

On Roots and Rhizomes : The Private and the Public in the Soviet 1930s

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There is no doubt that private life in the Soviet 1930s was under attack in its many aspects : material, spiritual, intellectual, religious, ethnic, national, sexual, etc., down to the psyche, where it was subject to "brainwashing". At the same time, contradictory phenomena could be observed. Stakhanovite shock workers received very personal rewards, such as private cars and motorcycles, more living space, salary bonuses, etc. Previous revolutionary practices that called for the withering away of the family were abandoned during the era of the Great Terror : despite the large-scale repressions, the family and private life received institutional support with the reintroduction of regulations making abortion and divorce more difficult. Parental authority was reinforced, the new year tree made again its appearance, and with it, other private values, which had previously been castigated as "bourgeois".

The present article attempts to investigate how the categories of public and private were recontextualized during the social and political upheaval of the Soviet 1930s in a series of diaries, written by ordinary people, men and women, workers, peasants, students, a housewife and activist, members of the intelligentsia, and even a first secretary of the Soviet Writers' Union. Most of these texts were recently published in English translation in a collection, entitled *Intimacy and Terror : Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (Garros, 1995). The sole publication of sources, unusual and new as they may be, does not warrant a new approach to history, which will always attempt to negotiate the "fact" between the document, a shared thinking, and one's own interpretation. But unusual sources can

sometimes stir up the imagination, force us to think over the patterns and structures through which we use to approach the "facts".

By revealing the secrets and private moments of these life stories, the editors of *Intimacy and Terror* knew that they had taken a risk : these diaries had not been written for an international public. But it is not this act of voyeurism and commodification that troubled critics : what was immediately questioned was the truth value of "ordinary writing", as stated by Richard Pipes in his review of our collection in *The Village Voice* :

To begin with, unless they possess a certain amount of literary talent, ordinary people, no matter how interesting their experiences, can no more convey them in interesting prose than they are able to communicate their feelings in stirring verse. Raised on classical literature, Russians are generally gifted writers, but for reasons best known to them, the editors have chosen a rather dull lot ... Most of the diarists portray their time in a pitifully inadequate way, in part because they fear being found out, in part because they lack literary aptitude. To obtain a sense of what it really was like, one apparently must have recourse to the writings and recollections not of ordinary but of extraordinary people — an Akhmatova, a Solzhenitsyn, or a Nadezhda Mandelstam.

(Pipes, 1996)

Pipes's remarks echo those of a French Russianist, who notes the disappearance of the diary as an intimist genre altogether in Stalin's times : "The new man has no more interiority. A diary ? He doesn't even know what this means", writes Georges Nivat in his recent book, *Russie-Europe : La fin du schisme* (1993 : 146, my translation).

What was "interiority" in the Soviet 1930s ? On 27 December 1936, Galina Shtange, the wife of a professor of the Moscow Electromechanical Institute of Railroad Engineers, member of the All-Union Conference of the wives of the Commanders in the transportation field of the People's Commissariat of Communication and Transportation, writes the following in her diary :

The year is drawing to a close. It was a painful one for me. The family is upset that I spend so little time at home. I'm sorry for them, but what can I do ? I'm not old yet, I still want to have a personal life. I did bring up my children, after all, and I did a good job of it too. Now that I've fulfilled my obligations to my family, in the few years

that remain to me I want to live for myself; I will always be sincerely glad to help them.

(Diary of G. V. Shtange, Garros, 1995 : 185)

On 15 April 1937 she writes :

Why should I, after bringing up four children and after going through so many hard times, in the declining years of my life, at the age of 53, have to give up my personal life just so my son's wife can live the way she pleases. This would be such a great sacrifice for me that I'm not even sure that I could find the strength in myself to suppress my desire for a personal life one more time, and of course this would be the last time.

(ibid. : 189)

What "personal life" (*lichnaia zhizn'*) represents for Galina Shtange becomes clearer with her diary entry of 27 August 1936 :

27 August 1936. So much for my community work ! To tell the truth, I assumed that it would come to this, but still I had no idea it would happen so soon. I was completely engrossed in my work for two months. I found my element and felt wonderful, in spite of being so tired. I managed to get some things done; and I could have done a lot more, but such was not my fate ! Circumstances will not let me be distracted, even for a moment, from what's going on at home. Borya had a son on August 15 and neither of us has a maid, in fact they don't even have an adequate place to live. Just a single ten-meter room and of course there's absolutely no way for him and Dinochka and the newborn baby to fit into it, along with their furniture, all the baby things and the little bathtub. He was told he'd get an apartment by around September 15, but for now they will have to live out at the dacha.

And I just can't leave them to their own devices. I feel awfully sorry for them, the poor things, and I have to come to their aid at this difficult time. So I decided to give up the work that I love so much, and take up cooking, dishwashing, and diapers again.

(ibid. : 172-173)

Shtange's life is divided between her "own narrow little family affairs" (*svoimi uzkooseinymi delami*) — as she says — and "community work" (*obshchestvennaia rabota*). From her autobiography (included in her diary), we learn more about what *obshchestvennaia rabota* means for her. She mentions a series of

personal contributions to society that she had made since 1905, including the organization of amateur performances for school children and warm meals for students of the railway school, as well as nursing in a hospital during World War I. She had to give up her social activities during the troubled period of the postwar era : having on her hands "a sick mother, four children, a kitchen garden and a cow", she was forced to "concentrate all her strength on feeding and raising her children". Shtange's diary and autobiography are marked by the difficulty she has in reconciling her "personal life", that is, "community work" with the worries of everyday existence. Despite the fact that she had to abandon her *lichnaia zhizn'* many times, she keeps on struggling in order to uphold what is for her "the meaning of life".

What some would probably consider an inversion or confusion of values is literally *mapped out* in the diary : parallel to the handwritten chronicle of her daily life, Shtange pastes onto the pages of her diary invitation cards for a banquet at the Kremlin, published photographs (for example, a snapshot of her husband with Kaganovich), letters from her relatives, newspaper articles, and other items. All this endows Shtange's collage with a polyphonic quality, where voices of public life and "interiority" intersect, and respond to each other.

But not all that is public makes its entry into Shtange's diary. Is it because she fears to be "found out" that she leaves out *her* version of one of the great purge trials ? Or because she accepts much of what will be written ? She writes on 2 March 1938 : "Today the first day of the right Trotskyist bloc. I won't write about it since I'm saving the papers and it all can be read there" (ibid. : 214).

Shtange's values of "home", "personal life", and "community work" seem to reflect the ambivalence which characterized the regime's policy toward the family and its "totalitarian" goals, an ambivalence noted some time ago by the "revisionist" historian Robert Thurston : "Whatever scale the terror of 1937-38 really assumed, the erratic nature of policy and practice towards the family suggests that in that sphere the repressions were not the rational culmination of any policy developments" (1991 : 562, 568). Thurston concludes that the Soviet state moved "substantially away from a 'totalitarian' approach to the family towards a contemporary Western model", which, incidentally, manifests certain parallels with Soviet practices : during the McCarthy era "family ties [also]

suffered" and the "American public has put perceived needs of society above family loyalty" (ibid. : 562, 568).

The problem with such a conclusion is its generality. Vladimir Andrlé writes : "To emphasize 'social history' while ignoring the theoretical underpinnings of describing the social life of a remote place and time produces yet another dogmatism" (1992). Indeed, there are many different "Western models" of family, themselves based on different traditions of private life within society, and ultimately founded on how self and other are culturally and historically determined. As Emile Benveniste argued in his already classic study *Indo-European Language and Society*, the "self" and the "other" were tied together from the very the dawn of time. A comprehensive view of all the derivations based on the stem **swe-* indicates that "self" implied, on one hand, the membership of a group of "own people" (like the Russian *svoi*, in *on svoi chelovek*—"he is our own", "he belongs to our group"); on the other, **swe* specialized the "self" in its individuality. Overall, it was "the word for social entity, each member of which realizes his 'self' only in the 'inter-self'" (1973 : 262). Benveniste's archeology of language tells the story of a primitive notion of freedom "as the belonging to a closed group of those who call one another 'friends'". The words *friend* and *freedom* have a common origin, "the notion of 'liberty' was constituted from a socialized notion of 'growth,' the growth of a social category, the development of a community" (ibid. : 264).

Shtange's longing to fulfill her personal life in "community work" shares with many of her contemporaries the millenarian dream of rebuilding paradise lost. After the troubled years of revolution and collectivization, the hope of overcoming "transcendental homelessness" by building — perhaps not a classless society — but at least a society based on justice, progress, and stability, was still alive, much as in the same way the dream to write the great epic of the future was alive. Georg Lukács writes in his *Theory of the Novel* that "time can become constitutive only when connection with the transcendental home has been lost. Only in the novel are meaning and life, and thus the essential and the temporal, separated; one can almost say that the whole inner action of a novel is nothing else but a struggle against the power of time ... And from this ... arise the genuinely epic experiences of time [die epischen echtgeborenen Zeiterlebnisse] : hope and memory" (Benjamin : 1968 : 99, 19?? : 274).

Meaning and life are indeed separated in the "novel" that Galina Shtange is writing for herself, and how could it be otherwise when "home" is "just a single ten-meter room", or a dacha ? This dacha has even become a "life's dream", as Shtange writes on 16 May 1937 :

Now our life's dream is about to come true, — by June 1 we ought to get a little dacha 42 kilometers from Moscow on the Kazan rail line.¹

During the 1930s, "shelterlessness" has increased, and "home", as it was before, has been replaced : what remains of it is the communal apartment, the private plot, left of the peasant household (the *dvor*), the "little dacha 42 kilometers from Moscow on the Kazan rail line", or some other islands of refuge, or roots. But what kind of roots can grow in "quicksand society" ? Moshe Lewin uses this term to describe the "Russia in flux" of the early 1930s. Rural Russia has become a *Rus' brodiazhnaia*, a Russia of vagrants. Factories and mines have turned into "railway stations" or, as Ordzhonikidze exclaimed in despair, into one huge "nomadic gypsy camp". This was a country where "workers, administrators, specialists, officials, party apparatus men, and, in great masses, peasants were all moving around and changing jobs, creating unwanted surpluses in some places and dearths in others, losing skills or failing to acquire them, creating streams and floods in which families were destroyed, children lost, and morality dissolved" (Lewin, 1985 : 221).

For many who live in the Soviet 1930s, these roots have grown into rhizomes, as depicted by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (1987). What is a rhizome ? Johnson Grass, Quach Grass, Iris, and other such weeds, grow in rhizomes. A college botany textbook gives the following definition : "Underground stems that grow near the soil surface. They typically have short internodes and scale leaves, and produce roots along their surface. They store food for renewing growth of the shoots after periods of stress such as cold winters" (Moore, 1995 : 310). For Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomes are of course not limited to botany, but function as powerful metaphors for

¹ Shtange, Galina Vladimirovna. *Vospominaniia 1932-1936gg.* RGALI: f. 1837, z. 5, ed. khr. 48-52 (my translation; passage not published in *Intimacy and Terror*).

certain types of epistemologies, social organizations, and modes of representation. Let us not forget that metaphors *form* our thinking, that they are, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have shown, what "we live by" (1985). It turns out that "rhizomes" grow not only in capitalism : after the Russian revolution, civil war, collectivization, and forced industrialization, roots, with their binary logic and biunivocal relations, are replaced by "radicle-systems" where "the principal root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed" and where "an immediate, indefinite multiplicity or secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development" (Deleuze, 1987 : 5). "Root-cosmos" has become "radicle-chaosmos", where the "linear unity of the world" has been shattered. This is a "world [which] has lost its pivot", and in which "the subject can no longer even dichotomize" (ibid. : 6).

Indeed, the tsar has been shot and the heavens have been stormed by the brigades of the "godless". As far as personality (*lichnost'*) is concerned, the regime developed its own metaphor : individuals were to become "cogs" in the great wheel of the state. But despite the fact that Stalin's metaphor of the *mashina i vintiki* was promised to a bright future, from the passportization of the country (fixing the peasants once again on their land!) to the Stakhanovite movement, and from other such measures of the "totalitarian state" to sovietology, all this related much more to the modernist dream of a taylorized proletariat (like for example Alexander Gastev's "Scientific Organization of Labor") than it did to the "quicksand society" of the 1930s.

Despite of this, many of our diarists hold on to their roots, or of what remains of it. Lyubov Shaporina is member of the Leningrad intelligentsia. Wife of the famous composer Yuri Shaporin, she is also the founder of the Leningrad Puppet Theater. She writes on 27 August 1937 in her diary :

I keep getting the feeling that I'm inside the Bryullov painting : *Pompeii's Last Day*.² Columns falling all around me, one after the other, there's no end to them; women run past me, fleeing with terror in their eyes.

² Karl Bruyllov, 1799-1852, who enjoyed immense popularity during the first half of the nineteenth century. He was acclaimed during his lifetime as the great master of Russian painting, precisely for *Pompeii's Last Day*.

Utter exhaustion.

The puppet theater is my salvation.

And Palekh. How lucky I was to meet those people, to witness that way of life, magical and unreal, like something in a fairy tale. I want to go there again. To take another look at that art that simple peasants brought down to us through the ages. That's something that Alyona would have appreciated. She would have been 16 1/2 now, a real beauty. And I am so utterly, completely alone. Alone.

(Diary of L. V. Shaporina, Garros, 1985 : 352)

To be the master of her *own* theater is Shaporina's string, which gives her something to hold on in a world where everything is, as she says herself, "out of joint". Shaporina's world is also deeply rooted in the prerevolutionary times. She is part of those who returned from emigration and thrived in Soviet reality in spite of everything. Now, to survive, the diarist retreats to "magical and unreal" Palekh and the art of its "simple peasants". She often abandons the present and retreats into reminiscences of her "Tsarist" childhood or of the short period of emigration in France where Shaporina seems to have lived between 1925 and the early 1930s. Implicitly dedicated to Alyona, the little daughter who died in 1932, the diary is a requiem for the one who, to cite the diarist's own words, "chose for herself the better fate" — not to live the civil war of "1937".

The diary of Lev Gornung, a Moscow poet and translator, and occasional photographer, covers only several days in the summer of 1936 (Garros, 1995 : 99-109). Gornung's depiction of his encounter with Anna Akhmatova and some friends in the dacha settlement of Peski, near Kolomna, the drinking of tea or raspberry punch on a terrace in the lamplight, while reciting and listening to poems, the reading of scenes from a new translation of *Faust*, conversations about "Osip" [Mandelstam], a bath in the river, a visit to Kolomna with its "lot of old churches and small Empire-style buildings", all this wonderfully illustrates the possibility of freedom, defined by a community of friends, on an island called "Sands" (Peski), an idyll in the middle of the storm, or, if you wish, "quicksand society" Russia in 1936.

Not much is left of this freedom-friendship for Vladimir Stavsky, the general secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers. The rhizomatic multiplicity of "public life", literally inscribed in the tormented handwriting of his diary, seems to have swallowed up much of Stavsky's self, literally tied up by a thousand strings : the

"informal meetings in the corridor" of the joint meeting of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, encounters with a Party Control Committee Plenary, the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Chief Administration of State Security, prominent writers and Stakhanovites, and Stavsky's public struggle against alcohol, obesity, and the lack of inspiration. The diary shows no trace of Stavsky's denunciation of Osip Mandelstam, which led to the poet's arrest and eventual death in a labor camp. But one can feel Stavsky's envy and frustration in the following entry about one of his literary colleagues, Vera Ketlinskaya and her novel *Courage* :

On the way back to Moscow I read Ketlinskaya's *Courage*. She has so much material. And her disposition is so bold. She introduces dozens of heroes all at once. And still manages to individualize them.

Tanya, her childhood, in the toilet, is very good. Andrei Kruglov, too, the Communist who falls in love a week before he has to leave ...

In general she gives so much material in 60 pages that in the hands of another one of us writers would fill three novels!

What can we expect from her in the future ?

(Diary of V. P. Stavsky, Garros, 1985 : 222. Translation modified)

Stavsky's writer's block fills his diary. Here is a note from a conversation with Mikhail Sholokhov. The author of *The Quiet Don* tells Stavsky words of encouragement :

Problems with your nerves ? Get some rest! Work every minute, read, go to lectures, don't miss a single one! Absorb everything, and then, as Hegel said, release your reflexes into the world around you, i.e., write your book!

(ibid. : 244)

At times, the general secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers, the "executioner of Soviet literature", has moments when he can "release his reflexes". In his dacha at Skhodnya, nature helps him to recall the harmony of his childhood : the "powdery snow giving off an air of virginal purity", the "whole sky covered with stars", "spring sounding in the air", and the tall spruce trees, "forming a gray wall outside the house" (ibid. : 219-221).

What do we find beyond the wall of Stavsky's dacha, and other dachas of the 1930s ? What about the private notes of "simple peasants" ? Moshe Lewin writes in *The Making of the Soviet System* : "The collectivization tempest, as is well known, eliminated or superseded the rural commune — but the *derevnya* remained. And

with it, for some time longer, the peasantry (Lewin, 1985 : 56). His analysis is plainly confirmed by two diaries that were included in our collection. The first was written not far from Peski, the dacha settlement where Lev Gornung pictured Anna Akhmatova and her friends; the second comes from the region of Tiumen'. Here are some excerpts (the translation attempts to reflect the diarists' writing) :

Ignat Frolov :

10th of October 1936. Fine sunny weather with a mild Northwest wind cold in the shade frost just wouldn't let up the livestock has been in the yards for two days now. Today in the kolkhoz we chopped and brought in frozen cabbage which is very bad the heads are real small and puny and there's hardly any of them and mainly just leaves. Today we got paid 12 rubles for the 2nd half of the season and still in spite of such a bad cabbage harvest the comrade Communists are forcing or rather directing us compulsorily to turn it over to the Government and the farmers on the kolkhoz are left with nothing for their labors for working all summer, well you know just take it and live with it.³

22nd of April 1937. Cold weather again with a strong north wind but no frost Nikita Gordeevich Martynov's 5-year old son Evgeny died last night ! I had to make him a coffin yesterday and today is potato planting. ⁴

Andrei Arzhilovsky :

29th of October 1936 ... We eat soup made from pig heads and count our blessings for it. I was at my brother Mikhail's recently. He's still keeping up appearances, with his valuable dog and his mistress. A modern Mazepa ...⁵ Just now Galina piped up. "If I can get a neckerchief I'll join the Pioneers". So all it takes is a neckerchief. She's not too bright. Every once in a while she'll spout such nonsense, you wouldn't even believe it. They study geometry and

³ I. Frolov. Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka im. Lenina: f. 218, n. 1283, ed. khr. 13. (Passage not translated in *Intimacy and Terror*).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ukrainian Cossack leader of the seventeenth century, who betrayed Peter the Great when he joined Charles XII at the battle of Poltava. The author refers certainly to Pushkin's poem "Poltava," in the double context of the preparation of the 1937 Pushkin commemorative celebrations and the image of Mazepa as a national traitor.

algebra, but they're utterly empty, spiritually. And they're going to feed us in our old age ?

(Diary of A. S. Arzhilovsky, Garros, 1985 : 113)

12/8. [1936]. Still freezing cold. With proper attention to the stoves and good quality firewood, our life is bearable; it's warm in the hut. Yesterday the city celebrated the ratification of Stalin's Constitution. Naturally it was approved unanimously, by direct, secret voting. Everyone, no matter what his past, has the right to vote and to run for office. For the first time I took part in a big public rally. Of course there's more idiocy and herd behavior than enthusiasm. The new songs are sung over and over, with great enthusiasm : "He who Strides Through Life with a Song on His Lips" and "I Know no Other Such Land Where a Man Can Breathe so Free". But another question comes up : can it be that people under a different regime don't sing or breathe ? I suppose things are even happier in Warsaw or Berlin. But then maybe it's all just spite on my part. In any case, at least the finger pointing has ended. We will continue to stride through life : it's not that far to the grave.

(ibid. : 131)

We do not know much about the author of the first diary, except that he was a collective farmer in the village of Novo-Khoroshee, near Moscow. Andrei Arzhilovsky, a peasant of the Chervishev district of the Tiumen' region, was arrested in 1919 for being a member of a politically incorrect committee and sentenced to eight years of labor camp. In 1923, he returned home thanks to an amnesty related to the creation of the USSR. In 1929 he was arrested as a kulak and sentenced to ten years of labor camp for anti-collective farm activities. In 1936 Arzhilovsky was liberated for medical reasons, "so he could die at home". A year later he was arrested again for participating in a "counter-revolutionary wrecker's kulak organization". The diary served as a piece of evidence for his conviction. Arzhilovsky was executed on 5 September 1937.

Collective farmer Ignat Frolov's chronicle, almost exclusively devoted to the current weather, could have been written during the sixteenth century, except a few details, of course : frost, sunshine, Northwest wind, frozen cabbage, Trinity Sunday, making a coffin for a neighbor's son, and "planting potato" (*sazhat kortoshku*). The very flow of discourse that never seems to stop and that does not repeat itself despite the endless repetitions of the "same" events, belongs to the same epic chronotope of a world that is still whole and where

man feels still "at home", not yet concerned by these later times of "transcendental homelessness". Lewin speaks about the nexus of family as a self-sufficient production unit, "maybe at the level of French rural life sometime in the sixteenth century": "life was, in the period under consideration, still almost fully regulated by the 'agricultural calendar'" (1985 : 52-53). Indeed, Frolov dates most of his days using the "old" (Julian), i.e., pre-revolutionary calendar. He does not write a diary, but an almanac. Bakhtin evokes in his "Discourse in the Novel" the "illiterate peasant, miles away from any urban center, naively immersed in an unmoving and for him unshakable everyday world" (1981 : 295). This is Frolov's world.

We find nothing of this sort in our second "peasant diary". Because Arzhilovsky experiences the "necessity of having to choose a language". Bakhtin writes :

As soon as a critical interanimation of languages began to occur in the consciousness of our peasant, as soon as it became clear that these were not only various different languages but even internally variegated languages, that the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and in no way could live in peace and quiet with one another — then the inviolability and predetermined quality of these languages came to an end, and the necessity of actively choosing one's orientation among them began.

(ibid. : 296)

It is remarkable that the two types of consciousness or identity coexisted in Stalin's Russia of the 1930s : the consciousness of an "unmoving", "unshakable everyday world", and its rupture, its transformation, generating irony and anger against "spiritual emptiness", to use Arzhilovsky's words.

One of the documents, in which "critical interanimation of languages" is perhaps the most visible, is Fyodor Shirnov's "manuscript diary" : during the process of its publication, one of the editors of the press commented on the fact that the translator "had improved the quality of her translation" during her work on Shirnov's text, and that she "should revise the first part".

It turned out that it was Shirnov himself, who, during the long years of writing, had "improved" his style. Language, passing from the personal, the local, and half-literate to the public-standardized, became here the direct expression of "Russia in flux" and upward social mobility, from "out in the middle of nowhere" to

Moscow, where Shirnov ended his life as manager of a workers' dormitory at the "second building materials factory". But what is even more stunning to discover in Shirnov's "manuscript diary", is the expression of the very moment of the loss of roots, right at the beginning of his life :

1888

3/1 — At five-twenty in the morning after the second roaster-crow I saw the light of day (I was born) on the stove Grandma Yevgenya cut my umbilical cord wrapped me in a blanket and put me aside my sick mama.

3/2 — Grandma washed me off and swaddled me rubbed my head with goose grease and stuck a knotted rag into my mouth for me to suck on.

3/3 — In the morning I took the tit (breast).

3/5 — They took me to the parish church in Vekshni to get christened. My godfather was the village clerk Nikolai Kotovich. My godmother was my aunt and my mothers sister Marfa Petrovna my parents wanted to name me Vitalisi. But my godfather and godmother forgot along the way there and father Vasily the priest christened me Fyodor at home Mother didn't like that name and they just called me Vitaly anyway.

(Diary of L. V. Gornung, Garros, 1985 : 67)

At the end of the diary we learn that Shirnov had received the notes relating the first years of his existence from his father, who had told him that "a literate person always had a better life in his village and easier work".

Not all our diarists had such a father, and not all had such a sense of *self in time*. In some of the diaries that I read, the multiplication of "fascicular roots" has grown further, and with it "spiritual emptiness" and the incapacity of distinguishing between *lichnaia* and *obshchestvennaia zhizn'*.

On 11 December 1937, the high school student Yury Baranov wrote in his diary :

Not long ago we received a letter from dad. In there he wrote that the VTsIK [All-Russian Central Executive Committee] commuted his execution into 25 years of imprisonment. (That's great!)

Mom went to see him, she obtained the right of visit. Dad said that he won't serve a term of more than 5 years, because every day of investigation counts for three. 25 years of isolation! But we'll still

go fishing together and play chess. V. Sh.'s father has already been executed. I feel pity for V. Sh.

In school, things go pretty well. I didn't get one single "fair" in German, only "good" and "excellent". And say that I feared German more than anything else!

The competition has ended. I got the first prize. I was elected to the district chess conference. Great! A section is organized in school. What a good guy this Chernyshevsky was! He even wrote poems. I wrote an ode, imitating him. I think that it didn't turn out bad. ("The Mongol hordes are rushing toward the West").

(Baranov, 1988 : 39, my translation)

For those who were born, like Yury Baranov, in "radicle-chaosmos" and had no "roots" to search for, there was no great difference between twenty-five years of isolation for his father and a first prize in a chess competition : perhaps because meaning and life, the essential and the temporal, could no longer been "dichotomized". As far as discourse was concerned, such "indecisiveness" was no doubt a refuge against the trauma of everyday experience. But if by misfortune one suffered from "wrong origins", or when the "filth of the soul" became unbearable, there was always the option of crossing out time, as did the student Stepan Podlubny in 1937 :

December 6, 1937. No one will ever know how I made it through the year 1937. No one will know because not a single day of my life this year has been illuminated in this so-called diary, I can't even recall the details of my life in this year myself, and if everything turns out all right, and there are only 3 more weeks to go, I'll cross it out like an unnecessary page, I'll cross it out and banish it from my mind though the black spot the massive ugly black spot like a thick blood stain on my clothes, will be with me most likely for the rest of my life.

(Diary of S. F. Podlubny, Garros, 1985 : 302)

Fortunately, there were those for whom life had become "better" and "happier". For them, there was immediate, indefinite multiplicity and flourishing development :

Youth you filled me with an impulse and you, o life lived impetuously and brightly, you did not recognize any difficulties, you pushed me on up the steep peaks of life. You demanded from me everything of which a man can only dream, you gave me great resplendent plans... The mighty joy of mankind in bloom. I rush forth to achieve the unachievable even more forcefully without sparing my

energy to turn dream into reality. Life, you must reward me with the flowers of an unexperienced joy. Let my life ascend as a beautiful firework, be it only a momentary flash, at mankind's celebration of its triumph.

(Diary of L. A. Potyomkin, Garros, 1985 : 289)

These lines were written in July 1936 by Leonid Potyomkin, a student of the Sverdlovsk Mining Institute. Of rural origin, he had left school before being able to attend the higher grades because he had to earn his living. Life rewarded him : in 1965, he became vice minister of geology of the USSR.

Since then, the search for a shelter, for a transcendental home, has not ceased, and it has been depicted by ordinary and extraordinary people. Raised on classical literature, I cannot resist the temptation of giving the example of a gifted writer of late Soviet culture. In "The New Robinsons : A Chronicle of the End of the Twentieth Century", Lyudmila Petrushevskaya tells the story of the flight from the public sphere and a threatening urban "them" into an autonomous space—first a village, then a deep forest—defined by the family circle and "rural" self-sufficiency (and the private expropriation of an old neighbor) (Petrushevskaya, 1993). In a way, fiction reminds us here of today's "dacha economy", which has become a hard fact of economic and spiritual survival for many Russians. "Planting potato" is still possible, but the question is how to take root in the indefinite multiplicity of a world that has turned unexpectedly, and brutally "global". It is perhaps here that "capitalism and schizophrenia" and the Soviet 1930s have something in common.

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