

INTRODUCTION

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In the new issue of *Laboratorium*, the editors' taste for experimentation manifests itself in new genres, research domains, and perspectives on familiar subjects. The texts that make up this issue, while not intentionally connected thematically, can all be read as explorations of issues of identity—the search for self-making in the complex space between Soviet and post-Soviet “identities,” between the roles prescribed by government and society and the longing for individual self-expression, between participation in market relations and relationships not predicated on capitalist exchanges, or between “spontaneous” activism and political apathy.

The centerpiece of this issue comprises the articles by the winners and finalists of *Laboratorium's* inaugural young authors contest conducted in 2012. The editors received over sixty manuscripts from Russian and foreign authors alike. We are especially pleased with the geographic diversity of the contest and the fact that among the young Russian researchers who submitted their work Russian regions beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg were well represented. The criteria for judging the entries included originality and social significance of the object of study, depth of engagement with the subject, thorough analytical interpretation of field data, clear substantiation of conclusions, clarity of style, and, last but not least, intentional and meaningful engagement with relevant theoretical dialogues and debates.

Another innovation of this issue is the “Field Notes” section. Its goal is to familiarize scholars with the materials of their colleagues' field research in a timely fashion. The temporalities of life and of reflections are rarely in sync, and often years pass between the initial research proposal and the publication of books and articles based on that research. In the meantime, the results of certain kinds of field research may lose relevance—first and foremost, for public debate. But the mission of this new section consists not only of “serving up” the time-sensitive results of field research to the public. This format facilitates the formulation and discussion of important methodological questions, which arise over the course of research but remain underdiscussed in the texts reporting the results of that research.

The lack of such discussions dedicated to crucial questions of methodology of qualitative (and more specifically fieldwork-based) research is particularly noticeable in the post-Soviet context. The editors of *Laboratorium* call on colleagues to submit for publication materials that will support the development of an academic culture of field research and the interpretation of qualitative data.

The first text in the research articles section is by Amy Garey, who received first place in the young authors competition—not least because of a highly original conceptualization of empirical data that problematizes the limits of the concept of collective memory. The author develops an alternative approach to the study of the phenomenon of “historical memory,” drawing on the semiotic theories of Charles Peirce. Although Garey is not the first to use this analytical frame, what she offers is a new perspective on processes of remembering the Soviet past, using examples from such different spheres as visual art, comedy routines, and ritual practices in a Buriat village. The author concludes that our references to the past have more to say about who we are today than “how it was” in reality. The analytical distinction between “symbolic forms” of memory aggregation about “the past” (cultural objects, monuments, mass media) and the “indexical forms” (individual memory) is particularly valuable for considering the question of where, exactly, images of the past are generated—that locus generally represented in studies of “collective memory” as some general “cauldron” of meaning.

The article by Timur Bocharov, which also won a prize in the young authors contest, offers a theoretical and methodological alternative to more normative research focused on the social construction of ethnicity. Bocharov offers a description of practices of ethnic categorization, grounded in the ethnomethodological approach of Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks. His choice of fieldsite and data collection method is also significant—participant observation in a St. Petersburg auto repair shop, which employs migrant laborers from Uzbekistan. Taking part in the workers’ daily practices (routine automobile repairs, eating, playing backgammon), the author deciphers some of their speech acts as “ethnic”-themed. Interestingly, in this context “(post-)Sovietness” also emerges as an “ethnic” category of sorts.

There are interesting thematic intertextual links between Garey’s and Bocharov’s papers. For instance, both in the Buriat village and in the St. Petersburg auto repair shop, local actors demonstrate a ritual for the stranger-researcher—a ritual they generally never perform without an audience of “strangers” or that they perform in a simplified form, in both cases describing their actions as “tradition.” The meaning of such demonstrations as a type of cultural text is not explicated by the authors of the articles, nor by their interlocutors. It is as if the question that arises is addressed to the reader: does this mean that “identity” and “ethnicity” are inherently products of an “other”’s exoticizing gaze? And what makes the “native” (and all of us are “native” in the eyes of our respective “others”) perform for the “other” in this negotiation of ascriptions and attributions of identities?

Tatiana Shchurko’s article, which received second place in the young authors’ contest, critiques state policies around the “protection of motherhood and childhood” in Belorussia. Mobilizing the conceptual framework of feminist and Foucauldian

critical perspective, the author shows how the female body is politicized and estranged as a “reproductive” body. Although in the West this kind of critique is by now well established in academic and public discourse, in Belorussia and Russia it still remains innovative and relevant. Shchurko’s analysis is particularly valuable because it helps problematize the post-Soviet “traditional turn” in terms of gender roles, which has thwarted the reception of feminism, as well as the quasi-eugenic state rhetoric that effectively erases the everyday difficulties involved in birthing and raising children.

The topic of medicine in the post-Soviet context continues in the article by Elena Berdysheva, who explores the case of the Moscow dental market. The author proposes that we consider the transition from distributive to market system in the vital-goods sector such as health as, first and foremost, a cultural problem—the problem of changing values, perspectives, and user practices. This transition is problematic for doctors, as it challenges their professional identity: “Who am I—a doctor sworn to help people, or a salesperson?” The content of medical work is also redefined: thus, dentists encounter a new cultural model of “healthy teeth” as well as new parameters of “model” dentistry services—parameters that have to be taught to patients. At the same time, the author discovers that the commercialization of medical services, under certain conditions, is not synonymous with “dehumanization.” As editors, we would like to note that this is also an exclusionary process for anyone who, due to their financial circumstances, does not have access to the new, more “humane” medicine.

Finally, Dmitry Kozlov’s article problematizes the concept of “the Soviet person” as a monolithic model of socialization during the Khrushchev era. Documents from the Arkhangelsk Region from late 1950s, found by the author in the archives, allowed him to reconstruct the different forms of “deviant” behavior among youth—behavior considered “anti-Soviet” at the time. This was a broad category, including such phenomena as student initiatives, reading and discussion of “Marxist literature,” performative exits from the Komsomol, or original fashion styles. The overly rigid Soviet anthropological model, on the one hand, and the arbitrariness of many decisions undertaken by the Komsomol and Soviet institutions, on the other, together contributed to a rapid dilution of the very notion of “Sovietness,” which turned out to be a fundamental weakness of the Soviet regime.

The topic of identity, running as a thread through most of the articles in this issue, is also present in a review essay by Chad Alan Goldberg dedicated to the history of the concept of “marginal man” in American sociology. This concept, first proposed by Robert Park in the end of the 1920s, was enthusiastically adopted in subsequent decades by a variety of researchers, who applied it more and more broadly, transforming and enriching its original meaning. This intellectual adventure, masterfully told by the essay’s author, is still not over today. The author identifies new possibilities for the deployment of the notion of marginal man, applicable to the highly relevant problems of the zeitgeist (such as multiculturalism and globalization). It is also interesting to test the heuristic possibilities of this concept in conjunction with the problems of Soviet and post-Soviet identities, like the ones engaged in this issue’s articles.

The “Field Notes” section, compiled and coedited by Alexander Bikbov, features preliminary results of studies of the protests that took place in Russia from December 2011 through June 2012. The authors of the pieces in this section, who successfully integrate fragments of field data (including photographs and excerpts from interviews with activists) and methodological reflections, are all members of an independent research initiative. In designing this thematic section we wanted, first and foremost, to problematize the dual role of the activist-researcher and to consider specific issues pertaining to fieldwork during ongoing protests, such as their spontaneity, unknown total parameters, and variable length of interviews.

These questions receive thorough treatment in the opening article of the section by Bikbov himself. The author’s integration of gathered and partially analyzed data allowed him to make substantiated conclusions regarding the social makeup and other structural parameters of the protest movement, which call into question the hurried interpretations by analysts and journalists that circulated in the mass media and blogs immediately following the first street actions in December. The problems surrounding the creation of media images, that mythologized selective features of both the protest and “anti-orange” movement independent and government-controlled media sources alike, are further engaged in Anastasiya Kalk’s submission. She successfully shows that the selections of video and photo materials are a result of intentional choice, grounded in specific political agendas, and do not objectively portray the visual characteristics of mass protests. Alexander Fudin’s text focuses on the experiences of election observers in one Russian region. There is little known about this sphere of experience in comparison with the training and work of observers in the capital, as their experiences were widely publicized in blogs and in the social media. Initial analysis of interviews with young people who became observers for the recent presidential election on the periphery illuminates broad issues of social differentiation and a giant chasm in access to resources between the capital and the Russian regions as well as within the same region. Anna Grigoryeva’s research note describes the experience of organizing *Okkupai* street camps in Moscow in May 2012. The author notes certain specificities of the Moscow camp, in comparison with the global movement (ideological and party factions, the weakness of the consensus process), which can be helpful for further study of the future of this type of activism in Russia. The thematic section ends with a research note by Olga Nikolaeva describing her own experience of participating in a French initiative in support of the Russian protest movement at the end of 2011.

In accordance with an already established tradition, the materials in the reviews section are thematically linked with the rest of the issue. For example, discussion of the topic of protests continues in the review by Alexandrina Vanke (*Enraged Observers*, 2012), while “alternative versions” of Soviet identity making are taken up in the review of Sergei Zhuk’s *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City* (2010) by John Bushnell. In turn, the edited volumes (*Health and Intimate Life*, Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, eds., 2011; and *Making Bodies, Persons, and Families*, Willemijn de Jong and Olga Tkach, eds., 2009), reviewed by Irina Tartakovkaya and Edit Szénássy, focus on the various aspects of regulating intimate life in post-Soviet space. The social

problems of the post-Soviet society are also the focus of *Needed by Nobody* (2009) by Tova Höjdestrand, reviewed by Elena Pavliutkina. The important and, to this day, understudied question of Soviet consumer culture is addressed in the anthology dedicated to automobile use across the Soviet Bloc (*The Socialist Car*, Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ed., 2011). In Tommaso Pardi's review of this book, the reader will find a critical engagement of the edited volume's contributions as well as new and promising approaches to formulating further research questions on the subject. Elena Bogdanova reviews a Russian edition (2008) of Peter Solomon's book on Soviet criminal justice under Stalin.

This issue of *Laboratorium* is, in a sense, predominantly "young"—in terms of authors and topics alike; at times polemical (in a good way); and, we hope, intellectually stimulating in its commitment to the search for new productive research domains, questions, and concepts.

Authorized translation from Russian by Veronica Davidov