Foreword

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FOREWORD

A decade ago, it was still possible to be surprised by historians' lack of interest in late Socialism.¹ Since then, the world of historiography has greatly changed. That period is the object of a frenzy of research, with frequent seminars and edited volumes.² As happened with the Khrushchev Thaw in the early 2000s, the Brezhnev years have become a happy hunting ground for researchers. The twenty years (1964-1985) between the Thaw and *perestroika* were a formative period for the "last Soviet generation," which is still a sizeable proportion of the current population of the former republics of the USSR.³ The predominantly positive image of the Soviet past as a whole is largely based on people's memories of their youth.⁴ A golden age for many citizens in the ex-Soviet republics, the period is less well known among historians: they find it hard to find a name for it, because its image is only revealed in contrast to the two periods of radical political change that came before and after it. "Stagnation," Gorbachev's term, has long been rejected; "developed" or "real socialism," the regime's own favoured label, can only now be used with scare quotes. The idea of applying the period names and concepts used in Western Europe and North America — the Sixties and Seventies — not only fails to reflect the wholeness of the Brezhnev period, but, not least, for all their

1. Edwin Bacon, Mark Sandle, "Brezhnev Reconsidered," in Edwin Bacon, Mark Sandle, eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave [Studies in Russian and East European History and Society], 2002), 1-21.

2. Boris Belge, Martin Deuerlein, eds., *Goldenes Zeitalter Der Stagnation? Perspektiven Auf Die Sowjetische Ordnung Der Breznev-Ära* (Tübingen, 2014); Marie-Janine Calic, Dietmar Neutatz, and Julia Obertreis, eds., *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity: The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1970s* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Northwestern University Press, 2010); Neringa Klumbyte, Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, eds., *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985* (Lanham: Lexington Boks, 2013); *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

3. Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*, (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press [Oxford Oral History Series], 2012); Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More : The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

4. According to opinion polls, Russians consider Brezhnev to have been the best leader in the country's history, ahead of Stalin; and his term of office to have been an excellent time. Survey respondents in Russia tend to project the relative prosperity and stability of the Brezhnev years onto the earlier periods. "Epokhi v zhizni strany: El'tsyn, Gorbachev, Brezhnev," accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2011012601.html>.

practical use, these terms rapidly come up against limitations: Brezhnev's Sixties were a continuation of the reforming optimism of the Soviet Fifties, rather than belonging to the triumph of consumer society as paraded by the market-economy countries.⁵ The reason the 1970s are seen as the beginning of a new era in the capitalist countries is that the oil crisis and the labour and ecological movements forced the economic model to adapt, while in the USSR, the Fordist production model was not changed until after 1986.⁶ In other words, the divisions of time habitually used for the history of the United States and Western Europe do not really fit the history of late Socialism. This issue of *Cahiers* joins the recent boom in studies of the Brezhnev years with a series of 22 articles in two volumes debating trends in current historiography.⁷

The studies that have given new life to the historiographical approach to the society, culture and consumption of the Brezhnev years⁸ share the characteristic of examining the growing mismatch between an authoritarian, conservative gerontocracy and a society undergoing change and emancipation. Earlier historiography interpreted the contrast between ossified state structures and social dynamics at the individual level with the image of a *homo sovieticus* torn between lip-service to the official ideology, ritually repeated, and escape into the private world of family, friends and hobbies.

To belie this supposed cynicism and pretence attributed to Soviet citizens under late socialism, Alexei Yurchak and Sergei Zhuk have sought to escape the binary contrast between external appearance and private convictions, simulated agreement in public rituals and dissimulated opinions in private.⁹ This dichotomy can be found everywhere: authors contrast the dynamism of informal trade with the sclerosis of the planned economy, dissident art with official commissions, and nationalities that were Socialist in form and nationalist in substance (rather than the reverse). Yurchak shows that the repetition of self-referential rituals and the circularity of the authorities' discourse did not exclude sincere belief in the ideals of Socialism, thereby refuting the reproach of hypocrisy. Similarly, participation in the activities

5. Contra Anne E. Gorsuch, Diane Koenker, "Introduction: The Socialist Sixties in Global Perspective," in Anne E. Gorsuch, Diane Koenker, eds. *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1-21.

6. On the 1970s: Niall Ferguson, et al., eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard university press, 2010); Calic, Neutatz, Ober-treis, eds., « Introduction », in *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity*, 7-27.

7. *Cahiers du Monde russe*, CFP "Beyond Brezhnevism" available at <http://monderusse.revues.org/7499>

8. Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, (New York: Routledge [BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 90], 2013); Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*; Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*; Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C. – Baltimore, MD: Woodrow Wilson Center Press Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

9. Generalised to Soviet history as a whole: Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, 1 (2000): 119-146.

of the official social structures (komsomol) did not prevent the pursuit of personal desires and ambitions whose meaning apparently contradicted the doctrine; on the contrary, it made it licit to set up new activities, such as pop and rock groups within the *komsomol*. Zhuk joins in the major points of this criticism of the duplicity of *homo sovieticus*, but with one considerable reservation: the displacements of meaning made possible by semantic withdrawal from the official discourse could not occur without causing considerable alarm among ideological and police functionaries. The guardians of ideology in the closed city of Dnepropetrovsk had no intention of allowing their flock the freedom to gambol in unapproved ways, and used a graduated armoury of effective punitive measures to deal with the recalcitrant (including the Gulag), even though by the end of the decade they had to admit that they had lost the battle against the influence of Western popular culture. Similarly, *Sonja Luchermann* shows that the official ideology's promotion of "spiritual values" and "personal development" was taken seriously by people working within the ideological apparatus as mere agitators. This encouragement of spirituality, far from involving a "revival of religious feelings," which Luchermann disputes, was seen as an "antidote to religion." However, those who believed in these ideas developed aspirations that they now connect to their religious commitment following the collapse of the Soviet system.

The golden age of the Soviet century

The decades of Brezhnev's rule correspond to the peak of the Soviet period: the USSR, at last an uncontested super-power thanks to a Soviet nuclear arsenal the equal of the United States', fulfilled its promises of public order, secure social mobility and a degree of material well-being. In the belief that this would guarantee stability, the regime carried out a cruel repression of members of the marginal classes and malcontents.

It is usual to split this period into two phases, with positive developments while Brezhnev still enjoyed good health and could envisage energetic reform; and "stagnation" during which Brezhnev, physically and mentally diminished after his 1974 stroke, was kept at his post as a symbolic figure by the gerontocracy.¹⁰ The exact chronology depends on the sector: in economics, the divide is between the high growth rates of Brezhnev's first decade, in line with a certain reforming spirit, and, from 1973, a decade of slower growth coinciding with the refusal of any extensive reform.¹¹ In the arts, the opening up that extended the Thaw was ended by the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968: de-Stalinisation stopped and the liberal dissident

10. Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48-49.

11. Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945*, Postwar World (London – New York: Longman, 2003), 98-99; Nicolas Werth, *Histoire de l'Union Soviétique de Khrouchtchev À Gorbatchev (1953-1991)*, 3rd ed. (PUF, 2007), 463-464.

movement was muzzled.¹² In foreign policy, the division is between détente culminating in the 1975 Helsinki Accords and a new “tepid” war following the invasion of Afghanistan.¹³

And yet, the eighteen years of Brezhnev’s rule do have a unity that makes them stand out in the century: Soviet citizens at last achieved some modest material prosperity and predictable upward socio-occupational mobility. Although it had begun under Khrushchev, the policy of stabilising the careers of junior and senior officials was enshrined in Brezhnev’s “trust in cadres” slogan.¹⁴ In contrast with the rest of Russia’s 20th century, the 1960s to 1980s stand out for their moderation and serenity: no major domestic upheavals, no armed confrontations on the borders of the USSR,¹⁵ no “top-down revolution”, no state terror against the general population. After a tumultuous Khrushchev decade ending with the massacre of demonstrating workers in Novocherkassk in 1962, the barometer of popular anger was set fair under Brezhnev.¹⁶ The series of “mass disturbances” (*massovye besporiadki*) against the political and police authorities came to a temporary end, and only resumed in the mid-1980s.¹⁷ Further evidence of this pacification is that the prison camps held a historically low number of political prisoners: offenders sentenced per year fell from a thousand in the latter half of the 1950s to a few hundred in 1961-1985.¹⁸ Society appeared therefore to be generally peaceful compared with the upheavals of the Thaw and *perestroika* that occurred before and after the Brezhnev years. And even more so when compared with the dissident movements occurring in the capitalist countries at that time: violent clashes between students and police in 1968, protests against the Vietnam War, extreme right- and left-wing terrorism in Germany and Italy. Admittedly, the USSR suffered more from terrorism than is generally thought, but it did not

12. Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70*, Eurasia Past and Present (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 212-257; Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 429-432.

13. Andreï Kozovoï, *Par-Delà Le Mur: La Culture de Guerre Froide Soviétique Entre Deux Détentes* (P.: Complexe, 2009); Ragna Boden, “Soviet World Policy in the 1970s: A Three-Level Game,” in *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity: The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1970s*, in Calic, Neutatz, and Obertreis, eds., 184-203.

14. Yoram Gorlizki, “Too Much Trust: Regional Party Leaders and Local Political Networks under Brezhnev,” *Slavic Review* 69, 3 (October 1, 2010): 676-700.

15. With the exception of the violent Sino-Soviet clashes on the River Ussuri in 1969, Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton university press, 2008), 340-342.

16. Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

17. Vladimir Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Hrushcheve. 1953- nachalo 1980-kh gg* [Mass disturbances in the USSR under Khrushchev. From 1953 to the beginning of the 1980’s], 3rd ed. (M.: ROSSPEN, 2010), 421.

18. V. Kozlov, « Kramola : Inokamyslie v SSSR vo vremena N. Hrushcheva, I.L. Brezhneva (Po materialam Verkhovnova Suda i Prokuratury SSSR);” *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremen-nosti*, no. 3 (2002): 84.

see the political agitation typical of capitalist societies as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s.¹⁹

This was largely the tranquillity of dungeons, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau would have put it. The “preventive conversations” held on KGB premises and the “treatment” of the recalcitrant in punitive psychiatric establishments showed that by the latter half of the 1960s the new political leadership had overhauled its arsenal of legal and illegal measures for silencing dissident voices. The papers by *Sergei Zhuk*, *Susanne Schattenberg* and *Amanda Swain* demonstrate the considerable clout of the political police in social life: it was the KGB that allowed or prevented scientists’ travel abroad, at a time when such exchanges were increasingly important for their careers. The KGB arranged the surveillance of personalities suspected of diverging from the official line and initiated the prosecution of teenagers who had taken part in unauthorised assemblies. The official ideological discourse remained inflexible. *Nikolai Mitrokhin* examines the fountainhead of content for official propaganda, the ideology department of the Central Committee. Basically conservative in their convictions, the guardians of ideology acted as intermediaries between the KGB and the media (publishers, writers, journalists, etc.). *Schattenberg* describes how Andrei Sakharov, the famous physicist and loyal Soviet citizen, attempted to push the limits of free speech via dialogue with the authorities. On the other side, some Politburo members, such as the head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, sought this dialogue with Sakharov in order to point out that he had gone too far and to get him to backtrack. However, these attempts foundered on the Politburo’s refusal to pursue the policy of opening up to expertise that had been promoted under Khrushchev. In her study of the coverage of the 18 May 1972 demonstration in Kaunas, Lithuania, Swain shows how those involved sought to define these embarrassing events in such a way as to escape being described as “nationalist,” which would have had disastrous consequences for both the young demonstrators and the police and local politicians. They all stood behind a damage-limitation version whereby the fault belonged to the gregarious instincts of “politically unaware” youths led astray by mysterious “hippies” influenced by Western culture.

Despite the repression, acceptance of the regime does seem to have had its heyday under Brezhnev.²⁰ Much of this was due to a wide conservative consensus: the law and order regime imposed by the new leaders was directed mainly at marginal groups, with drastic measures taken against “hooligans”, in order to reassure a population unsettled by the insecurity of the 1940s and 1950s.²¹ *Larissa Zakharova* gives the poignant example of a social trajectory of exclusion in the

19. Three Moscow bombings in 1977 attributed to Armenian nationalists (Kozlov, 435), frequent aircraft hijack attempts from 1970, often intended for escapes abroad.

20. Kotkin, *Armageddon*, 44, speaks of a brief symbiosis between the population and the authorities.

21. Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

Gulag. Although there were fewer political prisoners, the Gulag population eventually peaked at over a million in 1979, one of the highest incarceration rates in the world at that time: 420 prisoners per 100,000 population.²²

“Bearable” Socialism

However, the main reason the Brezhnev years were a unique period of “bearable” Socialism, as Vladimir Kusin puts it,²³ was that most Soviet citizens were now enjoying a historically high standard of living. Starting in the 1950s, consumption made it easier to support the regime and its values, or at least come to a tacit “little deal.”²⁴ The economic slowdown in the 1970s did not involve an equivalent slowdown in consumption, which continued to grow at an annual rate of 1.9% while GDP growth stagnated at 0.9% during the 1973-1982 period.²⁵ This was only possible because of the flow of petrodollars the USSR earned after the sharp rise in the oil price in 1973: even as the country was bogged down in its structural difficulties, high-cost gas and oil exports enabled it for twelve or so years to sustain consumption, invest in agriculture, continue the arms race and fund costly military incursions (Afghanistan, Angola, Eritrea).

When the OPEC countries decided to sharply raise the cost of gas and oil, the deposits in Western Siberia, discovered in the 1950s, were pumping at full capacity. Pipelines now brought Orenburg gas directly to Western Europe for hard cash. Economic crisis, détente and the West German Social Democrats’ Ostpolitik led to profitable contracts: Germans, Czechoslovaks and Soviets worked together to build the Soiuz, Bratstvo, Druzhba and Transgas pipelines. From being a net gas and oil importer, the USSR had in two decades become one of the world’s largest producers and exporters. This high price regime until 1986 made it possible not only to mask the structural weaknesses of the Soviet industrial apparatus but also to shelve the economic reforms that had been designed in the 1960s. The rude awakening only occurred on Gorbachev’s watch.²⁶ Consequently, the term “crisis,” even within the phrase “economic crisis” also appears to us to be inappropriate to describe the Brezhnev period.²⁷ It may well be that this reflects a fairly clear difference within the Communist bloc between the USSR and the Socialist countries of

22. Compared with fewer than 200 in the United States, before the “successes” of the “war against drugs” shot that country in a few short years to the rank of uncontested leader of the penitentiary utopia, with imprisonment rates comparable to those of Stalin’s Gulag.

23. Quoted by Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, 99.

24. James R. Millar, “The Little Deal: Brezhnev’s Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism,” *Slavic Review* 44, 4 (1985): 694-706.

25. Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, 99.

26. Kotkin, *Armageddon*, 15-16; Frank Bösch, “1973: Energiewende Nach Osten,” *Die Zeit*, October 18, 2013, sec. Geschichte, <http://www.zeit.de/2013/42/1973-gas-pipeline-sowjetunion-gazprom..>

27. Contra Calic, Neutatz, and Obertreis, “Introduction.”

Central and Eastern Europe: the latter were indeed caught up in a serious financial crisis that forced them into debt and increasing dependence on Western finance.²⁸ The 1973 oil shock hit them via their economic links with Western Europe, whereas the USSR, providing them with gas and oil, prospered from the high prices. The satellites' greater exposure to the Sixties' youth culture undermined the alternative model of Soviet development, which was anyway more recent for them and less ingrained. Ultimately, the striking characteristic of the development of the Communist bloc was its centrifugal forces: not only the political split with China, Albania, and, to a lesser extent, Romania and Yugoslavia, but not least the gradual economic drift of the "popular democracies" away from the USSR, whose integration model had lost its authority when compared with an EEC now able to include the former dictatorships of Southern Europe.²⁹

Leisure and consumption increased in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and really took off in the Brezhnev years.³⁰ The introduction of the five-day week, longer holidays, more private cars and rising wages all helped develop a private sphere; in urban areas, family flats and individual dachas in the nearby countryside were being fitted out with domestic appliances. Rising consumption and easier travel even affected villages: *kolkhoz* workers now received pensions and salaries (instead of *trudodni*), and with their new internal passports could travel freely. Leisure time was increasingly filled with activities often officially encouraged, whether or not they were run by the "social organisations": gardening, do-it-yourself, hill-walking and travel, physical exercise, personal well-being, etc.³¹ *Olga Smolyak* and *Aleksey Golubev* give the striking example of the development of do-it-yourself and manual skills, which both made up for the scarcity of certain goods and carved out areas for personal satisfaction. Illustrated magazines set the tone for the new standards of the modern Soviet citizen and reinforced the gendered division of daily life — women involved in interior decorating, gardening and fashion; men devoted to their hobbies of building models, amateur radios, etc. This development of the personal sphere was clearly reflected in the popular press and more generally in the representations shown in the arts and media.

The world of consumption was particularly open to goods and cultural products from abroad, whether Socialist or capitalist countries, whose standards helped form Soviet taste: Western Europe and the United States were still seen as a benchmark in the USSR, which was going to demonstrate the superiority of

28. Stephen Kotkin, "The Kiss of Debt. The East Bloc Goes Borrowing," in Ferguson et al., eds., *The Shock of the Global*, 80-93.

29. Poul Villaume, Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965-1985* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2010).

30. Nadège Ragaru, Antonela Capelle-Pogacean, eds., *Vie Quotidienne et Pouvoirs Sous Le Communisme: La Consommation Revisitée*, (Paris: Karthala [Recherches Internationales], 2010); Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*.

31. Christian Noack, "Songs from the Wood, Love from the Fields: The Soviet Tourist Song Movement," in Gorsuch, Koenker, eds., *The Socialist Sixties*, 167-192.

the Socialist consumer model by meeting material desires without the excesses of consumerism.³² Consumer and cultural goods from capitalist countries occupied an increasingly large place, because the Soviet state used its petrodollars to stimulate consumption, and also because clothes, books and records were smuggled in from west to east.

Another aspect of opening up to foreign countries, travel — mainly to the popular democracies, but also the capitalist countries — provided intensely felt interactions not to be measured in the quantity of goods acquired. *Igor' Narskii* and Zhuk assess the impact on carefully selected Soviet citizens of travelling to the United States. Narsky shows how the dancers of an amateur troupe from Cheliabinsk were caught up in the constraints of Cold War culture. Diplomatic and ideological objectives and officious control of the dancers' behaviour and contacts during their foreign tours weighed heavily on the arrangement of the trips and even their programmes and choreography. Although the dancers had taken on board at least some of the official clichés about foreign countries, they still underwent a culture shock when they travelled to the United States in 1979. Zhuk reports that the experts on North America, the "Americanists" who were allowed to travel to the USA formed an elite among researchers. They adopted various narrative strategies in their writing to share the interpretative advances they had made during their investigations, reading and, not least, meeting American colleagues.

This exposure to foreign countries affected behaviour as much as ideas. As *Alexei Popov* shows, comparison with other Socialist or capitalist countries obliged the authorities to improve the organisation of the service sector, particularly for major international events such as the Olympics 1980: foreign guests had to be offered facilities up to the standards of the international hotel sector. The USSR lagged far behind in this area, with the result that for the first time in its history it mobilised its economy for a sector other than industry and agriculture. This opened the way for a post-industrial economy led by the tertiary sector. However, for all the resources deployed to update Soviet enterprises, the refusal to introduce private initiative or market mechanisms reduced these efforts to a virtually unrepeatable experiment.

"Bearable" Socialism was also made possible by the relaxation of some controls under Kosygin's economic reform. *Simon Huxtable* analyses how aligning print runs and distribution with demand (rather than according to fixed quotas) challenged the propaganda nature of editorial content and the vocation of educating the masses that had habitually been attributed to newspapers since the birth of the Soviet system. The new role played by popularity and readers' opinions forced the journalists on *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* to define the tastes of their assumed average reader. They emphasised the ordinary activities and preferences that underpinned the identity of a middling class. A similar trend can be noted in films: the "experimental artistic studio of the cinema" examined by *Irina*

32. Susan Reid, David Crowley, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, (Northwestern University Press, 2010), 21 et seq.

Tcherneva was allowed a certain organisational freedom in exchange for compliance with the requirement of a minimum level of profitability. Although this experiment was limited, the studio had to take account of a wide range of audiences and to some extent move away from the educational function the Soviet cinema had been given until then.

In the world of theatre, the Brezhnev period marked the emergence of an increasingly asserted creative autonomy, particularly on the fringe of the dominant locations and legitimate professional spheres. As *Susan Constanzo* demonstrates in her article on amateur theatricals in the provincial towns of the RSFSR, this freedom was achieved by negotiation and connivance with the local authorities supervising the troupes, whether houses of culture, clubs, or regional or *komsomol* cultural departments. Support for amateur groups was a way of making up for the crying lack of professional theatres in the provinces and having a cultural life on the cheap. Distance from the centre and interdependence between the troupes and local authority structures made it possible to put on controversial plays and, by creating a precedent, helped remove the plays from the banned list. The Ilkhom Theatre in Tashkent, described by *Lucille Lisack*, also demonstrates the relationship between distance from Moscow and political and artistic audacity and formal innovation. It quickly gained a wide audience by introducing a new theatrical discourse and adapting plays that were controversial or even actually banned, while attempting to mirror an age and a generation of Soviet conformity ground down by routine. The Ilkhom Theatre became in this way a central institution for the counterculture in Tashkent, and is now idealised as an exceptional moment in the city's collective memory.

Disenchantment or ideological withdrawal?

The Brezhnev years are usually described as being a time of disenchantment with the Soviet dream and of ideological crisis. At the top, the new political leadership was careful not to make any specific promises about the date of arrival of Communism, i.e., a society without classes, with no State and no currency, after the abolition of private property. Individualism, consumerism and cynicism seemed to have won out over Communist values as the Khrushchev leadership had defined them in its 1961 "Moral Code of the Builder of Communism." That the Communist society announced by Khrushchev in 1961 had not arrived by 1980, and was not even in sight, surprised no one. In addition to ideological exhaustion there was the priority the political leadership had given to enhancing well-being, placing the regime in direct competition with foreign countries. Soviet citizens could see for themselves the contrast in development during their increasingly frequent trips abroad, especially to the "popular democracies," some of which, like Hungary, had adopted forms of Socialist development that differed from the Soviet model. Legal and illegal imports of consumer goods from capitalist countries showed that the industrial and commercial gap was widening.

The command economy that the government refused to reform was losing all credit in the eyes of Soviet citizens. After all, what was the point of Socialism if it wasn't better than capitalism?³³

However, the disappearance of the ideal of a Communist society and the expansion of consumerist and individualist behaviour did not result in undermining the legitimacy of the Soviet regime, desacralising Socialist ideals or discrediting the scientific and technical progress their society had achieved.³⁴ First, the satisfaction of material needs by imports was a factor in reducing discontent, and therefore strengthening the regime rather than weakening it, especially since that satisfaction was in line with the Socialist project of material well-being.³⁵ Second, the Soviet state had not given up its plans for transforming nature and society,³⁶ even if it now advanced more cautiously than before. As part of a major investment policy of building new towns (Tol'iatti³⁷) and huge transport infrastructure (pipelines, BAM³⁸) the leadership was also pushing ahead with the project of the century: to divert the northern and Siberian rivers to flow towards the deserts of Central Asia. The building of the Kapchagay reservoir in Kazakhstan encouraged the megalomaniac dreams of politicians in the regions, the republics and Moscow. However, *Tetsuro Chida* shows that technical experts, like those in Europe, were already moving towards a more "reflective modernity" that questioned its own impetus and focused on anticipating danger, unlike the thinking under Stalin and Khrushchev. Ultimately, the dam was built on a less grand scale with less impact on nature and dependant industrial activity, revealing a political indecisiveness Chida sees as characteristic of the Brezhnev years.

Fabien Bellat agrees with Chida that the indecisiveness of leaders about infrastructure policy was characteristic of the period. In his paper on the architecture of the Brezhnev years, he challenges the usual vision of uniform buildings by analysing the effect of many factors leading to diversity in architects' practice and achievements. The result was an architecture that might be monotonous or inventive, as we look at the culturally marked designs adopted in the republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, or the vastly ambitious town planning schemes devised for the city of Tol'iatti.

33. Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, 129-130; Kotkin, *Armageddon*, 19.

34. Agreeing with Calic, Neutatz, Obertreis, "Introduction," 19.

35. Răgaru, Capelle-Pogăcean, *Vie Quotidienne et Pouvoirs Sous Le Communisme*, 18, 22

36. Marc Elie, « Coping with the "Black Dragon": Mudflow Hazards and the Controversy over the Medeo Dam in Kazakhstan, 1958-66 », *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 14, 2 (2013): 313-342.

37. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Modernity Unbound: The New Soviet City of the Sixties," in Gorsuch, Koenker, eds., *The Socialist Sixties*, 66-83.

38. Christopher Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Johannes Grützmaier, *Die Baikal-Amur-Magistrale : vom stalinistischen Lager zum Mobilisierungsprojekt unter Breznev* (München: Oldenbourg, 2012).

On the front of social relations, although Brezhnev is generally described as having given up the Khrushchev era's utopian dream of controlling private space by comrades' courts and "byt" policy,³⁹ Moritz Florin shows that Moscow used authoritarian methods to completely alter household life in Kyrgyz villages by replacing compound walls (*duval*) with openwork fences that exposed private life to social control. Not least, "for the Party, consumption was an excellent factor of modernisation": furniture (tables, chairs, beds), cutlery and domestic appliances introduced into these homes were all instruments of Europeanisation/Russification that had reached Kyrgyz home life. Along with them went a family model, Soviet but still conservative, whereby women had most responsibility for the home. This "selective modernisation" under Brezhnev, sparing the traditional yurts and religious rites, had a real attraction for the rural population, despite the embittered scepticism of the cultural elites about consumer civilisation. The paper's focus on the Kyrgyz republic suggests that there is an imbalance in Brezhnev-era research, which concentrates almost entirely on the major cities of the European USSR, leading probably to an over-estimation and generalisation of the relaxation of social engineering in the attempts to transform society.

The disappearance of the Communist utopia did not put an end to the Socialist ideals of equality, personal development, collectivism and technical and social progress. These widely shared Socialist values were consolidated, outside the propaganda apparatus, in interpersonal relations. Zakhkharova shows how the long correspondence between a prisoner and a famous writer was a form of personal transformation: the emergence of a literate friendship turned this "particularly dangerous recidivist," excluded from society and held in the harshest of conditions, into a Soviet citizen capable of re-integration. His correspondent, acting as a tutor, mediator and guarantor, was in turn changed by this exchange of letters in her ways of writing and helping people. The papers we are publishing therefore do not reveal a weakening of Socialist ideals, but rather their reinforcement in social practices. Nevertheless, although there was no economic collapse or challenge to the regime's legitimacy, does that mean there was no crisis? Not quite.

Crisis of time and new regime of historicity

In the 1970s, Soviet time entered a crisis. The future horizon of Communism was replaced by an undefined "advanced Socialism": the vast scale proposed by Marxist-Leninist doctrine gave way to a paltry, purposeless pragmatism offering no step-changes in quality. This crisis of future dreams came with a crisis of past

39. Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press [Studies on the History of Society and Culture 32], 1999); Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (Peter Lang, 2007).

dreams: starting in 1956, the Stalinist discourse inherited from the Short course (*Kratkii kurs*) was being challenged by historians, writers, intellectuals and representatives of nationalist opinions.⁴⁰ The country's traumatic past of Stalin's purges and war could no longer be covered up by an optimistic drive towards the future: this past contained deep wounds that could no longer be justified by placing them against the prospects of linear progress leading to the achievement of a better society.

And yet, defining historical time was always a major preoccupation of the Soviet power structure. History and memory were instruments of Bolshevik and then Stalinist ideology, which based its political programme on the construction of a narrative of mythical origins and founding figures (Lenin, the Civil War, etc.), the starting point and viewpoint for a projected higher purpose, with the application of considerable propaganda resources. During the Thaw, the manipulation of people's relationship with time continued: the present successes of the conquest of space and its applications enabled Soviet citizens to look forward to a future in a typically modern vision of history marching in a single direction towards progress (both social and technical). Looking back, the Soviet regime under Brezhnev painted a heroicised vision of the past with the cult of the Second World War.⁴¹ But now the authorities were being forced to face the less controllable deployment of social practices of time that did not fit into this framework.

We may hypothesise that the USSR of Brezhnev's Socialism began to shift into a presentist regime of historicity, marked by a crisis in the heroic narrative, disenchantment and loss of faith in the future, in parallel with the process occurring in Western Europe in the latter half of the 20th century.⁴² The excessive focus on heritage and retrospection was both a response to and a symptom of this shift, and the construction of a painstakingly consistent past contrasted with a present that was complex, tortured and reflective.⁴³

Denis Kozlov has described as a "historical turn" in late Soviet culture the new historical awareness of the educated fringe of Soviet society after de-Stalinisation. One of the strategies for undermining the official clichés was meticulous research into historical facts fired by biographical exploration and

40. Sergei I. Zhuk, "'Cultural Wars' in the Closed City of Soviet Ukraine, 1959-1982," in *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985*, in Klumbyte, Sharafutdinova, eds., *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism* 67-90; Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia. Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge [UK] – New York: Harvard University Press, 2000); Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia : Dvizhenie Russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953-1985* [Le parti russe: Le mouvement des nationalistes russes en URSS 1953-1985] (M.: NLO, 2003).

41. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead : The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York NY: Basic Books, 1994); Jonathan Brunstedt, "Building a Pan-Soviet Past: The Soviet War Cult and the Turn Away from Ethnic Particularism," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, 2 (September 1, 2011): 149-171, doi:10.1163/187633211X589114.

42. Nikolai Koposov, *Pamiat' strogogo rezhima : istoriia i politika v Rossii* (M.: NLO, 2011).

43. François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps* (P.: Éditions du Seuil, 2012).

detailed reconstruction. The feverish enthusiasm that greeted “factographic”⁴⁴ historical publications revealed the increasingly unacceptable nature of official representations of the past for a society wracked with doubt and engaged in a gradual re-examination of conventional social values and historical interpretations. Although these texts contained gross simplifications and never challenged the Soviet conceptual armoury, they and their readers turned the debate about factual history into a way of discussing contemporary social and cultural questions, and even issues of identity.⁴⁵ Investigation of the past occupied the present and served it. In her paper, *Polly Jones* shows how the process whereby the son of the Civil War general Trifonov wrote his biography deeply involved witnesses of the period, readers and senior publishers. By disputing his facts or providing new evidence, their reactions were the first signs of a new look at the de-Stalinised myths and the controversies around figures who had been physically eliminated and removed from the Soviet narrative during the Great Terror. These reactions also revealed the importance of memory issues for Soviet citizens of the first and second generations concerning the period when the USSR was set up.

Another aspect of this retrospection can be seen in the emergence and expansion of the heritage movement. The All-Russia Society for Protection of Monuments of History and Culture (VOOPIK), founded in 1965, marks this same “historical turn” since it focused on the physical remains of pre-Revolutionary heritage. The drive to preserve architectural heritage, even religious buildings, met a general public demand and was based on the desire to reconcile historical experience with contemporary reality: protecting and rehabilitating the physical traces of the past not out of nostalgia but in order to integrate them into contemporary knowledge and life, and so make sense of the present.⁴⁶ Amateurs and professionals were involved in this heritage movement, breaking down the barriers between history and heritage, often at a purely local level that could still contribute to a wider “national” search. *Catriona Kelly* shows that, starting in the 1960s, the ideological principles that required destroying or downplaying any traces of pre-Revolutionary culture were breaking down, and it was no longer unthinkable to defend churches as an integral part of heritage, to ask for them to be restored or even rebuilt from scratch, and indeed to place them in the centre of rehabilitation plans for Leningrad’s historic city centre. These initiatives did not come from a top-down political decision but from overwhelmingly local pressure. This revealed a groundswell in educated Soviet society, retreating to national values and symbols taken from history.

44. Denis Kozlov, “The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953–1991,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2, 3 (Summer 2001): 577–600, 578–581. Taken from the Russian “*faktografiia*”, the accumulation of facts with no analysis or generalisation.

45. See also Zhuk’s analysis in this volume of the factographic approach as a way for United States historians to escape censorship.

46. Concerning the twists and turns of religious monument conservation in the 1950s and 1960s, see Anne Kropotkine, “Les ambiguïtés du Dégel,” *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 47, 1–2 (January–June, 2006): 269–302, doi:10.4000/monderusse.3802.

This “conservationist” movement produced arguments that tended towards nationalist thinking and foreshadowed the actual arrival of that thinking⁴⁷ in a well-known process of inventing/re-inventing tradition that was also expressed in other heritage “monuments” such as food, the subject of *Adrienne Jacobs’s* paper. The prolific cookbook author V.V. Pokhlebkina stressed the prime importance of an authentic national cuisine over the nutritional recommendations of Soviet hygienism and Western imperialism. This gastronomic historicism was an overt return to the past and tradition, a clear desire to re-educate Russians in the real tastes of their own cuisine, convivial and pleasurable in nature, better than any set of imposed standards for guaranteeing good health. The heritage phenomenon, part of public policy at All-Union level, was not restricted to European Russia. Architectural renovation and heritage conservation could also be seen in Samarkand, declared “oldest city in the USSR,”⁴⁸ Yerevan, where archaeological research was made use of by the proponents of cultural heritage to construct memories⁴⁹, and Tbilisi, where initiatives both institutional and informal developed to restore places of worship in particular.⁵⁰

A generation gap can be seen in the social practice of time. The youngest generations display two types of attitude. Some of them complied with the ideas put forward by the authorities, appropriating the cult of the Second World War within specifically designed political and institutional organisations: when Brezhnev introduced the public holiday commemorating the victory of 9 May in 1965, the *komsomol*, covered by the media, was in charge of promoting the memory of the War, its heroes and the exploits of the Red Army. This patriotic construction encountered a degree of support. One example is the *beskozyrka* (sailor’s cap) ritual described by *Vicky Davis*, in which since 1968 young men in Novorossiisk have celebrated the liberation of the Black Sea port by the Soviet regiment working from the stronghold of Malaya Zemlya, whose name happened to be chosen for the first volume of Brezhnev’s memoirs. Although he had only played a minor part in this operation, Brezhnev got the local authorities to indulge in an exercise of mutual self-congratulation by awarding the city the Order of the Great Patriotic War. The cult of this feat, which kept its popularity for many years, was then adopted locally by the official youth movement, who turned it into an act of romantic and highly patriotic virility. Brezhnev’s “memoirs,” whose origins are entertainingly traced by *Nikolaus Katzer*, were also an attempt to give young people a model Soviet trajectory with fewer pretensions. In the three volumes, corresponding

47. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, sees VOOPliK as a cradle for Russian nationalism; Silvia Serrano identifies groups of nationalist Georgian students who took the initiative to restore churches in the name of Georgian heritage and national identity, in “Religion, pouvoir, identités en Géorgie post-soviétique,” HDR, directed by Patrick Michel, EHESS, 2014.

48. *Drevneishii gorod SSSR*.

49. Svetlana Gorshenina and Claude Rapin, *De Kaboul à Samarcande: les archéologues en Asie centrale* (P.: Gallimard, 2001); Taline Ter Minassian, *Erevan: La Construction D’une Capitale À L’époque Soviétique* (Rennes: PUR, 2007).

50. Serrano, “Religion, pouvoir, identités en Géorgie post-soviétique,” 45-46.

to three formative episodes in Brezhnev's life, the official ghost-writers paint the portrait of an average Soviet citizen that anyone could identify with, since he embodied a combination of all the popular figures in society: worker, son of a peasant, combatant, technician, the General Secretary personified upward social mobility and undemanding consensus.

But identification with past heroes and Brezhnev himself was hardly enough to constitute the self-representations of the last generations of Soviet citizens. The lack of any horizon of expectancy, largely due to the standardisation of codes during the Brezhnev years (assimilation of socialist values, routine role of the Party and highly conventional organisation structures) and to socio-economic stability, prevented many having a tangible, positive perception of the future. The impression of an unchanging regime was the most frequent one among the Soviet citizens of the "last generation" and some of them slipped away into chimerical visions exemplified in works of science fiction.⁵¹ The USSR produced its own science fiction books and films, from the novels of the Strugatskii brothers to Tarkovskii's *Stalker*. In nearby socialist Bulgaria, they even showed the cult American film *Star Wars*, whose reception *Nadège Ragaru* details with its many facets. She rejects the implicitly "dissident" interpretation of audiences thirsting for alternatives to the Socialist model, and demonstrates that the enthusiasm for George Lucas's science fiction narrative was not so much a fascination with an imagined West as an expression of doubt about the common challenges of a world of technology. This dream of a world beyond blocs was a sort of nostalgia for the future: after national enthusiasm at the space exploits of the Thaw, the Soviet Union's heroes were dying (Gagarin and Korolev) and worries were growing about the cost of space exploration at a time of political stagnation.⁵²

As in other industrialised countries, Soviet society in the late 1970s was increasingly confining itself within a present that offered no hope of a better future and was no longer unanimously agreed on its connections to the past, except to the Second World War, a new foundation period replacing that of the Revolution.⁵³ The vision of history contained in official history was being attacked from both sides: the culture of factographic memory made the past not the origin of the future but rather a repository of observations for immediate consumption. And the disappearance of a Communism on the horizon sent each individual back to their own contingent circumstances. This sense of infinite presentism typical of industrial societies may explain Yurchak's line, "Everything was forever."

51. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*.

52. Asif A. Siddiqi, *The Red Rockets' Glare: Spaceflight and the Soviet Imagination, 1857-1957* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014), 300-301.

53. Koposov, *Pamiat' strogogo rezhima*.

Conclusion

The fact remains, however, that our inability to examine policy documents (from Party or government, at all levels of the administration), the total closure of the central archives of the KGB, army, MVD, and the military-industrial complex, and our severely restricted access to the papers of the ministries of industry, statistics, finance, budget and planning make it hard for historians to undertake a straightforward study of the Brezhnev years, much harder than for the 1920s to 1950s.⁵⁴ This largely explains the relative lack of historiographical interest in the period, since research is hampered by the lack of written evidence.⁵⁵ The difficulty of accessing documents dealing with painful and embarrassing issues — KGB surveillance, the shadow cast by the penitentiary system over society and the economy, army barracks life, poverty in rural Russia — throws a veil over the daily life of those on the margins. As a result, there is the risk of emphasising the normality of Soviet life by focusing on the educated urban classes rather than outsiders both urban and rural. The research based on interviews of people from a fairly homogenous background — the educated and socially privileged elite in major cities — tends to do just that. Conversely, the papers by Florin, Swain and Chida introduce a degree of social, geographical and national diversity that is often lacking in studies of the Brezhnev years.⁵⁶ However, this inability to use documentary evidence of political, economic, foreign policy and military decision-making, which is likely to continue, does provide an incentive to innovate and seek alternative sources. And that is what the authors we have brought together have attempted, by either taking interviews as a major corpus or mobilising previously unused collections of documents.

Despite these failings of historiography and the nuances required to portray any period, we may make so bold as to replace the term “stagnation” for the Brezhnev years by that of “apogee” or “heyday.” True, the gap between major social changes (urbanisation, feminisation, more education, consumption) and political immobility did justify Mikhail Gorbachev’s introduction of the term “stagnation” into political discourse to censure his predecessors and contrast with his own movement of “acceleration” (*uskorenie*). He rightly attacked the inability of the political leadership to respond to the growing discontent of the educated classes and the experts who pointed out structural problems and suggested solutions.⁵⁷

54. Although conditions of access are certainly different in the Baltic countries and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine and Georgia.

55. It is surprising to note that this tendency is not even mentioned in Bacon and Sandle, “Brezhnev Reconsidered”; Gorsuch, Koenker, “Introduction: The Socialist Sixties in Global Perspective”; Klumbyte, Sharafutdinova, “What Was Late Socialism?,” in *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985*, 1-14.

56. However, see Stéphane A. Dudoignon, Christian Noack, eds., *Allah’s kolkhozes: Migration, de-Stalinisation, Privatisation and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s-2000s)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag [Islamkundliche Untersuchungen Band 314], 2014).

57. M.S. Gorbachev, « Politicheskij doklad central’nogo komiteta KPSS XXVII s’ezdu kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza », in M.S. Gorbačev, *Izbrannye reči u stat’i*, M.: Politizdat, 1987, t. 3. http://lib.ru/MEMUARY/GORBACHEV/doklad_xxvi.txt

But seen through the experience of most Soviet citizens, whether synchronously or diachronously, the Brezhnev period meant years of family and personal happiness that was at last predictable, lives no longer tossed back and forth by war and revolution, happiness that seemed all the more achievable now that the Communist horizon in the most dogmatic sense had disappeared. This stability in people's life-stories accounts for the nostalgia for "advanced socialism" expressed by many post-Soviet citizens today, especially when compared with what they see as the wretched daily lives of tens of millions in Eastern Europe. Aside from this hindsight assessment, the USSR under Brezhnev did indeed experience a sort of social pacification, at the cost of strict law enforcement mainly against petty crime, but also because of negotiable arrangements at local level for social, economic and professional activities. For all the structural malfunctions of the economy and the regime's inability to reform itself, the popularisation of consumer culture after decades of severe, chronic shortages, led to a civilisation of leisure in which holidays, travel, sport, creation and entertainment were extending the possibilities for personal fulfilment. These activities often sowed the seeds of autonomous action in new social settings and new subjective awarenesses that would blossom at the end of the Soviet era.

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