New Spatial Histories of 20th-Century Russia and the Soviet Union: Exploring the Terrain

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New Spatial Histories of 20th-Century Russia and the Soviet Union

Exploring the Terrain

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Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, eds., *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*. 315 pp. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003. ISBN 0295983337, $50.00 (cloth). ISBN 0295983418, $16.95 (paper).

Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume Lesen Wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* [Reading Time in Space: On the History of Civilizations and Geopolitics]. 566 pp. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003. ISBN 3446203818. €25.90.

Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War*. 258 pp. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. ISBN 0300092911. $45.00.

In another article I have presented some preliminary thoughts on a new direction in historical research on Russia and the Soviet Union that I term the "new spatial history."[1] I argue that this new spatial history does not constitute a self-conscious 'school' of historiography, nor is it characterized by any unifying conceptual framework or methodological apparatus. What has transformed the wide range of recent historical scholarship on space into a coherent body of scholarship—and differentiates this new genre from "traditional" historical geography—is a shared critical interest in the interaction of space with human agency and the mediating role of culturally defined

I am grateful to Susan Reid, Jochen Hellbeck, and the editors of *Kritika* for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

[1] Nick Baron, "New Spatial Histories of Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union: Surveying the Landscape," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 55, 3 (2007): 374–400.

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spatial practices in history. The potential of this new direction is exemplified, though by no means exhausted, by the three works evaluated in the present review essay. I focus here first on Karl Schlögel's volume of interlinked essays *Im Raume Lesen Wir die Zeit*, which exhorts historians to widen the angle and, at the same time, to sharpen the focus of their spatial optics. I then consider *The Landscape of Stalinism*, a volume of articles written by specialists in Russian cultural studies and co-edited by Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, and finally examine Emma Widdis's monograph *Visions of a New Land*. While Schlögel's ambition is primarily to explore the terrain and survey the scholarly potential of the new spatial history, the latter two works paint rich and nuanced pictures of the many landscapes and visions of space that shaped the history of Russia and the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

Karl Schlögel's recent publication *Im Raume Lesen Wir die Zeit* offers an elegantly crafted and stimulating introduction to the new spatial history. This work will yield few new insights to the specialist as regards theory or method, but it provides an efficient overview of the main empirical and conceptual issues exercising the mental energies of scholars in this emergent field and a perceptive account of the origins and development of the new spatial awareness in its historical, intellectual, and political contexts. In part 1, "The Return of Space," the author is particularly concerned to salvage spatial scholarship from distortions wrought by geopolitical determinism and, specifically, from the German "obsession" with racialized constructions of space, *Boden* as defined by *Blut*, which dissolves real space into a crass biological historicism (52–59). Schlögel's project invokes instead the humanistic traditions of scholars such as Herodotus, Alexander von Humboldt, Carl Ritter, or Walter Benjamin, all of whom sought in their diverse ways to explore and explain the world in its rich, living complexity and whose work exhorts us to repudiate modern scientific specialization and the divide between theoretical and applied knowledge. Using these examples, Schlögel celebrates synthesis, interdisciplinarity, and a rapprochement between practical experience and abstract thought.

The second part of the book, "Reading Maps," includes a brief examination of the cultural nature and political significance of maps and an engaging, though rudimentary, outline of the evolution of cartography in relation to systems of power and knowledge. For these sections, the author relies heavily on a limited range of mainly English-language secondary sources, all well-known to Anglo-American scholars but perhaps less familiar to his German readership. The work is at its most interesting when the author ventures beyond the well-trodden territory of historiographical synthesis to offer

his own studies of modern space and the spaces of modernity, constructing an anthology or "sampler" of methods, approaches, and styles in the new spatial history. In part 2, Schlögel dedicates chapters to the 1938 *Philo-Atlas* (a handbook published in Berlin in 1938 to facilitate Jewish emigration), a tourist map showing Sarajevo under siege during the Bosnian conflict of the mid-1990s, the life of Sándor Radó (the Soviet "Agent Dora" based in Switzerland during World War II), and the historical role and meaning of the map-table. Each proceeds from description of the particular artifact, text, or biography to general meditations on 20th-century cartographic strategies, sensibilities, and technologies. In part 3, "Working with the Eyes," and part 4, "Diaphanous Europe," the author uses the same approach to reflect on the material and mental spaces of modernity and postmodernity, and on the means of knowing and understanding these spaces. Among other subjects, he analyzes a photograph of John F. Kennedy's assassination; the markings on city pavements; town plans; the life-stories of houses, hotels, and apartment blocks; room interiors; Berlin directories from 1932 to 1962; railway timetables; the fingerprint; Baedeker's travel guides; the poetics of the American highway; Diaghilev's cultural and erotic peregrinations; European cemeteries; and the gates to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

These essays are idiosyncratic, provocative, incisive, and insightful. They bring space into the foreground, as an historical actor in its own right rather than a mere backdrop to action, and enliven our appreciation of how history inscribes itself in spatial forms and ideas. At the same time, they constitute a significant challenge to historians—as well as to scholars of other disciplines, policymakers and planners, and the general reader—to engage with space in new ways. In particular, Schlögel proposes that we should "go out into the world" and experience space directly, through "working with the eyes" as much as with the intellect, studying nature at first hand like the explorer-scholar von Humboldt, treading city streets like Walter Benjamin, *flaneur* of 20th-century urban modernity. Following this method, Schlögel suggests, our narrative will be structured by the routes we take and observations we make, by our perception of analogies, contiguities, or disjunctions between or among phenomena, rather than by chronology or causality. This new history will no longer privilege diachronic development at the cost of acknowledging rupture and discontinuity, since it is grounded in our acute sensation, as well as our critical reading, of the juxtaposition of physical traces of the past in space. It is a history that asserts simultaneity and confrontation above progress and flow.[2]

[2] Schlögel's analysis bears a striking resemblance to Michel Foucault's 1967 assertion, "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed," in Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, 1 (1986): 22.

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The problem remains as to how history-writing can capture and communicate the past in these terms. In this regard, Schlögel readily admits that literature and the visual media have been more inventive in articulating space than historiography. His own response to this challenge lies partly in the structure and style of the present work.[3] It proffers no progressive, linear argument, working instead from the premise that we "learn more on detours than on any direct route" (11). The 50 or so mostly brief chapters represent tentative exercises and experiments in forms of spatial history which individually aim to sharpen the reader's sensitivity and attentiveness to the historical nature of space and the spatial dimensions of history without collectively presuming to assert any new paradigm. This book is engaged in "mapping" the historiographical territory through which it moves but does not aspire to produce any putatively complete or comprehensive "map" of the terrain, since—as its extended analysis of the historical relationship between cartography and power illustrates—any such map would itself be implicated in discourses of power and, as such, would constrain rather than liberate our vision. Instead, the work is a compendium of snapshots, a *bricolage* of impressions collected during the author's travels and travails as tourist, scholar, cosmopolitan, and, above all and at all times, as *flaneur*. The work's self-conscious and often sudden shifts in style and register, from the prosaic to the elegiac, from the disarmingly simple to the playful or verbose, similarly represent a device to manipulate the reader's proximity to the spatial texts and textual spaces which constitute the book. At one moment, vivid description draws the reader into a close, almost sensuous, relationship with the subject matter. At other times, artful literariness or scholarly verbiage is deployed to estrange the reader from any sense of intimacy with the material world.

This approach will not convince all readers, and a good many are likely to be disturbed by the author's essayistic style and lack of conceptual originality, as well as by the license he allows himself in the role of scholar-*flaneur* to indulge in repetition, elision, and an all too exiguous footnoting of secondary sources. Much of this criticism, however, would be missing the point. As Schlögel himself is at pains to reiterate, to focus on the surface is not necessarily to be superficial. Spatial history is as much about the visible and tangible surface as it is about understanding the abstract forces and relations that construct our social and material reality. For Schlögel as *flaneur*, it is sensuous experience, piquant observation, and a careful figuring into words of material reality that give us insight into historical processes no less—perhaps more—than the tortuous excavation of hidden structures and meanings. "The description [of surfaces] is an art," he writes, "although it involves some tough work as well" (279). Elsewhere I have argued that the new spatial history is

[3] Schlögel's earlier works also offer some insight into his methods of spatial history. See, for example, his *Moskau Lesen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1984, new ed., 2000).

concerned with the nature of both physical spaces and spatial ideas in the past, as well as the discursive and material practices mediating between them. Schlögel's leg-work, map-work, and eye-work and his imaginative, inventive, evocative framing of spatial narratives demonstrate with some verve that such an undertaking can be both engaging and productive.

Although Schlögel is professor of East European History at the Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt an der Oder, and a specialist in 20th-century Russian cities and cultural life, his present work is concerned with the region of the former Soviet bloc only *en passant*. The one chapter dedicated specifically to Russian space raises many interesting questions, but it is too cursory a sketch to offer even provisional answers, and—less forgivably—it overlooks a large body of scholarly literature that has engaged with these issues in recent years.[4] Schlögel's brief "attempt at a hermeneutic" of Russian space begins by suggesting that 1991 appeared to represent a transition from Soviet "territory," precisely defined and bounded, to a diffuse and vague post-Soviet "space." However, he asks, perhaps the swift and seemingly simple collapse of Soviet territory indicates that it was never as sovereign, strong, coherent, and stable as it seemed? Was Soviet territory held together solely by force [a *Machtraum*], and did its collapse represent the ultimate "capitulation of [Soviet] power to [Russian] space" (394)? If so, what does it mean to speak of Russian "space"? What constituted this Russian (national?) space and how was it understood and represented? Unfortunately, Schlögel offers few new insights here, or even clear definitions with which other scholars might work to resolve these intriguing and crucial questions.

He asserts, correctly, that much Russian literature, poetry, and visual art has been preoccupied with the problem of space but offers no case studies to help the reader understand the motivations or substance of this cultural tradition. His own descriptive-poetic approach to spatial history, so suggestive at the micro-level of everyday experience, is not equal to the task of analyzing the structures or meanings of spatial development on a continental scale. He characterizes Russian space by its vast expanse, its diverse landscapes and climatic extremes: "such spaces persist," the author states, "when systems are long defunct" (396). Soviet power merely overlaid this space, he argues, with its collective farms, its industries, and its cities, with their identical buildings, monuments, streets, and open spaces—an environment built not only to manage the explosive growth of the urban population, as he proposes later, but to inspire, educate, discipline, and "civilize" it (486–87). According to the Soviet narrative, he asserts, its territory constituted a single space, a unified "home" for its citizens, for which the map of the USSR, with its starkly drawn external borders and internal homogeneity, was both emblem and icon. For Schlögel, the rapid disintegration of post-Soviet space

[4] See Baron, "New Spatial Histories: Surveying the Landscape," 382–98.

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has demonstrated, on the contrary, that this homogeneity was merely of the surface (though, of course, no less interesting for that). Post-Soviet reality makes manifest the previous system's legacy of destruction and decay, both in the natural environment and the urban habitats of everyday life. (It is a pity that he says no more about these critical issues here; later in the book, however, he fleetingly bemoans that historians have neglected the intimate spaces of Soviet life, such as communal flats, queues, or markets [484].)

In general, the Soviet project of spatial production was characterized, he argues, by "overstretch" (*Überanstrengung*). Space and place were overloaded with purpose and meaning. Plans of spatial development or urban construction were conceived not merely for practical purposes but to be demonstrative and connotative. The Soviet regime's obsession with "grand design" (402) was a sign of its weakness—an attempt discursively to overcome and subdue the chaos and flux that its own policies were producing. Ultimately, Schlögel concludes, with little attempt to define or explain his terms, Soviet power failed to transform Russian space into Soviet space. This, he asserts, is a history still waiting to be written (405).

Of course, this is a disingenuous claim. A great deal of immensely interesting and innovative scholarship has already been produced in the genre of the new spatial history.[5] The other two works under review in the present article represent two of the most valuable recent ventures in the exploration of Soviet space and suggest many of the analytic structures and interpretative perspectives elided in Schlögel's collection of essays.

The contributions to *The Landscape of Stalinism*, edited by Dobrenko and Naiman, demonstrate the wide diversity of method, focus, and style that one would expect in a publication originating in a conference. Some of the chapters are speculative, concerned primarily to render visible the intertextual warp and weft of cultural production. Others are more solidly grounded in historical context. All are of high analytical quality; and, taken together, they illustrate the rich potential of cultural studies' engagement with questions of space.

The volume opens with a brief introduction by Eric Naiman mapping the structure of the book and sketching out a number of the shared concerns which hold it together: with the Soviet "semanticization" of space, with the "saturation" of space with meaning (recalling Schlögel's notion of symbolic "overstretch"), and with the aspirations to extinguish spatial difference

[5] Schlögel acknowledges some of these works in "Die Wiederkehr des Raums—auch in der Osteuropakunde," *Osteuropa* 55, 3 (2005): 5–16, his introductory essay in a special journal issue dedicated to East European spatial histories under the ingenious title *Der Raum als Wille und Vorstellung: Erkundungen über den Osten Europas.*

(especially the center–periphery opposition) and to transform nature into an image of socialist humanity, itself recreated in the process of "mastering" space by physical endeavor and "appropriating" it as discourse. Several contributors allude also to continuities between pre- and postrevolutionary cultures in the discursive strategies employed to order, assimilate, and re-envision space. The book itself is divided into three parts organized loosely around common themes. The first part deals with aesthetic uses of space. Katerina Clark's chapter addresses the "spatial myths" at the heart of Socialist Realism. She reads a number of canonical works of architecture, literature, painting, and film as embodying the distinction between "sacred" and "profane" space (also conceived as "high–low" or "center–periphery" dualisms) and thereby providing "templates" (10) for the socialist way of life. Clark also points to prerevolutionary precedents for the use of architectural and urban design as models of national identity and metonyms for political, social, or cultural choices. The second chapter, by Jan Plamper, considers how visual representations of Stalin were spatially configured according to a model of concentric circles, placing the leader (even when physically absent) at the sacred, static center. Oksana Bulgakowa is concerned with virtual, constructed cinematic space. Her intricate, nuanced thesis posits a transition from the disembodied perspectives of experimental 1920s montage, designed to annihilate "geographical fixedness" and recreate a non-representative and panoptic "post-filmic" reality (54), to the emphasis on point-of-view shots in 1930s cinema, which conjure a "semantic unity" (58) existing outside real time and physical space. "The synthetic space of this film," she writes of Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin*, "is to be constituted by the spectator not as a spatial but as a semantic structure" (61). Common to all the diverse theories and practices of film directors throughout these two decades is the transformation of cinematic space—as well as the "real" spaces depicted in film—into pure metaphor.

This "semanticization" of space is also the subject of Hans Günther's lively analysis of the "mother archetype" in Soviet mass song. He considers the associations invoked in their lyrics between the Mother (Russia, nature, space) and other members of the "Great Family": the Father (Stalin) and the infantilized yet heroic Soviet *narod*. The songs celebrated both wide-open, free, and boundless (*neob"iatnoe*) space and the state border delineating this land in opposition to the "antispace" beyond (90). Within these lyrical landscapes, subjects move unceasingly, spontaneously yet in unison, forward and upward toward Moscow or the future, or both. These songs "naturalized" the machine culture of the 1920s (airplanes are "falcons"), but at the same time they transformed nature itself into metaphor. The next chapter, by Boris Groys, presents a difficult, extended exploration of the "aesthetics of totality" (96) in relation to Stalinist and National Socialist photography, painting, and architecture. He argues that totalitarianism should be regarded as a "political-aesthetic struggle

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… for dominion over signs," wherein ideologies sought to claim for themselves all forms of representation known in the history of art, and to "occupy the world … with signs that are identifiable as 'our' signs, in contrast to 'their' signs" (97–98). In his view, the "disempowerment of the spectator" by the avant-garde, its rejection of "external" criteria of aesthetic judgment, itself constituted a totalizing project, a precursor to the political disenfranchisement of the subject under dictatorship which asserted the "inner necessity" (of race, of class: 104) as the only adjudicator of meaning and value. At this moment, art and life occupy a "single, total space" (107), and "the image itself begins to judge the spectator" (110). This is not to eliminate contradictions, however, but to unify them all into a single world-picture, just as Stalinist architecture unified the most eclectic, irreconcilable styles and forms (while those designers who strove for stylistic purity were condemned as "formalist"), or as the Moscow Metro subsumed the dark, subterranean past into the electrically illuminated heaven-on-earth of the present. In these spaces, the subject finds no point from which to observe or judge. Rather, the figurative representations of leaders and heroes looking down from their pedestals, mosaics, and murals observe and judge the subject.

The volume's second part also explores how the Stalinist subject was situated in ideological space but focuses on how cultural production served as a means of spatial orientation and mobilization. Randi Cox's discussion of Soviet commercial advertising under Stalin combines a sensitive reading of a range of primary materials (including posters and newspaper advertisements) with an engaging analysis of the changing social and cultural contexts in which commercial images were produced and consumed. Soviet advertising, she argues, "tried to redefine the social construction of space and the roles different kinds of space should play in the formation of identity" (141). Not only the "fantasy" spaces that it projected—from the 1930s onward, mostly comprising luxurious domestic interiors, places of urbane leisure and consumption, or "sentimentalized" rural landscapes—but also the sites that it occupied and appropriated for itself (for example, shop-window displays) played a role in defining and demarcating space in relation to the "private" values of *kul'turnost'*, family, youth, and beauty which the regime sought to promote as a means of political stabilization. Late Stalinist advertising imagery also accorded primacy to Russian ethnicity and national landscapes over non-Russian spaces and identities, which were either ignored or portrayed as exotic stereotypes.

Evgeny Dobrenko's chapter, "The Art of Social Navigation," is a shrewd, stimulating examination of how Soviet space was represented on postage stamps, in a tourism journal, and in a work of patriotic popular geography. First, he charts the shift in Soviet philatelic imagery during the 1920s from the allegorical and abstract to the scenic, a genre that used landscapes as background for figurative or other illustrations. From the early 1930s onward,

stamps increasingly depicted landscapes as subjects in themselves, "showcasing" (167) the country and, especially, its capital city. Dobrenko next takes the reader on a tour of the magazine *Na sushe i na more*, arguing that it promoted a "topographic schizophrenia" reflecting the official culture's obsession with and "fear of space" (180). To assuage anxiety, the hiking heroes celebrated in its pages demonstrated not only the grandeur, scale, and diversity of the Soviet landscape but even more forcefully its internal integrity and homogeneity. By adhering to strictly prescribed paths and tropes, their tales were designed to "resemanticize" (188) and thereby tame the periphery, implicitly signifying the dangers of the borderlands in their primal, "inflamed" state before assimilation into discourse. In the final section of this chapter, the author examines Nikolai Mikhailov's 1947 book *Karta nashei rodiny* (Map of our Motherland), proposing that this work aimed not only to educate its readers in how to understand maps but to substitute its own descriptive text for the visual representation of the map because, confronted by the Soviet miracle of constant change, "visualization becomes superfluous; the picture is powerless before the word" (195). Being synchronic, Soviet space was "of little value in and of itself" (197) to a discourse fixated on diachronic progress. Stalinist culture therefore undertook to "transform space into time, geography into history, the visual into the verbal" (199). The transmogrification of raw, static space into teleological text also entailed its mythologization: "description tends toward story; story, toward history; and history, toward myth" (199). At the crossing of the spatial and temporal axes of this geographical mythology—at its epicenter—lay Moscow, and at the center of the city was the Kremlin and Stalin. Thus Mikhailov's book is revealed to be not so much a handbook of popular science but a primer in the creation of a Soviet spatial imaginary, "harmonious, aesthetically perfect, and very beautiful" (199). Richard Taylor's essay on the "topography of utopia" in Soviet musical films also emphasizes the importance of imagination in Socialist Realist representations of space.[6] "A Communist who cannot dream is a bad Communist," Anatolii Lunarcharskii, Soviet commissar of education in the 1920s, had asserted. "The Communist dream is not a flight from the earthly but a flight into the future" (202). The Stalinist musical film articulated this synthesis of space (the "earthly") and time (the "future") by its use of fairy-tale narratives, the emotional power of music, and its adherence to certain topographical conventions in its depiction of the socialist utopia. In many films, a tomboy heroine embarks on a journey from periphery to center, where she experiences an "unforgettable encounter" and is duly rewarded (as

[6] This chapter is a revised version of Taylor's chapter in *100 Years of European Cinema: Entertainment or Ideology?* ed. Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 11–26.

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a worker, by recognition, and as a woman, by romance). Her linear, centripetal trajectory is simultaneously spatial, temporal, social, and psychological.

The third, final section of the volume explores the relationship between Soviet ideology and the construction of space, especially through the projection and transformation of "empty" territory (or, as the editors conceive it, through the inscription of a "blank page"). Emma Widdis's chapter on the development in early Soviet cinema of a new "mobile perspective" to capture the shifting experience of revolutionary, de-centered space is drawn from her book, reviewed in more detail below. The next contribution, by John McCannon, considers the role of the Arctic in Stalinist culture. The Far North served, he argues, as a "reflective lens … in which their self-image took form even as they formed images of their northern frontier" (242). The Arctic landscape, constructed as one of magical, primal ferocity, re-emphasized not only Moscow's centrality, rationality, culture, and modernity but also the capacity and heroic resolve of its "sons" to mobilize against danger on the periphery, to conquer and civilize these territories and deliver them as tribute to the "father" (248–49). In constructing a "socialist tomorrowland" (256) in the empty northern periphery, these heroes were also creating a model for the realization by society of its "utopian" aspirations to self-transformation. Here, once again, the cultural assimilation of imagined landscapes fuses together space and time to produce a new, four-dimensional dreamworld.[7] Mikhail Ryklin's essay interprets the Moscow Metro as example of what Hegel termed "symbolic architecture," designed to unify people within a single structure of meaning. He argues that the discourse of the Metro incorporated elements that were simultaneously conspiratorial and ritualistic, rational and aesthetic, technocratic and utopian, militaristic and transcendental. This amalgam of opposites recalls Groys's notion of the "art of totality." The Metro's idealized subterranean space constituted a "prototype for the future, above-ground image of the new capital of the world" (271): like several of the sites, landscapes, texts, and cultural artifacts discussed in this volume, it provided a discursive template for spatial fantasy striving to displace "real" time and space. The final chapter of the book, by Mikhail Epstein, is a complex and clever speculation on the nature of Russian space. "Time in Russia," argues Epstein, "is displaced by physical and metaphysical space—this is the Archimedean law of the immersion of a large geographical body in history" (278). Loss of territory, in his conception, has invariably produced historical acceleration, in the form of reform or revolution; expansion has resulted in stagnation. Paradoxically, Russian culture's response to the sensation of spaciousness is a desire for extreme congestion and communalism. The Russian's love of speed is a function

[7] For an exploration of the "dreamworld" of Socialist Realist culture, see Boris Groys and Max Hollein, eds., *Traumfabrik Kommunismus: Die visuelle Kultur der Stalinzeit / Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era* (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz, 2003).

of his fear of the void; his boundless longing (*khandra* or *toska*) is born of the open road; his expansive character is an expression of spatial expanse (*prostor*); and his innate provincialism created by the continual annihilation of local centers and concentration of authority in new metropoles. Indeed, the author contends that Russian culture is held in perpetual thrall by its desire for spatial self-alienation. "Russian autocracy," he observes, "is obsessed with the desire to base itself outside its own state, in order to rule that state as if it were provinces" (290). It thus places itself between barbarism and civilization, past and present. The everyday queue, in which people gaze solely at others' backs and behinds, is "hostile to culture"; it exists in "pure expectation" of deferred satisfaction; it is a "school of patience and a factory of optimism" (294–95). The ubiquitous string shopping bag "is a sign of our historical destitution and nomadism": it is "crudely materialistic" and is carried on the street "like one's own stomach turned inside out" (300). If Russian space cannot be cultivated, "so let us corporealize it," he concludes—warmed and softened by smoke and mud, polluted by its own secretions, Russian space is culturally intuited as "maternal womb or as outhouse, grandiose cosmic piss pot" (304).

The book, taken as a whole, offers a range of such stimulating, occasionally eccentric insights not only into Soviet spatial history but also into the literary, textual, and verbal fixations of contemporary cultural studies. "In this volume," writes one of the editors, "we explore how one-sixth of the globe was gobbled up by words" (xvi). After 300 exhilarating pages, the reader is left wondering if this scholarship is indeed an *exploration* and not as much a *demonstration* of the linguistic appropriation of space. Nevertheless, if some of the contributors seem to lose sight of the materiality of physical space underlying discourse, others compensate for this by offering sensitive readings of culture as a form of practice, both representative and constitutive, mediating between text and lived experience. In this regard, Emma Widdis's book *Visions of a New Land* is a model of the new spatial history, encompassing both "real" and "discursive" space as well as persuasively charting their intricate interactions.

Widdis's aim is to offer an account of shifting modes of spatial thinking during the interwar period. She is most interested in two interrelated issues: first, how Soviet "imaginary geographies" constructed through culture related to "real questions about the organization of the territory" (x); and, second, how the experience of space was represented and communicated in cinema and other cultural texts. Immediately after the Revolution, she argues, the new Soviet state embarked on a twofold strategy of spatial reconstruction, which involved, on the one hand, practical measures to explore, map, and organize its territory; to assimilate and integrate peripheral regions; and to overcome distance and consolidate political control; and on the other, a cultural process of self-representation "positioning the citizen and individual

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within the nation, constructing relationships between center and periphery, and associatively between private and public space" (3). Cinema was to play a key role in both integrating and representing space, and Widdis deals in depth with the artistic search for an appropriate new revolutionary form of filmmaking. At stake was no less than "the materialization of utopia in real space … the social body was to be mapped onto the spatial body" (4).

Rejecting simplistic, schematic interpretations, Widdis argues that the Soviet regime's initial impulse was not solely toward spatial "assimilation" (*osvoenie*), toward homogenizing space and rendering it static, visible, and subject to a dominant, panoptic center. On the one hand, such a strategy would simply have reproduced the center–periphery relations that were characteristic of capitalist spatial organization, whereas it was recognized that revolution should entail creating a new form of space and a new relationship between space and the individual. On the other hand, she also suggests that Vladimir Paperny's scheme of two cultures fails adequately to describe how different "models of centrifugal and centripetal spatial organization coexisted and competed" throughout this period, together with "competing models of *experience*" (9, italics in original).[8] Instead, Widdis proposes the concept of "exploration" (*razvedka* or *izuchenie*) to encompass the set of practices and discourses that treated space as "decentered, non-hierarchical, and dynamic," as differentiated, interconnected, and equal. This discourse did not aspire to "assimilate" space but to "appropriate" it through sensory experience, thereby overcoming the individual's alienation from nature and producing a new and creative rapprochement between man and the physical world (10–11).

The first chapter considers how Soviet infrastructural projects of the 1920s, such as electrification and the construction of radio communications networks, which established new linkages between and among regions, and the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32), which focused on opening up new areas, deconcentrating industry, and destroying the isolation of the traditional peasant village, served progressively to unify space and transform it into an increasingly integrated and equalized national territory. Widdis then examines how these processes were represented in propaganda; how filmmakers involved themselves in "embedding localness within the 'symbolic realm' of Sovietness" (45); and how architects and urban planners strove to incorporate local identities and valorize lived experience in this new, decentered space by

[8] Widdis is referring to Vladimir Paperny's highly influential *Kultura "Dva"* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1985), which depicted the transition from the postrevolutionary Bolshevik culture of the 1920s to the Stalinist 1930s in terms of a shift from a spatial paradigm asserting horizontality, a centrifugal dynamic, mobility, collectivism, and a leveling of difference, to a model valorizing the vertical, centripetal, static, symmetrical, and hierarchical. A translation has appeared under the title *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*. trans. John Hill and Roann Barris, in collaboration with the author (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

emphasizing dispersion, mobility, and networks. In chapter 2, Widdis examines the search by filmmakers for cinematic techniques that would visually render the experience of this dynamic, destabilized space. By embodying the immediacy of material reality, by emancipating the senses, it was thought that cinema could play its revolutionary role in overcoming man's alienation from nature. Major directors of the period—Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov—all understood that it was through a mastery of editing that they could create a new experiential visual language of energy, fracture, and flux. They rejected the traditional *mise-en-scène* with its illusory reproduction of the static, integrated space of the bourgeois world. Rather, by montage they could create new cinematic spaces and experiences, transforming the material geographies that constituted their subject and settings, creating new "visual simulacra" of reality (65), while also redeeming physical space by enabling the viewer to experience it directly, organically, sensuously. Each film director and theorist developed a distinct approach to this project. For Eisenstein, it meant an emphasis on controlling the "raw material" to produce a new and dynamic reality, whereas for Vertov it meant rediscovering the dynamism inherent in spatial experience by means of the anthropomorphic, "embodied perception" of the "Cine-Eye." Despite their differences, Soviet filmmakers of the avant-garde were all striving to innovate new methods of representing "the revolutionary experience" in art (72), and all celebrated the role of technology in creating the new aesthetic.

At the same time, filmmakers were struggling to find novel ways of portraying urban and domestic spaces to accord with the new social geographies promoted by the revolutionary project. The city played an ambiguous role in this radical discursive reconfiguration of space and time. It was the source of transgressive energies and a site of corruption but also embodied the achievements of modernity and technology. In her third chapter, Widdis looks at how cinema responded to the challenge of appropriating the "dynamism of the city" for the "dynamism of the revolution" and transforming its "liminal spaces" into the "lived space of the ordinary citizen" (80). Postrevolutionary cinema was an art in and of transition: in films of the 1920s we see amorphous crowds of individuals merging progressively into collectives; the historic, monumental city centers broken up by dynamic, fragmentary camera shots; private space fusing into the public. The urban space portrayed is still dynamic and disorienting, chaotic and liberating, but film has transformed its transgressive energy into a creative force to be appropriated by the viewer, as by the urban resident, through sensory experience.

The next two chapters move out into the wider space of Russia's *neob"iatnyi prostor*. Chapter 4 examines Bolshevik cultural representations of the still largely unknown peripheries of the new state. These were spaces of adventure, where "ordinary heroes" (99) could prove themselves, and where

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society could remake itself in the process of discovering and developing these regions. Widdis briefly discusses the role of geologists, cartographers, ethnographers, and amateur *razvedchiki* (scouts) in this "rush to the periphery" (97) and the role of local studies (*kraevedenie*) and popular science in demystifying and promoting knowledge of all corners of the state's vast territory. Filmmakers, too, played their part in integrating the periphery into a broader cultural space. Viktor Turin's *Turksib* (1930), for example, represented the building of a major railway link between Turkestan and Siberia (significantly, two peripheries independent of any historic centers) as "an adventure of exploration and discovery" (104); and Vertov's *One-Sixth of the World* (1926) projected a cinematic cartography of the Soviet Union, stressing both the diversity and the equality and interconnectedness of its constituent national and territorial regions. Widdis contrasts this approach to that of the Stalinist 1930s, when films, if they showed the periphery at all, did so merely to invoke "local color" and re-assert the center–periphery opposition that underlay the new policy of spatial homogenization and assimilation.

Her next chapter analyzes how this shift in the cinematic representation of space was reflected in its changing "models of vision" (120). While both Soviet power and cinema sought to explore space dynamically and on equal terms, she suggests, filmmakers manifested an "obsession with the train and with rail travel" (120), as both an expression of the "liberated and mobilized experience of seeing and a new way of living in the world" (121). Blurred landscapes were shot through the train window, permitting the viewer to "appropriate" space through direct, dizzying sensuous apprehension. As Stalinism sought to assimilate the periphery, establishing the center's panoptic dominance, the use of aerial shots became more common (as did films about heroic pilots), abstracting, framing, and stabilizing space while transforming it into "controllable territory" (122). Widdis links this perspectival shift also to a transition in the Soviet discourse and practice of travel. Whereas during the 1920s travel was promoted as a form of adventure and exploration, during the next decade travel became a strictly regulated leisure activity, with the periphery demoted to an exotic "decorative space" or "playground for the center" (139).

The final chapter expands the discussion of how cinema's "tourist gaze" on a "seamless, single landscape" reflected Stalinism's conflation of "conquest and leisure" (142–43). The new Stalinist cultural geography represented a self-contained, bounded territory. Power radiated from the center to the periphery, configured at its outermost extremities as a romantic space of man's heroic struggle against nature (including human nature) and of socialism's inevitable victory over the wild and liminal. Man and machine were no longer integrated in a single, dynamic "machine aesthetic," since technology had also been tamed. Industry was now naturalized as part of a domesticated, ordered, and stable landscape. At the center of this homogenized, pastoral space was

Moscow, itself undergoing reconstruction according to a radial model centered on Red Square. The new Moscow would be a "stable, framed, and monumental space" (175) for performative acts of ideological loyalty and participation. Under the panoptic gaze of Lenin atop the Palace of Soviets, the city would also become the new epicenter of national communications and transportation (for example, as the "port of five seas" depicted in Grigorii Aleksandrov's 1938 musical comedy *Volga-Volga*). Thus, according to Widdis, "the end goal was, rhetorically at least, reached, and utopia was realized" (189).

This is a relatively short work, but it concentrates in its pages a great breadth of insightful historical analysis, together with a nuanced conceptualization of different orders of space, spatial practice, and spatial experience and a sensitive treatment of a wide range of cultural texts. As I have sought to demonstrate here, the book touches on and brings together within a single interpretive framework many of the themes, problems, and ideas under scrutiny in the voluminous current scholarship on spatial history which I review in the companion piece to this essay. The book's argument is sophisticated and cogent and developed in a lucid and compact prose. The volume is handsomely designed and richly illustrated with maps, plans, posters, and film stills.

Both Widdis's monograph and the Dobrenko and Naiman edited volume deserve to take their place on readers' shelves alongside *Kul'tura "Dva,"* Vladimir Paperny's expansive, ambitious, and richly provocative structuralist treatment of Russian and Soviet spatial history. Some of the Dobrenko and Naiman essays share Paperny's preoccupation with textual inter-relations and demonstrate a similarly sharp, often witty, semantic ingenuity which, at times, blunts the edge of their historiographical analysis. Widdis is no less adroit in her interpretation of cultural sources than these scholars, but her approach to historical analysis tends less to the schematic, speculative, or eccentric. As such, her work is to be particularly recommended, by way of an antidote, to those historians who still suffer from a residual skepticism regarding the potential of cultural studies to contribute to our understanding of the past. Schlögel's work is the best means of gaining an overview of the key questions and problems of modern European spatial history and sampling some ingenious, imaginative, and intriguing attempts to address these issues.

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