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Kristin Roth-Ey. *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011. 320 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-7975-5.

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In this groundbreaking book, Kristin Roth-Ey, Lecturer at University College London, examines Soviet media during the Cold War, including films, radio, and television. Her work greatly enriches the broader historiography of cultural and media studies in the USSR through providing a pioneering study of television, a topic previously not addressed by the scholarship in any substantial fashion, and through an unprecedented exploration of the economics of film, radio, and television as industries.

The author claims that the Soviet Union committed itself to creating an anti-“mass culture” culture for the masses, a Soviet socialist culture dedicated to bringing high-quality culture to all. Soviet culture’s official mission and values were aimed at educating, training, motivating, mobilizing, and uplifting the populace to the level of connoisseurship and artistry. It was thus inherently and unapologetically elitist and pedagogical, with an inclination toward the public, the collective, and declamations. The audience was perceived as a constant work in progress, in need of education, and thus mass tastes for entertainment were inherently problematic, to be satisfied only to the extent required to relax the masses in order to prepare them for work. The Soviet Union proclaimed not only its cultural self-sufficiency but also a drive to prove the superiority of Soviet culture versus “mass culture” by making easy access to high-quality cultural experience a bedrock promise of socialism—especially in the context of the Cold War—one that the Soviet Union intended to bring to all people. In trying to do so, the Soviet Union in the postwar decades massively expanded its cultural industry, both in size and especially in variety, with various new media available. The Soviet cultural industry cannot be reduced to its cultural intelligentsia or the opinions of political leaders, and was powerfully influenced not only by ideology but also by bureaucracies, technologies, social networks, and everyday life practices. As the cultural industry grew, people found more spaces within which to pursue their own individual interests, which sometimes appeared to contradict big-picture ideological and economic goals—more so in the Brezhnev era than the Khrushchev era, when there was more commitment to the broader Soviet project.

In Roth-Ey’s view, the success of the American cultural project marked the failure of the Soviet one. This lack of success resulted less from content as such than from shifting technological and consumption patterns in the USSR, as modern culture in a mass-media age would be inherently different from the Soviet high-quality, public, pedagogical, enlightening cultural model. In the media age, Soviet culture

remained committed to its pedagogical and uplifting mission but also grew more entertainment-oriented, eclectic, faster, more immediate, and increasingly oriented toward everyday life: culture in a personal key and in the here and now. This was in contrast to the old, Stalin-era model of Soviet culture—collective, public, event-driven, with clear genres and goals—a culture of which there was still plenty, but Soviet cultural consumers did not have to choose it, and many did not. In the media age, Soviet culture increasingly became oriented away from enlightenment work and toward cultural consumption as valuable in and of itself. Thus, the Soviet cultural industry was in the paradoxical position of getting worse (in terms of undermining its own stated overarching goals and values) as it was simultaneously getting better (in terms of its reach and mass, as well as penetration and power). Thus, from the 1950s into the 1980s, the Soviet cultural industry became less and less tied to the Soviet grand narrative, less and less capable of mobilizing and motivating and enlightening, therefore marking the ebbing of vitality of the original mission of the Soviet cultural industry. However, it might well have increased Soviet stability by allowing citizens to find pleasure and enjoyment in this culture, and thus steadying Soviet society.

This well-researched monograph, which draws on archives, newspapers, and interviews, expands upon the author's excellent dissertation. The first of five chapters explores the post-Stalin Soviet film industry. Roth-Ey, in contrast to many other writers on Soviet film, highlights that this sphere indeed constituted an industry by illustrating the nexus of social, political, and economic interests—and the tensions among them—involved in moviemaking. The second chapter explores the evolving Soviet movie culture during this same period. The author underscores the growing divergence between the traditional official model forged in the 1930s of perceiving the audience as desiring uplifting films and the reality of growing numbers among the population striving to consume entertaining movies, with the movie industry increasingly moving to fulfill these needs, both by creating domestic movies and by importing foreign ones. The subsequent chapter traces foreign radio broadcasting into the USSR by US- and UK-sponsored radio stations striving to break through the Iron Curtain. The author describes how these broadcasts and their popularity broke the Soviet media's monopoly on the modes and meanings of cultural consumption in everyday life. In fact, by the early 1960s, Soviet radio began to shift from its orientation toward educating, inspiring, and mobilizing to a more entertainment-focused model in order to compete, with some success, with foreign broadcasts.

Chapter 4 begins the most groundbreaking section of the book, namely Soviet television. The chapter overviews Soviet television as an industry and explores how the authorities sought to use it to promote their agenda. The author argues that officialdom had trouble figuring out how to use television effectively, and television evolved from a more open and grassroots-oriented medium in its early years to a more centralized, standardized, and mobilizing format in the 1970s. The final chapter gets at those who worked in television. Roth-Ey demonstrates that many within the first wave of Soviet television workers were true enthusiasts. They perceived television as a medium for culturally edifying the population according to their own per-

spective and not the central political authorities, resulting in significant conflicts. Moreover, the audience overall did not prefer such culturally edifying and experimental programs and actually wanted movies and other similar formulaic entertainment, in contrast to the ideals of the Soviet TV enthusiasts. The greater centralization of Soviet television in the 1970s thus answered the demands of the audience, which the author examines through sociological studies, archival materials, and other sources.

The book has an excellent organization and narrative structure, and its central points are highly convincing. It could be strengthened by paying greater attention to the complexity of top-level prescriptions on Soviet culture. Thus, the book's presentation of "political authorities" does not offer sufficient nuance regarding the conflicts at the highest levels in central policy. For instance, the top authorities during the Thaw strongly endorsed grassroots initiative and spontaneity, making official central policy far from only pedagogically and politically oriented, as my own research has found.

This minor criticism should not detract from the overarching value of the book, which will set the standard for scholarship on Soviet television, and media in general, for many years. The author does an excellent job balancing an analysis of cultural production, political decision making, the interests of cultural professionals, and the industry of media production. This book constitutes required reading for anyone interested in the Soviet Union and the Cold War, as well as contemporary cultural consumption and media studies.