

Michael David-Fox. *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union*. Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh P, 2015. Illustrations. Index. 296 pp. \$28.95 (paper).

Reflecting two decades of work in Soviet history, Michael David-Fox's collection of essays is in many ways a work of summation and stock-taking. Its biggest arguments come in the first three chapters, which make the case for viewing the Soviet experiment as an alternative, intelligentsia-statist form of modernity and call for an eclectic approach to the study of how ideology functioned within it. This orientation on synthesis and the reconciliation of different points of view, eschewing old fights as false dichotomies, defines the general tenor of the work. The remaining four chapters are narrower and more concrete: a *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) of the Soviet cultural revolution (importantly expanded beyond the Great Break to include the "culturedness" campaign of the later 1930s); an examination of the institutional rivalry and eventual forced merger of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Communist Academy; a discussion of Mariia Kudasheva, Romain Rolland's wife and personal secretary, as an example of cultural mediation between the Soviet Union and its western fellow travelers; and a foray into the fascinating intellectual biography of Ernst Niekisch, one of a number of German ultra-rightists who were courted by Soviet diplomats in the early 1930s. These essays are not case studies that complement the more theoretical early chapters; rather they are themselves illuminated by the broader questions of the collection, as the reader is encouraged to rethink the role and interaction of intellectuals and the state in the idiosyncratic—yet still transnationally articulated—evolution of Soviet modernity. The concrete essays also serve as an introduction to David-Fox's two monographs, which respectively examine higher education in the early Soviet period (*Revolution of the Mind*, Cornell UP, 1997) and Soviet cultural diplomacy between 1921 and 1941 (*Showcasing the Great Experiment*, Oxford UP, 2011). In what follows I focus on the larger claims of *Crossing Borders*.

The collection's opening essay presents an excellent overview of the historiographical debates about Soviet modernity or neo-traditionalism, which dominated the field in the 1990s and early 2000s. David-Fox argues that both sides of the debate "hedged their claims," avoiding total commitment either to Soviet comparability with Western European modernity or to Soviet non-modern uniqueness (38). In the author's view a paradigm that recognizes multiple modernities ultimately renders this already blurred divide meaningless. The second essay then presents the state-intelligentsia hybrid and its efforts at "civilizing" the Soviet masses in detail, synthesizing and elaborating a wide range of classic and more recent works of Soviet historiography. This work of historiographical ground-clearing, opening up pathways for subtler analyses of the Soviet Union's place in the history of modernity, is certainly necessary. However, David-Fox unfortunately insists on the interpretation, shared with Stephen Kotkin, of Soviet modernity as a "failed" alternative to its western forerunners (9, 31). This claim could also do with some hedging, in my view, as it trades too easily in the terms of Cold War competition, ignoring the fact that failure is one of the fundamental principles of the project and ideology of modernity. It is precisely the ever-receding horizon of modernity's fantasy of fulfillment (typically imagined as the paradoxical fusion of perfection and perfectibility) that fuels the relentless pursuit of economic growth, technological progress, and the unsettling of every social relation. That the Soviet Union attempted a militant and utopian counter-modernity does not make it any more of a "failure" than global capitalism has proved itself to be after a mere generation of neoliberal hegemony.

The collection's third essay then turns to the historiographical fate of ideology in Soviet studies and again proposes a more multi-dimensional, eclectic approach—treating the "ideological sphere" as a specific, if not rigidly delineated, arena that may or may not outweigh other socio-political, economic, or cultural factors in determining the broader historical process. David-Fox describes six different modalities in which scholars have examined ideology, making small interventions into each that push them toward complementarity rather than mutual exclusion. Ideol-

ogy as doctrine must be understood as a dynamic, at times equivocal process, which in turn overlaps with ideology as worldview—more discernible in practices than in foundational texts and, indeed, reflecting broader intellectual currents than mere Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet case. At the same time, one cannot merely plumb the objective content of ideology, however fluid one considers it, but must also keep in mind the hermeneutic circle that includes historical actors' own understanding of what ideology means and why it matters. Ideology as discourse (identified at its extreme with the work of Evgeny Dobrenko on Socialist Realism) and ideology as performance (now rooted in the work of Alexei Yurchak) require similar tempering. Representational strategies are an essential aspect of ideology, but they should not be taken as primary in the historical process, crowding out other spheres and monopolizing causality. Yurchak's argument about a performative turn in the post-Stalin era is also too strong: "Ideas [...] do matter—even under Brezhnev" (95). Finally, one should not neglect the role of affect in ideology, which raises commitment to a level comparable with religious faith, although David-Fox maintains that the notion of "political religion" should not be pushed too far beyond the realm of metaphor.

The most interesting part of the ideology essay comes in its penultimate section, which uses the preceding discussion to undermine the surprisingly persistent dichotomy between "ideas and circumstances" (intentionality or context) in historical explanations for political violence carried out by the Jacobins, the Nazis, and the Stalinist regime. Presented against the background of David-Fox's nebulous and non-primary ideological sphere, the binary opposition posited in such debates does appear outmoded, driven as much by the professional paths of historians as by their subject matter. Certainly, we should welcome multi-causal approaches to what David-Fox calls the historiography of "modern cataclysms" (97). Nonetheless, one wonders why David-Fox feels compelled to isolate ideology as a component of revolutionary politics and its aftermath. The essay makes no mention of Althusser or Lefort, let alone Žižek, and it ultimately leaves the reader begging for a deeper consideration of ideology as a central phenomenon in all modern politics—including in societies that rely on systemic violence rather than dramatic outbursts of repression.

Indeed, in the end, the theoretical claims of *Crossing Borders* exhibit the author's own, frustratingly liberal ideology—calling again and again for a reconciliation of warring parties that will allow us "to have our cake and eat it too" (81). Yes, blind men groping for the elephant of ideology would do better to compare notes and work together. But we should be wary of de-politicizing these debates, reducing dialectical processes to a search for the golden mean. The great Soviet writer Andrei Platonov had his own image for such acts of compromise: "blind people copulating in nettles" (in *Happy Moscow* and "On the First Socialist Tragedy").

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Paul Robert Magocsi. *With Their Backs to the Mountains: A History of Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyns*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2015. Maps. Illustrations. Index. 550 pp. \$45.00 (paper).

Divided among various multiethnic empires throughout the last millennium, compelled to adapt to territorial shifts authorized in distant capitals, and frequently forced to defend their ethnic distinctiveness against the cultural imperialism of more powerful nations, the Carpatho-Rusyns are perhaps the Central European borderland people *par excellence*. As a stateless, transnational people, the Rusyns rarely appear in the historiography of a region still dominated by the cult of the nation-state, mentioned, if at all, in connection with the province of Subcarpathian Rus' in interwar Czechoslovakia. Paul Robert Magocsi, a well-known author on Ukrainian History and a self-identified Rusyn, authored *With Their Backs to the Mountains* not only to fill a lacuna in