick and Robbins provide a useful overview of the dynamics of social memory as a process, by analysing whether memories have changed or remained the same over time, calling it "types of mnemonic malleability or persistence" (Olick and Robbins 1998:122). The authors specify three ways in which social memory may be evaluated based on the memory's persistence or change: instrumental, cultural or inertial. In Table 1, I summarize the "six ideal types of mnemonic malleability or persistence" (Ibid.: 129), and describe each of the six categories providing short examples relevant to my research.

	Instrumental	Cultural	Inertial
Persistence	Self-conscious orthodoxy, conservatism, heritage movements	Continued relevance, Canon	Habit, routine, repetition, custom
Change	Revisionism, memory entrepreneurship, redress movements, legitimation, invented tradition	Irrelevance, paradigm change, discovery of new facts	Decay, atrophy, saturation, accidental loss, death

**Table 1.** Six ideal types of mnemonic malleability or persistence (Olick and Robbins 1998:129)

*Instrumental* memories may *persist*, that is, a particular version of the past may be “remembered” instrumentally (Ibid.). But *change* may also be *instrumental*, used to intentionally change the image of the past. Instrumental change may be exemplified in redress movements, and invented traditions.<sup>13</sup> For example, Putin-era revisionism in present-day Russia may be viewed as an attempt to preserve the symbolism of tsarist Russia (the return of the imperial coat of arms, and state support of the Russian Orthodox Church), while simultaneously abandoning all forms of Soviet ideology. Yet, these memories are also selective in their attempts to reinterpret the atrocities of the Gulag as a supposed historical necessity, as some Western scholars have been keen to replicate (see Applebaum 2003). This is paradoxically *instrumental persistence* in

<sup>13</sup> The concept of “invented tradition” was theorized by a prominent historian, Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). In this work, Hobsbawm argues that many traditions deemed ancient, are actually recent inventions: “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” (Hobsbawm 1:1992).

maintaining a particular state of affairs contrary to efforts of Soviet dissidents and members of the intelligentsia (of which Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "GULag Archipelago" is emblematic) who attempt to redress or immortalize the history of the GULag through publications and archives. There are similar examples if one is to look at Brezhnev-era conservatism following a period of a relative lack of censorship during Khrushchev's "Thaw" era, versus Gorbachev's attempts to deligitimize Stalin's image as a benevolent dictator by denouncing Stalin's cult of personality (Olick and Robbins 1998:129). *Inertial persistence* occurs when the past is reproduced by a sheer force of habit, routine, repetition or custom. In contrast, *inertial change* happens when the past is forgotten, "when carriers of a particular images die, our mnemonic capabilities decay, or we simply forget" (Ibid.). This mnemonic type of memory is best exemplified in the lives of individual actors (such as the elderly women who participated in my study) by contrasting these ideal types with instances of *cultural persistence* or change.

Olick and Robbins demonstrate that there may be instances of *cultural persistence*, where a particular past is relevant for later cultural formations (Olick and Robbins 1998:129). Barbara Myerhoff (1978) describes the tensions between cultural persistence and inertial change amongst an elderly community of Jews living in California.

The chaos of individual history, especially when history has been great and often marked by numerous social and cultural separations, may be acute. The burden of memories weighs heavily on the elderly; the necessity for integration of a life is often a strong impulse. Reminiscence among the old is not merely

escapist, not the desire to live in the past [...]. It is often the reach for personal integration, the experience of continuity, and the recognition of personal unity beneath the flow and flux of ordinary life (Myerhoff 1978:199-200).

The desire for personal integration is an attempt to balance opposing forces of change and persistence. As Myerhoff's participants reach the end of their life, their memories, as well as habits and customs, retrace a particular vision of the past through daily routines, stories or rituals.

There may also be instances of *cultural change*, where a particular past loses relevance in the present, or new facts replace previous paradigms. Authors such as Jennifer Patino (2005) and Rozalina Ryvkina (2006) argue that after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's transformation to a market economy, cultural values of the Russian population have shifted from mental embodiments of value, such as kindness, educability and collectivity to material values, such as financial wealth, and material possessions. This may also be exemplified in Alexei Yurchak's (2006) descriptions of late socialism where many rituals of socialist society—attending May Day parades, voting at Komsomol\*\* meetings, addressing audiences in public speeches—were performed and reproduced with great precision, despite the fact that many of these reproduced rituals had lost their original meanings, allowing for new creative meanings to evolve (Yurchak 2006:284).

Ways of remembering and forgetting were invaluable in my evaluation of the way social actors have interpreted their political or social positions in the past or present. Consider Myerhoff's statement about the "personal integration" amongst the

community of elderly Jews in California alongside Michael Herzfeld's analysis of social poetics: "In any encounter, the skilled actor alludes to ideological propositions and historical antecedents, but takes care to suppress the sense of incongruity inevitably created by such grandiose implications" (Herzfeld 1985:10). Although it is impossible to deduce where the syncretism of "personal integration" begins, and when the incongruity of "social poetics" ends, it is helpful to check remembered narratives against these contrasting understandings. This is what I attempt to do by focusing on my participants' life histories in the subsequent sections. The next sections rely heavily on an analysis of "social memory," which resurfaces throughout this thesis: I will focus on memories of the period of the *perestroika* in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five will draw on the way ethnographic films, including the one made as an appendix to this thesis have taken up the theme of memory.

### **3.3. Life's Memory**

It is an ominous task to render living memories into text. After all, memories are not simply retold through carefully structured narratives. They are lived and experienced, and as I have shown in the previous section, interpreted and reinvented. Memories are expressed in physical gestures and in linguistic syntax, in kinesthetic memory and in speech acts. However, I want to be careful in using memory as an overarching concept of this research. David Berliner emphasizes the "danger of overextension" of the concept, "a concept losing precise meaning, memory can also be



approached as an expansive notion" (Berliner 2005:198). The author argues that if "memory" is used to mean everything about the past, it will stop being an analytically salient concept.

The following sections on my participants' life history are delineated along a simple set of guidelines: they mirror the form of our interviews, and are themed based on recollections of: 1) ancestors, 2) childhood, 3) youth, 4) adulthood. Because of the wealth of interview material, I cannot convey the full content and impact of each narrative; rather, I give short vignettes describing themes relevant to my research. Moreover, because participants of the research were all between 70 and 90 years of age, it was out of the range of possibilities of this research to adequately describe each period of their lives. Nevertheless, Andrei Simic (1978) explains that life history methods are well suited to studying the elderly: "first, the extended personal history of the elderly makes a historical approach especially apt, for the elderly are often engaged actively in interpreting and reviewing their lives. Their concern with integrating the past and with relating external public events to personal history must be reflected in ours" (Simic 1978:21). Indeed, in the following conversations, participants were both willing and enthusiastic to remember certain aspects of their lives.

### 3.3.1 *Our Ancestors: A Pre-Revolutionary Legacy*

The first questions I asked participants were about their family history. Many participants felt that their parents were a strong influence on their early development. All of my informants' parents had reached adulthood before witnessing the Russian Revolution of 1917, which would have undoubtedly been an important marker in their lives. The Revolution was characterized by the persecution of upper and middle classes by the *Bolshevik*\*\* party led by V.I. Lenin. The persecuted also included members of other political parties, such as the *Mensheviks*,\*\* or the *Easers*,\*\* a non-Leninist wing of the Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party. If we are to correlate Lenin's famous quote that the "intelligentsia are the feces of the nation" with the consequences of the *Krasny Terror*\*\* ("The Red Terror") it can be seen that the most vicious attacks were on the educated middle class who had any semblance of political power, or the intelligentsia. Both Elena Vasilievna and Anna Mihaylovna lay claim to a rich cultural heritage, descending from a third or fourth generation of the intelligentsia stemming from the 19th century. However, both women described the dire conditions under which their relatives had to flee Moscow, or the Soviet Union to avoid persecution. Many parents, such as Susanna Solomonovna's and Malva Noevna's mother and father, were able to live unharmed during these years by supporting the Bolshevik Party and the ideals of the Revolution. However, both research participants came to develop a much more critical view of the Soviet State in their later lives, and therefore then became more critical of their parents' political views.

All of my participants' fathers had received influential positions with the nascent Soviet state in the 1920s. Both Elena Vasilievna's and Susanna Solomonovna's fathers were employed as engineers in constructing the "Great Buildings of Communism" during Joseph Stalin's *Five-Year Plan* industrialization initiatives; Anna Mihaylovna's father was a geology professor in Irkutsk, and Malva Noevna's father was a dean of the Saratov Veterinary Institute. Most participants described their mothers as unemployed or underemployed, working for the family home.

In asking questions about my participants' parents' biographies, I wanted to informally survey whether participants would attribute any influence to their parents and their upbringing in their present lives. In other words, I was curious about whether in remembering their early lives, participants would describe any important turning points that would have influenced their present outlook. I analysed this by asking questions relating to my informants' relationship with their parents; how openly parents discussed politics, and what they imparted to their children about their political involvement in the early life of the Soviet Union. I do not want to overstate these connections; rather, I want to provide a richer context for further analysis.

Both Elena Vasilievna and Anna Mihaylovna describe having, to some extent, inherited their parents' political and social outlook. Elena Vasilievna says, "at the time, political questions, or questions about our social or material condition did not

interest us at all. We were either higher, or lower than that." What can be "higher" or "lower" than an interest in the political, social or material conditions? In my interpretation, and in the way this turn of phrase is used in Russian, being "higher" than something, signifies that the banality of everyday life, and in this case, political life, cannot be the intellectual priority of cultured persons. But a "lower" position acknowledges that political life encapsulates a form of culturedness, since the ability to participate in politics can empower those who, like members of the intelligentsia, confront all forms of social injustice. This equilibrium is maintained through an ambivalent relationship to power: "It was stable. Stably poor. It was impossible to do anything anyway." However, in a separate interview, Elena describes that in 1937, at the peak of Stalin's repressive "Purges," her uncle was informed on for listening to a forbidden program on the radio. He disappeared, meaning that he either died in prison, or was executed. Elena describes this event as one that deeply touched her entire family, "it felt as if power reached us, as well." Because of the self-awareness of this narrative, it is possible to interpret exactly what political participation symbolized for Elena Vasilevna's family. Although it was never revealed to the younger family members, because of her family's turbulent past and critical stance towards the Soviet system, they withdrew from political life for fear of persecution at the height of political repressions.

Anna Mihaylovna describes her family's life in Irkutsk during her early childhood,

In school, I stood separate from everyone (“*Ya stoyála zámkom*”). Every week at the village, we had school dances. But I did not attend, because every Thursday, we had dances at home. And many highly educated, highly intellectual people came. The children weren’t excluded from conversations. We were to sit politely at the dinner table, and dad would always say, ‘if you have something to ask, ask, but don’t interrupt others’.

Rather than participating in the village dances, Anna Mihaylovna took part in her family’s gatherings, appraising them for the presence of other members of the intelligentsia. Her parents even taught the children proper etiquette for conduct around the dinner table. Simultaneously, despite holding a critical stance towards the Soviet regime, Anna Mihaylovna’s family avoided both confrontation and cooperation with Soviet authorities. “Dad never joined the [Communist] Party, and he bequeathed that to us. I was never a Party member.”

Susanna Solomonovna Pechuro’s parents were Ukrainian Jews. She recounts that her dad witnessed the pogroms against the Jews at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Ukraine. The family moved to Moscow at the turn of the century. In contrast to previously overt anti-Semitism, the Revolution of 1917, which seemingly guaranteed equality between ethnicities, and was welcomed by Susanna’s father,

I come from an ordinary, small town family. My dad was a very smart man, but he could be naïve to tears. My parents were never Party members. For that, you had to *believe* in something. They didn’t believe in anything, and didn’t enter the Party. They, of course, thought the Revolution was wonderful.

Despite their convictions about the virtues of the Revolution, Susanna’s parents never joined the Communist Party. Susanna exemplifies this ambivalence through an account of her parents’ enthusiasm for universal education. From early on, the Soviet state

guaranteed equal access to education for men and women; however, Susanna's parents were finding out the system had its own rules of conduct:

Dad became an engineer; he was a very bright engineer. He traveled, wrote books, engineered factories. And Mom? Dad convinced Mom to enroll in university, but she was kicked out from second year. Kicked out? It is interesting how...

Susanna's mom's grandfather was "declassified" (*lishenetz*). Before the Revolution, he was an owner of a small food stand in a village in Ukraine. Because he was considered a property owner and not a member of the proletariat, he was "declassified"—deprived of voting rights. Susanna's mom had never reported this to the university authorities, and she was expelled as a reprimand. Susanna described this episode with indignation: "Mom was quiet. And Dad was quiet. Yes, those are the rules. After this, Mom lived her life practically without a vocation; without any steady job." This episode highlights important and contradictory aspects of political participation in the early Soviet era: despite equal opportunities guaranteed by the regime, Susanna witnessed the unequal treatment of her own parents from early on in her life. This also suggests the constraints of social mobility for women who lacked a higher education. In the way Susanna remembers her parents, she describes them as conformist, and even "naive to tears." She voices disappointment in her parents' failure to confront injustice in light of her own present understanding of the early life of the Soviet state.

Malva Noevna Landa, whose father moved the family from Odessa to Saratov in 1925, describes her father as an adamant believer in the Russian Revolution and the political goals of the *Bolsheviks*,

My dad truly believed, which doesn't give him much honour, that when the first Five-year plan is accomplished in four years, there will be communism in the Stalingrad tractor plant!

Malva Noevna describes her father's optimism in relation to Soviet attempts at industrialization: if there will be communism in a tractor plant, a symbol of worker self-determination, there could be communism anywhere else. Why does she denounce her father's beliefs? During these years, she describes her involvement with the *Pioneeri*,\*\* a children's club espousing communist ideals: "I didn't just join to wear a red tie, and sing songs. I joined because I believed."

Malva Noevna's faith changed drastically at the height of collectivization. In 1930, when she was 12 years old, her father, working as a veterinarian on collective farms, brought her along,

I arrived to the *kolhoz*. I immediately wanted to help... [The villagers'] stomachs were bloated from hunger; they were eating some sort of saltbrush. The hunger in the village was a true nightmare. And half of the windows were boarded up [*crosses her arms to show how windows were boarded up*]. Those were the ones who were sent to exile.

This event signaled a profound rupture in Malva Noevna's understanding of the Soviet system and became a marker of her future dissent. In Malva's narrative, her dissent continued to be relevant, almost canonical, throughout her entire life. In the anthropological terms outlined at the beginning of the chapter, this event exemplifies a memory of persistence.

Several different reactions stem from this series of interviews based on the parents' legacies to their children. On the one hand, for Susanna Solomonovna who

was indignant that her parents did not confront social injustice, and for Malva Noevna, who denounced her father's belief in communism, parents do not inform their behaviour as members of the intelligentsia. This interpretation will be important when I discuss the moral aspects of the definition of the intelligentsia. On the other hand, Elena Vasilievna and Anna Mihaylovna acknowledge their parents' influence on their cultural status as members of the intelligentsia. These narratives follow two different trajectories of memory production: the first shows change, in the way self-initiative lead each participant to reach a distinct political outlook; the second, shows persistence, in the way tradition and history inscribed between generations have influenced participants' present lives.

### 3.3.2 *Childhood and the Great Patriotic War*

The experience of the Second World War was a formative memory of childhood and youth for three of the four participants. The fourth participant, Malva Noevna, was a young adult studying geography and pregnant with her first child at the start of the war. She chose not to elaborate on her experiences.

The history of Soviet involvement in the *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna*,\*\* ("Great Patriotic War," as it is called in Russia) is complicated and paradoxical. For example, in 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; a treaty of non-aggression, which was going to pave the way for the signatory countries to secretly subdivide Eastern and Northern Europe. As Robert Service



suggests, Stalin refused to believe that the German army was planning an assault on Soviet territory: "Stalin in any case was confident that the USSR was strong and getting insuperably stronger" (Service 1997:259). However, on June 22, 1941, Germans began an aerial offensive on Kiev, which quickly expanded to other parts of Western Russia. In addition to incredible Soviet casualties in the first months of the war, entire institutions had to be evacuated from the Western front to Central Russia. Factories, government offices, schools were virtually disassembled, moved on trains, and reassembled again beyond the Ural mountains.

Although it was normal for schoolchildren to be evacuated with their entire schools, and thus be separated from their parents, Susanna Solomonovna's family were all evacuated with her aunt, who was a doctor working at a Red Army hospital in the Ural region. The conditions were dire—the family found an abandoned shed to live in, and during the first winter, many schoolchildren died of famine. Then, wounded soldiers began arriving,

Oh, how often you hear about the friendship of the peoples in the Soviet Union. Well, we had five barracks. The commanders and officers were in the first. They had beds there, and curtains. The curtains I remember to this day. Curtains! In barracks two, three and four, there were Slavic soldiers. Their treatment was a little worse. And then, the last one: barrack number five, which housed all the *Natzmen*\*\*.<sup>14</sup> They were treated like dirt. Their beds

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<sup>14</sup> *Natzmen* is a slang term to describe "national minorities" distinct from Russians. According to Robert Service, the reason for hostility between the Russian soldiers and national minorities was that "the German occupation of Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic republics in the first two years of the war meant that the great majority of Red Army soldiers perforce originated from the RSFSR and were Russians [...] Yet the eulogies of the Russians also had to avoid giving offence to other nations whose young men had been conscripted into the Red Army. Most national and ethnic groups experienced an increase in their sense of distinctness in the heat of the war. The brutal policies before 1941 had induced permanent hatred of Stalin among most non-Russians. Antagonism was especially noticeable both among the deported nationalities but also among peoples living in states which had recently been

were lodged next to one another so there was nowhere to step, and they only had one elderly doctor who had no business being with them.

The hospital had a capacity for 250 patients. When it accepted 500 patients, the administration asked schoolchildren to nurse at the hospital, and gave them the liberty to choose which barrack they wanted to work in. Susanna picked barrack number five.

Mom said I had "class sentiment." It wasn't class sentiment; it was shame. *For the first time in my life, I was so ashamed that these patients were treated this way. Why? Are they not people? This shame persisted with me for the rest of my life.*

In this harrowing narrative, Susanna reflects on the persistence of some memories. This quote encapsulates one of the most important themes in my life history interviews: the feeling of responsibility for witnessing social injustice, which has defined Susanna's moral position since her childhood. Shame is not value-neutral, it is a normative concept. Contrary to embarrassment, for example, which is a selfish sentiment, shame is based on an understanding of a consciousness of wrong. Am I suggesting that Susanna feels the same shame today that she felt when she was nine years old during the war? No. But I am suggesting that through these narratives, it is possible to understand how memories create or recreate a particular identity in the present, based on an actual or perceived past. In this case, memory embeds morality in crafting self-identity.

The Great Patriotic War also provided significant ruptures with any previous ways of life. In 1941, Anna Mihaylovna's father left for the war, leaving behind his wife, her two sisters and their children. One day, the family was returning home.

Anna ran up the staircase with her brother.

We see a tall, thin man sitting on the windowsill. Probably Dad. He recognized us immediately, but we got scared. We ran downstairs, saying to Mom, 'there is a man sitting over there, it's probably Dad!' We all ran back up, hugging. But Dad looked awful. It turned out he was in the last stage of dystrophy. He was sent home to die.

Anna's mother tended her husband with traditional remedies and, after an extended illness, he recovered. Anna cried retelling this event. The shock of seeing her father, and the present-day dismay at remembering not having recognized him, literally embodied the disruption of the war.

Not every young family was evacuated from Moscow. Elena Vasilievna stayed with her mother and father in the capital city. She describes this period as a time of hardship,

In 1943, Dad passed away, and Mom and I had a tough time during the war, because we remained living in that same Moscow apartment... We had an oven installed, and I would chop wood on our staircase, and then make soup on the oven. Mom worked at the Night School of Working Youth, and came home late and exhausted. I would do homework in front of the oven, and then fall asleep.

Few things stand out as much as this departure from everyday life. For me, Elena chopping wood on the staircase was one of the most resonant images from our interviews. This story also became an extraordinary family anecdote that has caused both laughter and admiration when recounted at family gatherings. The significance of this activity is precisely because it was a symbol of a rupture with any previous way of life.

### 3.3.3 *Youth and the Death of a Dictator*

When the war ended, on May 8, 1945, many participants felt such joy that it was difficult for them to describe their feelings in words during our interviews. Elena Vasilievna describes the end of the war as a truly happy event. She went to the Manezh Square in front of the Kremlin. There, confetti descended from the sky; a giant portrait of Lenin hung on an aerostat above the crowd, and soldiers were being thrown into the air by companies celebrating victory,

The whole crowd was tuned to the same spirit. Everyone was so joyous, that this feeling spilled over. This human energy was so great that everything around us was full of this energy of joy.

Several participants used similar metaphors such as being “on the same wavelength,” being “tuned in,” or “carried away,” in expressing this feeling of collective joy. There is a difficulty expressing this literally, because the end of the war symbolized such an emotional departure from the hardships of the war years, while simultaneously creating what Susanna Solomonovna describes as “the background in which people grew up.”

For most, the post-War period signalled the end of school life, and the beginning of university or professional life. After Anna Mihaylovna’s father recovered from illness, he continued his career in geology. During the summer months, he would take the entire family on expeditions in Western Siberia. Anna has fond memories of those trips, which eventually inspired her first career in biology. Malva Noevna became a geologist, and led expeditions to various parts of the Soviet Union,

later becoming part of the prestigious aero-geological services. Elena Vasilievna enrolled in the Moscow Architectural Institute. In her student assignments, she took part in designing several notable downtown Moscow buildings. She remembers working alongside German POWs, who were held for several years after the war. During this period, Susanna Solomonovna was in secondary school, finding inspiration in literature and poetry from her literature teacher and friends. The following section will focus primarily on her experience.

#### *Part I. Joseph Stalin's Dictatorship*

In the late 1920s and 1930s, Stalin-sanctioned policies of collectivization, *dekulakization* and massive purges that included many members of the intelligentsia which claimed millions of lives. Although no definitive data exists, the state imposed a famine in the Ukraine named the *Holodomor*\*\* which claimed million of lives.<sup>15</sup> In the 1930s, ideologically-motivated persecutions took on a decidedly new character. After ideological disagreements with Stalin about state bureaucratization, and international revolution, Leon Trotsky who headed the *Comintern*\*\* (Communist International organization), was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1929. In 1934, a high-ranking general, Sergei Kirov was assassinated, which prompted a campaign against supposed Trotskyite conspirators against the Soviet Union. In 1936, Moscow show trials were

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Service comments on strict food dispensations in the Ukraine: "Passenger traffic between the Russian and Ukrainian republics was suspended in 1932 and the borders were sealed by Red Army units. From village to village the armed urban squads moved without mercy. 'Kulaks' were suppressed and the starving majority of the Ukrainian peasantry had to fulfill the state's requirements or else face deportation. Famine was the predictable outcome (Service 1997:202).

held to persecute high-ranking Politburo functionaries accused of plotting to kill Stalin.<sup>16</sup> In 1937, under the order of the head of the secret police, the NKVD\*\*, Nikolai Yezhov instituted a policy of "troikas." Troika, translated as "threesome," was a judicial system that appointed three Party members from various strata of the Soviet bureaucracy to carry out fast and efficient judicial trials, meeting quotas on the number of imprisonments and executions imposed per region.<sup>17</sup> Nicknamed the "Yezhovshina," in Russia, after Yezhov who instituted the policies, or the Great Purges abroad, these campaigns resulted in the execution or internal exile of hundreds of thousands of members of the intelligentsia who were denounced as "enemies of the people."<sup>18</sup> Those who were exiled, were often sent to work in the intensive labour camps, known as the Gulag\*\*, where many perished because of extreme environments, intolerable working conditions, disease and famine.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Service describes the 1934 murder of Sergei Kirov as one of the key events triggering a wave of repressions: "Stalin exploited the assassination as a pretext to rush through a set of decrees granting full authority to the NKVD to arrest, try and execute at will" (Service 1997:214). Between 1934 and 1938, newer and newer pretexts were issued to find arbitrary and ruthless punishments. As Service notes, "Stalin's campaign was relentless, and he appointed his admirer Nikolai Yezhov to take over the NKVD in September [1936]" (Service 2007:218).

<sup>17</sup> "The victims were tried by trios (*troiki*), typically consisting of the local NKVD chief, party secretary and procurator. Trials were derisively brief and sentences were carried out without right of appeal [...] As the Great Terror was intensified, the resolution 'On Anti-Soviet Elements' was applied to virtually anyone who had been active in or sympathetic to a communist oppositionist faction; and soon pretty well everybody who held a political, administrative or managerial post lived in fear. Not a single institution was unscathed by the NKVD's interrogators. The quota system was applied not merely to geographical areas but also to specific public bodies. The objective was to effect a 'cleansing' throughout the state. The NKVD was not to restrain itself by notions about an individual's possible innocence: the point was to eliminate all the categories of people believed by Stalin and Yezhov to contain the regime's enemies" (Service 2007:222).

<sup>18</sup> "On 2 July, at Stalin's instigation, the Politburo passed a resolution 'On Anti-Soviet Elements', and Yezhov scuttled back to the Politburo on 31 July with the scheme for the NKVD to arrest 259,450 persons over the following months" (Service 2007:221)

<sup>19</sup> "According to official central records, 681,692 persons were executed in 1937-8. This may well be an underestimate, but the total number of deaths caused by repression in general was anyway much higher as people also perished from the inhuman conditions of their captivity. Between one million and one and a half million persons, it is tentatively reckoned, were killed by firing squad, physical

After the Second World War, the terror campaigns continued, and the GULag's labour camps prospered, mainly because of the imprisonment of German prisoners of war and Russian soldiers returning from German concentration camps.<sup>20</sup> Several events, such as the fabricated "Doctor's Plot" in the early 1950s (where high-ranking Kremlin doctors of Jewish descent were accused of an assassination plot against Stalin) precipitated the "war on cosmopolitanism," an openly anti-Semitic policy persecuting Jewish intellectuals.<sup>21</sup> It was during this time that Susanna Solomonovna was confronted with the violence of post-war Stalinist policies. I quote from and paraphrase her narrative at length, in order to give a first-hand account of the varied experiences of people living in the Soviet Union during Stalin's dictatorship.

In 1947, Susanna joined a "creative literature" club at the *Dom Pionerov*<sup>22</sup> ("House of Pioneers – a communist organization for young people from 8-14 years old). At the club, Susanna met two like-minded friends, Boris Slutsky and Vladislav Furman—two boys slightly older than her. The three companions became inseparable, meeting twice a week at the literature club,

These were two happy days a week. But our leader was a crude woman and it seems someone started to pressure her, asking what we were reading. And after a girl read a poem about being sad at a school talent show, she told us "Soviet youth can't have feelings like this"... And she forbade us to read. We

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maltreatment or massive over-work in the care of the NKVD in those two years alone" (Service 2007:222).

<sup>20</sup> "The infamous Order No. 270 that defined as a traitor anyone taken captive by the Germans had not been repealed. Emaciated by their suffering in Hitler's concentration camps, 2,775,700 former Red Army soldiers were taken into Soviet custody upon their repatriation. After being interrogated by the Department of Verification-Filtration Camps, about half of them were transferred into the Gulag system" (Service 2007:301).

<sup>21</sup> "Most of the thirteen detainees in this Doctor's Plot had Jewish names and the tirades in the press against the 'assassins in white coats' produced an anti-Semitic hysteria" (Service 2007:324-325)

were outraged. We said we wouldn't allow censorship, and we all left the club. After everyone left the club, Susanna, Boris and Vladik decided to continue meeting separately in Boris' apartment. Describing their meetings, Susanna says that "most conversations turned from literature to politics," and that the three of them, along with several of their closest friends, decided to form an underground political organization. The goal of this union was to fight for the revolutionary principles established by V.I. Lenin, since they felt that these ideals had been betrayed by Stalin. The group gave itself a name, *Souz borbi za delo revolutsii*, [the "Union for the Affair of the Revolution"].

We started reading Leninist literature. But of course! We didn't have any other literary references. I remember the investigator yelling at me: 'What can we do so there won't be any people like you around?' I said, 'to ward off evil, take books and burn them all.' Because the 'doublethink' (*dvue-mislie*) was remarkable. You didn't need any underground literature. All of the books [that we read] stood on the shelves of the Lenin Library; we would go get them and read them.

In this quote, Susanna outlines the unfortunate irony of her situation. She was encouraged to read revolutionary texts; they were taught in school. She was, however, persecuted on the very basis of following up on the ideas outlined in those texts. For example, the group wrote out political pamphlets, using a "hectograph," a gelatin printing press. The instructions for making the press were outlined in the revolutionary memoirs of *Narodnik* Vera Figner's memoirs, which the group diligently studied. Of course, the printing press was strictly forbidden and had to be hidden during apartment searches.

Many scholars have characterized Soviet life as a binary model between



“official” and “unofficial,” or “public” and “private” discourses, failing to acknowledge what Alexei Yurchak calls the “ambivalence of cultural production” (Yurchak 2006:6),

[The] binary division between the state (censored) and the society beyond it (uncensored), fail[s] to account for the fact that many of the common cultural phenomena in socialism that were allowed, tolerated, or even promoted within the realm of the officially censored were nevertheless quite distinct from the ideological texts of the Party (Yurchak 2006:6).

It is implausible to suggest that the “doublethink” Susanna describes is an opposition between two forces – a state and its resisters, for example. Rather, Susanna highlights two mutually constitutive, although contradictory discourses that prevailed in Soviet life from at least the beginnings of the Russian Revolution.

*Part II: “Do not Forget, Many Great People Have Taken the Same Path.”*<sup>22</sup>

This sub-heading is a phrase that Susanna’s father told her when he came to visit her in a prisoner’s work camp in the Ural region a year after Susanna was incarcerated. Authorities uncovered the organization six months after it was formed. On January 18, 1950, Susanna’s family was woken up by a knock on the door of their communal flat. KGB members entered the flat that housed seven families, searched it and arrested 16 year-old Susanna Pechuro.

When I first met Susanna, I entered her single room apartment, and was immediately confronted with a multitude of cats. There were kittens sprawled on the floor, kittens on the chairs and bed. One of her cats had just given birth to a litter.

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<sup>22</sup> (Rus.) *Ne zabud', velikih eto chasto put'.*

Seeing my surprise, Susanna turned to me and said, "It's always important to have something alive in the house. When you're sitting in Lefortovo's *odinochka*" [single occupant prison cell], you're just praying for something, even a fly, to move." This statement, made in the present tense, perfectly enunciated my first impressions of Susanna Solomonovna. I brought her a flower for each subsequent interview: a symbol, among others, of respect in Russia.

Susanna spent 12 months in the notorious Lefortovo prison under investigation for trial. During the investigation, she endured various forms of physical and psychological torture. Simultaneously, she was taught by her former prison cell mates "how to sew with a fishbone from soup, how to sleep sitting down. And they immediately reminded me how to use the knocking alphabet."<sup>23</sup> Subversive actions like these, "without which a person cannot survive in prison," according to Susanna, filled her everyday life. These formed Susanna's coping strategies in prison along with rigorous mental exercises, where she would force herself to repeat school lectures, or memorize pages of a book. Outside of the Lefortovo prison, there was an airplane engine factory. Susanna says that,

By far, the scariest thing about Lefortovo was the constant noise heard from the factory... Because everybody was convinced that the guards started the noise when they wanted to mask executions and tortures. Because really, when that noise started, you could hear the sounds of beaten, tortured prisoners.

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<sup>23</sup> Susanna asserts that the knocking alphabet is still used in Russian prisons. It is communicated by a series of taps on the adjoining prison cell, similar to the principles of Morse code. Susanna related that her prison-mates were fluent enough in the alphabet that they were capable of learning foreign languages with inmates imprisoned in the next cells.

During a week-long trial, she found out there were 16 people accused of being part of the organization of which there were only eight members. Boris Slutsky, Vladlen Furman and Evgeniy Gurevich received the “highest degree of punishment”—execution. Ten students, including Susanna, received 25 year labour camp sentences, and three students received ten years in the GULag. From 1950 until 1956, Susanna served time in 11 prisons, including the infamous Lefortovo and Butirskaya prisons, and seven GULag camps including the notorious political prisoner camps, Inta and Minlag.

Stalin died in 1953, and was replaced by Nikita Khrushchev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party. The same year, Khrushchev signed an amnesty releasing a large percentage of political prisoners from the GULag. However, many requests for release took several years to process. When the case was assessed for retrial in 1956, Susanna’s executed friends were given 10 year prison sentences, posthumously. She was freed in April 1956, under the order of the 1953 amnesty. Although her story is filled with tragedy, Susanna has also displayed remarkable heroism, vibrancy, and even moments of humour in retelling these events. These qualities are undoubtedly a testament to her ability to reflect on the strength of friendships she formed with former prisoners, her ability to help others, and her enduring empathy and compassion. As she sums it up, “I don’t regret anything.”

### *Part III. Paradoxes of Soviet Cultural Policy*

Alexei Yurchak highlights a paradox that he says was inherent in the Soviet

system: the desire to achieve liberation in all aspects of social, cultural and political life through complete ideological control (Yurchak 1996:40),

This paradox was inherent in the political, intellectual, and artistic avant-garde that embraced a contradictory ethos of experimentation and creativity, and at the same time of professional revolutionaries who gave themselves up to the vanguard party based on strict centralized discipline (Yurchak 1996:40).

This centralized discipline was monitored by Joseph Stalin himself. Stalin launched an "intervention in many spheres of intellectual, scientific, political, and aesthetic discourse" (Yurchak 1996:44). Yurchak describes Stalin as establishing so-called "objective scientific laws" in linguistic practice, which were calibrated against Marxist-Leninist principles set by Stalin himself. Language rules, as well as other aspects of Soviet life, such as political demonstrations (May Day, or the November Revolution celebrations) and ideological discourses were followed according to a precise formula reproduced with great precision.

When Stalin died in 1953, linguistic and ideological rules persisted; however, without any authority that could evaluate them "objectively," they started losing their original meanings. These forms of authoritative discourse were still performed and reproduced as everyday practices of Soviet life, yet they shifted to encompass new and creative meanings. For example, it was important to vote at a *Komsomol*\*\* meeting; the procedure of voting itself was elevated to its utmost importance; however, many members describe not taking the resolutions passed seriously. Roughly stated, the content of these meetings was decided on by the participants. Similarly, although many attended May Day celebrations, they enjoyed them not on

the basis of their ideology, but because they were given a day off work.

Yurchak describes Stalin's death as an event that allowed for a paradigm shift in "authoritative discourse," which eventually destabilized the Soviet system (Yurchak 2006:36-76). Subsequent leaders, such as Nikita Khrushchev, General Secretary from 1958 to 1964, (discussed in the following section), and especially Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary from 1984 to 1991, (discussed in the next chapter), broke with previous forms of authoritative discourse by allowing ordinary citizens to discuss state practices critically, thus undermining state authority (Yurchak 2006:291). In light of this analysis, how did participants perceive the events following Stalin's death, and the subsequent delegitimation of Stalin's cult of personality?

#### *3.3.4 Adulthood: Between the Thaw and Stagnation*

Robert Service describes the events surrounding the profoundly shocking speech delivered by Nikita Khrushchev in the winter of 1956, denouncing Stalin's "cult of personality." In February of 1956, the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress gathered together delegates of the Communist Party from various parts of the Soviet Union. At the start of the congress, Khrushchev had proposed to speak on "the Cult of the Individual and its Consequences." The speech was delivered to a closed session of the Congress on 25 February (Service 1997:339).

The speech, which lasted four hours, was a turning-point in the USSR's politics. Its unifying topic was Stalin. Khrushchev informed the Congress

about Lenin's call in 1923 for Stalin's removal from the General Secretaryship.

The rest of the speech was given over to the abuses perpetrated by Stalin in the following three decade (Service 1997:339).

Soon after the Congress, the secret speech was read to every Party organization in the country. Reactions to the speech varied amongst my participants. Some were dismayed at the partial evidence of Stalin's crimes revealed in the speech—they were skeptical of Khrushchev's intent during the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress. Others describe this event as being as unexpected as "thunder from the blue sky" [*grom sredi yasnogo neba*], or one that caused a state of "deep shock" [*glubokoe potriashenie*].

#### *Part I. 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and Khrushchev's Secret Speech*

Elena Vasilievna describes her impressions of the beginning of Khrushchev's era as being "very abrupt." In our conversation about the changes witnessed during the *perestroika*, Elena Vasilievna parallels Khrushchev's period with Gorbachev's era: "it became freer, a lot freer... But it didn't begin then [with Gorbachev], it began with Khurshchev. With Khurshchev, it was very abrupt." Elena Vasilievna describes her reactions upon hearing the speech: "it was as if a dark cloud lifted from over us. As if something terrible had gone away. Now we understand that it didn't quite go away." Elena Vasilievna expresses two sentiments in this short quote: the continuity between personal hope in the political process witnessed with Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's eras, and the present awareness of the continuity of political violence throughout various epochs of Soviet and post-Soviet history.

Susanna Solomonovna was rehabilitated in the same year as the Hungarian

Uprising.<sup>24</sup> She describes her skepticism upon hearing Khrushchev's speech: "the same ideology, the same methods; nothing changed." Having spent six years in labour camps of the Ural region, she felt that she was well aware of "Stalin's cult of personality." But she also voices her optimism, "young people were finding out about this, and that was important." There is no ambivalence in this narrative; Susanna notes that despite the continuity of Soviet ideology, a generation of young people was becoming more aware of previous atrocities of the Soviet system.

Malva Noevna voices a similar idea about the continuities with past epochs:

Khrushchev said comparatively little to all the horrors that happened during Stalinism. Did I hear [the speech]? Of course, I heard. It was read to us, geologists. Back then, a young man said to me, "Malva, did you hear what Khrushchev said?" I had a huge aversion to people who said, "cult of personality!" Yes, I knew *a lot more* than what Khrushchev had said!

Malva Noevna acknowledges that she did not learn anything new from Khrushchev's speech. She argues that her colleagues also knew of the atrocities of the Stalinist regime, but chose to ignore them, and feigned shock over the supposed discovery made after the 20th Party Congress.

Judging these narratives with sensitivity, which they deserve, it would nevertheless be interesting to inquire about how knowledgeable participants were of the new discovery. Once again, the tension here is between memories of persistence or

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<sup>24</sup> Riazanovsky and Steinberg describe the events surrounding the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. In October of that year, a full-scale secessionist revolution occurred supported by the Hungarian army: "The new government of a revisionist Communist, Imre Nagy, constituted a political coalition rather than single-party rule and withdrew Hungary from the Warsaw Treaty." (Riazanovsky and Steinberg 2005:550). However, "on November 4, after only a few days of freedom, Soviet troops began storming Budapest and crushed the revolution." (Ibid.) These events were condemned internationally, and amongst circles of the intelligentsia inside the Soviet Union.

change. In some way, each participant underlines the continuity between previous eras and her present. If I were to give voice to this line of argument, it would read, "although with different intentions, ideology and extent, the actions of the state continue to be repressive and unjust to the present day." This is voiced differently in each narrative. Elena Vasilievna describes her optimism during the events that reinterpreted her view of Soviet life, but understands them differently in her present, as not having achieved their goals. Susanna Solomonovna voices a similar optimism, related to Khrushchev's "Thaw," and to Gorbachev's *perestroika*, although in her descriptions of the present, she also voices an uncanny pessimism. Malva Noevna describes her unflinching dissatisfaction with the Soviet state from her teenage years until the collapse of the Soviet Union. These narratives support a particular consistency of beliefs, and actions geared towards those beliefs. The next section describes the actions that one participant took to vocalize her disagreement with the Soviet state.

### *Part II. The Rise of the Dissident Movement*

In 1964, conservative party factions led by Leonid Brezhnev ousted Khrushchev from his leadership of the Politburo. Brezhnev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party. His persecution of those articulating their dissent drove many members of the intelligentsia to come to support a newly fomenting dissident movement. Malva Noevna became an active participant in this movement, which eventually found consensus with a nascent democratic movement in the late



1980s, toppling the Soviet system during the *perestroika* era.

In the autumn of 1965, two writers, Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel were arrested for publishing their work abroad, and criminally charged with spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. Many prominent academics and members of the intelligentsia signed petitions against the arrests and their show trial that lasted for over a year. Anyone who signed the petition had their party memberships withdrawn, lost their job, and took the risk of facing criminal charges of their own. On December 5, Alexandr Yesenin-Volpin, the son of a famous poet Sergei Yesenin, and a prominent Moscow mathematician, organized a demonstration to publicly protest the arrest and the trial of the writers. Ludmilla Alexeeva describes this protest as the birth of the dissident movement, “the human rights movement is considered to have a specific birthdate—December 5, 1965—when the first demonstration with the slogan ‘Respect the Soviet Constitution!’ took place in Moscow’s Pushkin Square” (Alexeeva 1985:9). Daniel and Sinyavsky’s trial was ingeniously documented in *samizdat* underground literature in the well-circulated *Belaya Kniga*\*\* [“White Book”], published by Aleksandr Ginzburg. Ginzburg was Malva Noevna’s future collaborator with whom she chronicled the conditions of political prisoners in the Soviet Union. Larisa Bogoraz, Yuli Daniel’s wife and adamant dissident activist also became Malva’s best friend and collaborator.

The dissidents met in secret in each other’s apartments; their job was to distribute information relating to local and national abuses of human rights to foreign correspondents, who would pass this along to foreign radio stations. Although Malva

Noevna emphasizes that the dissidents were just a group of friends with no leaders, the names of some of the most active members will still be recognizable to an older generation of Muscovites.

Entering the dissident circle was a seminal event in Malva Noevna's life. Many people shared *samizdat* in the Soviet Union—it was a matter of securing a typewriter and passing copies of typewritten material to friends—Malva Noevna, however, was a meticulous researcher, author and typist of many political publications chronicling human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. These publications were often typed on rice paper, since thinner sheets could produce up to 10 readable carbon copies, instead of the usual four or five reproducible on regular paper. Notably, she contributed to a seminal human rights *samizdat*, the *Hronika Tekushih Sobityi*, (*HTS*)\*\* [“Chronicle of Current Events”], a typewritten journal with an audience composed mostly of the intelligentsia exposed to dissident activities. Its authors were anonymous during the Brezhnev era; information traveled between circles of friends—someone who wanted to contribute information contacted the person from whom they received their *samizdat*, they contacted their link, and so on, until that information reached the editors. Because the authors were anonymous, they were difficult to trace and charge in case of arrest. The journal existed for 15 years, releasing 65 issues between April 30, 1968 and 1983, with a break in between 1972 and 1974 following KGB threats. The famous dissident and human rights activist Andrei Saharov called the “Chronicle of Current Times” the “Scriptures of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union” (Bahmina: personal communication, 2008).

In order to effectively communicate their messages, dissidents would secretly meet with foreign correspondents from Western newspapers and radio stations to give them information to broadcast. Malva Noevna remembers passing issues of the "Chronicle" to one foreign correspondent with whom she would meet in a secret location. She reflects on this method of communication with foreign journalists,

The biggest achievement of the dissident movement is passing information to foreign correspondents. They, in turn, broadcasted the material back to the Soviet Union through shortwave radio stations in Europe – *Svoboda*\*\* in Czechoslovakia, BBC in England and radio stations in Germany. I wanted the world to know that not everyone in the Soviet Union was pro-Soviet.

The quest for justice was pursued mainly through a human rights discourse of the dissident movement. Most, although not all dissidents, were oppositional to the Soviet state. Malva Noevna is critical towards those who wanted to "cooperate" with the state. For example, when she entered the Moscow Helsinki Group in 1976, an organization documenting Soviet adherence to the Helsinki agreement described in the second chapter, she was critical of the way her colleagues said they wanted to cooperate with the state in order to uphold human rights. Malva entered with a special declaration that "the state will not want to uphold human rights agreements. The Soviet state is built on the principle of ignoring human rights." Opposition to the state in Malva's narrative was framed within a moralistic discourse of "human rights," and tested against an environment that was hostile to respecting these rights. In other words, Malva Noevna's present memories of her past political participation in the dissident movement are consistent with her oppositional stance in the present. As Olick and Robbins point out, this is an instance of the persistence of memory,

which is both a reflection of personal identity, and a response to the political changes occurring in the transformation from the Soviet Union to the present (Olick and Robbins 1998:129). Paraphrasing Barry Schwarz, the authors point out,

certain meanings remain relevant over long periods of time despite superficial changes in the reading of those meanings as well as in their institutional contexts; certain pasts are constitutive elements of political cultures, and these endure as long as the political culture is not completely superseded (Ibid.: 129).

Although the political climate has changed drastically from the rise of the dissident movement, Malva Noevna's recollections remind us of a similar distrust towards the political culture she felt over two decades ago.

### **3.4 Chapter Conclusion**

I began this chapter by discussing life history scholarship as described by L.L. Langness (1965), who argued that most anthropological data is fundamentally biographical. Furthermore, I looked at the way anthropologists have analysed memory practices as social constructions, or a statements of cultural identity (see Passerini 1987); and the way memories have been linked to social power (Roseman 2003). In this vein, I introduced a schema on the dynamics of social memory outlined by Olick and Robbins (1998). The authors outline different ways that memories of the past can persist or change, depending on the way social actors choose to remember or forget, or interpret or reinvent the past for later cultural formations.

I analysed a series of life history interviews I conducted with four participants

of this research based on their memories of their parents and of themselves as children, youth and adults. In each period of their lives, I briefly connected descriptions of key political events with the way participants describe their personal impressions of these events. As a result, I drew conclusions about memory persistence, or malleability; in other words, what participants acknowledged has changed or remained the same in their perceptions of the past.

What I found most interesting in participants' accounts of their past, is that participants themselves emphasize continuities in their narratives. With reference to the past, Malva Noevna's narrative is self-affirming, achieving what Michael Herzfeld described as "the successful performance of selfhood depend[ent] upon an ability to identify the self with larger categories of identity" (Herzfeld 1985:10). In the following chapters, I want to move beyond an analysis on the performance of selfhood itself, and elaborate on what motivates this type of performance. In a much later analysis, Michael Herzfeld describes one of the phenomena of social poetics: an adherence to a static cultural ideal:

[This adherence] has a surprising and presumably unintended consequence: not only does it ground certain permissible forms of debate, but also it permits and perhaps even encourages the day-to-day subversion of norms. This comes about because the very rigidity of outward forms provides some actors with a mask with which to conceal a variety of messages, just as a strict morality may sometimes enable—through the mastery of its codes—remarkable freedom of individual action (Herzfeld 2005:22).

In light of this analysis, it may be instructive to begin to reformulate previous interpretations of the intelligentsia. Drawing attention to Malva Noevna's

oppositional attitude towards the state, I want to destabilize the notion that this is an inherent part of her identity. Rather, I contend that it is a strategy used as a way to relate to broader bases of power.

I want to explore this notion further, by following through on a moment of disruption of Soviet life: the *perestroika*, a seminal event in the history of 20th century Russia, and the period which drives this thesis' analysis of social and political transition in the following chapter. Based on the narratives of the past in this chapter, I focus on *perestroika* narratives to show that members of the intelligentsia have, according to Herzfeld, "mastered the codes" (Ibid.) allowing for themselves a "remarkable freedom of individual action" (Ibid.), and are thus able to negotiate their position of belonging and engage in social and cultural life of Russia in sometimes nuanced ways.

## Chapter Four—Turning Back the Waves: Memories of the *Perestroika*

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter analyzes the personal and political experiences of four research participants—Muscovite women of the intelligentsia—during the *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union. I contend that previous definitions of the intelligentsia modelled on “conformity” or “resistance” to state power become ineffective during this period. Primarily, this is because the *perestroika* era had already politicized all the members of the intelligentsia participating in this project in a way that made these distinctions redundant. Whereas during the Soviet period, there was a possibility to differentiate between the various “strata” of the intelligentsia in the way that I have distinguished between various “sub-categories” of the intelligentsia in Chapter 2 in order to analyze the coherence of such distinctions in present-day narratives, these differentiations became muddled during the *perestroika*. Secondly, those who participated in the political process were not necessarily oppositional, or conformist, to larger power structures.

We are reminded of Michael Herzfeld’s definition of “cultural intimacy,” which provides “insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation” (Herzfeld 2005:3). This chapter aims to discuss the ways that social and political reforms during the period of the *perestroika* resulted in my participants’

often-paradoxical involvement in the political process. While the “disenfranchised” had a certain degree of “creative irreverence” during this time, their present-day disenchantment with the social and political life of Russia is symptomatic of the way Russian society has shifted previously salient social categories to their exclusion. As I have shown in the previous chapter, participants have shifted their personal categories of belonging to encompass new definitions. In this chapter, I aim to show that their present-day disenchantment is rooted in the contrast to the hopes and expectations placed on the period of the *perestroika*.

It would not be an overstatement to say that in a little over a decade between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s Soviet citizens witnessed more profound political, economic and social changes than during any other period in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This decade signalled the rise of a contrastingly liberal leader of the Politburo, Mikhail Gorbachev, who introduced radical changes to Soviet society, ushering in a democratization of state institutions, the beginnings of a market economy and a relative freedom of speech. These reforms were largely welcomed by the intelligentsia, and severely criticized by conservative factions of society. This conflict culminated in the putsch of August 1991, when a conservative branch of the Communist Party led a coup to overthrow Gorbachev’s government, but were in turn confronted by thousands of democratic supporters at the Moscow White House led by a newly elected President of Russia<sup>25</sup>, Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin’s successful counter-coup

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<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev appointed himself as the President of the USSR. A separate post of the President of Russia, a Republic of the Soviet Union was created. The President of Russia was chosen through



signalled Gorbachev's political demise as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union, and paved the way for Yeltsin's rapid ascension as the leader of a strongly capitalist Russia. Throughout this period, Muscovites went from coping with Brezhnev era stagnation to being confronted by a series of successive economic hardships created by financial crises, price liberalization and hyperinflation. Despite all this, the most frequent reaction to the events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union was a sentiment of elation.

The period of *perestroika* signalled a growing hope that every social and political aspect in the lives of Soviet citizens was changing. Many describe this feeling as one of "belonging to, or being carried away by, history," as if "history was rushing past." There are also confused sentiments about what this period symbolized, and many felt everything changed too fast for them to comprehend. Some described their perceptions of this era as "being inside a period that you can only live through"; "being in the thick of it, without the ability to analyze what is happening." Whatever these metaphors express, they are symptomatic of a greater sentiment—a feeling of participation in society; participation in the political process that included putting trust in public or political figures, or openly exchanging (often contradictory) political views amongst friends, colleagues or family. These conversations politicized most citizens in the capital, if not the entire country.

The underlying goal of this chapter is to understand the effect of the changing sentiments during this period amongst a group of participants in this research in

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popular elections, which Boris Yeltsin won in March 1989.

response to the changing social and political events. As one participant describes, "It is interesting the way that this elation and hope turned to distrust, anxiety and hopelessness, with the result today—a total rejection of what is happening in the political sphere." In order to explain this transformation, I begin by discussing the historical context of several political transformations that have led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The challenge in portraying these periods from an ethnographic perspective is in combining three voices: an account of the events based on primary and secondary sources; participants' narratives surrounding these events; and my own ethnographic analysis. I combine research material with interview material, delineating this era into four periods. The first focuses on the last years of Brezhnev's stagnation before 1985, preceding the *perestroika* era. Alexei Yurchak describes the arrival of the *perestroika* and the collapse as simultaneously unexpected and fully anticipated. This is reflected in my participants' experiences of this period. The second period focuses on the events taking place between 1985 and 1991, as I describe the narratives surrounding Gorbachev's *perestroika* era. The third period ranges within half a year between the three days in August 1991 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December, relying mostly on my participants' descriptions of the events surrounding the *putsch*<sup>\*\*</sup>. Lastly, I discuss narratives that look back on this era from the perspective of the subsequent Boris Yeltsin's and Vladimir Putin's administrations, to contrast this period with participants' view of the present. These periods are not meant to compartmentalize historical events as coherent episodes; rather, they are meant to unpack a complex period in contemporary Russian history and to reflect on

delineations made by participants themselves.

#### 4.2 Studying Transition

Anthropologists have long been interested in studying political transitions. Focusing regionally on Eastern Europe over the last two decades, anthropologists have observed the transition to post-socialism in all of the dynamism of changing market trends, political transformations, invented traditions, changing ideologies, values, and memories of socialist life.

Amongst those topics anthropologists studied in the post-socialist era, the concepts of nation and national boundaries during transition were of particular interest. In some parts of Eastern Europe, several events marked the transition in redefining state borders. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and the subsequent reunification of Germany marked a pointed end to socialist rule in *GDR*<sup>26</sup>. In a seminal ethnography, *Where the World Ended* (1999), Daphne Berdahl studies the impact of reunification on a small East German village on the border with West Germany. She suggests that anthropology may offer multi-dimensional approaches to the study of transitions: "in doing so, anthropologists have challenged a certain linear, teleological thinking surrounding the collapse of socialism and pointed to the contradictions, paradoxes, and different trajectories of post-socialist societies" (1999:9). Berdahl's main contention in studying German borderlands is that social

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<sup>26</sup> The communist state of East Germany was established in 1949. Formally known as *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* or *DDR* in German, and the *German Democratic Republic*, the *GDR*, in English.

practices act as conduits of cultural transformation,

[M]oments and processes of transition are not to be measured solely by their political outcomes. In the process of this transition between two German states, people have invented, and to some extent ritualized, cultural practices that both reflect and constitute profound identity negotiations and transformations (Berdahl 1999:12).

Berdahl notes that in the process of this transformation, people have invented and ritualized certain traditions, indicative of the fast and fluid pace of cultural change in light of political transition. Other anthropologists have focused on cultural and political transition from the perspective of nationalism under socialism and beyond. An important theoretical work of this period is Katherine Verdery's *National Ideology under Socialism* (1997), which examines the intersections between intellectual discourse and nationalism in Romania during and after Ceaucescus's dictatorship.

Questions of the causes and consequences of various political and economic transformations in Eastern Europe have intrigued anthropologists, pre- and post-transition. For example, in *The Last Soviet Generation* (2006), Alexei Yurchak analyzes dominant discourse characteristic of the period of late socialism in the Soviet Union. He argues that authoritative discourses (representing ideological socialist canons) shifted during the last years of the Soviet Union, allowing people to craft new, creative interpretations of their life during socialism. On the other side of the collapse, and looking at the consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union and the blossoming of a new market economy in the *Unmaking of Soviet Life*, Caroline Humphrey connects moral values with new economic practices created through the informal markets in post-Soviet Russia (2002). Both authors analyze transition

indirectly, yet point to everyday practices created in the process of transformation.

Another trend in the anthropology of transition has revolved around the way gender and gender studies are conceived of in post-socialist society. Although I have reviewed the literature relevant to this theme in Chapter 1, it is interesting to once again point to scholars who have questioned the way Western scholarship is interpreted in Eastern Europe in light of changing social and political values. Nanette Funk (1993), who explores abortion politics in the former Yugoslavia, has more broadly questioned how feminism is interpreted amongst women and scholars in Eastern European contexts. Similarly, Galina Lindquist (1994:33) challenges her own relation to her informant, analysing the way intellectual women in Russia acquired new understandings in interpreting feminism after the transition. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman focus on gender in Hungary's and Romania's transitions to post-socialism, analysing the way discourses on gender have often been oversimplified, and offering a more nuanced way of looking at transition. Collectively, these authors argue that studying gender brings a unique perspective to the processes of transition.

As wide-ranging as the study of transitions has become, the word "transition" itself has come under scrutiny, and several authors mentioned above question the way the term "transition" delineates certain periods that may lack analytical salience. As Gal and Kligman suggest, transition "assumes evolutionary progress from one well-known stage of history to another" (Gal and Kligman 2000:10). Daphne Berdahl argues, "ethnographically grounded studies have emphasized important continuities

between socialist and postsocialist societies" (Berdahl 1999:10). There is an implicit assumption that in using the term "transition," a society undergoes transformation in a unilinear fashion. Gal and Kligman contend that the word "transition" assumes a theory of history in which "all aspects of society change in concert and in the same direction" (Gal and Kligman 1994:11). The authors acknowledge that discussions focusing on transition often fail to encompass different developments, ruptures and continuities (Ibid. 2000:11). As Herzfeld reminds us, "fixity of form does not necessarily entail a corresponding fixity of meanings and intentions; exaggeration, parody and other deforming practices both perpetuate the sense of enduring cultural form, and cause substantive change" (Herzfeld 2005:22).

It is my intention to bring the above-mentioned debates to the forefront in analyzing my informants' memories of particular ruptures and continuities during Russia's transformation from a socialist to post-Soviet society. I problematize the contrasts made between Brezhnev's and Gorbachev's eras in the next section, but before I can do that, I describe my use of primary and secondary sources in this chapter.

During the period of *perestroika*, many weekly publications circulated and were avidly discussed amongst Muscovites. These publications fomented a political consciousness especially amongst members of the intelligentsia. Alexei Yurchak writes that discussing newly published texts of the *perestroika* era became a national obsession:

Between 1987 and 1988, the circulation of most newspapers and literary journals jumped astronomically, as much as tenfold and more in the course of one year. Often, it was impossible to find many of the more popular publications at newsstands because of the speed at which they sold out. In letters to the weekly magazine *Ogonek*, readers complained of having to stand in line at a local kiosk at 5 a.m., two hours before it opened, to have any chance of buying the magazine (Yurchak 2006:2-3).

This journal was a state of affairs, weekly periodical dating to 1923. During Gorbachev's *glasnost* reforms, V.A. Korotich, a prominent writer, was hired to head the editorial board of *Ogonek*. His editorial contributions, and selection of contributing staff turned this publication into the "voice of the perestroika" (Yurchak 2000:2). This narrative about the attempt to acquire the *Ogonek* publications before they sold out was repeated many times during my interviews. These publications provide both a historical record, and a reflection of popular sentiments of this epoch. They were significant enough for many families (including my own), to preserve the most pivotal issues, if not all of them, from this era. Each issue was often actively discussed at work, at home, and even with strangers in long queues or in the Metro. In this chapter, I will quote these publications as a way to reflect on how some people experienced this period, and to support the diverse narratives of my participants.

#### **4.3 Paradoxes of Soviet Socialism**

Discourse analysis, pre- and post-collapse, has been another theme that has been relevant in the study of transition in Russia. Serving as the backbone for subsequent analysis in this chapter, this section focuses on the paradoxes of late Soviet socialism, as described by Alexei Yurchak (2006) in the ethnography *The Last*

*Soviet Generation: Everything was Forever Until it was No More.*

Alexei Yurchak analyzes the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union describing a radical shift in discourse that characterizes the period of late socialism. Yurchak establishes a paradox central to his analysis of Soviet ideology: the collapse of the Soviet Union was both unexpected, and fully anticipated: "for years that system managed to inhabit incommensurable positions: it was everlasting and steadily declining, full of vigor and bleakness, dedicated to high ideals and devoid of them." (Yurchak 2006:282). Yurchak describes these positions as forming a mutually constitutive dynamic: it became increasingly important to reproduce certain state-sanctioned functions with great precision at Komsomol meetings, or while in attendance at May Day demonstrations. Yurchak calls these actions "performative"; whereby certain procedural requirements (such as the act of voting) had to be accurately performed. Despite the requirement of participation and their importance as Soviet rituals, the nature of what was said or done during these events was becoming less and less important, allowing for a range of creative interactions. Yurchak calls these spontaneous interactions "constative."

In most contexts where that discourse circulated and was dominant it became less important to interpret its texts and rituals literally, as constative descriptions of reality, and more important to reproduce them with great precision. Its performative dimension became profoundly important, having opened the realm of creative innovation, unpredictable meaning, and reinterpretation of socialist life (Yurchak 2006:286).

Thus, participants found new and creative ways of occupying a position of being "good Soviet citizens," while partaking in events that were not directly sanctioned by



the Soviet state. Yurchak extends this analysis to many political or ideological spheres of late Soviet society. For example, during the Brezhnev era, Soviet citizens were encouraged to be “cultured” and to show self-initiative by learning other languages. The state promoted this campaign by marketing short-wave radios, which could receive signals from many countries around the world. Censors would jam some radio signals, but leave others accessible, allowing many to receive ideologically contradictory messages from the BBC, or *Radio Svoboda*\*\* [“Radio Liberty”]. These programs did not necessarily make listeners into dissidents; however, they created new meanings of Soviet life, simultaneously sanctioned and condemned by the state. All of these behaviours were constitutive of Soviet reality, but no longer described that reality.

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he instituted policies that relaxed censorship from the state. Yurchak argues that at the moment when the system itself was allowed to be questioned, the paradox of late socialism became apparent (Yurchak 2006:2). Previous regimes did not allow for the establishment of new norms, but a reiteration of old ones established through Marxist-Leninist principles, the Communist Party or by a figure such as Joseph Stalin. When Gorbachev allowed people to question the state’s monopoly on authority during the period of *glasnost*, a paradigm shift that allowed for a radical reinterpretation of the state system occurred (Ibid.: 37-76). Many supported this shift, finding resonance with the democratic movement and the transition to market reform. I discuss this with

the goal of placing the intelligentsia as an increasingly interesting social group positioned within the broader social transformations of the *perestroika*, and the present era.

#### **4.4 Continuity or Rupture? From Stagnation to Perestroika (1966-1985)**

When Mikhail Gorbachev was elected by the Politburo as head of state in 1985, he was seen as a representative of contrastingly liberal sentiments compared with Leonid Brezhnev's conservative rule between 1966 and 1982. However, there is a caveat in drawing such clear-cut distinctions between Brezhnev's "stagnation" and Gorbachev's era of *perestroika*. Alexei Yurchak (2000) warns that the implications of using these categories, is in the way they compartmentalize each period according to Cold-war ideology of the 1970s and 1980s. The nickname for Brezhnev's period of rule, *zastoi* ("stagnation"), came largely after the fact. The author argues that the term emerged during Gorbachev's reforms (Yurchak 2000:7). Supporting Yurchak's claim, K. Rogov argues, "The [Soviet] person in the 1970s had a rather vague understanding about the historical coordinates of his epoch, considerably vaguer than became apparent to the same person from the perspective of the late 1980s and 1990s" (Rogov in Yurchak 2006:7). In contrast to Brezhnev's period, conditions during the *perestroika* allowed for a public political discourse to evolve to encompass analyses of previous Soviet periods.

#### 4.4.1. Shortages, Scarcity and the Economic Downturn

In light of the previous discussion, a perspective that has the advantage of hindsight allows me to draw some limited comparisons between Brezhnev's and Gorbachev's eras. During interviews, Leonid Brezhnev's period of rule was usually described as a bleak period nested between Nikita Khrushchev's liberal period of the "Thaw" (1956-1964) and Gorbachev's progressive reforms. There are several reasons for these depictions; politically, the post-war climate divided two military-industrial superpowers—the United States and the USSR—and many Cold War tensions were accentuated during Brezhnev's rule. Internally, the Soviet economy began to stagnate. The economists David Kotz and Fred Weir explain that after the rapid growth of pre-World War II years, the Soviet economy was inevitably going to experience a slowdown (Kotz and Weir 2007:41), but they describe the climate in the mid-1970s as something more dramatic than an economic slump:

Given the central role that rapid growth played in the Soviet Union, the slowdown heralded a potential crisis for the Soviet leadership. Suddenly socialism was failing to bring rapid growth. The gap between the Soviet and American economies, rather than progressively narrowing, was now growing wider (Ibid.: 45).

The authors suggest "corruption and cynicism spread throughout the institutions of Soviet society" (Ibid.: 46). But while many underscore differences between Brezhnev's era of stagnation and Gorbachev's *perestroika*, there were visible similarities that persisted between these two eras.

Product shortages were not dissimilar during Brezhnev's era and Gorbachev's

period of *perestroika*. During stagnation, Elena Vasilievna lived in Moscow and experienced shortages of both foodstuffs and material necessities,

We were all tired of a terrible breakdown in the last years of Brezhnev's rule. We were very tired of the shortages in products, shortages of necessities of life, and of a terrible stagnation. Although we would be joyful, when we were given vouchers at work to acquire bed sheets, for example. There was a lottery for them and a few vouchers were given for the shop. A few vouchers were given for a vacuum cleaner; a few for wallpaper, and a few for bed sheets.

Many people coped with product shortages lining up in hour-long queues for basic necessities; however, despite the material conditions there was a relatively well-formed social safety net. New families were often provided with state-subsidized apartments and health care; transportation and education were state subsidized. Women were allowed to take maternity leaves lasting up to a full year. This is especially relevant for the women participating in this research, since they were all mothers of one or two children. However, at the beginning of the *perestroika*, these benefits of socialist life were experienced alongside a growing uncertainty: wages were often unpaid, food became scarce even in Russia's capital, and social and political events became unpredictable.

Caused by a downturn in the Soviet economy, material shortages persisted during Gorbachev's *perestroika*. Malva Noevna Landa downplays these hardships during this period,

It was '85, '86. By the way, at the time, there was no famine, but there was no flour in stores. There was no butter, no meat. But no one was dying of hunger. Moreover, we were given vouchers for flour.

Nonetheless, it is apparent how difficult it would have been to subsist during this

period. In a 1989 article, Leonid Pleshakov writes of the deficits of Gorbachev's era,

For four and a half years we see, that the economic situation is getting worse and worse, the quality of life of our population is decreasing. Almost every month, the list of products in deficit gets renewed. Meat given in rations, sugar, in rations, soap, in rations. One day, salt disappears; another, laundry detergent. Now, there are queues in front of Moscow kiosks: cigarettes disappeared. There is a huge deficit in the state budget.... All of this obviously reflects the people's mood (Pleshakov 1989:1).<sup>27</sup>

Yet, despite material shortages, many participants were becoming increasingly aware of, and optimistic about, the political transformation in the Soviet Union. During my interviews, it became apparent that shortages and deficits were experienced differently during this period than in previous eras. The social importance of political events seemed to take precedence over material shortages in the memories of my informants.

#### **4.5 Gorbachev's Era: Reform, Perestroika and Glasnost (1985-1991)**

Leonid Brezhnev's death in 1982 did not immediately signal the end of the period of stagnation. Yuri Andropov, a former head of the KGB, took over his post as General Secretary, but served from a hospital bed while on dialysis when he experienced kidney failure, and died less than a year following his appointment (Service 1997:433). Konstantin Chernenko, another Politburo heavyweight, took over Andropov's post, but again, died having served fewer than eight months as the

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<sup>27</sup> The original reads: "*Chetire s polovinoj goda vse mi vidim, kak vse bolee yhudshatsia edonimicheskoe polozhenie strain, snizhaetsia uroven' zhizni naseleniya. Chut ne kazdyj mesiat k perechniu defitsitnih tovarov pribavliautia novie. Miaso – po talonam, sahar – po talonam, milo – po talonam. To sol ischeznet, to stiralnyi poroshok. Teper vot po Moskve vitianulis' ocheredi u tabachnih kioskov: propali sigareti. Obnaruzhilsya ogromnyj deficit v gosudarstvennom budzhete... Vse eto, estestvenno, skazivaetsia na nastroenii naroda*" (Pleshakov 1989:1).

General Secretary of the Communist Party (Ibid.: 435). In contrast to previous leaders, Mikhail Gorbachev, elected by the Central Committee, was seen as a representative of a liberally oriented faction of the Politburo. Gorbachev spearheaded new reform policies in order to attempt to break with the stagnation of Brezhnev's era, while simultaneously trying to keep true to communist principles. The reform platform of *perestroika* had three components: market reform, which entailed a campaign geared at economic restructuring allowing private ownership at the level of enterprises and cooperatives; democratization of political and economic institutions; and *glasnost*—a reinvigorated campaign of de-Stalinization aimed at improving people's trust in the economic process. *Glasnost* signaled a discontinued censorship by the state.

In an analysis of this period, several authors, such as David Kotz and Fred Weir, describe how *glasnost* was strongly supported by members of the intelligentsia:

As the strict party control over their work was lifted, members of the intelligentsia suddenly had a new freedom of expression. At first, the intelligentsia's delight with *glasnost* translated into strong support for Gorbachev and his policies (Kotz and Weir 2007:61).

The authors contrast the intelligentsia's support for reforms during Gorbachev's early rule with his declining support nearing the August putsch and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, *glasnost* allowed for many future events to transpire. Yurchak (2006) argues that this support amongst the Soviet population was instrumental in eventually undermining the Soviet system,

the early changes of perestroika revealed and articulated something that was already part of everyone's life but remained unarticulated in a broad discourse—namely, that by unanimously participating in the system's institutions, rituals, discourses, and lifestyles everyone was involved in the system's continuous displacement (2006:283).

The author argues that despite the perceived immutability of the Soviet system, an eventual rupture that led to the collapse of the Soviet regime was completely unsurprising to many Soviet citizens (Ibid.). The era of *perestroika* and Gorbachev's reforms precipitated this transformation in unexpected and simultaneously anticipated forms. I explore participants' reflections on this era in the following section.

#### *4.5.1 Reflections on Gorbachev's Era*

The women of the intelligentsia who participated in this project remember having mixed impressions of the political transformations during Gorbachev's *perestroika*. Broadly speaking, some felt exalted at the possibility of political reform, whereas others were threatened by an uncertain future. Yet, it is possible to connect both these discourses under a similar understanding. What bound participants during this time was their desire to participate in the process of "rebuilding," all in their own capacity.

Shortly after Brezhnev's death, Malva Noevna had finished her second term in exile for "anti-Soviet propaganda" charges. She was allowed to return to the Moscow region in 1984. However, according to Soviet law, political prisoners were forbidden to reside in Moscow proper. Landa settled in Petushki, a regional town a few hours away from Moscow.

In 1985, a militia officer came to her home and read her a decree that banned former convicts from entering Moscow. Malva responded by typing up an article denouncing the decree and discussing the situation for political prisoners in Soviet prisons, and transmitted this information to international radio stations. She was summoned to the KGB for questioning. When asked whether she wrote the article, she responded fearlessly, "Yes, I wrote it. Why, is it untrue? Do you have better sources? Then give it back, and I'll correct it!" In this era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Malva Noevna has just finished her term in exile as a political dissident, and as might be expected, was skeptical of reforms. Despite discontinued censorship, she was persecuted on the very basis of disseminating information. She cheekily comments on the period of *glasnost*,

We were very critical of this *glasnost*. My neighbour, for example, 'suffered from it.' She said, "what happened? Before, there was nothing on television, and now there is a murder here, an epidemic there!" Before, it used to be classified information. So I told her: "Maria Ivanovna! Don't listen to the radio, don't watch television, and don't read newspapers." And she pretty well took my advice. I saw that she was suffering!

Malva playfully blends her criticism of *glasnost*—an insufficient reform of the socialist system which she wholeheartedly rejects—with her neighbour's reaction to newly discovered information.

Elena Vasilievna describes the neighbour's criticism by drawing parallels between those who supported the status quo during the last years of Brezhnev's rule and the period of *perestroika*, in their reactions to *glasnost*:

Many people were against it. Many people thought it was wrong, very many, despite all the repressions, many people were brought up this way. It sat



deeply. It wasn't a belief in communism, but it was a conformist lifestyle under the Party discipline. It sat in the blood, because there was no generational gap. All the young builders of communism, continued living, their families were brought up this way and everyone continued walking on that path.

Elena Vasilievna analyzes the continuities between previous Soviet lifestyles by looking at the way many convictions persisted beyond the period of *glasnost*. Interestingly, she describes these characteristics using similar metaphors to her definitions of the intelligentsia: conformist lifestyles were based on a moral stance and a generational experience. However, during this period, the intelligentsia did not support political stasis, but reform aimed at destabilizing the Soviet system,

There were some big indulgences. It became freer, much freer. We were all happy, while Gorbachev traveled with his wife. The way Thatcher received him,<sup>28</sup> and how she visited us, we perceived... not with a hurrah! But joyously in any case... Everyone was joyous; everyone was content and this sheltered all the difficulties of daily life that could not be immediately solved.

This is a key statement symbolizing a profound change: unlike previous regimes, participation in the social and political changes was foregrounded vis-à-vis the difficult material conditions. In contrast to Malva Noevna's persistent opposition to state power, it was during this period that Elena Vasilievna's daily life became politicized, since during various Soviet epochs she emphasized her lack of political participation.

Despite hardships during this period, Susanna describes this era as the "happiest time of [her] life." In the early 1980s, she was working for the Institute of

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<sup>28</sup> In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife Raisa Maksimovna made a visit to England to discuss economic policy with the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Africa as a historian. She describes her work as a rehashing of socialist ideology—"we were trying to persuade African countries to follow the socialist path. We weren't successful, and because of that, were given reprimands. Gibberish!" Because of a family situation, Susanna quit her job at the Institute and became a night security guard at the Moscow State University. She worked the night shift because her presence was required at home during the daytime. Her hectic schedule left her few hours for sleep, which led to health complications in her later life.

Working as a security guard, Susanna discovered that there were plans to build a monument to commemorate victims of Stalin-era repressions. She recognized the organizers; they were former political prisoners whom she had met while she was imprisoned in the GULag labour camps, and she immediately got involved. The group's efforts resulted in the founding of an organization named the Memorial Society. They began to archive evidence of Stalin-era repressions and Brezhnev-era dissident activities, and as the organization grew, Susanna left her post as a night guard and began working at Memorial full time.

By the early 1990s, Memorial was an active political entity. It was a grassroots, activist epicentre of the democratic movement. Fourteen members of the society were elected in popular elections to be People's Deputies in the Duma. Susanna's solidarity with democratic activists is evident in the events preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union:

It was truly a very happy time, because hundreds of thousands gathered... Hundreds of thousands. So, for example, the largest meeting was on March

28th, 1991. We were afraid that something very serious was going to happen in the city. The city was flooded with troops. It was just flooded. And 800,000 people went out onto the street. We stopped, for example, on the corner of Arbat St. There is the famous "Grauerman" maternity ward there; half of Moscow was born there, including me. Women were looking out of the windows, and we shouted to them, from the street: "Be healthy, raise your children in free Russia!" They lifted their babies. It's impossible to describe. Really impossible. It was a feeling of freedom, brotherhood, hope.

Susanna Pechuro describes a rally called on by the democratic opposition to protest the emergency session of the Russian Republic's Congress of People's Deputies, organized to oust Boris Yeltsin as President of the Congress (Remnick 1991). That rally was seen as a battle of democratic rights achieved by demanding that Yeltsin would keep his democratically elected post. This narrative of collective participation in a political cause sums up an overwhelming optimism in the future of the political situation in Russia. We are once again reminded that during this period, participation in the political process was not a "conformist," or "oppositional" activity, but an integral part of life for at least the four people participating in this research.

Anna Mihaylovna had already been living in Moscow for several decades at the time of the perestroika. She worked for a popular journal on hunting, and wrote articles on her Siberian past. Her reactions to these events signal to her desire to participate:

I thought, 'Perestroika was beginning; good. That means we won't feel that everyone is our enemy.' I started to buy newspapers, which I never did in the past. In our home, we bought newspapers; Dad bought *Pravda*\*\* ["Truth"], and looked through it. He always made such comments in the margins, that the newspaper had to be destroyed immediately. And I started to buy newspapers. I was buying *Pravda, Komsomol Pravda*... After work, I read them, trying to finish them. I wanted to sleep, I was falling from tiredness, but I read while standing in the Metro, everywhere.

Anna Mihaylovna's father was a professor of geology in Irkutsk. Judging from this narrative, he maintained a critical stance towards the Soviet system in the privacy of his home. Anna contrasted her father's private reading of newspapers during various Soviet periods of heavy censorship to her own, newly acquired ability to do so anywhere, expressing regret that her parents never witnessed these transformations in their lifetime. She comments on the era of *glasnost*, "of course, the most important thing for me was *glasnost*. It meant that without being afraid, without whispering in the kitchens, I could talk about anything out loud, in the Metro, for example."

Alexei Yurchak describes Soviet culture in scholarly accounts as a binary division between "official" and "unofficial," state discourse, and underground subculture. This compartmentalized Soviet life into "public," and "private" spheres, where the public persona was seemingly ideologically committed to communism, whereas a private persona was subversive, and critical of the Soviet system. Anna's narrative on reading newspapers or whispering in kitchens could be seen as an example of the conflict between "private" and "public" spheres. Writing specifically about Soviet society, Yurchak argues against this type of categorization:

[Binary distinctions] reduce Soviet reality to a binary division between the state (censored) and the society beyond it (uncensored), failing to account for the fact that many of the common cultural phenomena in socialism that were allowed, tolerated, or even promoted within the realm of the officially censored were nevertheless quite distinct from the ideological texts of the Party (Yurchak 2006:6).

Failing to see beyond a binary analysis, we are also failing to acknowledge Anna Mihaylovna's agency in experiencing the transformations around her. We are

reminded of Michael Herzfeld's rejection of the method of using binary categories, which "conceals the common ground (as well as the fact that these terms are themselves instruments in the negotiation of power) and so inhibits analysis" (Herzfeld 2005:3). Anna's case is not an example of the division between public and private spheres of life, nor official and unofficial state discourses; it is a cultural engagement predicated on a negotiation of a social actor with broader bases of power: an example of cultural intimacy.

Although she was adamant about her desire to participate, Anna had to turn her attention away from politics, and quickly find work in the newly created opportunities of the market economy. The uncertainty of her future during this period makes the perestroika a "very scary time" for her,

At one point, I stopped reading newspapers. I couldn't handle it anymore; I couldn't understand what was being said. Whatever they said, they would later do the opposite. I couldn't understand anything... It seemed to me that it was demagogy – a conversation about nothing. Something would start, tie into something else and then, it unravels and blurs, like fog. Nothing is achieved.

Other participants also voiced their aggravation at the "inevitability" of reforms, of not being able to predict the consequences, or analyze the situation because of competing political discourses. Anna continues,

Please, make it so there will be bread tomorrow; butter, at least, milk for children. Make it so there is heat in our apartments, so that people don't freeze. Make it so there is hot water, and not just cold. At least do this, at first. Then, do everything else. If it were perestroika, then let's rebuild so people would be better off, no?

Anna Mihaylova's frustration with the political process is rooted in the discrepancy

between the promised benefits of perestroika, and the material hardships that she experiences during this period. However, she did not “withdraw” from political life, but turned her attention to where it was needed most; her family. This is not an example of disengagement, but resourcefulness.

How can we explain this ambivalent reaction between the excitement about the prospect of political participation and the dissatisfaction with the political achievements of these reforms? The following letter sent to *Ogonek* publishers in September 1989, pinpoints the sentiments of many Muscovites.

The last two-three years, we are living as though a double life. In journals and newspapers, we read of perestroika, we listen to the calls of government leaders and we think: it finally started. And we believe that everything is now different, and we tune ourselves to the fact that everyone around us is already different, and we are different.... It seems, you would leave your house tomorrow, and everything around is boiling, and there is a desire to immediately participate in this process of renewal, to change and improve the system with your own hands.

But in the morning, we arrive to work, or to some other facility, and everything there is the same: event those who, it is long known, cannot do anything, most importantly, don't want to (Bogdanova 1989:4).<sup>29</sup>

This clue offers the key to the oftentimes contradictory discourses on political

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<sup>29</sup> The original reads: “*Poslednie dva-tri goda mi vse zhivem slovno dvoynoy zizniu. V gazetah i zhurnalakh chitaem o perestroike, slushaem prizivi rukovoditeley gosudarstva i dumaem: nachalos' nakonets-to. I verim, chto teper' inache, i nastravaem sebja na to chto I vse vokrug uzhe ne te, i mi drugie... Kazhetsia, vydesht zavtra is doma, I vse vokrug kipit, I hochetsia samomu nemedlenno uchastvovat' v etom processe obnovleniya, meniat' I uluchshat' sistemu svoimi rukami.*”

*A utrom prihodim na rabotu ili v kakoe-to uchrezhdenie, a tam vse po-prezhnemu, vse na svoih mestah, dazhe te, kto, davno izvestno, I delat' nichego ne mozhet, a glavnoe—ne hochet* (Bogdanova. 1989:4).

*Ne dumau, chto brezhnevskoe vremia bilo unikal'nim po tomu, kakuu armiu inakomusliashih porodila situatsiia. Unikal'naya pora skladivaetsia, vozmozhno, imenno seychas. Vriad li istoriia imela kogda-nibud' ran'she takuu sil'nuu komandu “prorokov v svoem otechestve”, poluchivshih priznanie pri zhizni. To, chto nekotorie okazalis' v chuzhom otechestve, detail. Glasnost' proizvela, na moy vzgliad, besprezidentnuu revoliutsiu v obshchestvennom soznanii.”* (Bossart 1989:14)

participation during this era. Most people, such as Anna Mihaylovna wanted to see the material benefits of perestroika; however, they had learned a tough lesson from early Soviet discourses that centred on promises of goods and services that were never delivered. This skepticism translates into ambivalence between participation in the political process and coping strategies with material shortages.

How could people participate in the political process, when they were struggling with mounting food prices, and shortages of daily necessities? Open criticism itself, however insignificant, was itself an act of resisting dominant ascriptions. Despite describing a kind of apathy, Bogdanova was nevertheless allowed to publish this letter in a state journal; similar to the way Anna Mihaylovna could read progressive newspapers in the Metro. Applying the model of cultural intimacy, Michael Herzfeld suggests that ordinary people were able to challenge older Soviet ascriptions and stereotypes,

the weak can fight back by recasting the original ascriptions by which they were consigned to the margins. In so doing, they challenge the prevalent interpretation and use of key categories. Consequently, their small acts of resistance may lead, at least incrementally, to some degree of change in the larger distribution of power (Herzfeld 2005:31).

The contrast between the intelligentsia coping with, and participating in, the events of the perestroika is significant. If we are to look at the participants in these events, what was their political outlook during those times? In a November 1989 article in the *Ogonek*, Alla Bossart commented on the position of the participants of reforms.

I don't think that Brezhnev's time is unique in the quantity of dissenters that it gave birth to. A unique era is perhaps under formation in the present. It is doubtful that history ever had such a team of "messiahs of their own epoch,"

who received recognition in their own nation. The fact that many turned out to be geographically in the wrong nation is a small detail. Glasnost', in my opinion, provided an unprecedented revolution in the collective consciousness (Bossart 1989:14).

The "messiahs" Bossart writes of were the members of the intelligentsia active in the process of democratization, or Westernization. Hence, the reason they were born in the "wrong nation." In the author's view, during the period of *glasnost*, a bounded nation state seemed less important than a collective consciousness that united like-minded people. However, looking back at this era, is it productive to say that *glasnost* had united the intelligentsia in opposition to the Soviet regime and led it to embrace Western ideals? In my narratives, it is evident that the four participants in this research were engaged and politicized in the social reforms, yet they voiced entirely different concerns. Participants disagreed about the direction of reforms, on the quality of changes from the Soviet past, and on material shortages as a sign of the failure of reforms. The only constant point of agreement was that this period engaged and politicized all the participants of this research.

Sharing political views, whether or not they contrasted with the views of a neighbour, friend or family member, was a constant preoccupation; the perestroika had effectively politicized the entire population. However, this conclusion makes previous analytic categories ineffective—how can we classify the intelligentsia as "moral," "oppositional," "cultural" or "professional," living a "private" or "public" life, and belonging to a "socialist" or "democratic" camp, if these categories were quickly shifting, and participants themselves seemed at a loss for identifying with a



particular social category? Was it still possible, for example, to accept the ascription of some being 'members of the oppositional intelligentsia' as if they were in complete accord with the actions of the state that was working to overthrow a previous system? Or others as members of the "professional intelligentsia," if they had lost their job, and with it, a position of relative influence and social standing?" Michael Herzfeld reminds us that the model of social poetics is "a way of explaining how cultural change was forever emergent in performance; while particular social interactions are always, and necessarily, acts of self-reification, their content and form are both nevertheless perpetually in flux" (Herzfeld 2005:66). The situation of classifying the intelligentsia became especially problematic in August of 1991, when a military faction of the government executed a coup to overthrow Gorbachev's presidency.

#### **4.6 Putsch, Defence of the White House and Collapse (August-December 1991)**

During the late 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev had transformed the political structure of the Soviet Union. He created a post for the president of the USSR elected by the Congress of People's Deputies, and a post for the president of Russia, who was elected by popular elections (Lane and Ross 1995:3). Gorbachev became the President of the USSR, while Boris Yeltsin was voted into the presidency of Russia on March 18, 1989. He became a strong opposition leader pushing for pro-capitalist reforms and Russian state sovereignty. In a parallel process, nationalist movements of

the Soviet republics were becoming more vocal, and several violent clashes in Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and most dramatically, in Azerbajdjan and Armenia, escalated the nationalist separatist tensions. By 1990, when there were already plans at the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many political factions shifted their support from the conservative communist, to the democratic pro-capitalist camps. There were also powerful defenders of the communist regime, and they had a considerable amount of support from the general populace.

While Gorbachev was on vacation in August of 1991, eight members of the Politburo, formerly appointed by Gorbachev himself, formed the *GKChP*\*\* ["State Committee for the State of Emergency"]. The committee placed Gorbachev under house arrest, declared a state of emergency, gained control of the military apparatus and led tanks towards major state institutions in Moscow. Boris Yeltsin, acting as the President of the Russian Republic, immediately denounced the committee's attempted coup. A description of these events are summed up in David Kotz and Fred Weir's analysis of the putsch,

[Yeltsin] called for a general strike in opposition to the coup. A crowd quickly gathered around the "White House," the building that housed Russia's parliament, and a few military units arrived which offered to protect the parliament. The crowd defending the "White House" was initially estimated at only about 20,000, far below the size of earlier Moscow demonstration. This appeared to be the final confrontation over what system would prevail in the country (Kotz and Weir 2007:145).

It is difficult to estimate the number of "defenders" of the Moscow White House.

Participants remember their relatives or friends bringing food and water to those who

sat at the barricades. After a three-day confrontation at the White House, the coup organizers who were popularly seen as regressive Communists aiming to return the Soviet Union back to a pre-perestroika model, failed to garner any support, whereas the “defenders of the White House”—Moscow citizens who seemingly represented the ideals of democracy—became perceived as the country’s moral and social leaders. The counter-coup was successful, and Gorbachev returned from his house arrest to attempt to resume his leadership. But Kotz and Weir explain that the successful counter-coup demonstrated that support for Gorbachev’s socialist reform weakened,

Yeltsin and his allies, having vanquished the Old Guard, now realized that they could push Gorbachev – and the Union – aside as well. With no more legal basis than the coup leaders had possessed, Yeltsin signed a decree transferring the ownership of all property on Russian territory to the Russian Republic. He lowered the Soviet flag and raised the traditional Russian flag. He suspended the Communist Party and its newspapers within Russia. Within a few days, Gorbachev was forced to resign as the Communist Party leader and to call on the party central committee to dissolve itself (Kotz and Weir 2007:146).

More than any other victory for the pro-democratic movement, the defense of the Moscow White House is seen as a historical turning point. In the September issue of *Ogonek*, Anatoliy Golovkov commented on the sentiments emblematic of the days of the coup.

The victory over putsch initiators opened the doors for a democratic citizenry. And many Muscovites are living in a state of revolutionary euphoria. Truly, the road is paved for a real breakthrough, for a radical reformation of all spheres of life (Golovkov 1991:25).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The original reads: “*Pobeda nad putchistami otkrila demokraticheskuiu obshchestvennost’*. Da I mnogie moskvichi prebivaut kak bi v sostoyanii revoliutsionnoy eforii. Deystvitel’no, teper’ otkrit put’ dlia serieznoogo proriva, dlia radikal’nogo reformirovaniya vseh sfer zhizni.” (Golovkov 1991:25)

Indeed, for democratic supporters, the putsch symbolized a remarkable triumph. The relatively minor presence of the defenders of the Moscow White House was offset by the symbolic significance of this event.

#### 4.6.1. Reflections on the Putsch

Although other significant dates stand out in participants' narratives describing the era of the perestroika, there are few moments as memorable as the putsch. Every participant remembers in vivid detail where they were when they heard the news of the coup, and what they did in the subsequent three days.

At 6:00 a.m. on August 19, 1991, Susanna Pechuro describes receiving a phone call from a member of the Memorial Society staff. She asked what happened. The voice on the line replied, "there is a putsch. Get ready, quick. Tanks are in Moscow. Don't turn on the radio or television, you will only hear *Lebedinoe Ozero* ["Swan Lake"<sup>31</sup>]." The mass media was blocked for a portion of these three days; the only broadcast that came through was Tchaikovsky's ballet, 'Swan Lake'. Susanna left her home, and having crossed Lenin Avenue (*Leningradsky Prospect*), a central artery connecting the periphery and the city core, she saw tanks travelling towards the Kremlin.

Tanks, tanks, tanks, *BTRs* [Military transport vehicles]. And out of every tank, young soldiers looked out... I caught myself in this pose: I stood with

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<sup>31</sup> In previous eras, people found out about the deaths of Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko when Tchaikovsky's ballet was broadcast on radio or television during a state of emergency, because it always preceded the official announcement of the death of a head of state.

my hand raised, my face was covered in tears, and I was shouting "Boys, what are you doing, boys!?"

Elena Vasilievna was living in Moscow at the time of the putsch. Her apartment on Kudrinsky Square gave her a perfect view of the events that unfolded at the White House,

When the storming [*shturm*] [of the White House] began, everyone participated in it. At work, at the studio, every newspaper, every speech was energetically discussed. [My daughters] and my [grandson], were terribly concerned for those who sat at the Moscow White House. [My daughter] carried them coffee and potatoes. Overall, there was a big commotion there. Everyone was very concerned. And Yeltsin standing on a tank was like a flag. Everyone said; "Yeltsin, finally! Down with the Party, down with *VKP(b)*"\*\* we're writing history anew." Everything was great [*na urá*]; literally, great.

Because of the magnitude of this triumph, the putsch signifies a turning point in Elena Vasilievna's perceptions of this era.

In contrast to the feeling of hope and collective participation expressed in this narrative, Anna Mihaylovna describes her reaction to the putsch,

I was terribly scared. I'll tell you how it started: I was working at the time on Kirov street. Suddenly, we were told, "don't leave, tanks are going down your street..." It was true. People were edging away; the asphalt was being shattered. These things pass along with the militia and soldiers. So, I came home, and my son is getting ready to go somewhere. I say: "[Don't go; it's scary out on the streets". He says: "I'm going. I have to be there." He left. He didn't come home for three days. I don't know what happened there. He didn't tell me any details, I just felt sick, and I was in a terrible state. You know how it is; I was scared.

In this narrative Anna Mihaylovna voices concern for the potential dangers her son faced at the Moscow White House, and she describes a state of perpetual anxiety while he was away. Unlike previous narratives that focus on collective participation during the events of the putsch, Anna Mihaylovna felt threatened by these changes.

For several years preceding the putsch, Malva Noevna continued her activist work by publishing articles in "Express Chronicle."<sup>32</sup> She traveled to locations of various armed conflicts, such as Armenia, Dagestan and Azerbadjan to research and document the violent clashes between separatist and Soviet armies. At the time of the putsch, Malva Noevna Landa lived in the town of Petushki. She witnessed these events by listening to the radio.

Before this, there were *such* speeches made in the *Verhovniy Sovet*\*\* ("Supreme Soviet"). They were pro-Soviet. They critiqued Gorbachev's so-called liberal politics. He could have hindered it in some way; he had some power. Everything was being carried out, as if that is how it was meant to be. And in my opinion, he wanted the putsch to happen, but wanted to be unaccountable for it; more like a victim. I do not know. I am not certain. If those forces really needed to deal with the defenders [of the Moscow White House] they could have done it. I say they could have killed those defenders with one blow! If not with one, then with two.

Malva Noevna's narrative suggests that as an observer to these events, she was distrustful of the fatalistic actions of the state, acknowledging she never felt elation of the defenders of the White House. Describing these events with both authority and uncertainty, she calls the putsch "the end of Gorbachev's epoch, which is called perestroika. And what is Yeltsin's era called? They now call it the 'Zero epoch'."

All four participants had vastly different experiences during these three days in August. Yet, participants made reference to having engaged in some form of

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<sup>32</sup> Express Chronicle [*Ekspress Hronika*] was a journal founded by Aleksandr Podrobinnik. The title references the quintessential underground dissident publication called the Chronicle of Current Times [*Hronika Tekushih Sobitiy*] discussed in the previous chapter.

political participation in all of the interviews: attending rallies, publishing material on these events and even reading newspapers, were all departures from the ways informants participated in the political process before this period. Once again, it is especially evident that binary categories that defined members of the intelligentsia in the past, such as “conformist,” or “dissident,” fail to apply to all of the participants in reference to this period. Participants shifted between different understandings defining this period: concern, anxiety, or hope, but few remained neutral in their position or activity. In this way, individual members gave insight into how they understood their social position, role and participation and the way they engaged with the events of the perestroika.

These reflections point to two competing realities: participants desire political change, and simultaneously express their skepticism about the political process. Were they wrong in supporting democratic reforms? Current scholarship focuses on the intelligentsia as having displayed being a “bad prognostic” in supporting Yeltsin’s reforms (see Gessen 1997; Ryvkina 2006; Sinyavsky 1997). However, it will become evident in the next sections that these generalizations do not provide an all-encompassing scenario of people’s experience of transition. The next section explores the growing public distrust in the political process following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

#### 4.7 Yeltsin's Era: Market Reform and Presidential Power (1991-2000)

Two strong directions characterized the first years of Yeltsin's presidency. Tensions in the newly formed Russian Republic continued to escalate between Yeltsin and Parliament over issues of jurisdiction. Meanwhile, Parliament was trying to curtail Yeltsin's presidential power (Lane and Ross 1995:9). Simultaneously, Yeltsin implemented a campaign of economic transition to a market economy.

Most commentators of this period are surprised by the sheer speed of the events that led to radical economic reforms. Stefan Hedlund suggests that the "events that unfolded in the time between the failed August 1991 coup and the actual launching of Russia's economic reform program in January 1992, are crucial in the sense that they would be so obviously formative for subsequent developments" (Hedlund 1999:145). Hedlung describes the quickness with which five young economists, headed by Yegor Gaidar, implemented radical market reform,

From 10 October until 28 October, the president of the Russian Federation had a mere 18 days in which to decide on how one of the most important reforms in Russian history should be implemented... It would take this small group of young economists ... no more than a couple of weeks in which to work out how to implement something that had never been done before (Hedlund 1999:147).

Economists such as Stefan Hedlund criticized this radical break with past economic policy, which had not previously been attempted in such a short period of time (Hedlund 1999:144). Many have seconded Hedlund's criticism of these reforms; however consider Vaiz Unisov's description of condition in Moscow before Gaidar's policies were implemented, published in an *Ogonek* article half a year after the



putsch.

The hunger of which I wrote about in the spring and the summer (for which I was accused of spreading panic), had nevertheless approached Moscow, like Germans in '41. Queues line up not just for sugar and vodka, but also for bread... A large portion of products sits in warehouses or stores, where it is sold for mindboggling prices and is bought by that stratum of the population that does not need any help (Unisov 1991:12).<sup>33</sup>

However, when Gaidar's market reform policy took effect on January 1 1992, food appeared on store shelves overnight. "Price liberalization" allowed for the market to establish the price of consumer goods, as opposed to prices affixed by the state. This type of radical market reform allowed for competitive pricing to move products previously stored in warehouses into private markets.

Amongst Muscovites, many members of the intelligentsia supported the shift to a market economy; however, the program drew a lot of criticism after its long term effects began to be felt. David Lane and Cameron Ross discuss the waning support for Yeltsin's economic reforms in light of drastic price inflation,

From as early as January 1992, when Gaidar's policy [took effect] in the first month of "price liberalization," prices rose by 460 percent, and each month after that there were increases of 20-25 percent, giving an annual inflation rate in 1992 of 2,600 percent (Lane and Ross 1995:42).

Salaries and pensions at the time did not reflect the rate of the inflation. Many professionals were significantly underpaid, and employers often held back wages for

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<sup>33</sup> The original reads: "Golod, o kotorom ya pisal vesnoy I letom v zapiskah (za chto bil obvinen v razzhiganií isterii), tem ne menee gde-to uzhe na podstupah k Moskve, kak nemtsi v sorok pervom. V magazinah vistroiilis' ocheredi ne tol'ko za vodkoy I saharom, no teper' uzhe I za hlebom. ... Bol'shaya chast' tovara osedaet v kommercheskih lar'kah I magazinah, gde idet po umopomrachel'nim tsenam I skupaetsia temi sloymami naseleniya, kotorie ne nuzhdaetsia ni v kakoy pomoshi'". (Unisov 1991:12).

months. Entire institutions became bankrupt without state support. David Kotz and Fred Weir remark on the irony of these tumultuous changes from the perspective of the intelligentsia:

One of the great ironies of the rapid rush to free-market capitalism, which began in Russia in 1992, is that among the biggest losers in this process have been the intelligentsia, who were suddenly dumped into the unforgiving world of the free market as the system of state support for intellectual endeavor largely collapsed (Kotz and Weir 67).

Although this argument may be an overstatement, since many members of the intelligentsia were able to adapt to market transformations, there nevertheless needs to be a more inclusive analysis beyond only that focusing on material and specifically economic conditions. Amongst shifting markets and waning institutional support, other political developments amplified the discomfort of this era.

Tensions escalated between Yeltsin and Parliament in September and October 1993, and Yeltsin suspended Parliament. The conflict was rooted in Yeltsin's desire for stronger presidential power, whereas Parliamentary representatives wanted power to be diffused between various administrative bodies. A legislative body known as the Constitutional Court declared this action unconstitutional (Lane and Ross 1995:12-14). In late September of 1993, Yeltsin had concocted plans to take over the Moscow White House, the Parliamentary building. On September 24, Yeltsin ordered a full-scale blockade, giving the members of Parliament until October 4 to leave the building (Ibid.: 16):

At 7 a.m. on Monday 4 October, tanks began to fire on the White House and by 4:30 p.m. virtually the entire leadership of the Parliament... had been

arrested and taken to Lefortovo Prison. Approximately 144 people had been killed. The battle between the Parliament and the presidency had ended with a victory for Yeltsin [...] A two-week state of emergency was declared in Moscow under which 90,000 people were arrested and a further 10,000 [...] expelled from the city (Lane and Ross 1995:17-18).

None of the participants in this research approved of the violent firing on the White House in October of 1993 and, for some, it was the ultimate turning point in their support for “democratic” reforms. The next section explores the growing tensions created for participants by Boris Yeltsin’s ascension to power.

#### *4.7.1 Reflections on Yeltsin’s Epoch*

Because of the Memorial Society’s strong links with the People’s Congress of Deputies,<sup>34</sup> Susanna actively participated in changing legislation on the abolition of the death penalty in the newly formed Russian Federation. She describes how in 1992 she still had hope in the political process. Susanna’s loss of faith in the political system began the following year,

We were simply filled with this happiness, and the feeling that no one will ever do anything to us again; and if they will, we will be able to withstand it. Now we understand, we were mistaken, and that’s shameful... And then 1993 came. [White House blockade]. It was very difficult and very scary. We were still on Yeltsin’s side, although we understood that what he did was unfixable. And in December of 1994, the Chechen War<sup>35</sup> started. With that, all the illusions stopped. Immediately. And then there was 1996, when the elections

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<sup>34</sup> *Siezd Narodnih Deputatov Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, was the top governing body of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union and until Yeltsin’s dissolution of Parliament in October 1993.

<sup>35</sup> The First Chechen War (1994) was a violent conflict between a region in southern Russia demanding autonomy and the Russian Federation. Strong military attacks, a devastating toll on civilian lives and a devastating bombing of Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic, characterized the First Chechen War.

were forged<sup>36</sup>. Falsified. And we understood it. We shouldn't have believed it; we should have understood from the very beginning that we have the same road that was, and it will be the same road ahead.

Susanna explains that her former optimism was based on the collective participation of the democratic movement in reforming an oppressive socialist regime. She describes events during this time in collective terms—using the first person plural, “we.” This plural denomination is a shifting category of belonging—belonging to the intelligentsia, to democrats, to people able to influence the political process as citizens. I am reminded of Herzfeld’s rhetorical question, “why do people continually reify the state” (Herzfeld 2005:5)? In this instance, Susanna’s expressions of collective belonging are a testament of her active involvement in the democratic process, a way of saying, “we have the power.” By placing collective responsibility on these events, Susanna expresses her engagement in the political process, but she also believes that it was a collective failure that led to the continuation of state-imposed violence—evidenced in the White House blockade, the Chechen War and the forged 1996 elections. In contrast to her previous narratives that characterize the period of the perestroika as an era of hope, this narrative highlights the continuities between previous regimes and her present-day disappointment in the political process.

Anna Mihaylovna expresses the hardships that she had to endure during this period,

At that time, I was just trying to survive, because a tragedy happened with my son. [In order to resolve the situation, A.M. needed to acquire money] I was catastrophically lacking money. Catastrophically. My husband, of course,

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<sup>36</sup> The second presidential elections, where Yeltsin was reelected in 1996, were widely disputed.

wasn't helping with money or anything... It was very hard. That is why, all the commotion happening here, started going past me. I was trying to get away... I had to just save my son and everything else came later, and that's how I was holding on. It was very hard, and it was a very hard time. I think every God-given day is a gift. I always thought that way. That is how our parents brought us up. But there were times when I thought, 'what a nightmare, and when will this end?' Now I don't think about that, and don't even want to. But at the time, I did.

Undeniably, Anna was concerned with the welfare of her son, while other aspects of her life faded in importance. In her narrative, she personalizes descriptions of political events, describing living in a constant state of fear during this period. Anna's reactions are entirely different from Susanna's narrative. The phrases "I was just trying to survive;" "I was trying to get away;" "I don't know what was happening there," signal Anna's disenchantment with the political situation during this time.

Participants who felt that they took part in the political transformation emphasize the elation they felt during the perestroika based on the rupture with previous eras and voice their disappointment in the failed hopes of the perestroika. They tend to accept the responsibility for these events, drawing on a morality-based discourse of rights, and collective responsibilities. Others, who engaged less actively in explicitly political activities, but negotiated various other aspects of post-socialist life, such as the challenge of meeting basic needs in a market economy, also emphasize various ruptures, but focus on the unpredictability of this era and connect their present disappointment with the actions of the state. In analyzing recollections of this period, I am making links between political disenchantment during the perestroika and present-day detachment from political life. My data suggests that for all the

participants of this research, their unique form of political participation set the tone for future memories, while simultaneously fuelling their present disappointment in the political system.

#### **4.8. Seeing the Present in the Past and the Search for Personal Integration**

What can we make of the elation turned into disenchantment after the period of the perestroika exemplified in Susanna Solomonovna's narrative? What does this elation mean? During one interview with Susanna, I showed her a previously edited footage of one of the interviews concerning the perestroika era. In the middle of her narrative concerning this period as a time of "freedom, hope and brotherhood," Susanna interrupted saying, "We felt like citizens."

During Leonid Brezhnev's era, the dissident movement advocated for human rights guaranteed by the constitution to all Soviet *citizens*. In the view of the dissidents, these rights were shown disrespect by the Soviet state. The feeling of citizenship that Susanna expresses can be related to the dissident goal of being recognized as citizens. In discussing these discourses, Jarrett Zigon asks the question, "who counts as human, and who is in charge of guaranteeing these rights?" (Zigon 2008:77). Building on Talal Asad's analysis, Zigon points to the irony in human rights discourses:

it is the recognition by states of its citizens that can both guarantee these citizens their human rights and deny them these rights. This is so because one only has human rights by first having national rights... States, then, and not some abstract definition of a shared humanity guarantee human rights. In this

sense, furthermore, it can also be said that states define that which counts as human, for in a very real way, if one does not have a certain status based on the legal framework of one's own state, then one may also not have the opportunity to have their human rights recognized (Zigon 2008:77).

In this instance, being or feeling "like citizens," is equivalent to achieving basic human rights guaranteed by the Soviet state. I contend that this was the true cause of elation behind collective political participation.

Yet, despite feeling like citizens, many material difficulties of previous periods persisted or became worse during this era, the social safety net collapsed, and as may be expected, some participants felt threatened by these changes. Focusing solely on the political transformation that characterized the span of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's eras is insufficient in describing the way positioned actors negotiated their social, economic and political lives. Individual experience affected people's reaction to the changes during the perestroika. Their ability or willingness to participate depended not only on the participants' political outlook—how interested, involved, or concerned they were with the political life of the Soviet Union, but on their social and material circumstances during this era.

Considering the way many participants express their past or present-day disagreement with the modern Russian state in light of their experiences of the period of the perestroika, it is important to lay out the anthropological groundwork for the term "disenchantment" discussed in the previous section. The term was first introduced by Max Weber, a German sociologist who used it to describe the departure from the "Occidental" religious culture, and the arrival of modernity and capitalism, in

a seminal work *die Entzauberung der Welt*. Quoting Max Weber, Douglas Holmes describes disenchantment in the sociologists' original conception of *entzauberung*.

The "disenchantment of the world" (*die Entzauberung der Welt*)... is the central theme in Max Weber's analysis of Western cultural development... It refers to the progressive purging of the authority of magical ideas by modern secular societies. It is thus bound up with Weber's notion of "rationalization," which traces the processes by which "scientific" thinking displaces magical content in the Occidental cultures (Holmes 1989:219).

The process of "disenchantment" relates to the way rational thought has replaced religious belief systems through the process of "rationalization." In a more recent ethnographic analysis of peasant-workers in Northeast Italy, Douglas Holmes analyses the peasant experience in light of a reliance on factory work. He argues that the "peasant worker (*contadino-operai*), more than any other figure in the countryside, straddles the enchanted and disenchanted realms" (Holmes 1989:12). Holmes describes how, "accounting formulas for time, work, and wages, the relentless demands of machinery, and the often ruthless directives of overseers, thrust the workers into an alien environment dominated by a 'rational' technology and business organization" (Ibid.). In analyzing this type of process, is it fair to suggest that a member of the intelligentsia, and also one used to the centrally planned economy system of the Soviet period, introduced to the market economy may also experience similar tensions with their work?

For example, Consider Anna Mihaylovna's experience as a participant in a completely different set of circumstances and with a different moral outlook from Susanna Solomonovna, or Malva Noevna. In 1991, she had to acquire money to save



her son:

I took every job I could get, I went to teach music in kindergarten, I was doing everything: I was typewriting; I was sewing blazers. I can't even stand the word, 'blazer'. I sewed them from corduroy, from wool, from velvet, from cotton. It was a nightmare—all this, at night, because in the morning, I went to work. Every day and every night, I hoped that I would only be able to get to work, and to get home. My head is spinning, I don't understand a thing and I'm catastrophically lacking money.

Similar to the way Douglas Holmes describes a peasant-worker as the person who, "in some cases with great shrewdness, in other cases with disarming naïveté, ...negotiates the complexities of the wage economy" (Holmes 1989:12), Anna Mihaylovna had to assert her position in the newly created competitive market. While I do not want to suggest that Anna Mihaylovna was at all naïve in negotiating these complexities, I do want to state many people were not familiar with the harsh reality of the market economy, and struggled to make ends meet both as consumers, and as wage labourers.

Participants' personal sense of their participation in the social and political reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s established a definite connection with the present period. In fact, I started out my interviews with a question looming in my mind, "What is the *present* position of the elderly women of the intelligentsia in Moscow?" In order to make my discussion of the past relevant in the present, I summarize what sentiments were expressed to me. Participants felt that they were living out their years with a fading hope for a better future, if not for themselves, then for the succeeding generations. They were deeply affected by the changes in the country, yet they felt politically futile, and rejected the legitimacy of the present-day

administration. Moreover, they felt that the position of the intelligentsia was becoming progressively more marginalized because of the pace of change of Russian society. They either felt the impossibility of change, or they felt they wanted to be peripheral to various present-day transformations.

Analyzing these sentiments, we are reminded of Barbara Myerhoff's argument that in later stages of life, people attempt to achieve "personal integration"; an "experience of continuity, and the recognition of personal unity beneath the flow and flux of ordinary life" (Myerhoff 1978:199-200). When particular social or historical shifts disrupt the flow of ordinary life, my data suggests participants are likely to offset this disruption with the desire to provide an element of continuity. One may say, "during the war, our family had a very difficult time." This would be a memory of a profound cultural change; where, according to Olick and Robbins, the past "no longer fits with present understandings" (Olick and Robbins 1998:129). The war was an event that significantly interrupted the flow of ordinary life—yet, I have heard many participants add that, "in spite all the difficulties, we were children, and we were happy." Despite a difficult disruption, the fact that participants did not focus on the way their childhood was interrupted points to a memory of cultural persistence, whereby "a particular past perseveres because it remains relevant for later cultural formations" (Ibid.). This signifies that the war had both transformed memories of childhood, and served as their background preserving them as "childhood memories" still.

In most of the narratives of the past, participants attempt to balance memories

of persistence and change. Recently, Susanna Solomonovna published an article in the journal "New Poland," a portion of which she read to me during our interview:

We lost everything. Everything slipped through our hands...We were wrong in that we allowed for everything to be taken away from us. We allowed the country to be turned backwards, and again, its every step is shameful. There is no sense that one could do that, for which, excuse the big words, one would not be afraid or ashamed to die for. Question: Is there a feeling of country? There is no feeling of country...There is a feeling of shame.

This feeling of shame is similar to what Susanna recalls experiencing upon seeing wounded soldiers mistreated at a hospital during the war. The skepticism expressed in this article highlights what some scholars esteem as the collective failure of reforms (see Ryvkina 2006; Zubok 2009). However, expressing these concerns publicly, in print, Susanna attempts to reconcile with the moral obligations she feels are typical for a member of the intelligentsia. Participants of this research did not form a stratum of the privileged few in positions of political or economic power; yet, they consistently engaged in the political process through methods similar to this one.

Susanna emphasizes that attempting to remedy these injustices is characteristic of a member of the intelligentsia: this sense of responsibility gives meaning to her life,

This was the meaning of our life, and it still is. When that meaning is taken away from us, and everything crumbles in front of our eyes; when we can't hold on to anything, for all of us it's a tragedy.

Without having a way of assuring continuity of their influence as members of the intelligentsia, participants are disquieted by the profound political changes that have occurred and continue to take place in Russia. Despite the social responsibility that

Susanna perceives amongst the intelligentsia, she feels that it has not disappeared, but has lost its influence. However, does this mean that her feeling of social responsibility fits within the definition of the “moral intelligentsia” described in chapter two, or does her moral stance stand outside of the definition? Consider Malva Noevna’s reactions to Vladimir Putin’s administration between the years 2000 and 2008:

*Malva:* Everyone is talking about how when Putin came to power, he “lifted Russia from her knees.”

*Author:* Are you of the same opinion?

*Malva:* No! I consider him worse than I consider a state criminal!

This reaction is representative of Malva Noevna’s relationship to the broader bases of power, but does it remind us of previous narratives espoused by the “oppositional intelligentsia”? Elena Vasilievna seconds the resignation heard in Malva Noevna’s narrative: “Everything is bankrupt. The villages are bankrupt and so are the provinces.” Finally, Anna Mihaylovna describes her current relationship in her social and political life, “I don’t conform to this environment. No, I cannot do that. I just keep ... to the side.”

These examples may appear to be consistent with previous accounts, but they are also unsettling in that despite significant cultural changes to which each participant adapted in her own way, they are voicing a concern that they are not able to integrate personal and political aspects of their present lives. As participants grow older, they are finding that their position as members of the intelligentsia within the rapidly changing Russian society also becomes more precarious and their narratives highlight these growing feelings of marginalization and disenchantment.

#### 4.9 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the personal and political experiences of the four research participants during the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although this period of transition was an extremely complex political, economic and social process, in this chapter, I attempted to characterize the very rudimentary political changes that participants of this research would have experienced.

When Mikhail Gorbachev, a seemingly liberal representative of the Politburo, came to power in 1985, many facets of Soviet life, such as material shortages and scarcity of goods persisted. However, Gorbachev made one crucial change that was critical to the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union: he introduced *glasnost*, a campaign of de-Stalinization that signaled relaxed censorship from the state, and which, in contrast to previous regimes allowed ordinary citizens to criticize the state without reprimand. Along with *glasnost*, Gorbachev instituted political and market reform. While Gorbachev appointed himself the President of the USSR, he instituted democratic elections for leaders of Soviet Republics. Boris Yeltsin, a Politburo functionary from Sverdlovsk, was able to summon support of the democratic movement to become the first-ever elected President of Russia.

Many felt exalted at the possibility of political reform; others felt anxious about their uncertain future. These tensions culminated on August 1991, when a conservative faction of the Politburo instituted a coup. Boris Yeltsin summoned Muscovites to defend the Moscow White House during a three-day siege, and along

with it, everything that the era represented then: democracy, freedom and hope.

What conclusions can be drawn from this chapter? Participants have offered their contemporary positions and self-identifications within the broader cultural context of life in Russia. However, I argue that the four categories of the intelligentsia that were needed to establish a particular rapport between social actors and broader bases of power earlier, are no longer applicable as a viable method of analysis. The reason for this is made clear in the analysis: despite the consistency of participants' views, the social fabric of post-Soviet Russia has transformed significantly enough that the categories of the intelligentsia, and their respective values are no longer applicable as practical essentialisms described in Chapter 2. Although the discourse on the "life" or "death" of the intelligentsia is prevalent, essentialisms on the categories of the intelligentsia no longer circulate in the discourse; these categories are no longer salient stereotypes. However, it is evident that we are misled in asking the question "Does the intelligentsia remain relevant or irrelevant in contemporary Russia?" This fails to acknowledge the way individuals articulate their position within the membership. As Herzfeld points out, "fixity of form does not necessarily entail a corresponding fixity of meanings and intentions" (Herzfeld 2005:22). Whereas the concept of the intelligentsia may remain culturally salient, members may have adopted new techniques to voice their concerns about their present-day situation in Russia.

Here, I have shown that members may shift between moral and political definitions of self-identification suggesting that these shifting categories can be analysed

as a critique of the current social and political processes in Russia. Moreover, members' slow habituation to the market economy, in contrast to a centrally planned system of the Soviet period, led some participants to experience "disenchantment," a process signaling their relationship to an increasingly alien environment. Drawing attention to these critiques may empower those who attempt to vocalize their social and political position. This is this goal of the next chapter that focuses on communicating participants' concerns through the medium of ethnographic film.

## Chapter Five—Ethnographic Film

### 5.1. Introduction

In the course of a four-month fieldwork period in Moscow in the summer of 2008, I videotaped a series of interviews with seven participants in this research. The result of this work is both this thesis and a feature-length ethnographic film focusing on the life histories of these informants. The film is entitled *Turning Back the Waves*. Several visual anthropological themes emerged in the course of my research, including memory in film, the use of elicitation, and collaborative filmmaking and representation. Inversely, in the course of subsequent analysis, the interviews recorded on camera served both as research for the written analysis, and the content that was edited into the film.

In this chapter, I analyze my use of visual anthropology techniques and the use of a video camera in the field in three distinct ways. Primarily, I look at film as a language; the camera encodes a particular representation of experience that invites a dialogue between the filmmaker and the viewers to participate in and interpret the actions on screen. The priority of this approach is for the filmmaker-anthropologist to communicate ethnographic meaning in the most effective way. Secondly, I situate film within this project as a medium to record and communicate memories. The focus of the second approach is on the tools ethnographic filmmakers use to translate social memories into an audio-visual language. Thirdly, I look at ethnographic film as a medium that invites participation and collaboration between the filmmaker and the



participants. This approach situates the filmmaker as an anthropologist who focuses on the ethics of the way participants are represented in an ethnographic film. These three approaches combine the responsibility of the filmmaker as an anthropologist and the interests of his/her informants, with the broader goals of communicating to audiences viewing an ethnographic film.

Working based on these themes, I have divided this chapter into four interrelated sections. First, I briefly discuss the history of ethnographic film, laying out its theoretical trajectory as a subfield of social and cultural anthropology. Second, I discuss the theoretical basis for my ethnographic film project, analysing several instances of the film in light of visual anthropological theory. Third, I address the way film can function as a tool to preserve personal testimonies and social memories in a project focused on the potential of the camera as a tool of documentation. Lastly, I aim to explain how I use collaborative methods of visual anthropology in order to problematize notions of collaboration and representation.

## **5.2. Ethnographic Film**

Ethnographic film has a rich history in the field of social and cultural anthropology. Some scholars argue that an anthropological interest in visually representing ethnographic subjects stems from the birth of cinema itself (Griffiths 2002; Rouch 2003). Tracing that history from an anthropological perspective, Jean Rouch describes the early experiments of Eadweard Muybridge. In 1872, Muybridge

invented the chronophotograph, which was an apparatus that displayed a sequence of photographed horses in motion (Rouch 2003). Muybridge's discovery of cinematic motion led to an obsession with human locomotion by photographing nude models in order to study a scientific anatomy of a human being. Alison Griffiths analyzes the process of visually representing the exotic "other" as a way of reinforcing cultural difference, as "cinema promised an exact and endless repeatability of the display of cultural difference" (Griffiths 2002:78). The most striking acknowledgment of that difference is found by combining these two perspectives: looking back at the colonial photographs dating to the 19th century, one can see the nude "native" standing next to the clothed anthropologist, visually highlighting each other's status to European and North American audiences. Early visual ethnographic representations grappled with this tension of both highlighting cultural difference, and promoting cultural understanding as advanced by anthropologists at the beginning of the century. It was in this context that Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) introduced the term "participant observation" in a seminal anthropological work published in Britain, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, on the Trobriand Islands northeast of Papua New Guinea. On the American side, anthropologist Franz Boas researching amongst the Kwakiutl Indians at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, promoted an ethical position of "cultural relativism," suggesting that cultural values are relative to the cultural context.

In 1922, Robert Flaherty created the film *Nanook of the North*, widely recognized as a pioneering work in both documentary and ethnographic cinema. The

film portrayed an Inuit family performing everyday activities in the Canadian Arctic. Over the years, it has been both praised for its sensitivity to the subject matter, and criticized for its attempts to staging certain scenes in a project that supposedly attempts to portray the “reality” of an Inuit hunter and fisher, Nanook. Robert Flaherty has been criticized for placing his actors in artificial or potentially dangerous situations. For example, a scene where Flaherty films Nanook hunting a whale with a harpoon, led to criticism that Flaherty took advantage of Nanook for the sake of portraying a supposedly traditional hunting scene, during a period that the Inuit used guns for hunting whale. The film is still relevant in contemporary debates that focus on the potential of ethnographic film to distort the representation of those being filmed. For example, Jay Ruby argues that Nanook and the wider community actually decided on what should be filmed,

It is clear that Flaherty planned from the very beginning to have the Inuit participate in the making of the film [...] In the 1915-16 expedition, Flaherty began the process of asking the Inuit to be collaborators and sought feedback from them about his understanding of their way of life (Ruby 2000:87).

Flaherty was explicit about his methods of attempting to actively involve the community, actively engaging the Inuit to be technicians in the film, and screening the material back to them for evaluation and feedback, Ruby argues that,

It is only in the past twenty years or so, when his work became reevaluated, that it was “discovered” that the problems with which Flaherty grappled are the problems of today’s image makers and that his solutions are illuminating and worth considering (Ruby 2000:91).

In light of the subsequent development of the ethnographic film genre, other

movements in cinema and ethnographic film deserve attention in retracing the history of the intersections between moving pictures and anthropology.

Early Soviet experiments in cinema were geared towards representing a type of reality that was ideologically influenced by Marxist-Leninist principles. As a result, these experiments were a propaganda tool for Bolshevik ideology which was attempting to create a cinema for the working classes. This cinema had a documentary orientation, political engagement and a commitment to formal experimentation (Tomas 1992:27). This is best exemplified in early Soviet documentaries such as Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1927). The film, documenting a day in the life in a city (there were three cities filmed), cinematically argues for the triumph of socialism over capitalism. Along with his brother, Mikhail Kaufman who appears in the film, and his wife, Elizaveta Kaufman who helped to edit it, Vertov pioneered the use of many cinematic effects in this film. For example, in one scene, the "Bolshoi Theatre" in Moscow, a symbol of the elitist, Tsarist regime after the Bolshevik Revolution, seemingly collapsed on itself through the use of techniques of superimposition. This type of language in cinema highlights another potential of ethnographic film—as a tool to advance a political goal.

Jean Rouch saw Dziga Verov as an early pioneer of anthropological film. Rouch describes Vertov's motivation to represent reality: "It was no longer an issue of staging, or adventures, but of recording little patches of reality. Vertov the poet thus became Vertov the militant, and perceiving the archaic structure of the newsreel film, he invented the kinok, the 'ciné-eye'" (Rouch 2003:32). Vertov wanted to exhibit

“the camera in its natural state”—not in its egotism but in its willingness to show people without makeup, to seize the moment” (Rouch 2003:32). Contemporary visual anthropologists rarely speak of recording “patches of reality,” since many argue that film is a construction, from the beginning stages of framing and recording images, to final processes of editing and projecting finished works (see Ruby 2000). However, the desire to create an ethnographic language that is able to communicate a particular message to an audience is still present amongst anthropologists.

This desire to create a language of visual representation found resonance with Jean Rouch as well, who argued that ethnographic projects should be motivated to “capture the most authentic images possible while respecting the rules of ethnographic language” (Rouch 2003:270). As early as 1953, when Rouch filmed *Bataille sur le Grand Fleuve*, he elucidated on methods to feedback, to develop an ethnographic language of mutual awareness. He describes recording a musical soundtrack to a moment in the film where hunters are chasing a hippopotamus:

At the moment of the chase, I put a very moving hunting air, played on a one-stringed bowed lute, on the sound track; I found this theme particularly well suited to the visuals. The result of the playback, however, was deplorable. The chief of the hunters demanded that I remove the music because the hunt must be absolutely silent. Since that adventure, I have paid much attention to the way music is used in my films (Rouch 2003:42).

Through this ethnographic misunderstanding, Rouch develops the idea of feedback, prevalent in later films, such as in his collaboration with Edgar Morin on *Chronique d'un Été* (Rouch and Morin 1961). Amongst the tools the filmmakers use to convey this ethnographic language, are the interactions among a group of participants

reflecting on the way they are being filmed. Rouch calls this technique a method for an anthropologist who has “ceased to be a sort of entomologist observing others as if they were insects... and has become a stimulator of mutual awareness (hence dignity)” (Rouch 2003:44).

Other anthropologists have a similar method to feedback. Using filmed images as a tool of “elicitation,” they record participant reactions to photographs, material objects, and portions of filmed actions or interviews (see Collier and Collier 1986). These methods date back to Flaherty’s attempts to create a dialogue with his participants. Ruby describes his involvement in the process:

The Inuit performed in front of the camera, reviewed and criticized their performance, and were able to offer suggestions for additional scenes in the film—a way of making films that, when tried today, is thought to be “innovative and original” and confounds the naive assumption that ethnographic films are merely a record of what happens in front of the camera (Ruby 2000:88-89).

Visual anthropologist Fadwa el Guindi (2004) reflects on her use of elicitation as a means of “cross-checking with the people about their culture, [...and] eliciting data by combining visual aids with interviews” (el Guindi 2004:477). Stephanie Krebs (1975) uses film footage in a Thai dance drama as elicitation “to discover how [Thai dancers] conceptualize and categorize the phenomena of the world in which they live” (el Guindi 2004:477). These methods ask ethnographic filmmakers to delve deeper into the ethics of representation with regard to their ethnographic subjects.

In my project, I envision my goal of representation during the filmmaking process as a negotiation of, and about, the degree of control and trust that the

filmmaker and those being filmed achieve with each other. Thus, both the filmmaker and the participants negotiate the creative and the functional elements in the filmmaking process, but it is often ultimately the filmmaker who decides what is to be included in the film; thus, it is the filmmaker's responsibility to understand ethical challenges in dialogue with participants. I discuss how these aspects relate to the ethnographic film completed for this research project in the last section of this chapter.

The ethnographic film *Turning Back the Waves*, which I directed (and is included as a DVD appendix to this thesis) is a memory project about various Soviet and post-Soviet periods in the lives of my participants. As a result, I focus on the way this memory is transmitted and represented. Roxana Waterson builds on the analysis of Carmen Guarini who differentiates between films that "intend to transmit memory" (which often include archival footage and interviews), and films that "intend to become part of that memory" (Guarini in Waterson 2007:65). The latter category usually employs devices that acknowledge "the complexity of its representation and showing the process of memory production, its limits and difficulties" (Ibid.). My research plan was influenced by both categories. In this research, I articulate the ways in which "memory, at the moment of sharing, is an event, linking teller and listeners [thus,] the sharing of memories simultaneously promises them a longer, collective life" (Ibid. 66). Waterson examines the potential of film as a medium to preserve memory as historical evidence, as testimony, and as a medium to transform individual memories into social ones (Waterson 2007:53).

I have briefly described various aspects of ethnographic filmmaking, from early efforts of representation and advocacy, to later debates on the use of elicitation, collaboration, transparent filmmaking methods, and the process of memory production. The ethnographic film, *Turning Back the Waves* included in the appendix to this thesis has been made with an awareness of all these debates. The film links various aspects of memory practices to previous discussion on methods of feedback and elicitation; methods that preserve memory as historical evidence, and methods that link individual memories with social ones. Primarily, I use forms of feedback to ask participants to comment on portions of edited material, and elicitation, by asking participants to describe family photographs, and reread family letters. I use archival footage to elaborate on certain historical events, in concert with narratives surrounding particular historical periods, and I link the narratives of seven participants of the film through techniques of continuity editing and a chronological structure of the film's narrative. These goals will be discussed throughout this chapter in light of memory as a collective remembering of the past.

### **5.3 Theoretical Directions of Ethnographic Film**

In making ethnographic films, anthropological filmmakers understand that they are communicating through a different set of rules than written ethnography. I start with a basic premise that ethnographic film as a genre fundamentally diverges from ethnographic writing. Some visual anthropologists who discuss these divergences suggest that each medium should ideally share an ethnographic understanding. Some



argue that in contrast to writing, this understanding must precede the filmmaking process. Karl G. Heider, a theorist of visual anthropology, and collaborator on Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* (1965) writes that

Ethnographic understanding emerges from the analysis, and an ethnography is only as good as the analysis. But an ethnographic film can only be as good as the understanding that precedes the filmmaking. Or, put another way, the degree to which a film is ethnographic depends on the degree to which prior ethnographic understanding has informed the filmmaking (Heider 2006:9).

Similarly, Fadwa el Guindi describes her methods in the project on an Egyptian birth ritual called *el sebou'*:

The project begins as any ethnographic project with fieldwork—long-term data gathering and intermittent analysis culminating into an adequate analysis of the subject of study. This precedes and serves as a basis of filming [...] Filming takes place on the basis of firm mastery of the data and of cultural knowledge as well as on an analytic framework gradually formulated (el Guindi 2004:217).

Similar to Karl Heider, el Guindi precedes her filmmaking with intensive field research. However, as the author describes, the goal of her visually-based research was not to discover new facts, but to construct what she calls, a “visual ethnography” (el Guindi 2004:218). El Guindi distinguishes visual ethnography from ethnographic film, because she views it as an extension of all four sub-fields of anthropology arguing for the “inclusion of analysis into the medium itself” (el Guindi 2004:19) and of a construction that closes off interpretation (Ibid.).

Jay Ruby argues that ethnographic film should be “produced by anthropologists as the result of a long-term, intensive field research project concerned with the visible manifestation of culture in performative events that lend themselves

to being transformed into filmable scenarios" (Ruby 2000:266). Ruby attempts to distance himself from documentary realism; his approach advocates for a genre that is deeply rooted in ethnographic fieldwork, and one that explicitly states its methods as an ethical imperative. He argues, "the film itself would be a reflexive narrative in which the anthropologist tells the story of his or her field experiences as a series of observed cultural performances that reveal some aspect of the culture studied" (Ruby 2000:266). Entering into the debate that attempts to develop a truly ethnographic cinema, Jay Ruby argues that "ethnographic filmmaking should be the exclusive province of anthropologists" (Ruby 2000:239). The rationale for this practice should be "one that makes possible to visualize culture and to see behaviour as an embodiment of culture so that it can be filmed, and to create film styles that transmit anthropological knowledge to a desired audience while at the same time making the theoretical position of the maker clear and the methods employed explicit" (Ruby 2000:240). Indeed, in a 2007 research project about a Chicago suburb, *Oak Park Stories*, Ruby veered away from the traditional film medium in order to elaborate on his theoretical position. He films interviews allowing his voice to be heard in the recordings; he uses natural lighting (highlighting the methods employed during the ethnographic encounter). Simultaneously, he provides detailed ethnographic descriptions by compiling CD-ROMs that include modestly edited, full-length interviews with his informants. This footage is cinematically un compelling, but Ruby's goal is to make it ethnographically challenging. The author supplies viewers/readers with a wealthy assortment of non-linear commentary, research and

analysis using the possibilities of interactive software.

Other authors have offered contrasting approaches that agree with some of the stated points, (for example, that film appearances are performed), but differ drastically on others (for example, that the ethnographer must be an expert on the subject before shooting the film), in constructing visually based anthropological work. Jean Rouch argues that the anthropologist, as observer, modifies himself to observe, look and think as an ethnographer. Those who share with the anthropologist, modify themselves in turn, to be able to share, speak and think in an ethnographic manner (Rouch 2003:100),

It is this permanent ethno-dialogue that appears to be one of the most interesting angles in the current progress of ethnography. Knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in the Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of an endless quest where ethnographers and those whom they study meet on a path that some of us now call "shared anthropology" (Ibid.: 100-101).

Jean Rouch vigorously advanced the theory of "shared anthropology," seeking to make the camera and film a medium of shared communication. As Stoller explains, "Rouch's field methods are implicated ones in which the investigator participates actively—and over a long period—in the lives of the people being investigated" (Stoller 1992:47). This theoretical position allows for a reflexive approach, where the presence of the camera and the influence of the filmmaker are both felt in the filmmaking process. In light of this discussion, Jay Ruby acknowledges a paradox in anthropological research:

Why do most anthropologists identify themselves as social scientists and their work as being in a social-scientific tradition and yet often fail to adequately describe their methods they employed in their research and to account for the possible effects that the researchers and the form selected to transmit their work might have on their research (Ruby 2000:157)?

Thus, Jay Ruby calls for a heavily reflexive approach, where “to be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the characteristics of the producer’s life, the process of construction, and the product are a coherent whole” (Ibid.: 156).

If we are to acknowledge that filmic projects, like other forms of representation such as written ethnographies, are constructions, as opposed to reflections of an abstract reality, we can start to deconstruct ethnographic films into their component parts. David MacDougall starts with this basic premise:

Much of the film experience has little to do with what one sees: it is what is constructed in the mind and the body of the viewer. Films create a new reality in which the viewer plays a central role, or at least is invited to do so. Thus, much of the meaning of sophisticated ethnographic films lies in how their theories and insights are embedded in their structures (MacDougall 1998:71).

The structure of an ethnographic film must thus include some theoretical premises aiming to communicate this insight to the viewer. Because of the visual nature of ethnographic film, Karl Heider argues that ethnographic filmmakers must maximize or exploit the visual potential of film (Heider 2006:113). The next section details the way I have chosen to visually portray several theoretical insights achieved in the course of my fieldwork.

### 5.3.1. *Filmic Structure: Visual Metaphor*

The film opens with a wide, establishing shot of a train station. The camera is inside the train, positioned to face the windshield in the last train car facing the station. The train takes off from the platform while the camera is focused on the point of horizon. As the train pulls away from the station, the tracking shot opens up a continually wider perspective. The opening sequence lasts for over four minutes. It incorporates opening titles, a soundtrack, and a short audio introduction to each of the seven participants.

In this thesis, I establish my use of visual metaphor using three different approaches, all of which introduce the main theoretical themes of this chapter. Primarily, I consider visual metaphor as a technique of montage from which ethnographic structure emerges in the film. Secondly, I consider visual metaphor as a concept that expands textual ethnography, using the perspective of sensory anthropology. Lastly, I consider visual metaphor as a sign of memory, using David MacDougall's analysis of filmic signs.

Film structure poses several interpretative questions. For example, Anne Grimshaw challenges ethnographers to experiment with form: "The exploration of anthropology's ways of seeing involves an experimentation with form" (Grimshaw 2001:10). Cinema owes its largest debt of one of the most evocative descriptions of film form, to Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage. Anna Grimshaw describes filmic montage as a relevant anthropological concept,

I use montage to disrupt the conventional categories by which visual anthropology has come to be defined and confined. Montage defined as 'the technique of producing a new composite whole from fragments'... involves radical juxtaposition, the violent collision of different elements in order to suggest new connections and meanings (Grimshaw 2001:11).

Following on my own suggestion to use visual metaphor, I quote John Berger's visual description of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions" at length,

By this he meant that what precedes the film-cut should attract what follows it, and vice versa. The energy of this attraction could take the form of a contrast, an equivalence, a conflict, a recurrence. In each case, the cut becomes eloquent and functions like the hinge of a metaphor. [...] Yet there was in fact an intrinsic difficulty in applying this idea to film. In a film, with its thirty-two frames per second, there is always a third energy in play: that of the reel, that of the film's running through time. And so the attractions in a film montage are never equal (Berger 1982:288).

John Berger argues that this montage of attractions is unequal in film, unlike photography, because film moves through time. Because the images in film are superimposed by virtue of film movement, and not juxtaposed like photographs, the perception of one image will always be influenced by the preceding frame. This is important considering the use of visual metaphor in film, since metaphor must be interpreted by contextualizing it within what preceded it, and what follows it. The word, or in this case, the visual image is applied figuratively, not literally, to an object or action. In this sense, meaning, as conveyed through visual metaphor, can never remain unambiguous.

Anthropologists, such as Paul Stoller, David Holmes and Jaida Samudra have challenged the anthropological reliance on text in their attempts to advance an anthropology of the senses. They argue that the use of visual anthropology remains

ocularcentric, or centered on visual perception and interpretation (Grimshaw 2001:5). The hope is to create what Paul Stoller calls “multilayered texts that communicate to a number of audiences” (1989:140), or what Jaida Samudra attempts to do through an “attempt to verbalize kinesthetic practices” (Samudra 2008:666) and to develop a “metaphorical language to describe new sensation” (Samudra 2008:673). I apply this meaning to my use of metaphor in the medium of ethnographic film, by attempting to evade literal interpretations focused on visual perception in the film, and to instead create a sensory experience for the viewer.

MacDougall argues that “anthropological understanding is rarely achieved through unitary meanings” (MacDougall 1998:83). The author has argued that both text and films are multivocal codes. Describing these codes, MacDougall quotes Christina Toren describing the kava ritual in Fiji, “When I as a foreigner and anthropologist talk of the meaning of the kava ritual, I can grasp that meaning only as metaphor” (Toren in MacDougall 1998:83). Ultimately, MacDougall wants to convey that “film offers anthropology, alongside the written text, a mixing of embodied, synaesthetic, narrative and metaphorical strands” (Ibid.). Following this description of visual metaphor, I want to discuss my use two central visual metaphors in the film *Turning Back the Waves*.

The opening train sequence described above is a visual metaphor employed several times in the course of the film. The train has a cultural and folkloric significance in Russia—it symbolizes, amongst other connotations, an introspective journey that suggests “moving forwards, looking back.” Consider a line from a

popular song, "Blue train car" performed by Vasili Livanov,

Slowly, the minutes trail off,  
Don't expect to meet them again,  
And although we are wistful of the past  
The best is of course, ahead my friend,

Like a tablecloth, the path lays outstretched  
And intersects the ceiling of the sky  
Everyone, everyone, hopes for the best,  
While the blue train car keeps on rolling by.<sup>37</sup>

The opening line of the film is a quote from a participant: "I can't distinguish between memory and imagination. It seems to me that my first memory is of going into a bomb shelter, but I can't tell you for certain that it happened." This directs the viewer's attention to the allegorical nature of the image, which suggests that the tracking shot of the train should not be interpreted literally. In this sequence, I aim to visualize the way metaphors work in my film: similar to the way perspective is altered through the distance traveled by the train, so too is the way viewers' perspectives may shift with every new line of dialogue. Malva Noevna Landa is introduced by saying, "I knew I was unfree but, I allowed myself to think freely. I didn't have any ideological constraints." Elena Vasilievna says, "I don't know what category I belong to... The intelligentsia? Or a simple, former, Soviet person." Finally, Susanna Pechuro says, "We shouldn't have believed it; we should have understood that we have the same road ahead of us as we do behind us." This narrative, as well as the visual backdrop of the train leaving the station, describes the complex reality of

<sup>37</sup> The original is: "Medlenno minuti uplivaut vdal/Vstreachy s nimi ti uzhe ne zhdi  
I hotia nam proshlogo nemnogo zhal/Luchshee konechno vperedí./  
Skateryu skateryu, dalniy put', stelitsya/I upiraetsya priamo v nebosklon,  
Kazhdomu kazhdomu, v luchshee veritsya/Katitsya, katitsya, goluboy vagon..."



positioned actors living in contemporary Russia. Portraying this visually, the metaphor is necessarily open-ended: instead of explaining its denotation, I invite the viewer to interpret its meaning, as well as its intention in the film.

A visual metaphor can also create new meanings through careful juxtaposition with other visual material. This technique is known as montage—an assembly of images or scenes that create particular associations for viewers because of their placement next to one other. This opens up a wide potential for interpretation of the visual material, in contrast to ethnographic writing. David MacDougall compares editing in written and ethnographic mediums,

Film editing creates meaning by implying relationships between the contents of shots, as does the movement of the camera from one field to another; but with both techniques, the connotations of the material for the viewer may override its denotative meaning or the significance being attached to it by the filmmaker. Film images do not constitute a lexicon of the kind available to the anthropological writer, nor can they be organized with the same grammatical assurance (MacDougall 1998:191).

If MacDougall suggests that film images can be ambiguous, how can ethnographic filmmakers reconcile the task of gaining ethnographic understanding through a visual language?

Filmic editing does not only open the space for metaphor, but it creates another language that MacDougall describes as inherently ambiguous.

Written ethnography lends itself far better to the making of summary statements. Filmic ethnography, by contrast, tends to draw attention to *relations*. Writing can give theoretical causal explanations, but a film can only suggest causal relationships within a given text (MacDougall 1998:75).

A film invites the viewer to interpret these relations, through both a visual language and a formal structure. But unlike written ethnography that may use language and structure to advance a causal explanation, the medium of film may be able to successfully suggest these relations through visual metaphor, rather than the kind of narration sometimes used that replicates the organizing structure of linear written texts.

I have used other tools in order to suggest these “causal relationships”. Because of a wealth of interview material, I was able to construct a narrative based on my interpretation of past and present moments from the way my participants described their lives. In filmic terms, this is known as *dialogue editing*, which focuses on filmic language, rather than written language, and employs montage, rather than the “grammatical” structure of a film in order to highlight the type of relations to which MacDougall (1998:75) makes reference.

The filmic structure of “Turning Back the Waves” is loosely based on a chronological timeline. After the opening sequence, participants begin retracing elements of their life from their earliest memories, to their present experiences. Between each significant historical period, I have inserted a vignette—a brief episode focusing on each of the seven participants. These vignettes were created in dialogue with participants to highlight an evocative event in their lives, or filmically represent a subject important to them. For example, one participant wanted to physically reconstruct the route she took as a young person, from her home to her school in the Moscow centre. Another participant walked through an exhibition in an art gallery,

remembering her relationships with the artists whose work was on display. These vignettes, brief episodes outside of the interview structure of the film, are a way to highlight another method of remembering particular moments of participants' lives, where participants chose to physically place themselves in a context where certain experiences that are important to them could be remembered, because of an association or experience with a place.

The chronological structure of the film is often interrupted by "intertitles"<sup>38</sup> that explain the movement from one historical period to another. I have chosen to include these brief historical explanations in order to provide the contextual background for those viewers who are not acquainted with Soviet history. In combination with these broad structural elements, there were specific filmic decisions in the composition of the shots, and in the editing of participants' actions and speech that merit discussion in light of my theoretical approach.

Since the film is structured chronologically, I divided it into seven sections corresponding to the sequence of my life history interviews. After I had assembled approximately hour-long sequences corresponding to each section, I started to edit for dialogue. Mindful of narrative continuity, I wanted to create links between participants' experiences, without compromising the way each participant expressed herself, and the peculiarities of their biographies. This is done in film through a technique called *parallel cutting*—when people express similar thoughts, the editor

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<sup>38</sup> Intertitles – a scene, several seconds in duration, where text on screen supplements the visual/aural information.

combines their dialogue to make it seem like they are finishing each other's sentences. In this case, the sections of each women's interviews are aligned so that they comment in reference to the same time periods of their respective lives (e.g. childhood). The viewer assumes continuity between these dialogues, because narrative continuity is preserved.

From an anthropological perspective, this is fuelled with difficult ethical and theoretical decisions—is it appropriate to assume continuity between distinct social actors? Should this type of narrative homogenize experience, or should informants have their own distinct voices, even if they overlap? I have used the technique of parallel cutting intentionally, both to highlight the awareness that film is a construction, and to strengthen the connections viewers can perceive between individual actors. I have shown in previous chapters that despite different classifications inherent in the descriptions of the intelligentsia, there are underlying themes that carry across each of the participants' biographies. This is consistent with MacDougall's suggestion that filmic ethnography "tends to draw attention to *relations*" (MacDougall 1998:75) between social actors.

This type of theoretical approach is related to the way that memory and life history were conceived of in Chapter Three. Memories are not unambiguous; their nature or character can change or persist, depending on the way that social actors want to legitimate or dismiss a particular history. Providing an overview of scholarship on social memory, Olick and Robbins (1998) argue that the "belief that history and memory are epistemologically and ontologically distinct has eroded"

(1998:134) and that “competing pasts and historical legitimacy claims have proliferated” (Ibid.). In this way, I take a theoretical position that questions previous and current discourses of the Soviet past, arguing through visual means that competing voices are not necessarily contradictory. In the next section, I elaborate on the types of representations I employ, in order to make this goal explicit.

### 5.3.2. *Film As Translation*

In this section, I address the way that film can be suited to address anthropological concerns with representation and translation. I do this by elaborating on the scholarship of sensory anthropology that questions the dominance of text-based ethnography, in order to show that filmic depictions, despite being audio-visual, can open up a space for interpreting gesture, actions and other sensory experiences. I also address film as a medium that can translate experiences between foreign (non-Russian) and domestic (Russian) contexts, in a way that communicates to foreign audiences in a dual manner: through the preservation of the original spoken Russian narrative, and the use of English subtitles as text.

### *Part I: Anthropology of the Senses*

David Howes (1991) urges anthropologists to pay attention to the medium through which they gather information, “since the medium may well be the message, to paraphrase McLuhan, or in any event have a force quite independent of its content” (Howes 1991:10). In a self-reflexive manner, Howes questions the accepted

neutrality of some anthropological perceptions: "Everywhere the sensory order is bound up with the cultural order in intimate ways" (Ibid.). The author hopes that his approach will provide "an impetus for an exploration of sensory patterns and combinations that go far beyond any of the reigning paradigms of textuality" (Ibid.: 285).

Paul Stoller argues that anthropologists cannot ignore their sensual biases when they produce ethnographic work (1989:7). He argues that it is possible to reconstruct ethnography based on a fundamental epistemological shift towards knowing the senses:

We need to describe others as people and give them a voice in our discourse. We need to write ethnographies as multilayered texts that communicate to a number of audiences. We need to acknowledge in the text the presence of an ethnographer who engages in dialogue with his or her subjects (Ibid.: 140).

Stoller suggests that this is only possible by following through an anthropology that is in tune with the senses.

Jaida Samudra describes her challenges in analyzing and writing somatic experiences based on her participation in a silat martial arts class, "People can be expected to flounder in the attempt to verbalize kinesthetic practices that cannot be performed smoothly if filtered first through language" (Samudra 2008:666). She argues that ethnographies will benefit from incorporating sensory, and in this case, kinesthetic experience:

Because normal sensory language does not always provide vocabulary for deep somatic experience, the ethnographer may also have to develop his or her own

metaphorical language to describe new sensations, which can then be checked against the stories told within the silat community (Ibid.: 673).

I have had similar dilemmas describing various aspects of my research. Many experiences that range in their linguistic, sensory and experiential qualities cannot be literally translated in the written component of this thesis.

Consider a participant picking gooseberries at a summer cottage. Ripping the berries from a prickly gooseberry bush, her actions are both carefully choreographed and spontaneous based on years of practice berry picking. It is possible to describe both the meticulous concentration and the fluid motions of her hands, but unless this action can be seen, there remains something elusive in this description. Similarly, it is impossible to describe the delicate and refined gestures of a participant who invited me for tea after our interview. Pouring tea into small china cups, the participant observed many coded rules of hospitality, typical of a member of the intelligentsia, such as adherence to a code of conduct around guests, or manners around a dinner table. Yet, describing this experience seems painfully ordinary. I am seconded by Unni Wikkan's account of a dilemma she encountered while conducting field research in Bali, and the discrepancy she felt between her account and other major anthropological work in the region: "[I was] quite prepared to stand up for my own interpretation. What troubled me, on the other hand, was that the Balinese of my account should seem so plain and ordinary, so nonexotic" (Wikkan 1992:460). Wikkan argues that anthropologists must ground interpretation "in people's own forms of discourse and the concepts they use in their daily lives" (Ibid.: 464). I argue

that in order to do that, ethnographic material can be made accessible to both audiences unfamiliar with the cultural context of the participants, and audiences that share the context of those portrayed through the medium of ethnographic film.

### *Part II. Anthropology in Translation*

In the construction of the ethnographic film, I have attempted to make my interpretation of the visual and aural data accessible to both domestic and foreign audiences. There is no English narration in the film; the narratives of the participants are entirely in Russian. The film is subtitled for an English-speaking, literate audience in one version of the film; subtitles are removed for the Russian version. Nevertheless, David MacDougall suggests that these approaches are not void of representational dilemmas,

By using the words of their informants, anthropologists (and ethnographic filmmakers) bring into their work the narrative forms and cultural assumptions embedded in speech. Wherever "quotation" occurs, an indigenous narrative model is possible. For all that, there are persisting doubts about this form of representation. If ethnographies now incorporate other voices, what textual independence do these voices actually have? In an absolute sense, all texts used in this way are subordinated to the text of the author. This may be more true of written ethnography than film, in which more unencoded information can be said to "leak" from the images, but in both cases the author decides what texts to include or exclude (MacDougall 1991:5).

The written component of this thesis incorporates many translated quotes from my interviews; nevertheless, the interpretation of these quotes and the underlying structure of the ethnography are my own. As MacDougall shows, issues of representation such as textual independence are not benign in the film medium either.



Constructing the narrative of a film implies a selection process regarding the dialogue that I have chosen to include. Inclusion or exclusion of the narratives in both mediums was made partly with the consideration of the way these “voices” could be translated to foreign and domestic contexts.

Elaborating on the notion of translation as “domestic inscription,” not cross-cultural communication, Lawrence Venuti argues that

Translation has moved theorists towards an ethical reflection wherein remedies are formulated to restore or preserve the foreignness of the foreign text [...]. Yet, an ethics that counters the domesticating effects of the inscription can only be formulated and practiced primarily in domestic terms, in domestic dialects, registers, discourses, and styles. And this means that the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text can only be signalled indirectly, by their displacement in the translation, through a domestic difference introduced into values and institutions at home (Venuti 2000:469).

Indeed, in the translation of participants’ dialogue in this written research, linguistic and cultural differences are signaled indirectly. This is done mostly through grammatical manipulation of text; for example, I use contractions and deliberately leave in sentence fragments when translating from informal, colloquial Russian to signal to their use in domestic contexts. However, techniques of translating text vary significantly in ethnographic film, which can communicate both through text (to a foreign audience), and dialogue (to a domestic audience). While foreign text has been displaced in the written translation, the film preserves the “foreignness of the foreign” text through including participants’ own voices in Russian.

Suzanna Solomonovna acknowledges her participation on camera in response to my question on what she wants the film to convey to a foreign audience,

I don't know what I want the audience to see. I am telling you. Then, you choose what you think will be meaningful. Show something so that people will understand us here. Because we're living in this country, and to us there is nothing more important than what is happening here... This is the meaning of what was, and which remained with us. And when this meaning is beaten out of our hands, and everything is crumbling around us, it's a tragedy for us.

Susanna allows me, as an interpreter of our interviews, to decipher what will be meaningful for non-Russian audiences. In this case, meaning cannot be communicated through experience, but it can be interpreted and imparted through narrative. Narrative is understood here as a personal account of participants' recollections, which can nevertheless be analyzed discursively. It is both a cultural tool seen as a dialogical process, and a performed strategy that can be treated as symbolic action (see Section 2.1.1). Translation, then, becomes a tool of representation—a way of heightening the awareness of communication between the researcher and the participant. Susanna's narrative highlights the tension between communicated meanings and interpreted, or translated meanings. However, does not all interpretation fall short of the original meaning? Walter Benjamin, an important 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, and one of the first theorists on translation writes,

In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages themselves (Benjamin 2000:21-22).

Translating from one language to another, some interpreters have more, or less successfully, translated text literally, denotatively. However, Benjamin argues that there are moments in language that remain untranslatable. Therefore, I use the medium

of film in order to convey the tensions between “something symbolizing, and something symbolized” (Ibid.). Filmic language combines denotative and connotative meanings, which allow untranslatable moments analyzed by Benjamin to be communicated indirectly, suggesting an idea or feeling in addition to the literal translation—the narrative of the film.

### *5.3.3 Representations of Mind: Sensory, Lexical and Enactive Categories.*

The chronological timeline, employment of visual metaphors and dialogue editing are among the ways I have chosen to represent my research participants filmically. I have also made deliberate choices in terms of how I wanted to convey film content, and I describe these by using three representational types following David MacDougall’s model of sensory, lexical and enactive categories. I discuss these three types of representations as they are exemplified through interview material archival footage, and performative material (or, participants’ actions and gestures).

David MacDougall borrows from Mardi J. Horowitz’s classification of thought into “image,” “lexical,” and “enactive” categories (MacDougall 1998:236), in order to analyze representation in film as a process resembling our thoughts. All three classifications were used in my film. Primarily, I have made extensive visual use of interview material. For MacDougall, interviews represent an instance of “lexical” thought (relating to words or vocabulary of a language). Lexical thought is “amply represented in films, although usually in a more studied form (such as commentary)

than in the scribbled demotic of daily experience" (MacDougall 1998:237). Indeed, most of the film is a first-person narrative of each woman's personal experience, or her reflections of a particular historical event.

I have made several editing decisions relating to this category: for example, I decided to eliminate my voice from the film in order to focus the viewer's attention on participants' narratives. My interpretation of the ethnographic material was present in every other aspect of filmmaking—decisions about which narratives to include in the film were made based on ethnographic interest, my awareness of the historical account of these themes, and on an extensive literature review. I also wanted to make the film accessible; therefore, I avoided descriptions of many Russian public figures unfamiliar to foreign audiences. As mentioned, I have also subtitled the film into English, making it accessible to both Russian and English speakers.

Archival footage was employed for the majority of the cutaways, and is featured extensively as the visual imagery of the film. MacDougall employs the idea of "sensory" thought, rather than "image," (since "image" in Horowitz's case can refer to the memory of all the senses [MacDougall 1998:237]), evidenced in the use of archival footage. MacDougall builds on a contrast between real life and visual imagery on screen, arguing that memories are "more complex and less systematic than the visual imagery of cinema" (Ibid.). Furthermore, the author argues that "[i]mages recalled through conscious effort are more often indistinct and elusive... Films condense such multidimensional thinking into concrete imagery, stripping the

representation of memory of much of its breadth and ambiguity” (Ibid.). I used several online and offline sources<sup>39</sup> to access archives of still and moving images. Much of the footage came from sources as diverse as American newsreels of the Second World War and amateur photography in Moscow. These eclectic sources allowed some of the footage I have chosen to use in the film to represent memories as a visual interpretation, and not an illustration of historical events.

MacDougall argues that many present-day social and political documentaries endorse the idea of these two modes: the sensory (exemplified in archival footage), and lexical (shown in interview materials), which are thought to be sufficient in accurately representing actors involved in most documentary films projects on memory. However, I have used another equally important mode in the representations of thought. The third category, “enactive” thought,

is neither image nor word, but gesture—experience recalled, one might say, in the muscles [...] One might call this the kinesthetic dimension of thought, familiar to ourselves but only observable in others when it is translated into actual physical movements, just as lexical thought is only observable when translated into speech (MacDougall 1998:238).

In my ethnographic film, I made an effort to integrate gesture as an essential element of the visual data. Gesture may evoke both individual and cultural elements. As

MacDougall comments in relation to gesture in film,

Enactive memory finds its primary filmic counterpart in images of physical behaviour of an habitual kind [...] It is evident in certain gestures—when, for

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<sup>39</sup> The principal sources of offline archival footage was Memorial Society’s photography archive. The main archival source online was a creative commons library of video and stills footage, Internet Archive <<http://www.internetarchive.org>>.

example, artisans are at work and the memory of their craft seems to reside “in their hands.” Such gestures can express not only the memory of a habitual activity but an attitude toward it, as when a cook breaks eggs with a flourish that combines both pride and expertise (MacDougall 1998:238).

After having screened the film to a small audience, an audience member highlighted how evocative she found participants’ gesticulations, because they reminded her of Russian grandparents. This may have happened because of the way that I edited several scenes incorporating participants’ hand gestures: someone counted something on her fingers, another person poured a cup of tea, or fixed a curtain. I also used visual material recorded while being a participant observer: I filmed one participant picking gooseberries; another cutting grass with a long scythe; and another drawing water with a bucket from a large well at her summer cottage. This material offers pointed insight on the daily routines of the women portrayed in the film.

Anthropologists have been interested in habitual gestures for decades. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead studied “face-to-face communication,” theorizing on “complex connections and interconnections between sounds and motions” (el Guindi 2004:162). Ray L. Birdwhistell performed microanalytic research on movement he called “kinesics.” El Guindi describes his research process, “Birdwhistell spent many years demonstrating that replaying a film repeatedly in real time or slow motion (something film editors know so well) will reveal actions that at first the observer had not noticed” (el Guindi 2004:165). She elaborates that “silent cues to social interactions” such as gesture, facial expressions, body posture, and so on communicate cultural messages in the interaction (el Guindi 2004:174). I incorporated

short sequences of these movements in the film in order to demonstrate my participants' everyday activities. However, in my research it becomes theoretically problematic to assign interpretation to these gestures. The reason that I have included these moments in the film is to allow a richer contextual palette from which viewers can draw their own impressions and interpretations. In the next section, I elaborate on the anthropology that encompasses not only gestures, but also hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste.

#### **5.4 Films and Memory**

In the previous section, I discussed the theoretical basis for decisions regarding content and form in the film *Turning Back the Waves*. The basic premise of this visual project is to filmically convey the way participants chose to recount their memories as well as the memories themselves, drawing attention to what it meant for participants to be involved in a project of memory such as this one. In this section, I consider both foci by describing what participants chose to highlight, and then how I chose to portray these memories on screen. In order to highlight what I choose to represent, I use David MacDougall's analysis of "The Signs of Memory" (1998:233-34) to explain several intentions in the film. MacDougall argues that "films of memory draw upon a distinctive repertoire of signs" (Ibid.: 233). The author refers to three such signs: signs of survival, that are "images of objects that have a physical link with the remembered past" (Ibid.); signs of replacement, which are "similar objects and

sounds and, at the farthest extent, reconstructions and reenactments” (Ibid.: 234); and signs of resemblance, which “offer a looser, iconic link with their objects, filling in the missing pattern of the past by analogy” (Ibid.). In my film, the presence of all three of these signs warrant a more detailed description of the way my film, with the collaboration of my participants, focuses on memory practices.

#### *5.4.1. Films of Memory*

Participants often reminded me of the importance of remembering by self-consciously drawing attention to the process of memory itself. For example, recalling the difficulties of the perestroika period during an interview, Anna Mihaylovna elaborated on what her memories meant to her, “it is good to remember this, even the scary moments. Because this is life, and it is important to remember.” In another interview, Susanna Solomonovna talked of her hope in political change towards democracy during the years of the perestroika and the hopes and difficulties surrounding these years. In our interview, Susanna highlighted her desire to communicate these memories,

There are things that people should know—how normal people experienced these events in Russia. Now I am certain of this: the world understands us poorly. Black and white distinctions are not what this is about.

These accounts bring into awareness a challenge of portraying individual voices in a way that represents both individual and collective recollections. Moreover, participants want to be portrayed in ethnographic film in a way that adequately



represents them. I have attempted to do this through a continuous dialogue with them, selecting three distinct ways to portray my participants' memories.

In order to grapple with a film as a site of memory production, I specify three "signs of memory" employed by David MacDougall in describing how ethnographic filmmakers may employ filmic language to convey a particular idea. The first, *signs of survival*, are arguably the most common feature of films of memory, and these are "images of objects that have a physical link with the remembered past" (MacDougall 1998:233).

The most common *signs of survival* that I have used in the film were family photographs. Photographs of participants reveal a lot of information—the style of dress, the composition of the shot, the technical aspects of the photograph, and whether it was posed or not, can reveal significant aspects of that period. Collier and Collier describe the way photographs impact on people's memories:

The impact of photographs in interview is in the response to imagery reflective of the life experience of the informant. We believe that photographs, film, or video challenge the informant more than verbal artwork because the literal character of their images intercepts the very memory of the person (Collier and Collier 1986:122).

There were moments during interviews when photographs triggered very distinct memories. During our interview, Susanna Solomonovna showed several photos from a photo album. I asked her about her reactions, discovering her ambivalence towards certain photographs,

[GULag] Camp photos were always set-up [shows photo of herself as a teenager, sitting on grass]. They were sent back home to tell families that

everything was all right, and everyone was treated well. So, I don't like them very much, because they were lies. But this photo, I like. [Photo of Susanna holding a baby]. It's my [first daughter]. She is 3 months old. She's smiling.

Recall Olick and Robbins' mnemonic for memory practices: state approved camp photographs, which undoubtedly preserved an image of the Gulag as a more humane institution than it actually was, is an illustration of instrumental change, where the state "intentionally change[d] an image of the past for particular reasons in the present" (Olick and Robbins 1998:129). Susanna redresses this through instrumental persistence: as a witness to the atrocities of the Gulag, she "intentionally seek[s] to maintain a particular version of the past... to maintain or recover the past" (Ibid.). In this case, photographs as signs of survival, serve a physical and significant link with the past.

I asked Irina Pavlovna Gavrilova, who was not one of the key life history examples, but who appears in the film, to describe the kind of reaction she had while looking through photographs of her early years as a professional geologist. She exclaimed, "the tenderest memories! Just to think how difficult it was back then, but how enthusiastic we were. It was thought that as a geographer, you had to overcome all difficulties." Not only was this a great insight into the way Irina Pavlovna perceived her early career, but it was also indicative of the way she experienced her present. Irina Pavlovna and her sister, Svetlana Pavlovna Gavrilova, appearing in the film, also preserved letters they had written to their parents when they were evacuated from Moscow during the Second World War. Irina Pavlovna was thirteen years old at the time of the war, and her younger sister was nine years old. These

*signs of survival* were significant in their recollections of the war—I asked participants to read passages of their choosing, and to comment on them. It is apparent from these letters that such documents go beyond simple illustrations. They evoke specific memories that might not have surfaced in response to interview questions, and are examples of “elicitation,” a method that employs photographs, or the interview material itself, to trigger further memories (Rouch 2003; el Guindi 2004; Krebs 1975). This method was crucial in the research, since these materials were the primary means of eliciting memories to both personal and historical events, going well beyond the original scope of our interviews.

In our interviews, some situations of the past could not be conveyed through *signs of survival*, because original signs have disappeared or have become inaccessible. David MacDougall describes *signs of replacement* as another category within his rubric of signs of memory:

If objects do not survive to be filmed, films of memory often resort to *signs of replacement*—similar objects and sounds and, at the farthest extent, reconstructions and reenactments, such as those of docudramas [...] Journeys and the retracing of steps are especially favored by films of memory because revisiting places—like viewing photographs—produces emotions of both retrieval and loss (MacDougall 1998:234).

Several participants wanted to travel to particular destinations in Moscow in order to recall events surrounding these locations. For example, Tatiana Pavlovna Gavrilova, another participant who is more prominently featured in the film, brought me along the route she took while walking to the elementary school that proved to be a major influence on her childhood memories. We walked, filming our conversation as we

passed through the historic downtown core, and along several Moscow landmarks. The participant connected these landmarks with certain periods of her life, commenting on the changes that she was noticing in the architectural landscape of the city: "now that the city is so different, a meeting with a place like this reminds you of what was dear in earlier periods of life—in your childhood, your youth." In as much as acknowledging continuities between places, these memories also accentuate the changes informants witnessed in the city.

The last sign of memory shifts the focus back to the filmmaker's interpretation of memory—an interpretation of visual, spatial and temporal markers.

David MacDougall describes this as a *sign of resemblance*:

At one remove from replacements in kind are replacements in form: what we might call *signs of resemblance*. These offer a looser, iconic link with their objects, filling in the missing pattern of the past by analogy—not, as it were, by striking the missing note, but by supplying its harmonic. They make possible major shifts of magnitude: a day's work or a short trip can now speak of a life's journey (MacDougall 1998:234).

Signs of resemblance had relevance to the way participants interpreted their memories. Returning to Moscow in 2009, I was able to show the finished film to all the participants. I had asked them to comment on the effectiveness of my visual interpretations of their memories. For example, the opening train sequence and the visual metaphor of crashing waves in the ethnographic film are both signs of resemblance—they symbolize my visual interpretation of the way a passage of time can signify the ambiguous nature of remembering. Recording footage from the train took place over several days, but the scenes are ordered in such a way as to represent

the passage of a single day; within the time span of the film, the train metaphor allegorically represents the span of a lifetime.

Music is an exemplary sign of resemblance. David MacDougall argues that the use of music has served as analogous to emotion in documentary films. Moreover,

[M]usic is used by films of memory for its historical associations. Because musical styles “date” and are culturally specific they make ideal aural icons. A piece of music can almost always be found to fit a particular historical and social milieu (MacDougall 1998:234).

I have made extensive use of music in “Turning Back the Waves.” I used two types of genres—Russian bard song, invested with cultural and historical meanings, and a purely instrumental, contemporary and electronic soundtrack. I recorded the first type of songs with a singer/songwriter who specializes in the bard singing tradition. In Russia, the bard tradition started in the late 1950s during Khrushchev’s Thaw era; the lyrics of these songs were typically imbued with social and political commentary. I use three songs in the film, they are entitled “I remember that Vaninsky Port”<sup>40</sup>, “Farewell to Lenin”<sup>41</sup>, and “Ave Maria”<sup>42</sup>. The first song, “I remember that Vaninsky Port” is a “camp song”—a genre that refers to the songs of GULag prisoners. It plays in the film when Susanna Solomonovna describes her imprisonment in the GULag. The second song “Farewell to Lenin,” is a satirical composition describing the transformations of national symbols during the years of the *perestroika*. It is played

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<sup>40</sup> *Ya pomniu tot Vaninsky Port*. Author unknown. Performed by Vladimir Alier. (a pseudonym has been used at the request of the musician.)

<sup>41</sup> *Proshchanie s Leninom*. Composed and performed by Vladimir Alier.

<sup>42</sup> *Ave Maria*. Composed by Aleksandr Galich, used with permission of the author’s estate. Performed by Vladimir Alier.

during a turning point of the film, when participants describe how their hopes of the political changes in the Soviet Union began to fade. Aleksandr Galich, a famous bard poet, a dissident and a revered musician amongst circles of the intelligentsia, is the composer of the song "Ave Maria," which plays over the closing credits. The song is an evocation of the inequalities and struggles suffered by women during the various stifling and repressive periods of the Soviet system.

In contrast to the lyrical and heavily symbolic genre of the bard songs, I have also used an ambient, instrumental soundtrack. This genre of music is anachronistic (it does not presently have any associations with a specific time period); uses electronic textures, and lacks a persistent beat. Because it has lost much of its original connotation, MacDougall argues that it achieves the status of being as "neutral as possible, representing (it is hoped) nothing so much as pure emotion" (MacDougall 1998:235). The genre, and in some cases, the melodies of the first series of songs, will be familiar to many Russian viewers, including my participants. This decision was made deliberately to align modes of representation to the type of signs with which participants are familiar. The second set expresses my interpretation of this material, bringing the discussion back to the way that film may interpret narratives, and come into a dialogue among the filmmaker, the audience and the participants. I now turn my attention to the ethical obligations ethnographic filmmakers carry in their filmic decisions by discussing the type of voices heard in the project of memory.

#### 5.4.2 *Film as Memory: Camera as a Witness*

In this section, I look at the association between the Russian genre of autobiography and the Latin American genre of personal *testimonio*, both of which attempt to redress injustices of the past, although by different methods. I do not want to overstate the similarities, thus detracting from the uniqueness of the Russian tradition, but to relate the genre to other memory practices. I do this to ultimately argue that the medium of film is an appropriate anthropological tool to convey these types of memories.

There is a strong tradition of memoir literature amongst the Russian intelligentsia. In 1934, a Russian poet and a member of the *Akmeist*\*\* group Osip Mendelshtam was incarcerated and sent to the GULag during Stalin's terror campaigns. His wife, Nadezhda Mendelshtam, wrote a memoir of her husband's struggle and persecution. Lev Gumilev wrote a similar type of memoir on his mother, Anna Akhmatova, who was a famous Russian poet persecuted by the Soviet state. Part social commentary, part historical account, and part autobiography, this type of narrative focuses on a protagonist who struggles against, or is unjustly punished by, the Soviet authorities. The author communicates his or her thoughts and reflections in the process of traumatic events. Although the memoir or autobiography genre stems from a much earlier history of Russian literature, it has been replicated endlessly, and has become almost canonical in its present formulation. Varlam Shalamov's *Kolymski Tales*, Vladimir Bukovski's *The Wind Returns*, as well as dissidents' accounts by

authors such as Yuri Orlov, Andrei D. Saharov, Pietr Grigorenko and Sergei A. Kovalev, have been written to chronicle the authors' struggle, dissent, persecution and eventual release or rehabilitation under different Soviet epochs. Perhaps Aleksandr's Solzhenitsyn's works, including the novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963) and the three volume magnum opus *GULag Archipelago* (1974) are the most visible publications of this genre.

The autobiographical genre of the Soviet victims of state-imposed violence may be associated with a genre of Latin American literature called *testimonio*. In contemplating her ethnographic writing style as a storyteller, Ruth Behar (1993) considers writing *Esperanza's story* as a testimonial novel, "which 'invents within a realistic essence' literature from the words of those who usually don't make literature" (Behar 1993:13). The *testimonio* itself was a genre recognized in the early 1970s as a type of Latin American documentary literature. In the quote above, Behar references Miguel Barnet, a Cuban writer who coined the term in *La fuente viva* in 1983 (Behar 1993:346). To this end, Behar combines this style with oral storytelling techniques, providing an important precedent for anthropologists attempting to convey ethnography in non-traditional ways.

The genre of *testimonio* was originally employed by social movement activists, especially in Marxist social activism. John Beverley (2004) describes the genre as a "form of narrative literature in which we can at the same time witness and be a part of the emerging culture of an international proletariat/popular-democratic subject in its



period of ascendancy" (Beverley 2004:x).

The genre was also popularized by women in Latin America, in their descriptions of experiences of civil war, violence and abuse, among other traumatic events sharing experiences from a unique women's perspective. An important book on this genre, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001), comprises the work of eighteen feminist authors and scholars of diverse Latina backgrounds. "The Latina Feminist Group" gave new coherence to the genre of women's *testimonios* as a product of their collaboration in the mid-1990s. They also elaborated on the style of the *testimonio*:

*Testimonio* is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere. Thus, scholars often see *testimonios* as dependent products, an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity. *Testimonios* with women in Latin American have focused much of the critical attention to the genre in the last two decades. These texts are seen as disclosures not of personal lives but rather of the political violence inflicted on whole communities. Here, the *testimoniantes* (subjects of the texts) admit that they withhold secrets about the culture or details of their personal lives that, for political reasons, are not revealed in the stories narrated (2001:13).

In this approach, the collaborators of *Latina Feminist Testimonios*, the genre of Russian autobiography, and my own approach to ethnographic filmmaking diverge significantly from the description above. The women in *Telling to Live* have incorporated a more personal approach, "in which the personal and private became profoundly political" (Ibid.), nevertheless drawing from common, collective

experiences. Russian autobiography is based entirely on personal narratives of political struggle, and rarely relies on others in documenting traumatic events, or struggles. Similarly, my ethnographic approach diverged from the above description, since my goal was to elaborate on women's life histories by drawing cultural interpretations from their personal experiences.

I contend that the method of making this kind of ethnographic film is consistent with the Russian autobiography/memoir genre, and Roxana Waterson's elaboration of the *testimonio* genre in film, which generates its own meaning and "demands a dialogical engagement with/by the audience" (Waterson 2007:53). She suggests that participants who often recall past traumatic events become active in performative elements of filming; this becomes useful in analyzing the dialogical relationship between participants and audiences (Ibid.). The author suggests that testimony must be understood as an event in itself, created in the present:

As such, filmed testimony also offers us clues to be read in the speaker's manner of self-presentation, with all its attendant dimensions of non-verbal communication: the style of speech, the pitch, tone and tempo of voice, pauses, hesitations, facial expressions, body language, gesture; all of these tell us about emotion and state of mind (Waterson 2007:61).

While in the field, I was able to edit some interview material and show it back to several participants. I focused on the period of the perestroika in Susanna Solomonovna's narrative, and showed her both her account of her happiest experiences, and her mental disenchantment with politics in the post-Soviet period. Consider Susanna Solomonovna's quote in response to my question asking her of impressions to seeing herself on camera,

I say what I think, feel and remember. I would say the same thing now. There is no repetition here. I tell as I think, feel and remember... People see what they see. There are no set-ups here, no roles. People have to see what's here, and nothing else. That's important.

Susanna Solomonovna prioritizes the importance of conveying her memories in an authentic style over the ethnographic interpretation of the material. She argues that her memories are unscripted, and not enacted, nor performed.

In interactions with all of my participants, the camera served as a kind of archiving tool that created a repository of information accessible to potential audiences. An important product emerged from this inquiry; this type of document can serve a visual memoir, in the tradition of Russian autobiography focused on past injustices, similar to the way that in Latin America, the *testimonio* has become an important literary canon.

During our interviews, Susanna was an articulate narrator. She often paused to express the emotionally strong moments of her narrative. She gestured with her hands, lifting them up in the air while talking of despair; pushing away the air in front of her when talking about moving "Russia away from this mess." Whether or not she was conscious of the effectiveness of her storytelling techniques, she conveyed much emotion through it. When I recorded her narratives, Susanna was able to see herself, and provide feedback on how she perceived herself in my work. This type of method will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

## 5.5 Film, Feedback and Collaboration

### 5.5.1. *Film as Elicitation and Film as Feedback*

In my research, it became imperative to foster a mutual awareness between my research goals and the goals of my participants. I became interested in the kind of feedback I would receive if I were to show portions of the film to individuals informants who participated in it.

Over the last several decades, several anthropologists have relied on the technique of elicitation to draw responses from participants based on their reflections of seeing their filmed or photographed representations. As early as the 1940s and 1950s, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson were interested in using photographic material as a tool of analysis. John Collier (1967) suggested that showing photographs to participants may evoke an interesting set of reactions. Another anthropologist, Stephanie Krebs (1975:285-290) filmed a Thai dance, and showed it back to participants to invoke their interpretations. Finally, Fadwa el Guindi showed photographs and elicited responses in her work on the Zapotec in the mid-1980s (2004:176). All these experiments have resulted in an interesting combination of anthropological analysis and reflection of the analysis based on the reactions of the people studied. But it is imperative to remember that earlier work, which existed both within and outside of anthropology, has been successful in sometimes delving much further in the goals of representation.

As early as 1922, while making *Nanook of the North*, Robert Flaherty was able

to involve his Inuit participants in some aspects of film production, including showing them portions of filmed footage of the film. Flaherty's goal was not only to elicit data, but to inquire into how the Inuit would perceive the film: it was a method of collaboration.

One of the most interesting ethnographic studies in showing filmed material to participants was introduced by Jean Rouch. Calling this technique "feedback," Rouch also showed filmed material to his participants and often recorded their reactions. For example, working on the film *Bataille Sur Le Grand Fleuve* (1953), Rouch wanted to dramatize a moment where hunters of the Niger delta were chasing a hippopotamus. "At the moment of the chase, I put a very moving hunting air, played on a one-stringed bowed lute, on the sound track; I found this theme particularly well suited to the visuals" (Rouch 42:2003). Showing the film to the participants, Rouch wanted to fulfill his broader goal of making "shared anthropology." Rouch describes the result of the screening as "deplorable": "The chief of the hunters demanded that I remove the music because the hunt must be absolutely silent" (Ibid.). In later films such as *Chronique d'un Été* (1961), Rouch and Morin gathered all the participants together for an on-camera discussion of how they perceived themselves and each other in the film. This material is included in the final moments of the film.

This type of feedback is not simply a method of gathering analysis, but a way of making collaborative film projects. Paul Stoller describes Rouch's collaborative work:

“shared anthropology” is the story behind the story of Rouch’s films. It is a story in which Rouch has used the medium of film to share with the “other” the results of his works. Sharing results builds a solid foundation of respect between ethnographer and other (Stoller 1992:170-171).

In my research, I am using the term “elicitation” as elaborated on by Fadwa el Guindi (2004:180), for the technique of showing filmed material, or other cues that may trigger participants’ memories, and “feedback,” as used by Jean Rouch to open up a way for the researcher to reflect on filmed material based on feedback received from showing it to participants. During my fieldwork period in Moscow, along with video equipment, I had access to editing equipment. I edited portions of interviews Susanna Solomonovna Pechuro and Malva Noevna Landa. This resulted in two sequences five and ten minutes in length, focusing on the two participants, respectively.

Susanna’s sequence was highly stylized, and included a musical soundtrack of her acquaintance, Vladimir Alier. The sequence focused on her description of the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent events, as a turning point in Susanna’s hope about democracy in Russia. Upon viewing her footage, Susanna commented,

This is life. All of it. And because human life encompasses all of this—a feeling of responsibility for what is happening; I value very much that my grandchildren will understand this—for myself—to understand my own life better.

This narrative changes in tone from other accounts of Susanna’s present outlook.

Consider this quote taken from the last chapter, which focused on the fading hopes of the perestroika,

This was the meaning of our life, and it still is. When that meaning is taken away from us, and everything crumbles in front of our eyes; when we can’t hold on to anything, for all of us it’s a tragedy.

These comments complement each other—although the present generation comprising the aging intelligentsia may feel powerless, they may transfer a feeling of responsibility towards the younger generation—their grandchildren. If I had not asked these questions during the elicitation phase, my interpretation of this material would have been drastically different. In the earlier version, Susanna's narrative sounds hopeless; there is nothing to validate her political efforts during the years of transition. However, upon viewing the interview material as elicited footage, Susanna places her hopes in her grandchildren who represent hope for a new generation of socially responsible and politically aware individuals.

How do participants see themselves? Susanna elaborates on how she sees herself on camera,

The only problem is that I appear as a hysterical old woman! And it's very apparent that I don't have any teeth, so I have a continuous grimace. But what can I do? It's absurd to complain about it—it's like looking in the mirror and being sad that you don't look like what you did fifty years ago.

There is an awareness of aging that is provoked by seeing ourselves on camera, more so than in our conversations. Yet, the process can be empowering—by bringing it into awareness, the participant acknowledges it, and removes the stigma from markers of age (“it's absurd to complain about it”). Similarly, upon seeing herself on camera, Malva Noevna comments, “What a little old lady! It's frightening! Although there *are* some resemblances. [Malva smiles and nods.]” Malva is good-humoured when she comments on her appearance. She reflects on the way that there is “some resemblance” between how she perceives herself, and her filmed image. This

accentuated both the continuities in her perception of self, and influenced my own decisions on the editing techniques and the selection of clips.

Feedback with Malva Noevna was done by editing a 10-minute sequence that focused on her dissident activities from the 1960s to the 1980s. The sequence featured Tatiana Mihaylovna Bahmina—a historian working on the dissident archive at the Memorial Society in Moscow, commenting on Malva Noevna's various social activist projects. The elicitation phase with Malva provided some of the most important footage in our interviews. Primarily, Malva Noevna commented on the way she understood definitions of dissent,

I don't have any concerns about the footage. There is one thing that you should understand: Dissidents are an ideal case. Revolutionaries become revolutionaries because of a feeling of "resentment" [in English]. It's a long word to translate; but *you* understand it.

This feedback provided a more personal, trustful contact with the participant. Malva Noevna followed this up with an overview of the terminology she used to describe dissidents and the intelligentsia. In response to how she placed herself within this system of classification, she answered, "I knew I was unfree, but I allowed myself to think freely! I didn't have any ideological inhibitions." Feedback techniques gave invaluable insight into the participants' reflections, self-awareness and critical interpretation of my work. But elicitation and feedback are amongst several of many tools available to anthropologists concerned with fostering a reflexive approach that follows in Rouch's tradition of a "shared anthropology." Next, I want to discuss this moment of sharing in the context of collaboration in ethnographic film.



### 5.5.2 Collaboration in Ethnographic Film

Visual anthropologists have long been concerned with issues of representation of their filmed subjects; as image-makers, they are looking for an ethical position towards people they research, balancing advocacy, representation, and their own anthropological interpretation. Elicitation in the previous section could be seen as an instance of collaboration; however, delving further, I want to elaborate on collaboration in filmmaking.

Collaborative filmmaking is most poignantly articulated by Sarah Elder (1995), based out of the University of Alaska, who has practiced this task for over two decades amongst the Inupiak and Yup'ik indigenous communities. At the beginning of her filmmaking career, Elder termed her approach "Community Determined Filmmaking" (Ibid.: 98), but soon understood that there were tensions between multiple authorships and the aesthetic vision she wanted to convey: "after a few films I began to see that I had been naïve about how aesthetics and authorship could be shared" (Ibid.). Elder argues that "the films were indeed authored by us, and by our vision, and that the communities were not so much "determining" the films but collaborating with us. Villagers and filmmakers were dialogically contributing to the real process of making film" (Ibid.).

Sarah Elder argues that the only ethical position of an image-maker is that of a collaborator: ethical representation has less to do with whether the filmmaker is considered an "insider" or "outsider," but "between the power dynamics between any filmmaker and her subjects" (Elder 1995:96). At the beginning of every project, Elder

shows village residents and tribal elders her previous work and describes her goals. The community selects the events they wish to be filmed, and views edited portions of the film, or the entire film at the end of each project (Ibid.: 94). Elder describes her goals as a filmmaker: "collaborative filmmaking leads subjects to change the rules by which they will be filmed, as much as it changes the rules by which we film" (Ibid.).

Carlos Flores has been among the most vocal anthropologists about the notion of collaboration. The author makes collaborative films amongst the Maya-Q'eqchi' communities in Guatemala (2004). Although Flores involved the indigenous community in many aspects of the filmmaking, he was ultimately in control of many editing decisions. He questions, quoting David MacDougall in reference to multi-vocal ethnographic texts, "if ethnographies now incorporate other voices, what textual independence do these voices actually have? In an absolute sense, all texts used in this way are subordinated to the text of the author" (MacDougall in Flores 2004:37). Carlos Flores attacks this question with what he calls a "self-consciously interventionist anthropological enterprise" (Flores 2004:35), concluding that collaborative ventures depend on the "ability of projects to establish a common ground where those involved can pursue different sets of interests and negotiate, combine, and materialize them in a collective fashion" (Ibid. 40).

In my film, *Turning Back the Waves*, I have employed the method of elicitation both as a collaborative technique, and as a tool to strengthen the written analysis of this project. My use of the elicitation technique informed my future editing decisions. Upon showing participants edited portions of the interviews, I

reviewed the material recorded during elicitation, and built on it in my subsequent editing. In agreement with Sarah Elder, I believe that collaboration was an empowering process for participants, because it gave them a chance to voice their concerns about the project. They did not have much criticism for my editing decisions; however, the act of elicitation allowed participants to take part in the editing of the film. My approach differed from Sarah Elder's; I did not seek participants' approval or disapproval to continue working in the community, since I worked with individuals who all gave their informed consent to participate initially and continue participating. Similar to the way Carlos Flores argues that collaboration is in some ways a negotiation of different interests, this method allowed me to modify my project in concert with the way participants wanted to be represented, and allowed them to feel assured that they did not misplace their trust in agreeing to share personal details of their life in this research project.

#### **5.6 Chapter Conclusion: The Goals of Visual Anthropology**

In this chapter, I have explored diverse themes and some aspects of the history of visual anthropology relating to my purpose in making ethnographic films. Paying particular attention to the way anthropologists are attempting to develop an ethnographic language, I explored how this language may develop along with the concepts of representation and collaboration in ethnographic film.

I started my discussion of ethnographic film by questioning how ethnographic understanding may be achieved. For example, Karl Heider and Fadwa el Guindi argue

that ethnographic understanding must always precede the filming. Jean Rouch argues that this type of understanding must be a result of "shared" anthropology developed in the process of ethnographic research between participants and filmmakers. In turn, Jay Ruby calls for reflexive filmmaking in order make the construction of films apparent:

If ethnographic filmmakers were to produce films that tell the story of their field research, and the story of the people they studied, in a reflexive manner that permitted audiences to enjoy the cinematic illusion of verisimilitude without causing them to think they were seeing reality, then an anthropological cinema would be born (Ruby 2000:278).

I locate my research within this group of filmmakers, since I see my film as a multi-layered process that incorporates all of these approaches. Primarily, the development of the research for the thesis and film was based on a year of rigorous research on the subjects of political transition, gender and life history which sensitized me to a particular ethnographic understanding. Secondly, while filming, I used methods to elicit feedback of filmed material by editing filmed footage in the field and screening it back to participants. This was instrumental in shaping subsequent analysis, because it allowed me to focus on moments that participants found important in their reflections of our interviews. Lastly, while editing the ethnographic film, I used a reflexive approach by making several methods apparent to the viewer. For example, during Susanna's emotional account of her experience of persecution by Soviet authorities, I used a song that references experiences of the GULag in its lyrics. However, instead of using this as background music to stir up an emotional response from the viewer, I show the singer/songwriter performing on camera, to remind the audience that the

musical soundtrack is not an illustration, but a construction; the song is a lyrical expression of these experiences, and not a way to manipulate the viewer.

I have also used several visual metaphors in the film, such as a shot of a moving train, in order to open up the interpretation of the film. In film, the moving train often represents a journey through time, the reflection of the past, and the illusion of cinema.<sup>43</sup> I argue that visual metaphors are able to convey a very different ethnographic understanding from written text. This is consistent with anthropologists who have written on the senses, such as Howes (1991); Stoller (1989); Wikkan (1992); Samudra (2008), and with scholars who view translation as a system of communicating meanings, such as Venuti (2000) and MacDougall (1991). In the case of translation, I have been able to preserve some textual independence by leaving the Russian voices intact, but subtitling the film for an English-speaking audience.

I focused on the potential of film to convey personal and social memories. I have borrowed from David MacDougall to describe the three distinct ways in which I portrayed these memories on screen: through personal interviews, archival footage, and participant actions. Following this, I relate my own film to the Soviet tradition of autobiographical writing, which attempts to remedy the injustices of the state through a process of recounting memory.

I have also attempted to develop a collaborative project by using the elicitation method, whereby previous filmed material was screened back to participants soliciting

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<sup>43</sup> Consider films as varied as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, (1979), Lumière Brothers' *Arrivée d'un Train* (1895), and Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, (1959) for example, where trains serve as these films' central metaphor.

their reactions. I employ elicitation in this thesis, not solely as a tool for analysis, but as a collaborative technique, where every participant may voice different goals for the project, but still feel that they are in a collaborative and dialogical relationship with the filmmaker and their future audiences.

## Chapter Six—Conclusion

### 6.1 “Western Audiences Just Wouldn’t Understand”

This phrase, which I have often heard as a resigned lament from my participants, may be a strange way to draw some conclusions about the main foci of the thesis; yet, the phrase convincingly sums up the main arguments of my research. Primarily, it is a marker of self-identification, pitted against a type of western misunderstanding (“you do not understand, but I do.”) Secondly, it is a way for participants to voice their social engagement by engaging readers and potential film audiences in their project of restitution for past injustices. They may not be politically vocal, but they are socially engaged, through speech acts such as this one.

This research focused on the way four Moscow women in the written thesis, and seven women in the film, belonging to the intelligentsia remember and relate their political participation in Soviet, transition and present-day periods of their lives. I started this project with a question that asked “has the intelligentsia remained relevant in contemporary Russia in the post-socialist era?” Little did I know at the time, but in the subsequent research, I became convinced that this was absolutely the wrong question to ask.

Primarily, this type of question presupposes there are such social markers as relevance and irrelevance, especially in relation to the intelligentsia in present-day Russia. This would ignore one of the conclusions of this research, that members negotiate their position of belonging in the intelligentsia, and clearly articulate their

present involvement in Russian society, thus asserting their “relevance.” Secondly, this term is problematic in ethnographic analysis. Despite being politically disenchanted, participants are nevertheless engaged in the social and cultural life in present day Russia.

The present political climate in Russia reminds some participants of Brezhnev-era totalitarianism: a recent backlash of persecutions of human rights activists (the case of Hodorkovsky, for example) to which no participant was impartial, was reminiscent of the way dissidents were persecuted in the late 1960s and early 70s. However, as Michael Herzfeld reminds us,

Fixity of form does not necessarily entail a corresponding fixity of meanings and intentions; exaggeration, parody, and other deforming practices both perpetuate the sense of enduring cultural form and cause substantive change (Herzfeld 2005:22).

Despite tremendous social and political transformation, many practices have persisted from the socialist past. Many participants feel they are not able to speak freely today—something they felt during the perestroika era. However, in Russia, there is a well-documented genre of jokes, called *anekdoty*. They are told amongst friends, and are usually reflective of the political and social atmosphere of an era. Some *anekdoty* can circulate for decades, whereas others age after a short period. During the Brezhnev epoch, there were copious amounts of jokes on stagnation, on relations between the Cold War divide, and on Brezhnev himself. Authors such as Alexei Yurchak (2003) have analyzed Brezhnev-era *anekdoty* as a set of practices that reconfigure accepted norms to create a new set of meanings. We are reminded of Elena Vasilievna’s statement describing this era: “professionally, we took everything with humour. We



critiqued the state, and we did it with irony.” During Mikhail Gorbachev’s leadership and the perestroika era, these *anekdoty* ceased. Participants seldom remember a single one told about Gorbachev. In the 1990s, some new *anekdoty* (especially concerning New Russians\*\*) have resurfaced amongst a younger generation. These types of actions are undoubtedly what Herzfeld refers to as deforming practices that both “perpetuate the sense of enduring cultural form” (the retelling of *anekdoty*), and “cause substantive change.” Yurchak (2003) argues, for example, that during the perestroika era, new meanings existed precisely because alternatives to the system could be imagined through these types of practices.

Consider the phrase *nikto na zapade etogo ne poymet*—“western audiences just wouldn’t understand.” It is obviously an exaggeration that is meant to destabilize a particular understanding. I interpret it, along with my participants’ shifting categories of belonging as a type of critique of the current social and political climate in Russia. Individual members can give us insight into how they understand their position and participation in contemporary Russian society, and therefore, whether that society has been able to accommodate their experiences, memories and histories. This warning is an indication that they perceive a type of misunderstanding not just in the relationship between the participant to a western audience, but between the participant and the anthropologist, and participant and the wider Russian society. In a self-effacing analysis that is not itself void of irony, I discuss an instance whereby participants have challenged my understanding, by contextualizing this phrase I had often heard during our interviews.

This phrase “western audiences just wouldn’t understand,” reflects on a particular relationship with participants, which warrants attention. Namely, I want to remedy the fact that in a thesis geared towards women whose political position drew inspiration from systems outside of the national boundaries of the Soviet Union, I have until now limited my analysis to their narratives about their lives in Russia. It is topical to now reflect on their relationship to contexts outside of the Soviet Union, because I argue that this relationship ultimately shapes a particular understanding of belonging amongst my participants. The distinction between foreign and Russian contexts is relevant to anthropologists working on translation, since they constantly problematize the transfer of one language into another. In this concluding section, I want to understand what participants meant when they asserted Western misunderstanding in a project focused on *their* experiences in Russia and the Soviet Union.

Beginning perhaps in 1973, with Clifford Geertz’s argument for “thick description” in ethnographic work in the seminal *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), and continuing well in the 1980s with James Clifford and George Marcus’ *Writing Culture* (1986), anthropology as a discipline has undergone much self-critique for the way it represents its subjects. Before this, surprisingly little was written on translation in the anthropological project, especially in the way anthropologists communicate across cultures through translation. The criticism centers on the authority of the anthropologist involved in the task of cultural representation. James Clifford writes, “Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are

systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control. Ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete” (Clifford 1986:7). This type of critique led to the problematization of the objective authority of the anthropologist. Some have even asserted that anthropologists attempt to create meaning out of absurd or incomprehensible assertions (Gellner in Asad 1986:143).

Talal Asad, one of the contributors to *Writing Culture*, argues against this kind of skepticism in the anthropological translation of foreign texts, critiquing assertions that anthropologists make overly coherent statements out of something that lacks coherence (Asad 1993:173): “all successful translation is premised on the fact that it is addressed within a specific language, and therefore also to a specific set of practices, a specific form of life” (Ibid.). Asad argues that translation of a foreign text hinges on an understanding of a specific set of practices. Lawrence Venuti discusses translation as an interpretation of a foreign text that can be shared between foreign-language and domestic readers.

A translation of a foreign novel can communicate, not simply dictionary meanings, not simply the basic elements of narrative form, but an interpretation [...] And this interpretation can be one that is shared by the foreign-language readers for whom the text was written. The translation will then foster a common understanding with and of the foreign culture, an understanding that in part restores the historical context of the foreign text—although for domestic readers (Venuti 2000:473).

Both authors focus on translation as a task that attempts to make foreign meanings decipherable in the domestic language.

This argument can also be applied in a backwards fashion by acknowledging

this relation between my dual role as both a domestic translator from Russian, and a foreign anthropologist communicating in English. This way translation can be treated as a dialogue among participants, the researcher and their respective audiences. I argue that the phrase “Western audiences just don’t understand” is an attempt to translate Russian experience to a foreign audience; a translation that attempts to “foster common understanding” (Venuti 2000:473), but is nevertheless addressed from “a specific set of practices” (Asad 1993:189) that were influenced by social and political factors. Below, I give a series of examples of this type of translation, which also resonates with the themes developed in the thesis.

For example, during years of economic collapse, particularly in 1991, Suzanna Solomonovna described buying groceries or clothing:

We couldn’t buy food or clothing. Sometimes noodles; bread less often, and milk practically wasn’t there... There was no money, and people sat without wages or pensions for months. In December, in the winter, I was in Vorkuta. A guest came from Sitkivkar, and told us of hunger there. We loaded his backpack with grains and cans. He wrote to us in the spring, telling us we saved their village from a hungry death. *This is how it was, and in reality, no one really understands it abroad.*

This narrative chronicles the harsh economic conditions during the last years of the perestroika, when there was a desperate lack of essential commodities. By affirming personal agency in the process of rescuing a village from a hungry death, the phrase can be interpreted both as an attempt to translate Soviet conditions of the time to a “Western audience”, and to acknowledge one’s own position in witnessing and participating in these events. Recall Susanna’s definition of the intelligentsia, “It’s the

*substance* [sut'] for which we are responsible. And those people who are concerned with the substance are suffering right now, especially after the lost hope of the 90s. We felt powerless after the perestroika." This type of reflection is identity affirming. While this narrative is not a direct marker of what the "moral intelligentsia" is concerned with, it connects the principles of social responsibility (*sut*—"substance"), through a discourse centered on presumed Western misunderstanding. Retelling these events, it is apparent Susanna is not disengaged; on the contrary, she is fully engaged and committed to spreading this type of information to others.

Malva Noevna described her involvement in the Moscow Helsinki Group, a dissident organization formed in 1976 to advocate for the Soviet Union to recognize and respect human rights:

As an expert on camps, I entered with a special declaration: authorities will not respect the Helsinki Group, but it is still important to document their infringements [on human rights]. The Helsinki Group wanted to collaborate with authorities to prove the Helsinki Accord effective. I wrote a lot of documents. I wrote on the codex of prisoners; what the punishments were, etc. I consider this my "diploma" work... *Read, Westerners, read!*

Again, self-identification is pitted against indignation that "Westerners" misunderstand former Soviet injustices. But there is a tension inherent in this account. In 1971, Malva Noevna Landa describes her political position and her activities surrounding her role in the dissident movement: "I wrote on the details of my first search. It was in September of 1971, and I wrote on my position. *I wanted the world to know that not everyone is pro-Soviet.* Even our dissidents were not decisive enough to say it." This narrative details Malva Noevna's transmission of information to

foreign correspondents. Her strong position in an era of political persecution of dissent could be seen as an assertion of her opposition to the Soviet regime. After all, Malva Novna contrasts her position with other dissidents who wanted to collaborate with the Soviet regime in order to enforce the Helsinki Act agreements. She critiques her friends' attempts at collaborating to reform a system she considers inhumane. Interestingly, the above quote also signals to Malva Noevna's involvement with the dissident movement in relation to Western broadcasters, on which she depended for disseminating information about human rights in the Soviet Union. In this case, Western influence gives cogency to an entire movement.

Malva Noevna's discourse, and her friends' contradictory attitudes towards the Soviet state exemplify a paradox analysed by Alexei Yurchak in the context of the youth of the last Soviet generation. The author argues that this paradox, which shaped the Soviet Union's relationship with outside influences was at the core of the Soviet system:

The state's simultaneous attempts to promote good cultural internationalism and to contain bad influences of the bourgeois culture enabled the emergence, in the 1950s and 1960s, of various imaginary worlds as part of the Soviet everyday. One of the most significant among them for the last Soviet generation was the Imaginary West (Yurchak 2006:289).

According to Yurchak, the state's discourse on the West "only contributed to normalizing the interest in Western culture among masses of 'normal' Soviet youth who were educated, hard-working, and, as good Soviet citizens, did not identify with the objects of this critique" (Ibid.). Pitted against Cold War tensions, dissident

narratives mirrored these contradictory discourses, while simultaneously allowing the dissidents to consider themselves to be, to some extent, good Soviet citizens.

Another interpretation of “Western misunderstanding” is that it was addressed directly to the researcher, as opposed to narratives that may have been habitually reproduced, or rehearsed between participants and Russian audiences. In this section, I have emphasized portions of my participants’ quotes using italicized text, to represent a noticeable change of intonation signaling a heightened awareness of my presence, or the presence of the camera. When participants spoke of “Western misunderstanding,” they usually pointed in my direction (also the direction of the camera). Consider the three examples, “*This is how it was, and in reality, no one really understands it abroad,*” “*Read, Westerners, read!*” and “*I wanted the world to know that not everyone is pro-Soviet,*” as a dialogue between the participants and the researcher. Moreover, this dialogue is spoken with awareness that I have a relative knowledge of the life trajectories of my participants, and that I am making a film that may be shown to Western audiences. The phrase is said with the hope that if the West will misunderstand, the anthropologist who has left Russia and came to live in the West, will not.

Contradictions within these present-day discourses stem from the same argument I advanced in the third chapter. Participants attempt to “personally integrate” (Myerhoff 1978:199-200) present-day understanding (“Read Westerners!”) with their past experiences (“I wanted the world to know not everyone is pro-

Soviet"). As Barbara Myerhoff reminds us, reminiscences are a way to assert such goals, to "reach for personal integration, the experience of continuity, and the recognition of personal unity beneath the flow and flux of ordinary life" (Myerhoff 1978:199-200).

The era of the perestroika provided a significant rupture and a context for many of the social categories relevant in the past to be significantly redefined. Among these categories is Yurchak's concept of the "Imaginary West," the cultural significance of which has transformed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when many formerly Soviet citizens began to travel abroad, exposing much of the cultural mystique of this "Imaginary West" upon their return to Russia.

In this section, I analysed how memories of past eras and difficult material and political conditions were pitted against an understanding of Western discourse, and yet, simultaneously were dependent on it in defining the identity of the participants of this project as members of the intelligentsia, who imagined the "West" as an antithesis to Soviet life. In the next section, I summarize all the conclusions reached during this research.

## **6.2. Final Remarks**

Some scholarly treatments argue that the historical role of the intelligentsia has been to "humanize political power, without being in power themselves" (Nakhushchev 2007:36). Others recognized the close relationship of the intelligentsia



to various regimes over time. For example, under Joseph Stalin's dictatorship, members of some of the professional intelligentsia received influential positions in the nascent Soviet state. Discourses surrounding the role of the intelligentsia often highlight the social position of the intelligentsia as conformist, or dissident to various regimes over time (Gooding 2002). These debates were fundamentally reformulated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some have theorized that because of changing social values in the post-socialist era, the role of the intelligentsia has become irrelevant; or that the intelligentsia as a social stratum had completely disappeared because it was not needed to provide moral leadership, and because its support for reforms was misleading (Ryvkina 2006:9). Once again, attempting to answer the question on the intelligentsia's relevance, I was challenged to balance competing narratives of all the participants of this research. In a project that sought to understand the social position of several members of the intelligentsia, was it not problematic to impose a didactic discourse that separates relevance from irrelevance through arbitrary markers such as political power, social milieu, or cultural impact?

I argued that using binary categories exclusively to describe the relevance or role of the intelligentsia, compartmentalizes quite diverse experiences of members belonging to this social group. The definition of the intelligentsia remains porous, politically charged, and often used in the negotiation of belonging. We are reminded of this in Alexei Yurchak's analysis on binary categories,

What tends to get lost in the binary accounts is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the

fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state (Yurchak 2006:8).

Members of the intelligentsia participating in this project, routinely transgressed these categories. Elena Vasilievna makes this explicit, "I don't know which category I belong to; the intelligentsia, or a simple, former, Soviet person." These shifting categories remind us of what Michael Herzfeld calls, "cultural intimacy," where aspects of a cultural identity, "provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation" (Herzfeld 2005:3). In this way, I interpret the definitions of the intelligentsia as shifting between degrees of belonging.

I was interested in interviewing women of the intelligentsia precisely because women during socialism were perceived as serving a dual and sometimes contradictory position between that of mothers and workers. On the one hand, the Soviet state had guaranteed women an equal right to work, and on the other, women's cultural identity was predominantly based on ideals of femininity in a largely patriarchal society (Buckley 1989). I was similarly interested in the way the perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union transformed the social position of women in post-Soviet society.

Feminist scholars of post-socialism discuss the heterogeneous discourses of women's roles in contemporary Russia. Kathleen Kuehnast suggests that the "image

of mother-workers” has been replaced by a multitude of ideas, ranging from circumscribed women’s roles linked to their relationship to male partners and children, to feminist ideals of women’s participation in all aspects of life of their countries (Kuehnast 2004:18). Lissyutkina suggests that “Russian women have not the slightest wish to acknowledge to themselves, still less to outsiders, the discrimination against them. But they are perfectly conscious of it, and clearly formulate it” (Ibid.: 185). Perhaps this formulation is best exemplified by a quote from Susanna Solomonovna,

I am an ordinary Moscow woman [*baba*]. And maybe that is why it makes sense to talk about how I feel, because other ordinary Moscow women feel the same way. Women, who worked their entire lives, god-knows what for, and who barely managed to feed their children; who were tired out, and infinitely worn-out by all of this life here. And who tried to break out, not for self-benefit, but so that life, in principle would seem more humane.

This narrative suggests that in this project focused on memory, Susanna attempts to redress past injustices by speaking on behalf of, or in concert, with other Moscow women. At the same time, Susanna shifts her own position, based on a quite extraordinary biography, to encompass other “ordinary” women. Yet, when asked what instances of discrimination participants have witnessed themselves, they adamantly refute that it ever happened. Once again, participants’ self-definition shifts depending on the way they articulate their identity.

During the course of research and further analysis, I became aware that scholarly discourses on “relevance” or “irrelevance” of the intelligentsia necessarily place these social actors in a position of needing to justify themselves—why is it that

they have to defend their pertinence in present-day post-socialist society? Analysis geared to answering questions about these members' perceived importance only repeats previous binary models. Instead, I propose to reformulate the question in order to encompass their present-day relationship with the political process, by asking, "what does the intelligentsia's present, at times disenchantment, and at other times, engagement, with the political and cultural processes signify about the wider social and political conditions in present-day Russia"?

Using life history methods, I traced my informants' memories of social and political participation in the Soviet Union. I correlated certain historical events, such as the Great Patriotic War, Joseph Stalin's dictatorship, or Nikita Khrushchev's "Thaw," with my participants' biographies—memories of their childhood, youth and professional lives, looking at particular ruptures or continuities in their recollections of various eras. I continued with life history methods, asking participants about their participation in the political process of the perestroika, an instrumental period that highlighted many memories of rupture and continuity with previous epochs. Participants supported the reforms of the late 1980s more so than any other period in their previous Soviet history. All four women remember having felt that they were participating in the historical process of democratization and characterize this period as an era of hope. Yet, in their memories, they also critically retrospect on this period as a continuation of the state abuse of power similar to previous Soviet eras. Once again, previous categories of conformity and resistance are insufficient in describing

the shifting positions of participation or disenchantment with the political reforms of the perestroika. Many of the intelligentsia actively supported many reforms, such as *glasnost*, and yet were critical that these reforms were still insufficient in totally undermining Soviet authority.

The tumultuous events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s are now epitomized in history textbooks. But what is often neglected is the way various processes—such as Boris Yeltsin's ascendancy to power, a transformation of Russian economy and violent clashes with separatist republics, such as Chechnya—were experienced by various social actors living in Russia at the time. These events signaled a growing sense of marginalization and disengagement with the political process after participants had placed many hopes in the social transformations that were geared toward the emergence of a seemingly more liberal and democratic society they helped to support. Because of this, some participants have mostly shifted their interests or priorities away from Russia's formal politics toward other forms of social engagement, whereas others remain committed to political activism.

Life history methods allow me to ask the question: how do the memories of political participation, social position and political beliefs in former periods of the four informants who participated in this research relate to their present outlook of life in contemporary Russia? Using Barbara Myerhoff's (1978) method of analyzing continuities and ruptures with the past, I have argued that participants are searching

for personal integration. In a project of memory such as this one, persistence of memory is an important marker of cultural identity. This persistence is evident amongst participants throughout various stages of their lives. Consider Susanna's recollections of the prison camps,

As I always say, I do not regret anything. I have learned to try to understand each person, irrelevant of the social rung they stand on, be they homeless, or whatever. It doesn't matter – they're human... The [prison] camp gave me this. Like the saying of convicts goes—"do not ask, do not tell, do not be afraid"—this is a motto.

This narrative shows tremendous continuity with past beliefs and experiences. However, this narrative is not consistent with the experiences of all of the participants. Consider, for example Anna Mihaylovna's present account of her sentiments of participation in the social and cultural life in Russia, "I cannot say one has to conform to this environment. No, I cannot do that. But I just keep like this [waves hand pushing something aside]... to the side." This comment is similar to several participants' expressions of their present disenchantment in life in Russia, and their hopelessness in the political situation that has retrenched in many ways to a former, autocratic and totalitarian model of government.

If I was to summarize participants' present position in Russian society, it can be seen from previous analysis that participants feel disenchanting in contemporary Russian society in comparison to the hopes placed on the political system during the period of the perestroika. Undoubtedly, they are marginalized as participants in the current political climate in Russia. However, they are not disengaged, as they express

their social and political interests through strategically negotiating their wider position as women of the intelligentsia; and critique the current state of affairs through various actions, a small example of which can be the phrase, "Western audiences just wouldn't understand." In light of these accounts, how can we answer the question, "what does the present disenchantment in politics and engagement in other ways of social life of the four women of intelligentsia (participating in the written thesis project) with the political and cultural processes, suggest about the wider social and political state of affairs in contemporary Russia?" The implied answer to this rhetorical question is that this is a state-of-affairs that does not include the women participating in this project as dignified citizens. Some participants' at times political disenchantment is symptomatic of an undemocratic and authoritarian political process.

In light of their marginalized position in present-day Russia, I argue that projects of memory such as this one attempt to reconnect participants with wider Russian and Western audiences. An appendix to this thesis is a feature-length ethnographic film titled *Turning Back the Waves*, which chronicles the life histories of seven women of the intelligentsia. The film is a collaborative project focused on participation, feedback and attention to representation, the intention of which is to appeal to an audience engaged in studies of the post-Socialist transition, gender, Central European and Russian studies and history, and those interested in the documentary and ethnographic genres focusing on memory, narrative, and filmic

discourse.

What final conclusions can be drawn from this research? It is evident that we are misled in asking the question "Does the intelligentsia remain relevant (alive) or irrelevant (dead) in contemporary Russia?" It appears to be inappropriate and condescending to suggest that the intelligentsia is more, or less, relevant than any other social group—the intelligentsia remains as "relevant" in the contemporary social and cultural processes as scholarly discourses and the social and political climate allow it to be. Simultaneously, it is important to acknowledge that members of the intelligentsia are marginalized from many social and cultural processes in Russia. By taking heed of their present concerns, I have collaborated with individuals in writing a thesis based on their accounts and in making an ethnographic film, in order to translate their involvement in the social and political life of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia to domestic and foreign audiences as a tool of advocacy and empowerment. It is my hope that this work will engage readers and viewers in the social and political conditions of this remarkable group of women of the Russian intelligentsia.



Appendix A (film): *Turning Back the Waves*



## Appendix B. Glossary of Russian Terms and Abbreviations.

**Akmeists** - A group of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian poets who rejected symbolism of the turn of the century "Silver Age" poets, and embraced formalism and clarity.

**Beloemigranti** – (also known as "First Wave Emigrants," or "White Emigrants") those who emigrated from Russia fearing political persecution in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917. They are nicknamed "White Emigrants," since many were representatives of the White Movement, or Mensheviks, who were actively persecuted during the Red Terror.

**Bit/Bitye** - [Rus.: "social conditions"] The physical and material conditions of everyday life.

**Bolshevik** - [Rus.: *bolshe* - "more"] A section of the Russian Social Democrat Party representing the majority, which took power after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

**Collectivizatsiya** - [Rus.: Collectivization] A policy set in place in 1927, and achieving full effect by 1929, whereby peasants were forced to work on state-owned collective farms. It was introduced in concert with the first Five-Year Plan of industrial and economic development.

**ComIntern** – the Communist International, a pan-Communist international organization founded after the Russian Revolution. Founded in 1919 and aimed at creating an international Soviet republic. Comintern's founders included Leon Trotsky, and V.I. Lenin.

**Dacha** – [Rus. Cottage] A seasonal second home occupied during part of a year. Many relied on small vegetable gardens to subsist during various periods of Soviet rule.

**Deti 20go Siezda** – [Rus. "Children of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress] Refers to children who were born surrounding the period of the Second World War, and came to maturity around the time of Khrushchev's speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, in which he denounced Stalin's Cult of Personality.

**Dom Pionerov** – [Rus.: "House of Pioneers, also referred to as *Dvoretz Unih Pionerov* - "The Palace of Young Pioneers"]. The *Pioneri* (Pioneri) was a youth organization meant to espouse communist ideals to children and teens from 8-16 years old. The *Dom/Dvoretz* of Pioneers, were the organization's Moscow headquarters.

**De-kulakizatsiya** - [Rus.: De-kulakization] A forced seizure of property and lands from property-owning peasantry, and forced exile of *kulaks* (see below).

**Duma** - [Rus. *Dumat'* – “to think”] A Soviet legislative body set up after the Revolution of 1905. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new Duma was set up as branch of Parliament.

**Eho Moskvi** – [Rus.: “Echo Moscow”] A Moscow Radio station that started broadcasting in 1990, and was one of the few sources of information during the August putsch in 1991. It continues broadcasting political, democratically-oriented talk shows.

**ESER, SR** - [Rus. abbr.: *S.R.*–“Social Revolutionary”] - A member of the Russian Social Democrat Party that represented the minority of the Party after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and were severely repressed by the Bolsheviks during the Red Terror between 1917 and 1922.

**GKChP** – [Rus. abbr.: *Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Chrezvichaynomu Polozheniu* – “State Emergency Committee”] A committee organized by high-ranking state functionaries appointed by Mikhail Gorbachev, who organized a political coup decrying his liberal reforms while he was on vacation. They attempted to seize major Soviet institutions such as the Moscow White House, but were met with massive public protests led by Boris Yeltsin.

**Glasnost'** - [Rus.: “Voicing”] - a policy instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, which discontinued most forms of censorship from the state, and led to a mass of previously forbidden or unauthorized literature to be officially published.

**GULag** – [Rus. abbr.: *Glavnoe Upravlenie ispravitel'no-trudovih LAGerei*, Chief Administration for Corrective Labour Camps] Forced labour camps with a large percentage of political prisoners, instituted after the decree by the NKVD in 1934 and in effect until 1953.

**Holodomor** – [Ukr.: Murder by hunger] Refers to a period during active Stalinist collectivization attempts when Stalin cut off food distribution to the Ukraine. A famine swept the Ukrainian Republic, killing millions of people.

**HTS** - [Rus. abbr.: *Hronika Tekushih Sobitiiy* Chronicle of Current Times] A political, underground journal organized in 1968 following prominent Brezhnev-era show trials. It was individually typewritten and distributed through *samizdat* channels, and lasted until 1983.

**KGB** - [Rus. abbr.: *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, Committee for National Defence] The Soviet state intelligence organization between 1954 and 1991, responsible for internal and international espionage activities.

**Kolhoz** - [Rus. abbr.: *Kollektivnoe hoziyaystvo* - “collective holdings”] A collective farm emerging on a seemingly voluntary basis after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and through forceful and repressive campaigns after 1928, the *kolhoz* functioned as a

pseudo-cooperative, whereby those working on the farm did not benefit financially from supposed joint ownership of the lands.

**KPSS** [Rus. abbr.: *Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuz* – CPSU, “Communist Party of the Soviet Union”]. The KPSS/CPSU was founded by V.I. Lenin as the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which led the October Revolution of 1917 under the title “All Soviet Communist Party (of Bolsheviks).

**Krasny Terror** – [Rus. “Red Terror”] A period of several years after the Russian Revolution of 1917, characterized by massive purges, extrajudicial executions and arrests of any political opposition to the Bolsheviks.

**Kulak** - [Rus.: “fist”] - a peasant emerging from the emancipation of serfdom in 1861, that could afford to hire labour, or had some form of private property.

**Lishenetz** – [Rus.: *Lishen* – “deprived”] *Lishentzi* were *Mensheviks*, politicians, other political activists who protested the Revolution of 1917, or small time merchants and property owners. After 1917, all these groups were deprived of voting rights and forbidden to enter the Bolshevik Party.

**Memoriál** – Originally intended to fundraise to build a monument for Stalin-era repressions, *Memoriál* was formed as a Human Rights and Dissident society focused on advocacy and archival work in 1989. The organization was active in supporting the democratic movement surrounding the perestroika era, and continue working presently.

**Menshevik** – [Rus.: *menshe* - “less”] A member of the Russian Social Democrat Party that represented the minority of the Party after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and were severely repressed by the Bolsheviks during the Red Terror between 1917 and 1922.

**MHG** – [Rus. abbr.: *Moskovskaya Helsinskaya Gruppy* - Moscow Helsinki Group] - An underground organization founded in 1976 by Yuri Orlov, following the publication of the Helsinki Act in state newspapers. The organization monitored human rights abuses in the Soviet Union.

**MVD** – [Rus.: *Ministerstvo Vnutrennih Del* – “Ministry of Internal Affairs”], was a USSR secret service between 1946 and 1953, preceding the formation of the infamous KGB - Committee for State Security (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*).

**Narodnik** - [Rus.: *Narod* - “The People”] Members of the middle class active in the middle of the 19th century, who saw it as their duty to enlighten “the People” or “the masses” in the villages.

**Natzmen** – [Rus.: *Natsionalnoe Menshinstvo* – “National Minorities”] A slang term to describe members of non-Russian ethnic groups, characterized mostly as visual minorities from various Soviet Republics.

**NEP** - [Rus. abbr.: *Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Programma*, “New Economic Policy”] Following massive famines that swept the Soviet Union, the “New Economic Policy” was instituted by Lenin in 1922, allowing some artisanal-based private businesses.

**NKVD** - [Rus. abbr.: *Narodniy Komissariat Vnuternnih Del*, National Commissariat of Internal Affairs] Serving as the successor of the *OGPU* (State Political Directorate) and the predecessor to the KGB, the *NKVD* was both the public and the secret police between 1934 and 1946, largely known for massive repressions and the function and control of the *GULag*.

**Odinochka** – A single-occupant prison cell usually without light, and with reduced rations, which was used as punishment for any deviant behaviour in Russian prisons.

**Ogonek** – An old Soviet periodical that existed since 1899 and revived in 1923. It was a state-of-affairs publication until the *perestroika* era, when progressive writers headed by Vitaliy Korotich were appointed as the “voice of the *perestroika*.” Korotich emigrated in 1991, and the popularity of the periodical waned. It exists presently.

**Ottepel’** - [Rus.: “Thaw”] A period lasting between Stalin’s death in 1953, and Brezhnev’s ascendancy in 1964, when Nikita Khrushchev allowed for more social and political liberties, and which was characterized by a blossoming of poetic, artistic and literary production.

**Perestroika** - [Rus.: “Rebuilding”] A policy instituted in 1987 initially meant as the economic branch of Mikhail Gorbachev’s reform program, allowing some private enterprises and meant to combat Brezhnev-era stagnation. In present use, the *perestroika* refers to Gorbachev’s period of reform lasting until the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1985 and 1991.

**Piatiletka** - [Rus. abbr.: “Five-Year Plan”] A series of initiatives, the first of which came into effect in 1928 meant to develop heavy industry and spur rapid economic growth.

**Pravda** - [Rus. “Truth”] The state newspaper of the Communist Party between 1918 and 1991. It was founded in 1912 and exists into the present day.

**Prazhskaya Vesna** - [“Prague Spring”] A liberalization campaign in Czechoslovakia began in early 1968, and led by Alexander Dubček with the aim of “building socialism with a human face.”

**Putsch** - [Swiss German: “Thrust; blow”] A sudden, unconstitutional attempt to overthrow the government and the present name for the coup initiated by Gorbachev-appointed party members who began a three-day coup on August 19, 1991.

**Radio Svoboda** - [Rus. "Radio Liberty"] Formed in 1953, and broadcasting out of Czechoslovakia, Radio Liberty was funded by the American Congress. In the 1970s and into the 1990s, it was an important voice box for the Soviet dissident movement.

**Samizdat** [Rus. abbr.: "sam" - self; "izdat(el)" (abbr.)- publisher] - Self-published, usually underground literature existing throughout various Soviet epochs, but particularly popular in the Brezhnev era. The types of publications included banned literature, censored poetry or political pamphlets. It was usually printed on home-made printing presses, or circulated as typewritten copies.

**Sem' sester** (known to Muscovites as **Visotki**) - A Stalinist architectural project initiated in 1943, the "Seven Sisters" were skyscrapers built as architectural landmarks in various locations in Moscow.

**Sotsrealism** - [Rus. abbr.: *Sotsialistichesky Realism* - Socialist Realism] An aesthetic code instituted by Joseph Stalin, to which artists had to adhere if they were to make art in the Soviet Union. The style was characterized by realist depictions meant to glorify the working classes.

**Verhovniy Soviet** - [Rus. Supreme Soviet] The legislative body of the Soviet Union (there were also Supreme Soviets of each of the Soviet Republics), that served the role of a pseudo-parliament and a subsidiary of the Communist Party.

**VKP(b)** - [Rus.: *Vsesouznaya Kommunisticheskaya Partiya (bolshevikov)* - "All-Soviet Communist Party (of bolsheviks)"]. The name of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union between 1925 and 1952, and subsequently renamed the *KPSS*. This is not to be confused with a Marxist-Leninist political party that appeared in November 1991 with the same acronym (VKPB), and a Marxist-Leninist political party operating presently, which split up from the VKPB to form the VKP(b) in 1995.

**VOA** - [Abbr.: Voice of America] An American radio station that began to counter Soviet propaganda by broadcasting in Russian after the Second World War. Its signal was frequently jammed in the Soviet Union, although these broadcasts were ideologically important for the dissident movement.

**VOV** - [Rus. abbr.: *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna* - "Great Patriotic War"] - the Soviet Union's involvement in the Second World War between July 1941 and May 1945.

**Yezhovshina** - A period between 1937-38, also known as the Great Purges, nicknamed in Russia after Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the secret police or the NKVD. The period is characterized by extrajudicial executions, mass purges of perceived "enemy" or Trotskyite elements, who were considered ideological enemies at the time.

*Zastoi* - [Rus. "stagnation"] A period of Soviet history beginning in the late 1960s, characterized by a reduction of economic growth and mass deficits of consumer goods, during Leonid Brezhnev's terms in office between 1964 and 1982 (and sometimes, encompassing Chernenko's and Andropov's leaderships until 1985).

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