Soviet Policies on Gender, Education and Culture

Edited by

Christina Engelmann

University of Giessen

Franziska Haug

University of Regensburg

Ingrid Miethe

University of Giessen

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Introduction
What Can We Learn from Soviet Education, Cultural and Gender Policy?

Christina Engelmann

University of Giessen

Franziska Haug

University of Regensburg

After 1989, the Western narrative of the triumph of free-market capitalism and liberal democracy spread rapidly, along with the promise of prosperity for more and more people. This was accompanied by a depreciation of everything identified as socialist and associated with the so-called Eastern Bloc. There was nothing to learn here; no pause for rethinking social models seemed called for. Socialism was considered to be defeated, outdated, nothing but a negative counter-example. However, since the global crisis from 2007 on, it has become clear that the liberal vision of the end of history has not been realized. The economization of the former socialist states did not lead to a rise in living standards: on average, these have declined significantly as the countries were largely deindustrialized to the advantage of the leading economies. [1] The neoliberal restructuring of all aspects of life has by no means led to greater freedom or a more self-determined way of life for most people. Rather, we are seeing a precarization of working and living conditions, increasing isolation – there is now even talk of a "pandemic of loneliness" – and a widespread feeling of political powerlessness. This has in many cases been accompanied by political crises, the rise of right-wing governments, and the triumph of nationalist and far-right forces in recent years. In light of these developments, thinking about alternatives to the present organization of society is once again gaining topicality.

[1] For a comprehensive and interdisciplinary examination of the social impacts of the transition that started in 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe and in 1991 in the Soviet Union, with empirical data from a variety of official sources for 27 post-communist countries, see Kristen Ghodsee and Mitchell Orenstein, *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2021).

Our aim with this anthology was to break with such triumphant narratives and overcome the usual polarizations and hostilities of the Cold War era. We want to encourage some initial analysis and new research towards a differentiated and systematic examination of the various attempts to create a socialist education, culture and gender policy. The Soviet example appears to us particularly instructive as the October Revolution of 1917 marked the beginning of a period of profound change which, in relatively few months and years, gave rise to a qualitatively different culture and education. This complex transformation process entailed both the creation of new elements and the preservation of old ones.[2] At the same time, we recognize that the historical process of implementing these policies in the interests of working people and the attempts to build better living conditions among free and equal people were marred by shortcomings and sometimes considerable deficiencies. Our analysis is aimed neither at a nostalgic glorification nor at a wholesale rejection of the democratic idea of the socialist state, but rather at taking an unbiased look at the history of the Soviet Union in order to find out what we can learn from it for today's politics. The volume explores the experimental character of cultural and education policy in the young Soviet Union and the forms it took on in later years. It focuses on three themes.

I. Pedagogical Concepts and Discussions on the New Education System

Early Soviet cultural and education policy is characterized by a wide range of approaches and concepts, and the early Soviet Union has accordingly been considered a time of experimentation in the context of far-reaching social upheaval.[3] In the wake of the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks faced the practical challenge of fulfilling their aspiration to involve the population in the creation of the new social order, even though many people lacked basic education. Soviet education is thus closely connected with the question of how self-organized, collective learning can be seen as a component of an educational system intended to prepare for the development of a socialist society. This task was particularly urgent as most of the former "intelligentsia" were hostile to the new government,[4] and the ongoing civil war seriously affected the living conditions of the population. The education of the previously

[2] See Abbott Gleason, "Introduction," *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Gleason, Abbott, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), vii.

[3] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50.

[4] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3.

disadvantaged segments of the population was therefore seen as fundamental for the creation of functioning social and economic structures.[5]

Although the education system was developed under difficult material conditions, the early period was characterized by a broad discussion about its reorganization, during which numerous new pedagogical approaches and experimental schools emerged.[6] This phase of experimental change was also characterized by an openness to progressive pedagogical approaches from other countries.[7] Soviet pedagogues such as Nadezhda Krupskaya, Pavel Blonsky, Stanislav Shatsky, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Vasily Shulgin and Anton Makarenko – to name just a few of the most prominent figures that shaped the development of Soviet education policy – elaborated a variety of teaching concepts and ways of learning processes. These concepts were intended to lift broad segments of the working population out of the political passivity to which they had been relegated under the tsars, and to enable them to participate in shaping the economic and cultural life of the new society. The concept of the labor school[8] and the complex method[9] are just two well-known examples of early Soviet approaches to progressive education that drew inspiration from all parts of the world. However, most of these early approaches could not be pursued for long as the practical implementation of the pedagogical concepts which they introduced caused considerable problems, particularly in connection with the poor material resources of the schools and high demands placed on teachers. In the early 1930s, Stalin broke entirely with experimental early Soviet pedagogy, which he considered to be at odds with the goal of industrial modernization.[10] Research has yet to bring the details of the early approaches to light and into academic discourse. Contributions to this anthology examine the extent to which those concepts and methods are still relevant to educational research, and whether we can learn from them for our current education system.

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[5] Vladimir Lenin, "The 1919 Lenin Program of the CPSU (Bolsheviks)," *International Socialist Review* 22, no. 4 (1961): 115–124.

[6] Oskar Anweiler, *Geschichte der Schule und Pädagogik in Russland. Vom Ende des Zarenreiches bis zum Beginn der Stalin-Ära* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1978), 102.

[7] Irina Mchitarjan, "John Dewey and the Development of Education in Russia before 1930: Report on a Forgotten Reception," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19, no. 1 (2000): 109–131, 110.

[8] Pavel Blonskii, *Trudovaia shkola* (Moscow, 1986).

[9] Nadeshda Krupskaja, "Über Komplexe," in *Sozialistische Pädagogik: Eine Auswahl aus Schriften, Reden und Briefen*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1966), 154–165.

[10] Larry Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia 1917–1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 110.

Simon Gurisch examines Nadezhda Krupskaya's concept of children's play as a central element of emancipatory education. As Gurisch shows, Krupskaya envisions a free form of play that is inherently connected to the process of developing a crucial capacity for self-organization, which makes liberation possible. Through a critical reconstruction of Krupskaya's Aristotelian framework, and drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of imitation, Gurisch demonstrates that free play in Krupskaya's understanding can be understood neither as relying on a capacity that is innate in humans in potentiality nor as a mere result of an externally imposed form of education. Rather, Krupskaya's model of freedom of play describes a process in which a capacity for playful imitation is realized, which transcends the limits of the bourgeois order of capacities.

In analysing the writings of Vladimir Lenin, Nadezhda Krupskaya, and Anatoly Lunacharsky, **Austin Garey** examines how assumptions about child development that were often based on Marxist theory influenced education policy in the early years of the Soviet Union (1917–1924). As Garey shows, these three leaders' concepts of the relationship between class structures, labor, and the good of society led them to endorse a form of moral education, *vospitanie*, that taught children to orient towards collective aims. The Soviet pedagogue Krupskaya drew on Lev Tolstoy's idea of education for personal development and assigned it a decidedly political purpose: to raise persons with socialist rather than bourgeois values. Garey traces how responsibility for *vospitanie* shifted from parents to state-run schools, and elaborates the central components of the early Soviet program of *vospitanie,* including the roles of labor and anti-religious sentiment. Although these elements changed over time, Garey shows that *vospitanie* left a lasting legacy in the educational systems of Russia, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states.

Jarvis Curry analyzes how the legacy of Soviet pedagogy, its philosophies, curriculum, and key figures, has been taken up, criticized, and reinvented in the post-1991 period. The post-Soviet educational change is presented as a "negotiated hybridity" of legacy and innovation: Rather than a wholesale repudiation of Soviet in favor of "Western" pedagogy, many post-Soviet systems have selectively adapted Soviet educational practices, such as high expertise in math and science and inclusive schooling for all children, to the new social and economic conditions. By charting continuities as well as ruptures from the Marxist-Leninist foundations to the neoliberal influences of the 21st century, Curry's chapter examines the different ways in which the Soviet pedagogical legacies remain a reference point as educational reforms continue to evolve in the post-Soviet societies in new forms.

Mark Tauger challenges a prominent narrative of Soviet Ukrainian history, which holds that, after the relatively free development of Ukrainization in the 1920s, the Ukrainian language and culture were entirely suppressed. As Tauger

shows, schools and universities in Soviet Ukraine taught Ukrainian history during most of the Soviet era, both as a subject in its own right and as part of a larger Soviet history course – although shortcomings and biases can certainly be observed in the presentation of that history. Tauger traces how Ukrainian scholars took advantage of Soviet policy to promote scholarship on Ukraine, publish textbooks, and expand students' knowledge of Ukrainian history at all levels of Ukrainian education. The article discusses the problem of Soviet censorship and compares omissions and bias in Soviet Ukrainian and U.S. history textbooks to show that both countries require a new approach to their historical failings in order to provide students with a more accurate and self-reflective awareness of history.

II. Gender, Politics and the Transformation of Sexual Relations in the Soviet Union

Even though we owe much of our daily realities of public childcare to Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai's policies, which were intended to grant working women full reproductive freedom, Kollontai is mostly excluded from Western histories of the global women's movement.[11] She shares this invisibility in Western academic and civil-society discourses – including liberal feminism – with other socialist, Soviet, and materialist feminists and women's rights activists. Appointed People's Commissar for Welfare in 1917,[12] Kollontai initiated a wide range of social reforms aimed at improving the lives of working women: maternity protection, publicly funded canteens and laundries, access to childcare, and vocational training programs specifically designed for working women.[13] In the first years of the socialist state, Kollontai thus had a huge influence on the construction of Soviet cultural and social policies for the needs and interests of working women and children. Together with the Russian revolutionary Inessa Armand,[14] Kollontai established the women's section of the Bolsheviks, called *Zhenotdel*, in 1919 to create the infrastructure for women to participate in the

[11] Kristen Ghodsee, "The Most Famous Feminist You've Never Heard Of," *MsMagazine.com*, March 29 (2020).

[12] Natalia Novikova and Kristen Ghodsee, "Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952): Communism as the Only Way Toward Women's Liberation," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 59–95, here: 72.

[13] Beatrice Brodsky Farnsworth, "Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai," *The American Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (1976): 292–316.

[14] Kristen Ghodsee, *Red Valkyries: Feminist Lessons from Five Revolutionary Women* (London/New York: Verso, 2022), 105–128.

revolution and open new perspectives on women's roles and gender relations. It was abolished under Stalin.[15]

Kollontai's politics rested on a materialist conception of the relation between gender and social relations: like many Bolsheviks, she believed a genuine socialist revolution required not only the transformation of labor conditions, but also a profound reconfiguration of everyday life and intimate relationships.[16] Central to this vision was the socialization of reproductive labor – previously performed without pay in the private sphere – through state-supported infrastructure.[17] These policies did more than relieve women of domestic burdens: they challenged the underlying material and supposedly "natural" foundations of gendered labor divisions. In doing so, Kollontai and other Soviet feminists opened new imaginative and practical horizons for a rethinking of gender roles, female desire, and the cultural conditions that structure women's lives.[18]

From the very beginning, the Bolshevik Women's Bureau was in close contact with the international proletarian women's movement. In the early 1920s, they began their work among women in the southeastern Soviet republics.[19] Beginning with the Congress of the Comintern in Baku in September 1920, at which women's emancipation was designated as a priority of the communist movement,[20] the international conferences of the communist women's movement increasingly

[15] On the work of the Zhenotdel within the Bolshevik party, see Carol Eubanks Hayden, "The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party," *Russian History*. 3.2 (1976): 150–173; Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilsm, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 329–345.

[16] Franziska Haug, "'Die bürgerliche Familie wird aussterben.' Zu Alexandra Kollontais kommunistischem Familienmodell," in *Materialistischer Feminismus: Gegenwartsanalysen zu Geschlecht im Kapitalismus*, ed. Christina Engelmann and Lisa Yashodhara Haller with Forum kritischer Wissenschaften (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2024), 37–47, here: 44.

[17] Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

[18] Lauren Kaminsky, "'No Rituals and Formalities!' Free Love, Unregistered Marriage and Alimony in Early Soviet Law and Family Life," *Gender & History*, 29, no. 3 (2017): 716–731.

[19] On the work of the Zhenotdel in Soviet Central Asia, see Anne McShane, "Bringing the Revolution to the Women of the East: The Zhenotdel Experience in Soviet Central Asia through the Lens of Kommunistka," Doctoral thesis (University of Glasgow, 2019). May 5, 2025. ‹https://theses.gla.ac.uk/40903/1/2018McShanephd.pdf›; Massell, Gregory. *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

[20] Brigitte Studer, *Reisende der Weltrevolution: Eine Globalgeschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020), 122–123.

focused on women's emancipation in the Islamic countries of the region.[21] The work of the Zhenotdel among Muslim women demonstrates its ambivalent status in Soviet policy: On the one hand, it shows that there was enormous potential in the beginning for self-determined organizing and educational processes, and that the Bolshevik activists had an exceptionally progressive understanding of the various forms of oppression of the marginalized population at the time – which can be instructive even for today's intersectionality debates.[22] On the other hand, the example of Stalin's anti-veil campaign [23] makes it clear that the initiatives of the Zhenotdel were subordinate to the general measures of the Central Committee and were therefore dropped in cases where conflicts arose.

The section opens with an interview with **Kristen R. Ghodsee**, professor of Russian and East European studies, author of numerous books on women and state socialism both before and after 1989, and the host of the podcast A.K. 47 on the life and work of Alexandra Kollontai. With Ghodsee, we discuss the far-reaching social and gender policies in the early phase of the Soviet Union. As Ghodsee points out, based on her analysis of the relationship between traditional forms of the patriarchal family and the emergent political economy of capitalism in Russia in the late nineteenth century, Kollontai drew the practical conclusion that women had to help build a workers' state that fully socialized reproductive labor. It was on Kollontai's initiative that the Bolsheviks intensified their work among women in 1919 and created the Zhenotdel, through which a broad network of local women's organizations was built to spread the word about the new policies. As Ghodsee illustrates, Kollontai also challenged the party's course when she felt it necessary in the interests of women. For instance, she openly criticized the New Economic Policy (NEP) as a contradictory attempt to build socialism using the tools of capitalism, and she witnessed its disastrous effects on gender relations. We can learn from Kollontai, Ghodsee argues, that socialism requires more than collective ownership of the means of production: it also necessitates revolutionized relationships. Furthermore, we could have much more mutually supportive and pleasurable friendships and romantic relations in a non-atomized society in which relationships are freed from economic considerations.

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[21] Mike Taber and Daria Dyakonova (ed.), *The Communist Women's Movement, 1920–1922: Proceedings, Resolutions, and Reports* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023).

[22] Christina Engelmann, "'[...] aus eigener Kraft befreien.' Clara Zetkin über die politische Arbeit der Zhenotdel unter muslimischen Frauen im Kaukasus," *Ariadne: Forum für Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte* 80, no. 1 (2024): 59–82.

[23] On how the Zhenotdel positioned itself on the anti-veil campaign see McShane, *Bringing the Revolution to the Women of the East*, 55–64, 96–101, 128–137, 159–163; Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, 226–246.

We also talked with Kristen Ghodsee about the mostly forgotten radical-socialist and antiwar history of International Women's Day, about how Cold War superpower rivalries catalyzed social progress for women around the globe, and about the devastating effects of the transition to free market capitalism after 1989, as seen in "refamilization" policies, for example. The interview concludes with the question of what is to be done in our everyday lives to work towards a fundamental transformation of society as a whole.

Egan Chambers examines how queer Soviet women challenged the prevailing socialist norm in the early USSR through their writings, lives, and political worldviews. Based on the work of Sophia Parnok, Vera Gedroits and Concordia Antarova, Chambers aims to show that these women created alternative forms of cultural and social capital which were in contradiction to the atheistic and materialistic ideal of the Bolshevik revolutionary subject. Using Bourdieu's theory of "exchangeable capital" and Chakrabarty's concept of the "modern political subject", the article shows how queerness operated as both a form of resistance and a framework for generating value outside norms. The article introduces the notion of the "ambiguous queer subject" to describe the liminal, often pathologized yet creative position of queer people under Soviet socialism.

III. Cultural Institutions, Art and Literature

The entanglement of cultural and educational issues was a central and omnipresent concern during the early years of the Soviet state. One of the most pressing questions of this formative period was about the role that art, literature, and culture were to play in the emerging socialist society.[24] Cultural policy in the Soviet Union was not conceived merely as a matter of aesthetic taste or artistic innovation, but as a decisive influence in shaping the consciousness of the masses and constructing a new social reality, a tool to educate workers artistically and to open opportunities to change material conditions. The revolutionary transformation of society demanded a corresponding transformation of culture, one that would break with the elitist traditions of bourgeois art and instead orient itself toward the educational and participatory needs of the proletariat. This is discussed in artistic debates on worker-writers, the role of literature in the political education of the working class, and the cultural movement *Proletkult*.[25]

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[24] Igor Narskij (ed.), *Hochkultur für das Volk? Literatur, Kunst und Musik in der Sowjetunion aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter/Oldenbourg, 2018).

[25] See Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *On Literature and Art*, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (St. Louis/Milwaukee: Telos Press, 1973); Jurij Striedter, *Russischer Formalismus: Texte zur allgemeinen Literaturtheorie und zur Theorie der Prosa* (München: Fink, 1971);

The establishment of the first proletarian museums in Moscow shortly after the October Revolution exemplifies this ambition.[26] These institutions were designed not merely as repositories of historical artifacts or fine art, but as central general educational platforms for the population. They were to function as laboratories for a new aesthetic pedagogy – one that was not limited to the passive contemplation of objects, but invited active engagement and collective learning.

Artists affiliated with modernist and constructivist movements – including such figures as Vladimir Tatlin, Alexander Rodchenko, Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, and Vladimir Mayakovsky – took on the task of inventing new modes of perception and communication. Their work was aimed at dissolving the boundary between art and life, creating aesthetic forms that would directly intervene in everyday experience, and helping to shape a socialist form of living. These efforts involved a radical rethinking of the artistic object, authorship, and the public sphere itself.

This section explores how Soviet cultural policy sought to make use of the educational potential of art. How were practices of the aesthetic avant-garde integrated into broader strategies of mass education? What role did self-organized proletarian cultural movements such as *Proletkult*[27] play in fostering the autonomous appropriation of artistic practice by workers? And how did the Soviet state negotiate the tension between revolutionary innovation and the preservation or reinterpretation of the pre-revolutionary cultural heritage? Such questions are key to understanding how art functioned not only as a medium of expression, but also as a tool of ideological formation and social transformation in early Soviet society.

Dietmar Dath emphasizes in our interview that literature in the Soviet Union was not just a form of propaganda, but a means of thinking about socialism. While early bourgeois realism highlighted social decay, it was Soviet literature

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Fritz J. Raddatz, *Marxismus und Literatur: Eine Dokumentation in drei Bänden* (Reinbek/Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969–1973).

[26] See Tobias Haberkorn, "Museen für das Proletariat: Die Verbindung von kulturellem Erbe, Bildung und Erziehung in proletarischen Museen Moskaus von 1918 bis 1928," in *Proletarische Pädagogik: Verhältnisbestimmungen, historische Experimente und Kontroversen sozialistischer Bildungskonzepte*, ed. Christina Engelmann, Tobias Haberkorn and Ingrid Miethe (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 2025), 306–318.

[27] See Aleksandr A. Bogdanow, *Die Wissenschaft und die Arbeiterklasse* (Frankfurt a. M.: Makol 1971). See also Leon Trotsky, "Proletarian Culture and Proletarian Art," in *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), 184–214 and Vladimir Lenin "On Proletarian Culture," in *Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 316–317.

– works such as Galina Nikolayeva's *Battle on the Way,*[28] for example – that depicted the transformation of production and social relations in a meaningful way. Dath criticizes both utopian excesses and aesthetic radicalism and warns against the romanticization of projects such as *Proletkult*, which aimed to replace rather than develop the cultural heritage of humanity, whereas effective socialist art combines strategic clarity with emotional and ethical depth.

According to Dath, literature under socialism offered a space to address tricky political questions and contributed to the formation of a political consciousness by mediating between objective conditions and subjective positions. Besides Nikolaeva, he emphasizes such works as Furmanov's *Chapaev,*[29] Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*[30] and Eduard Klein's *Alchemisten* ["Alchemists"][31] as examples of art that embody a shift from revolutionary mythology to a productive engagement with socialist transformation. Dath regards science, social theory and art as different but complementary forms of knowledge: science defines constraints, social science analyses structures, and art cultivates will and imagination. He sees Soviet and East German science fiction – such as *Andymon* by Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller[32] – as valuable instruments for exploring alternative futures: in other words, for socialist utopias. Realism, says Dath, is not about imitation, but about developing attitudes that can change the world, and therefore the best science fiction is a true subgenre of realism.

In her article, **Carlotta Chenoweth** argues that Vladimir Mayakovsky developed a unique mode of "telegraphic literacy" after the Russian Revolution, shaped by the material and communicative constraints of the telegraph. This form of literacy disrupted traditional reading practices by imitating the fragmented, abbreviated, and encoded style of telegraphic messages – thus transforming the poet into an operator mediating between technology, state, and people. Through ROSTA posters, primers such as *Songs for Peasants*, and even candy wrappers, Mayakovsky crafted visual-poetic hybrids that required

[28] See the film *Battle on the Way* [*Bitva v puti*] (1961) by Vladimir Basov (screenplay by Nikolaeva Galina and Maksim Sagalovich) after the novel by Nikolaeva. No English translation; German: Galina Nikolajewa, *Schlacht unterwegs*, trans. Ellen Zunk (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1988).

[29] *Chapaev*, film by Sergei and Georgi Vassilyev (screenplay by Anna Furmanova, Georgi Vassilyev, Sergei Vassilyev), Soviet Union (1934).

[30] *Konarmiya* is the Russian title of a collection of stories by Isaac Babel published in 1926. See Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry*, trans. Peter Constantine (New York: Norton, 2003). German: *Die Reiterarmee*, trans. Peter Urban (Berlin: Friedenauer Presse, 1994).

[31] Eduard Klein, *Alchimisten* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1968). See also the film *Alchimisten* by Wolfgang Luderer (German Democratic Republic, 1968).

[32] Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller, *Andymon: Eine Weltraum-Utopie* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1982).

active decoding and oral transmission, often using broken typography, rhythmic *chastushki*, and *lesenka* verse. These works deliberately "illiterized" the reader to dismantle bourgeois habits and create a new Soviet reader trained in both form and ideology.

Anatoly Lunacharsky was a key figure in the promotion of avant-garde art in the first decade of the Bolshevik government. **Olivia Kennison** explores his role, focusing on his work as head of the Narkompros, the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment. Lunacharsky believed that cultural education was essential to the construction of the new socialist society and saw art not only as a means of ideological propaganda, but also as a force for intellectual and moral transformation. He championed artistic freedom and actively supported experimental artists such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Kazimir Malevich by offering them institutional positions, commissions and state funding. While other Bolsheviks were increasingly suspicious of the avant-garde, Lunacharsky saw its revolutionary aesthetics as congruous with the broader political project of creating the "New Man".

Maria Momzikova's article deals with Amaliia Khazanovich, the presenter of the Soviet agitation and education program "Red Chum." Khazanovich's work of "participatory education" meant that she lived with her nomadic Indigenous students for about a year, teaching them Russian, promoting Soviet values, and encouraging collectivization. Momzikova presents Khazanovich's work as "participatory observation" with its associated cultural meanings. Particular attention is paid to the way Khazanovich described gender issues in cultural education and the teaching of Soviet values and practices. This is because mutual relations with the local population were also part of Soviet policy for the employees of the "red chums," who, mostly men, established Soviet power in remote regions. In Khazanovich's case, the article emphasizes, her skillful use of rules of reciprocity and attention to cultural practices through participatory education helped her overcome traditional gender differences in Indigenous societies and gain the trust of both men and women.

The idea for this anthology arose in the context of the panel "Soviet Cultural and Education Policy" at the 14th European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) in Gothenburg, Sweden, in April 2023. In addition to us three editors, Tobias Haberkorn was part of the panel, and we want to thank him for his collaboration. We are also very grateful to Kristen R. Ghodsee and Dietmar Dath for the orientation we drew from their very insightful and instructive interviews, and to all the contributors to the volume for renewing the debate on the potentials and difficulties of education, gender and cultural policy in the early Soviet Union. Our special thanks are due to Tony Crawford for translating the interview with Dietmar Dath and for his careful and precise editing of the contributions, which have greatly enhanced this anthology.

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About the Contributors

Egan Chambers. Egan Chambers holds a Master's in European Studies with a specialization in Soviet History from the Centre for European and Eurasian Studies at the University of Toronto. She was previously Editor in Chief for the program's yearly journal *Eurasiatique* and has also interned at the Herder Institut in Marburg, Germany. Her research interests include queer theory, Soviet history, literary theory, postcolonial theory, leftist history, and history of epistemologies. The article presented in the Anthology: Soviet Cultural and Education Policy is her first article.

Carlotta Chenoweth. Assistant Professor, United States Military Academy. Carlotta Chenoweth is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and World Languages at the United States Military Academy, where she teaches Russian language, literature, and culture. Her research focuses on 20th- and 21st-century Russian literature and culture, the intersection of literature and technology, the digital humanities, and language pedagogy. She has published in the *Russian Language Journal* and *Slavic Literatures* and contributed chapters to several edited volumes. She holds a Ph.D. from Yale University and a B.A. from Wellesley College.

Jarvis Tyrell Curry. Professor of Business, Hutton School of Business, University of the Cumberlands, Williamsburg, Kentucky. Curry holds a Ph.D. in Business and Strategic Management and a Juris Doctor. In his teaching and research, he combines business analytics, education theory, media studies, and global development. Curry is the author of articles and book chapters that examine education reform, cultural policy, finance, and post-Soviet transitions. His scholarly work on Soviet and post-Soviet education emphasizes the legacy of centralized pedagogical ideologies and their evolving reinterpretation in contemporary educational systems. He has developed a data-informed and historically nuanced approach to policy analysis and curriculum reform. His broader research interests include strategic governance, organizational transformation, cinematic narratives, and ethics in emerging markets. He is an active member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), and the American Bar Association (ABA).

Dietmar Dath. Dietmar Dath is a writer, translator, musician and publicist. Since 1990, he has written journalistic, essayistic, literary and satirical articles in German and English-language newspapers and magazines on the subjects

of science criticism, pop culture and society, e.g., for the Feuilleton of the German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. From 1998 to 2001, he was chief editor of the Cologne-based pop culture magazine *Spex*. He has published numerous essays, graphic novels, non-fiction books, journalistic texts, novels, radio plays, theater and opera texts, poetry and short stories, e.g., *Für immer Honig* (2005), *Maschinenwinter* (2008), *BasisBiographie Rosa Luxemburg* (2010), *Niegeschichte. Science Fiction als Kunst- und Denkmaschine* (2019), *Cordula killt Dich!* (2021) oder *Skyrmionen. Oder: A Fucking Army* (2025). Dath has received numerous prizes for his work, including the 2018 Günther Anders Prize for Critical Thinking (2018) and the Siegfried Kracauer Prize for his film criticism *Killermaschinistinnen vor!* (2020). One of Dath's main areas of work is socialist aesthetics and the culture and literature of the Soviet Union.

Christina Engelmann. Research associate at the Justus-Liebig-University of Giessen and PhD candidate at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. Christina Engelmann studied philosophy, sociology, political science, and German studies at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and at the Université Paris-Sorbonne. She is a research associate at the University of Giessen, where she works on Clara Zetkin and the labor and women's movements. She is pursuing her PhD at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (IfS) with a thesis on the critique of the liberal concept of freedom from a materialist-feminist perspective and is co-spokesperson of the Gender, Kinship, and Sexuality working group there. Her research interests include social philosophy, critical theory, feminist materialism, and political education. Since 2019, she has been a member of the board of the association Forum kritischer Wissenschaften and is engaged in projects for societal organization in Frankfurt.

A. Austin Garey. Postdoctoral Research Scholar, Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars A. Austin Garey is an anthropologist who studies cultural institutions in Russia and Ukraine. Her first book, *Leagues of Laughter: War, Comedy, and the Soviet Legacy in Russia and Ukraine* (University College London Press, 2025), traces how a Soviet-created youth activity changed as students' nation states collapsed, competed, and went to war. She has previously taught at Moscow Pedagogical State University, the University of Pennsylvania, UCLA, and George Mason University and has published on issues of semiotics and cultural production in the *Journal of Childhood, Education, and Society*, *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Science*, and *Michigan Feminist Studies*.

Kristen R. Ghodsee. Professor of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Kristen R. Ghodsee is a professor of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, where she also serves as a member of the Graduate Groups in Anthropology, History, and Comparative

Literature. Her articles and essays have appeared in publications such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Jacobin*, *The New Republic*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and *Die Tageszeitung*. She is the author of numerous books on women and state socialism, both before and after 1989, most notably *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence*, which has been translated into 15 languages. Her recent books include: *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* (Duke University Press, 2019), *Taking Stock of the Shock: Social Impacts of the 1989 Revolutions* (Oxford University Press, 2021) and *Everyday Utopia: What 2,000 Years of Bold Experiments Can Teach Us About the Good Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2023). She hosts the podcast, A.K. 47 – Forty-seven Selections from the Works of Alexandra Kollontai, which inspired her 2022 book, *Red Valkyries: Feminist Lessons from Five Revolutionary Women*. Ghodsee has held several residential research fellowships, including the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey; the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University; the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies in Germany; the Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki in Finland; and the Center for History at Sciences Po in Paris. In 2012, Ghodsee was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for her work in Anthropology and Cultural Studies.

Simon Gurisch. Postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg and a member of the Collaborative Research Center (TRR 294) "Structural Change of Property" at the Universities of Jena and Erfurt. His research focuses on political philosophy and philosophy of law, with particular emphasis on early Critical Theory, Historical Materialism, and German Idealism. He received his PhD in philosophy from Goethe University Frankfurt, under the supervision of Christoph Menke. His recent publications include *Die Verfassung des Lebens. Die politische Form der Vergesellschaftung durch Individuation bei J. Habermas und G.W.F. Hegel* (Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2025) and "Die Vormacht des Allgemeinen. Über die Funktion des Rechts als ideologischem Staatsapparat bei Adorno und Neumann," published in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie – Beihefte*, vol. 172 (Stuttgart 2023).

Franziska Haug. Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Regensburg in the research project "Light On! Queer Literatures and Cultures under Socialism". Franziska Haug studied art education, German studies, sociology and gender studies in Frankfurt am Main, was a research assistant in the German literature department at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main and wrote her dissertation on the relationship between labor and gender in literature and pop culture. She is currently a postdoc in the research network "Light On! Queer Literatures and Cultures under Socialism" at the University of

Regensburg with a research project on queer GDR literature. She is part of the collective Forum Kritischer Wissenschaften and DiasporaOst. Her research focuses on queer theory, materialist feminism, Marxism, pop culture and antisemitism.

Olivia Kennison. PhD candidate in Slavic Studies at Brown University. Olivia Kennison is a PhD candidate in Slavic Studies and MA in Classics at Brown University, working on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russian literature. She is currently writing a dissertation titled „The New Significance of Ancient Tragedy: Receptions and Translations of Greek Drama in the Russian Silver Age." She is an assistant editor at *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. Her research focuses on receptions of classical antiquity in Russian literature and the evolution of cultural movements among the Russian intelligentsia in the early 20th century.

Ingrid Miethe. Professor of General Education at the University of Giessen. Ingrid Miethe completed her doctorate in political science at the Free University of Berlin and habilitated in educational science at the University of Halle-Wittenberg. Her research focuses on the history of education with an emphasis on GDR history and Eastern Europe, education and social inequality, as well as qualitative social research. She led a research project on workers' faculties in the GDR, Cuba, Vietnam and Mozambique, as well as on the work of Clara Zetkin in the Soviet Union. Current publication: Ingrid Miethe, Tim Kaiser, Tobias Kriele, Piepiorka Alexandra, *Globalization of an Educational Idea. Workers' Faculties in Eastern Germany, Vietnam, Cuba and Mozambique* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2019).

Maria Momzikova. PhD Candidate at the University of Tartu. Maria Momzikova is an interdisciplinary scholar of Anthropology and Folklore. Her primary academic interests lie in the Anthropology of Time, the History of Anthropology, and Indigenous Studies. Her PhD dissertation focuses on Soviet ethnographers' interaction through storytelling with Indigenous Peoples on the Taimyr Peninsula. She was one of the principal investigators and researchers of an anthropological project about time zone experience in the contemporary Russian Far East (2017), which showed temporal inequality between western and eastern regions of the country. She was the editor of the volume "Ethnography of Social Time," in *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* journal (2019), and an organizer of conferences and workshops. Her works were published in *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* journals, and *De Gruyter* publishing house. She has participated in academic and applied projects in urban anthropology in Russia (2015–2017), practices and feelings of ice-swimmers in St Petersburg depicted through visual art (2022), and digitization and repatriation of Soviet Indigenous folklore collections (2022–

2024, MEAP). She is currently a social and cultural anthropology teacher at a high school and conveys ideas of educational reciprocal dialogue with students in practice.

Mark B. Tauger. Emeritus Associate Professor at West Virginia University. Mark B. Tauger earned his Ph.D. from UCLA in 1991 and taught at West Virginia University for 31 years, retiring in 2023. He was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, in 2016–2017. He has published on famines and agriculture in the USSR, on the Bengal famine in India in 1943, on the global Green Revolution, and related topics. His books include *Agriculture in World History* (second edition 2021), as well as collections of his articles and short monographs published in Ukraine (*Golod, golodomor, genotsid?*, Kiev 2008) and France (*Famine et transformation Agricole en URSS*, Paris 2017).

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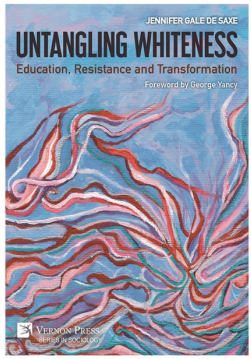

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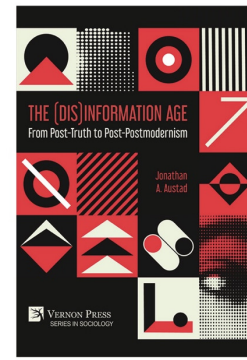

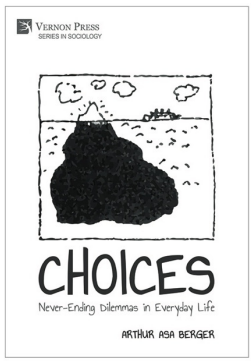

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