

PROLETARIAN IMAGINATION

SELF, MODERNITY,
& THE SACRED IN
RUSSIA, 1910-1925

MARK D. STEINBERG

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*Self, Modernity, and the
Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925*

MARK D. STEINBERG

Cornell University Press

ITHACA AND LONDON

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For Jane and Sasha

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GARF	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation) (formerly TsGAOR), Moscow
RGALI	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art) (formerly TsGALI), Moscow
RGASPI	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History) (formerly TsPA IML), Moscow

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Proletarian Imagination

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Introduction

The imaginary . . . is constitutive of man, no less certainly than everyday experience and practical activities.

—MIRCEA ELIADE

Self-consciousness . . . is the demon of the man of genius in our time . . . providing so much of its cheerful and its mournful wisdom.

—JOHN STUART MILL

This is a book about particular, even odd, historical subjects: working-class Russians with little or no formal education who wrote poetry, fiction, and other creative texts.¹ These workers did more than just occasionally put down a few lines of poetry or prose. They wrote with a determination and persistence that justifies our calling them writers. And they wrote less to create “art” than to speak aloud about the world—about the everyday life around them and about the extraordinary, about the meaning of existence, and about themselves. Their world—Russia during the final years of the tsarist order and the first years of the Soviet era, but also the larger world of modern Europe as seen from its most unstable boundary—was one of enormous ferment and flux. The years in focus here, roughly 1910 to 1925, extend from a period of complex stasis after the revolutionary upheavals of 1905–7 and the establishment of a partially reformed political order, through a time of world war and revolution followed by bloody civil conflict, into the first unstable years of socialist experimentation and construction. These were whirlwind years in which very little seemed clear or certain, though a great deal seemed possible.

These individuals stood in a special relation to their times. As worker authors, even proletarian intellectuals—a hybridity full of the unease and power

¹ More precisely, I have focused on individuals who began writing before 1917, while still employed in wage-earning jobs, whose work found its way into print (even if much remained unpublished), and who lived and were active in the predominantly Russian regions of the empire.

we have come to associate with liminal social identities—they moved about on sensitive borders of social and cultural meaning. They inhabited, negotiated, and often challenged the unstable social and cultural boundaries between classes and categories: between manual and intellectual labor, between making things and creating ideas, between producing and possessing culture and consuming it. From this vantage point, their voices offer rare insights into many of the social dynamics and strains of the time. No less important, unlike most lower-class Russians, they had the ability and the determination to put their thoughts and feelings into writing, leaving us an exceptionally rich record of their efforts to make sense of their world and to define themselves. They did not approach these questions innocently, of course. Their thinking was constructed not only from everyday experiences but also from an available cultural language (found in old stories, modern literature, the daily press, and conversation) that brought to them usable symbols, images, ideas, and sentiments. In these complex dialogues with the surrounding culture and with their own social lives, these individuals offer a compelling and complex view of a society and individual lives in ferment.

These plebeian authors engaged many of the key cultural issues of their day—questions about how Russians interpreted their own lives that historians are still only beginning to explore in any depth. At the same time, as many of these worker writers themselves well understood, these were issues not just of their own time—or, for that matter, place. Worker writers grappled with the problem of culture—as a standard to define, a measurement and tool to deploy, and an ideal to which to aspire. Ethics and morals preoccupied them—as sweeping, even universal, standards of right and wrong that could be applied to all of political and social life, but also as a matter of personal behavior and individual choices. And power was never ignored—whether it was the cultural power to define truth (universal moral truth, for example) or the existential power to determine one's own fate and being. As they engaged these questions, particular themes loomed especially large. Three of these often troubling questions about existential meaning and purpose were especially preoccupying: the self, modernity, and the sacred. These themes have given this book its shape.

Self

Notwithstanding stereotypes about the essential collectivism of the Russian cultural mentality, concerns with the self and its social and moral meanings have a long history in Russian culture and pervaded Russia's flourishing civic life in the final decades of the old order and into the early Soviet years.² Ple-

² Some of the first sustained scholarly inquiries into this important theme were brought together in a conference and then a collection of essays on narratives of the self in Russian history and literature: Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler, eds., *Self and Story in Russian History* (Ithaca, 2000). For a sophisticated if somewhat idiosyncratic discussion of the concept of self in

beian Russian authors were no less preoccupied with these questions. The idea of the self, in Russia as in much of the modern world, has been a potent category with which people have thought and acted, and which they have invoked as they grappled with such fundamental existential questions as identity, moral good, and truth. Conceptions of self, of course, are not universal. Shaped on the indeterminate terrain where the natural actions of the mind grapple with external worlds of experience and meaning (ranging from material life and political structures to cultural landscapes of language, imagery, and symbol), the self has been variously recognized, imagined, presented, and used. It is precisely this variability in the category of the self and of its dialogues with morality, identity, and ideas of truth that makes histories of this notion so revealing.

The idea of an interior and autonomous personhood, reflexively aware, actively self-fashioning, and by nature endowed with a universal humanity and dignity, is only one of a range of self concepts, though it is one that has had a powerful historical effect in shaping moral thinking and social and political reasoning in much of the modern world. While the introspective effort to know one's self is ancient, only in the last two or three centuries has the preoccupation with the self become characteristic and even popular; the nineteenth century in particular became, especially in the European world, "the age of introversion." This "century-long effort to map inner space," as Peter Gay has described it, nurtured art, literature, philosophy, and even science, and had important effects on the personal lives of individuals.³ It also generated ethical conceptions that converted easily into political and social convictions. The notion of the inward self dignified by nature nurtured the very consequential view that every person possesses certain natural rights, not because of any particular status, situation, or role but simply by virtue of being human. We should not impute more cohesion or orderly progress to this particular history of self and morality than it had. It has been resisted even in its alleged Western European home by groups—early-modern villagers, for example—who refused to see the individual person as having any meaning apart from his or her connections to community and place or who saw the self as porous and changeable. Recent scholars have described other fractures in this supposedly coherent Western history of the self: ways, for example, in which culturally evolved notions of gender, of the nature and place of male and female, helped to construct different standards of selfhood and of the realized self. Some work has gone further and explored still more ambiguous and often quite dark histories of the self and self-awareness: in which selfhoods and ideas of self were profoundly shaped by feelings of anxiety, alienation, melancholy, and fear, and by the self's own leanings toward narcissism, deception, and irrational desire.⁴

Russian culture and practice, focused mainly on the Stalinist and later Soviet years, see Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, 1999).

³ Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart*, vol. 4 of *The Bourgeois Experience* (New York, 1995), 4.

⁴ Influential studies in a variety of disciplines have explored varied self concepts and especially

The story I present here dwells on how the self has been imagined in Russian culture. I examine a plebeian version of a widespread discourse about human selfhood and human dignity, which helped worker writers (and many others) to articulate a moral challenge to subordination and exploitation. At the same time, these writers were often drawn to more elaborate and transcendent images of selfhood: images of the genius, the savior, the mythic hero, the Nietzschean superman. Even after the authoritative rise of an ideology of collectivism after 1917, we find persistent idealization of heroic individualities and persistent and often preoccupying concern with self-perfection and the inward emotional and moral world of the individual. No less apparent, however, was a darker narrative of self, highlighting the inescapability (but also suggesting the allure) of solitude, estrangement, suffering, and death—a vision of life's course and meaning as fundamentally tragic. These were often not competing perspectives or alternative choices. And as time passed—as individuals aged and the movements of history, especially the outcomes of the revolution, disappointed—the darker side tended to overshadow the transcendent. Often, though, the heroic and the tragic remained inseparable and ambiguously intertwined.

The ideas and images of the self in the writings of workers and former workers ask us to question our assumptions about what mattered to people in the past, especially common people. Among at least some Russian workers we find a rather subtle worldview that has less in common with the rigid categories of political ideology or even social history than with the concerns of moral philosophy. Though speaking from a very different time and place, Immanuel Kant came very close to describing the mentalities of many of these worker authors in his observations on the sublime. The sublime, in Kant's account, is an aesthetic and emotional view of the world that arises from a deep feeling of the beauty, dignity, and richness of human nature, of the human self, and blends a vision of great beauty with deep melancholy or even

the interrelations between the self, ideas about the self, and moral reasoning. Among works I have found most suggestive are (in order of publication) Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia, 1989—originally published in French 1981); Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," in *Local Knowledge* (New York, 1983), 55–70; Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984); Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge, 1985); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge Mass., 1991), 113–85; Roy Porter, ed., *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1997). On gendered constructions of the self, see esp. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 28–50. Michel Foucault's work on the history of sexuality was focused strongly on the "constitution of the self" and the historical importance of ideas about the self in the "genealogy of ethics." See his *History of Sexuality*, esp. vol. 3, *The Care of the Self* (New York, 1986), and his interview in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1983), 229–52.

dread.⁵ This was a mental and emotional orientation very familiar, sometimes painfully so, to many Russian worker writers.

Modernity

As city dwellers, proletarians, and often participants in revolution, worker writers felt the textures of modern life, as the expression had it, on their flesh. As we would expect, the physical and social life of the modern city and its industrial landscape of factories, machines, and wage labor helped give form to their thinking aloud about the modern. In doing this thinking and in inscribing thoughts in writing, however, they engaged not only the tangible realities of urban and industrial life but also an existing and ongoing public discourse about the meanings of the modern, especially of the characteristically modern spaces of city and industry. This cultural terrain heightened their sensitivity to the physical and social landscape even as the physical and the social continued to affect the way they thought about and used the ideas of others. Together, social and cultural experiences helped give their representations of the modern a distinct sensibility.

The city has long stood as one of the most potent symbols of human capacities and nature. As the largest and most enduring creation of human imagination and hands, and as the largest and most sustained locus of human association and interaction, the city has been seen as a marker of what humans are and of what they do. This signification has almost always been shaded with ambivalence. In old legends, epics, and utopias, cities (both actual and symbolic) appeared as places of exceptional but also contradictory meaning. Troy, Babel, Sodom, Babylon, and Rome were viewed as standing for human power, wisdom, creativity, and vision, but also for human presumption, perversion, and fated destruction. Images of the modern city restated this ambivalence with fresh intensity. Great modern cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, and New York have repeatedly been portrayed as sites of opportunity and peril, power and helplessness, vitality and decadence, creativity and perplexity. This contradictory face of the city has appeared so often in Western thought as to suggest an essential psychological and cultural anxiety about civilization and about its creators. Modernity, with its plenitude of human artifice and moral contradiction, poured salt on these wounds.

Modernity is an elusive category, not least because of its essential ambiguity. Only in part can modernity be defined by the processes and values of rationalistic and scientific modernization: by the modernizing project of administrative and aesthetic ordering of society and nature, by the driving will to modify and control the physical environment and social and economic re-

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley, 1960), 47–67. Similarly, in writing about French worker philosophers in the mid-nineteenth century, Jacques Rancière wrote of those who felt the “melancholy of the infinite” (*Nights of Labor*, 109).

lationships with applied science and technology, by the vision of cities and machines as emblems of rationality, efficiency, and change.⁶ Nor can modernity be defined solely by Charles Baudelaire's famous phrase "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent,"⁷ by the aesthetic and modernist vision of modernity as the cultural experience of disjuncture and ambiguity. Attempting to reconcile these contradictory aspects of the modern, Matei Calinescu, a literary theorist, has written of "two modernities." One modernity can be characterized by "the cult of reason," "the doctrine of progress, confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, [and] the concern with time." The other is an aesthetic modernity, repelled by the contemporary bourgeois applications of reason, science, and time and embracing instead a modernity of defiant rebellion, passion, and often an ambivalent and pessimistic vision of progress and the future.⁸ The political theorist Marshall Berman has argued similarly that modernism in literature, art, and intellectual life embraced less the rationalizing and reordering drive of modernization than its dynamic disruption, chaos, and flux, though tempered by an essential, if sometimes faltering, faith that a new and better life (and beauty) would emerge from the maelstrom.⁹

Theorists of postmodernity have moved beyond these dualisms to recognize the multiple worlds of modernity: the pervasiveness of disjuncture and difference, shaped by, for example, gender, race, class, and locality; the centrality to the nature of modernity of the experiences of those on the bottom and at the margins; the varied rhythms of time, in which hybrid temporalities are marked not only by acceleration, newness, and innovation but also by continuity, repetition, and revival; and the variety of modernities over time and space.¹⁰ Complicating the effort to define the modern, Zygmunt Bauman has emphasized the false and unsettling relation of modernity to its own contingency, flux, and uncertainty. Modernity, he argues, characteristically denied

⁶ For an excellent discussion of the "high modernism" of the modern state, see James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (New Haven, 1998). Much of Michel Foucault's work describes the modernizing rise of systems and structures of power that subject individuals to ever greater surveillance and control. For a general discussion of Western models of modernity as modernization, see Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, 1989), esp. 409–15. On the notion of "man as machine" in Western cultures since the Renaissance, see Bruce Mazlish, *The Fourth Discontinuity: The Co-evolution of Humans and Machines* (New Haven, 1993). See also Charles Beard's definition of the modern West as a "machine civilization": Charles Beard, ed., *Whither Mankind* (New York, 1928), 14–20.

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London, 1964), 13.

⁸ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, 1987), esp. 10, 42, 48, 89, 90, 162. For discussion of Western models of modernization, see Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, esp. 409–15.

⁹ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982).

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis, 1997); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass, 1993); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass, 1995) and *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York, 2000), chap. 2.

its own self and nature. Inherently critical, restless, and insatiable, modern culture paralleled a modern society that was in a constant state of upheaval, destruction, and instability. But it simultaneously struggled to overcome all these uncertainties: to disenchant the world by imposing the artifice of “meaning-legislating reason”; to embark on a never-ending flight from the natural wilderness; to struggle constantly for universality, homogeneity, and clarity, to “purge ambivalence.” In a word, it was in the very nature of modernity to “live in and through self-deception,” to engage in a constant denial—in the name of necessity, universality, scientific truth, certainty, and natural order—of the contingency, artifice, undecidability, provisionality, and ambivalence of its own making.¹¹ Modernity, I find, is most usefully defined by these contradictory and unstable dialogues, by the ambiguity (in the sense of unresolved contradiction) that stems from the interdependence of contingency and its denial, of positivist rationality and questioning iconoclasm, of disciplining repression and libidinal excess, of legibility and startling multiplicity, of faith in progress (even pleasure in change) and deep unease.

Modern cities exemplified the ambiguities of the modern. The rapid growth and industrial transformation of European and world cities since the eighteenth century provoked a flood of discourse in which modernity itself was at issue. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the most common and paradigmatic images of the city in European and American writing were deeply modern. The city was vital energy and constant flux (“moving chaos,” in Baudelaire’s phrase); a physical landscape of stone, cement, machines, and noise; a psychological terrain of loneliness and anxiety (“paved solitude,” in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous phrase); a site of mythic domination and existential alienation; a disorienting labyrinth where only fragments of the whole could ever be seen at one time.¹² These are modern images of the city, inspired by a modern way of seeing and apprehending the world as much as by the determinate forms and rhythms of that world. Historians of modern Europe have highlighted the ambiguities in these narratives of the modern: ambivalence about both unleashed individuality and the subordination of individualities; anxieties about the new roles women and others took on in the fluid

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, 1991) and *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London, 1992), esp. Introduction and chap. 9.

¹² For discussion of ideas and representations of the city in Western culture, see esp. Carl Schorske, “The Idea of the City in European Thought: Voltaire to Spengler,” and Sylvia Thrupp, “The City as the Idea of Social Order,” both in *The Historian and the City*, ed. Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 95–114, 121–32; Lewis Mumford, “Utopia, the City, and the Machine,” *Daedalus*, Spring 1965, 271–92; Philip Fisher, “City Matters: City Minds,” in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome Buckley (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 371–89; Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, 1981); John H. Johnston, *The Poet and the City: A Study in Urban Perspectives* (Athens, Ga., 1984); David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore, 1985), esp. 180–206; Kristiaan Versluys, *The Poet in the City: Chapters in the Development of Urban Poetry in Europe and the United States (1800–1930)* (Tübingen, 1987); Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge, 1996); Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

public sphere of modern life; judgments of modern politics as both emancipatory and increasingly repressive; the allure of science and fears of science gone mad; and a new experience of time that simultaneously included faith in rapid progress, nostalgia, and an intensified vision of a coming end time. Of course, anxiety about change or about the human subject is neither new nor particularly modern. What is modern is the interdependence of these anxieties with contradictory feelings—with the simultaneous drive to rationalize and discipline, with delight in contingency and ambiguity—and the explicitness with which many people were conscious of all this contradiction.¹³

Russians shared deeply in these European experiences and visions of modernity, which were intensified by Russia's notorious and often obsessively self-aware "backwardness": by its lateness to embrace and experience industrialization, urbanization, and the contradictory drives of modern discipline and disorder. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Russian literature and the Russian press were increasingly preoccupied by the fascinating vitality and sinister dangers of modern life; by, on the one hand, the lure of modernist simplification and scientific ordering of society, politics, and even the human personality and, on the other hand, the no less modernist allure of self-invention, subversion, and despair.¹⁴

Russian worker writers' encounters with the modern landscape were especially intimate and severe. Their necessarily indeterminate identities and experiences as simultaneously urban workers and creative writers gave their symbolic treatments of city, factory, and machine a particular shape and pathos. This was a sharply modern vision, especially in its ambiguity. City, factory, and machine remained stubbornly alien and malevolent even for those who vigorously embraced the industrial city's vitality, aesthetic beauty, and promise. Workers' writings combined a sense of freedom with feelings of regret and loss, self-discovery and self-fashioning with estrangement from one's own essential self, pleasure in the intoxicating rhythms and flux of urban industrial life with an often despairing sense of soulless cruelty. Some of these worker writers were quite explicit about the ambivalence of modernity as a place and time where "wonders grow into horrors and horrors into wonders," where "unexpected pains and joys . . . appear at every step."¹⁵ Even the most intellectually subtle, however, did not find these contradictions anything but

¹³ See esp. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton, 1984); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992); Felski, *Gender of Modernity*; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

¹⁴ Only recently have historians begun to examine explicitly the complex culture of Russian modernity. See esp. Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, 1992); Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900–1914* (Berkeley, 1993); Roshanna Sylvester, "Crime, Masquerade, and Anxiety: The Public Creation of Middle-Class Identity in Pre-Revolutionary Odessa, 1912–1916," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1998. Literary studies of Russian modernism have been plentiful, though they have paid relatively little attention to the wider social and cultural settings. A major exception is Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

¹⁵ N. Liashko, "O byte i literature perekhodnogo vremeni," *Kuznitsa*, no. 8 (April–September 1921), 29.

painful. This modernist frame of mind hesitated, alas, before a postmodern sensibility. These proletarian intellectuals took no pleasure in indeterminacy, paradox, or irony. They wanted to see the world with greater clarity, certainty, and faith. To their visible sorrow, they could not.

The Sacred

A feeling for the sacred—for the cultural field of images and stories that speak with a sense of awe and mystery of structures of meaning and power that reach beyond the known material world toward transcendent mythic qualities—was essential to these varied ways of making sense of modern life and of the inward self. In treating these themes, as in interpreting languages of self and modernity, we again face the challenge (this time with a vengeance) of trying to comprehend and describe clearly how people handled an elusive and ambiguous form of knowledge. But we cannot afford to neglect this knowledge and sensibility. A sense of the sacred in the world and in their own lives pervaded workers' writings.

Historians of modern Russia have begun to examine seriously the vital and complex place of religion, spirituality, and the sacred in Russian life, especially popular life. This subject, too long neglected for both political and methodological reasons, is now recognized as among the most important and compelling fields of study for understanding Russia's modern experience. During the decades before and after the turn of the century—including the early Soviet years—Russia experienced what has been called a religious renaissance, rich in variety and passion and full of complexity and contradiction. Many educated Russians, even on the political left, were attracted by religious idealism, Theosophy, Eastern religions, spirituality, mysticism, and the occult. Among the lower classes, too, though scholars have only begun to explore this history, one sees a renewed vigor and variety in religious life and spirituality.¹⁶

These studies have been influenced by research and theorizing about religion in other places, especially modern Western Europe, and other times. Par-

¹⁶ Major works include Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1963); George L. Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* (Chicago, 1968); Christopher Read, *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia, 1900–1912* (London, 1979); Maria Carlson, “No Religion Higher than Truth”: *A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton, 1993); Vera Shevzov, “Popular Orthodoxy in Late Imperial Rural Russia,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1994; Catherine Evtukhov, *The Cross and the Sick: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890–1920* (Ithaca, 1997); Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, 1997); Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park, Pa., 1997); Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, 1998); Heather Coleman, “The Most Dangerous Sect: Baptists in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, 1905–1929,” Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1998; Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (Ithaca, 1999); Christine Worobec, *Possessed: Women, Witches, and Demons in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, Ill., 2001). Additional works are listed in Chapters 6 and 7.

ticularly important has been the shift away from a primary focus on institutions and formal theologies toward a view of religion as social and cultural practice, as a living process in which people create intellectual and emotional meaning. This shift echoes and parallels larger methodological changes in the study of history, but also new work by anthropologists and others on religion, magic, and the sacred. Challenging arguments about the progressive “secularization of the European mind” and about the presumed growing separation, as modernization advanced, of the sacred and the profane into separate spheres, histories of religion in early and late modern Europe have demonstrated the persistence and even periodic intensification of religion, spirituality, and the sacred. Religion, it is argued, is not an autonomous phenomenon but a body of meaningful symbols and rituals entwined with modern politics, social relations, gender, and community, without being reducible to any of them. Religious beliefs and practices, including forms not approved by clerical establishments, have served to define and assert identities, articulate ethical norms and values, and exercise and contest power. And sacred and transcendental visions of the world have remained powerful.¹⁷

Most writing on the history of religion has been better at elaborating the social and cultural functions of religion than at describing and theorizing its subjective power. Yet it is clear that religion provides needed emotional knowledge and expression. Religion answers human needs to see as orderly and comprehensible what otherwise would seem to be the meaningless chaos, evil, and suffering of everyday life and to exercise some power over the unknown (religion as *nomos*), but also to express feelings about the world as a place of mystery and awesome power (religion as *ethos*). Religion provides meaning and a measure of control, but it also gives form to imagination, to nostalgia for lost perfection, and to potent feelings of awe and the sublime.¹⁸ The religious evocation of mood and meaning—and the extent to which feeling and meaning define each other—has been most evident in studies of such forms as death rituals, miraculous apparitions, possession, spiritualism, and devotion to saints, but also in research on less definable forms of sacred imagination such as symbol and metaphor, memory, and the gendering of

¹⁷ For reviews of the scholarly literature and of some of the theoretical issues in the study of popular religion, see esp. Natalie Zemon Davis, “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures,” in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis, 1982), 321–41; Ellen Badone, ed., *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton, 1990), Introduction; Caroline Ford, “Religion and Popular Culture in Modern Europe,” *Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 1 (March 1993): 152–75; and Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford, 1996).

¹⁸ Although I am using these terms slightly differently, on religion as *nomos*, see Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, 1967), esp. 19–25. On religion as *ethos*, see esp. Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” and “Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” both in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), esp. 89–103, 126–41; and the works of Mircea Eliade, notably *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York, 1959) and *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (New York, 1960). A useful summary of Eliade’s work may be found in Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, esp. 159–80.

piety.¹⁹ Still, most historians have remained cautious before this difficult terrain, hesitating to look beyond the traditional focus on shaping contexts to consider deeper layers of motivation and meaning. Among these, it is essential that we recognize the persistent and ubiquitous power of aesthetic, mythic, and emotional forms of understanding as well as their connections to the social and the political.

Russian worker writers engaged these issues and contexts complexly. When these authors wrote in a religious idiom, as they often did, their writings were usually not religious in a literal sense—that is, in the sense of expressing faith in an ecclesiastical doctrine or belief in a stable, uniform, and “true” cultural system and ordering of a sacred cosmos.²⁰ Christian and other sacred terminologies, imageries, and narratives were invoked not primarily for their literal meaning in relation to Christian faith but rather for their metaphoric and symbolic power as a means of speaking about the sacred. These were stories, images, vocabularies, and symbols that—to paraphrase a common definition of the sacred—reached across boundaries of time and space to manifest the transcendent, to link the immediate and the visible to universal, even eternal, narratives and places.²¹ When such epiphanic practices—in which the sacred is made manifest—do not insist on the literal truth of the stories evoked, as was typically the case in Russian workers’ writings, this becomes a still more complex expression of the religious. Images—crucifixion and resurrection, for example—did not need to be literally true in order to exert imaginative and emotional power. The symbolic language of the sacred, as it most often does, helped read the disjointed fragments of everyday experience as part of a meaningful and purposeful narrative, a coherent conception of existence and time. This was also a discourse of affect and emotion, an effort to voice the imagination, to articulate things sublime and terrible.

Interpreting Cultural Practice

This book is a history of ideas (and of their elusive relatives: values and sentiments), but unlike traditional intellectual history, it focuses on ideas expressed by people who were relatively uneducated and, for much of their lives, subordinate. I treat these ideas not as a separate sphere but as entwined with social and political life. And unlike traditional social history, the focus here is less on collectivities and commonalities than on individuals and margins, less on ex-

¹⁹ See, e.g., Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton, 1993); Ford, “Religion and Popular Culture,” esp. 162–69; David Blackburn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1993), 9, 12, 29, 32, 142; Sabeen, *Power in the Blood*, 30, 32, 43, 103–12, 212.

²⁰ I am using a definition of “religion” as distinct from “the sacred” (though they never are fully distinct) similar to that in Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” 98–123, and Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 26.

²¹ Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, esp. Introduction and chap. 1, and his *Cosmos and History: The Myth of Eternal Return* (New York, 1959).

PLICITLY social and political ideas than on categories of thought better defined as philosophical. These are immodest purposes. With only texts to go on—notably such notoriously indeterminate texts as poetry—I am not so naive as to claim that I have fully described what these worker writers thought (much less felt) about Russian social and political life, not to mention self, modernity, and the sacred. I can read these writings again and again, listen carefully, consider what we know about the larger social and cultural context, and question my own assumptions, but I remain on the uncertain ground of interpretation. And while theoretical and comparative studies may offer suggestive hints toward constructing a plausible picture out of these fragments, they also increase the risks of misreading. These are the risks of cultural study, which, as an interpretive discipline in search of meaning, must remain “intrinsically incomplete.”²² For historians, the risk is worth it, I think, if our purpose is to understand not just why events happened but also (though this impinges on understanding causation) what events (and also the uneventful everyday) *meant* for people.

We necessarily have to sort out the ways people make and use cultural forms (language, symbols, rituals) and how their making and using have been shaped, constrained, and provoked by the harder surfaces of their lives (material conditions and objects, social location, relative power, the process of cultural practice itself). It is by now an interpretive commonplace to recognize the power of discourse to constitute meanings about the world, to rearrange the givens of experience, to shape vision and purpose. More persuasive theorizing, however, recognizes the persistent intersections and mutual invasions of structure and agency, the intertwining of the material and the cultural, the “dialogue” between the word and the world. Put more strongly, people’s social and cultural lives involve an experiential, practical dynamic (theorists speak of “practice”) in which the physical and social worlds retain power to shape, limit, and disrupt discourse, in which cultural meaning is inescapably “burdened with the world,” as well as the reverse.²³ Russian worker writers drew upon and made use of an assortment of available ideas, vocabularies, and images, but they also necessarily reflected upon and were influenced by tangible forms of experience, including poverty, social sub-

²² Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 5, 29.

²³ Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985), 138. For influential theoretical discussions on the complex mutual interactions of culture and structure, see also Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*; Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York, 2000); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1984) and *The Writing of History* (New York, 1988); William H. Sewell, Jr., “Toward a Post-materialist Rhetoric for Labor History,” in his *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis* (Urbana, 1993), 15–38; Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life* (Princeton, 1995); M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Mikhail Holquist (Austin, 1996). For useful summaries and evaluations of many of these theoretical issues, see the Introduction to and articles by Sherry Ortner and Stuart Hall in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner (Princeton, 1994); and Roger Chartier, “Intellectual History or Social-Cultural History? The French Trajectories,” in *Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca, 1982).

ordination, new opportunities, war, and revolution. At the same time, the cultural practices being considered here were not merely responses to particular events or conditions. The historical time present in these practices was not only immediate and contingent. The world that “burdened” these worker writers was both present and remembered, visible and imagined, *événementiel* and essential.

Notions of the active subject are central to these arguments about cultural practice. Accounts of power, especially cultural power, that posit inescapable and totalizing hegemonies, or even the subjectless play of cultural fields of force, make for dramatic rhetorical accounts of the world but necessarily ignore or deny much of the real complexity of human agency and power relations. There is plenty of evidence that individuals and groups retain power and space to rework, subvert, and even misuse available cultural forms. We must recognize not only the controlling and debilitating forces surrounding the subject but also the ways people follow errant trajectories, seize moments and opportunities, and actively appropriate forms and meanings. Russian worker writers often understood all this, if in plainer terms. They believed themselves to be subjects in their own history. They knew that the world threw up obstacles at every turn. They refused to be deterred.

Minor Lives on the Margins

This book approaches questions of cultural meaning on a peculiar margin of Russian life (itself significantly at the margin of modern Europe)—at the edges of both popular culture and the culture of the educated, in an odd space where some of the literate poor embraced reading and writing with exceptional passion. This inquiry assumes (or rather insists) that there are important benefits to studying such small stories located so far from typicality—useful not just to fill gaps in our knowledge but as a way of viewing the whole picture differently, of rethinking the larger narrative. This is no longer a novel argument. The insight that odd stories and marginal histories reveal much beyond themselves and that liminal sites and individuals often exercise special power in a culture has produced important historical writing. Studies of coalescing and contested national boundaries, of the margins of cities, of the atypical life stories of women or workers, of individuals of all sorts creating selves on the frontiers of the everyday, have revealed much about the meanings of nation, the dynamics of urban life, and the pressures and possibilities of gender and class. These works have usefully undermined the assumption that truth lies in aggregates and that the past (or the present) is best understood by the stories that are most typical and representative.²⁴

²⁴ See, e.g., Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; Rancière, *Nights of Labor*; Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge, 1991), 93–113; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York, 1982); Natalie Davis, *Women on the*

The group of Russians examined here is best described as “strange”; their identities, even in their own eyes, were suffused with otherness. Taking up pencil and pen to express ideas and feelings about the world around them and the world within, worker writers signaled and nurtured their strangeness as both workers and writers. This is a telling strangeness, for it occurred at some of Russia’s most critical boundaries during its most troubled and tumultuous years. These were social boundaries: the edges of manual labor and intellectual creation, of popular culture and the literature and ideas of the educated, of everyday life in the working class and the exceptional lives of wanderers, dreamers, misfits, and leaders. No less important, these writers explored intellectual and sentimental boundaries: the spaces of contact and tension between collective identification and personal alienation, social criticism and literary imagination, the sacred and the profane, revolutionary enthusiasm and existential melancholy.

Even if the thoughts and feelings these worker writers articulated were only their own, they would still be compelling as passionate contemporary visions of an important time and place in modern history. Pure originality, of course, is impossible. These writers were inescapably working with experiences and ideas that were at hand. Their writings were part of a dialogue with the world and with culture. They were not “representative” or typical, but they were hardly anomalous. The repetition of themes in the writings of so many of these writers (the result more of common experiences and common reading than of mutual influence) is an important sign of patterns in their engagement with the world around them. At the very least, their writings suggest “horizons of possibility” within the larger culture, patterns of popular (and not only popular) thought whose traces would otherwise have been lost.²⁵

These particular and even strange writings also remind us of the variety of what we call popular culture or working-class consciousness. Although these Russian worker writers were more strangers than comrades in their own class, they were also leaders and spokesmen, roles shaped by the same singular passions and revelations of a different world. For all their liminality, indeed because of it, their actions and words influenced others. No less important, their stories help us see past the usual stereotypes about what working-class consciousness was or could be—about, for example, how workers thought about class or socialism or their attitudes toward self, modernity, and the sacred. As will be seen, heterodox ideas were to be found among even supposedly “conscious workers.” My aims are to shed light beyond familiar stories, but also to disturb them.

Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives (Cambridge, Mass., 1995). More than historians, anthropologists have explored the category of liminality and the meaningful and often powerful lives of liminal individuals in a culture.

²⁵ See Ginzburg, *Cheese and the Worms*, 128.

Emotion, Subjectivity, Imagination

The question of emotion, especially its relation to meaning and morality, plays a significant role in my efforts to explore plebeian thought. Clearly this is a difficult subject for historical analysis. It is hard enough to determine and explicate the ideas and values of people long dead without asking questions about sentiment and mood. Yet for all the risks, we must recognize that emotion was a crucial part of the *meaning* of the past for those we are seeking to understand. It may be more prudent to resist trying to penetrate layers of consciousness that we can only infer from our sources. Yet such prudence does not change the still obvious fact that human experience and action are composed of emotion as well as rational perception, of moral sensibilities as well as ethical conviction, of what Russian worker writers themselves called “life feeling” (*zhizneoshchushchenie*) and the “emotional side of ideology.” Ideas and emotions—meaning and feeling—are linked in a complex but potent dialogue.²⁶

For many Europeans from the late eighteenth century on, the power and value of emotion were matters of principle, literally of selfhood, morality, and virtue—a view that was an essential component of the great intellectual upheaval that has been boiled down into the notion of Romanticism.²⁷ A large number of educated Europeans viewed truth, especially moral truth, as necessarily requiring attention to a voice that lay within the deep self and held that passions and sensations were the keys to unlock the deepest moral and universal truths. At the same time, as part of this pursuit of the inward self, sentiment and affective expression were prized in themselves. There were, of course, older traditions to draw upon—Christian ideas of soul and passion, and, still further back, ancient ideas about the centrality of emotion to rhetoric and ethics and about the sources and meaning of the sublime. With Romanticism, these notions became a far more elaborate and explicit body of ideas about emotion and much more strongly linked to questions of the inward self. The arts, in particular, acquired enormous importance as expressive forms, as means of communicating the creations of intertwined intellect and feelings of the inward self, as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (William Wordsworth’s famous definition of poetry).²⁸

²⁶ The study of emotion as a social phenomenon has become increasingly widespread. See, e.g., Sabean, *Power in the Blood*, esp. 45–53, 94–112, 170–72; Gay, *Bourgeois Experience*; Theodore Zeldin, “Personal History and the History of Emotions,” *Journal of Social History* 15 (1982): 339–48, and *An Intimate History of Humanity* (New York, 1994); William Reddy, *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814–1848* (Berkeley, 1997).

²⁷ On the conceptual problems of defining Romanticism, see, e.g., Arthur O. Lovejoy, “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms,” in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore, 1948); Lilian Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective* (New York, 1969), and idem, ed., *The Contours of European Romanticism* (London, 1979).

²⁸ See, e.g., M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, 1953), esp. 21–26, 54–55, 71–78 (quotation 21); Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 368–90.

Imagination, especially the expressive inward power out of which emerge creative works of art (including, perhaps with particular force, poetry written by scarcely educated authors), is at the heart of this complex interplay of emotion, thought, and intellect. For Romantic theorists such as Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, and Friedrich Schelling, imagination is precisely the place where sentiment is combined with rationality, the external world with inner meaning, the infinite cosmos with the infinite self. Imagination, these theorists maintained, is the force that synthesizes images, thoughts, and feelings. It is the exercise of the imagination that makes images of the world not simply mimetic reflections of finite external objects but expressive articulations of both the inward self and eternal truth. Imagination resolves the contradiction between the conscious and the unconscious and hence functions as the truest and deepest thought.²⁹ Russian worker writers were probably ignorant of this Romantic tradition, though not of its strong elaborations in nineteenth-century Russian literature. In any case, whether we speak of influence or resonant similarities, we see a common spirit. My effort to reconstruct the “imagination” of Russian worker writers is directed precisely at this interplay of the external world and the inward self, at the intertwining of intellect, thought, and emotion.

A darker voice of Romanticism, especially the more skeptical post-Romantic elaborations of this expressive sensibility, was also echoed in the mentalities of Russian worker writers. In their writings, we encounter (surprisingly often for leftist workers in an age of revolution) expressions of pessimism, *toská* (a mixture of melancholy, sadness, anguish, depression, and longing), existentialist feelings of life’s pointlessness, and a tragic view of life. Unexpected echoes of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Søren Kierkegaard abound. These philosophers were known in Russia, and their ideas about suffering, tragedy, melancholy, and the dark interior of the self resonated indirectly in the works of some Russian writers. We cannot easily assume influence, however, much less determine it. The reading experiences of worker authors were scattered and often unsophisticated. One can speak with certainty only of telling affinities. Yet we also see an important difference. Worker writers could not so easily share the sensibility of the many Romantic and post-Romantic writers who found something inspiring in tragedy and consoling and even pleasurable in melancholy—who found in the sufferings of the world and the self “reverie and voluptuous sadness.”³⁰ The sense of tragedy and melancholy we find in workers’ writings was more a bitter moral sensibility—a critical though sometimes unfocused protest against the injustice of the world—than a pleasurable aesthetic. They could not theorize their way to accept suffering; perhaps they were too unsophisticated; perhaps the hardships of daily life were too personal and overwhelming. Whatever the rea-

²⁹ Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 22, 54–55, 119, 130, 169, 210; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 371, 378–79, 512–13.

³⁰ Daniel Mornet, *Le Romantisme en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1912), quoted in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 296.

sons, their melancholy tended to lead less to consoling and voluptuous sadness than to either defiant engagement or (to appropriate a notion from later existentialist writing) philosophical and emotional nausea.

Ambivalence and Ambiguity

Complicating efforts to understand and describe clearly the thinking and feelings of worker writers about self, modernity, and the sacred is the problem of ambivalence and ambiguity. Briefly, I mean by “ambivalence” a form of thought, understanding, and feeling about the world that is unstable and even contradictory in meaning. Ambiguity is a way of expressing ambivalence, though also a perception less certain than ambivalence and a definition of the world itself, of the irresolvable contradictions that make ambivalence and uncertainty necessary and true. These are simplifications, however, of categories that by definition resist simplification.

Most commonly, and in its origins, the concept of ambiguity has been used as a linguistic and literary category. The classic definition of ambiguity is William Empson’s: a “verbal nuance” that “gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.”³¹ More recently, literary scholars have written of ambiguity as language that calls for a choice between alternative meanings but provides no ground for making that choice.³² Although these are primarily linguistic definitions, they hint at phenomenological ones, at interpretations of the external world that language and literature seek to depict, at a world beyond the text that is by its nature unstable and even contradictory in meaning.

It is telling that until the twentieth century, ambiguity had been viewed mainly as something harmful. It was seen as standing in the way of a clear understanding of a reality that was assumed to be coherent and knowable. The modernist drive to impose order and legibility is evident here, though the roots of this anxiety about ambiguity are much older. In the ancient world, Stoic philosophers criticized ambiguity as an obstacle to expressing clear reason and hence as opposed to truth.³³ It has been in the modern era, however, that critics and philosophers have been most vigilant in warning against ambiguity in expression, as a “vice or deformity in speech and writing,”³⁴ as an obstacle to truth—which, it was believed, had coherent and knowable order and purpose—or even worse, as a device for deliberate equivocation and obfuscation, and thus as morally and epistemologically dubious. Modern social thought has tended to share this general view of ambiguity. One of the defining char-

³¹ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 2d ed. (London, 1947), 1.

³² Shlomith Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity: The Example of James* (Chicago, 1977).

³³ Catherine Atherton, *The Stoics on Ambiguity* (Cambridge, 1993).

³⁴ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie* (1589), quoted in Leonard Orr, *Dictionary of Cultural Theory* (New York, 1991), 34. This was approximately the time when, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “ambiguity” began to be used in English.

acteristics of Western social theory (including the emerging social sciences) from the seventeenth century into the early twentieth was a “potent urge” to view human society “in strictly unambiguous terms.”³⁵ Modern statecraft (including that of modern revolutionary movements) has also tended to share this refusal to accept ambiguity, pursuing instead a “high modernist” aesthetic of simplification, purity, and order, a driving compulsion to make society and nature “legible,”³⁶ and a determination to “purge ambivalence” in the name of “universality, homogeneity, and clarity.”³⁷

Modern life, of course, has never been so unambiguous, orderly, or legible. On the contrary, this ordering discourse emerged partly as an effort to control, even deny, the characteristic contingency, flux, and upheaval of modernity. And modern thought itself always contained a strong countercurrent to this denial of ambiguity. Renaissance humanists such as Michel de Montaigne, such connoisseurs of modern flux as Charles Baudelaire, and fin-de-siècle artists (including, notably, Russian Futurists and Symbolists) were all able to see and take pleasure in ambiguity, paradox, and uncertain meaning. By the twentieth century, against prevailing currents in the social sciences, interpretation in the humanities and the cultural sciences increasingly recognized the need to account for and understand ambivalence, ambiguity, and indeterminacy. Postmodernist and poststructuralist thought, in particular, has taken its philosophical stand largely on the disordered flux and uncertainty of modernity and has tended to abandon faith in the possibility of resolving ambiguity. Literary critics have tended to insist on the ultimate “indeterminacy” and interpretive undecidability of texts. As social interpretation, postmodernist and poststructuralist theory has similarly rejected the allegedly modern lure and deceit of a monistic, ordered, and unambiguous world, insisting on the inescapable presence in human thought, communication, and action of ambivalence, ambiguity, multivalence, indeterminacy, and paradox.³⁸ Many of these accounts echo definitions of modernity that emphasize the ephemeral and the contingent, noting the disorderliness of modern social “practice”—the pervasiveness of bricolage, plasticity, disruption, and chance—and how the complex and often subversive ways people use and appropriate culture and other structures introduce a pervasive ambiguity into social and cultural life.³⁹ Histori-

³⁵ Donald N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory* (Chicago, 1985).

³⁶ Scott, *Seeing like a State*. Michel Foucault made similar arguments in much of his work, though Scott focuses more on the impossibility and failure of the modern project of visibility and control.

³⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* and *Intimations of Postmodernity*, esp. Introduction and chap. 9 (quotation 120).

³⁸ See the discussions in Timothy Bahti, “Ambiguity and Indeterminacy: The Juncture,” *Comparative Literature* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 211–23; Gerald Graff, “Determinacy/Indeterminacy,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2d ed., ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago, 1995), 163–85; Dirks et al., *Culture/Power/History*, 17–22; Bauman, “Postmodernity, or Living with Ambivalence,” in his *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 231–45; P. Kruse and M. Stadler, eds, *Ambiguity in Mind and Nature* (Berlin, 1995).

³⁹ See esp. Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii, xv–xvi.

cal studies have similarly shown a growing recognition of the importance of taking the measure of ambivalence and ambiguity in people's attitudes and cultural expressions, of the "indeterminate multiplicity" and "hybridity" of identity, of the "multivocality" of texts and other discourses, of the unstable meanings that people read onto their social landscapes. As historians seek to interpret such motivational and perceptual categories as morality, pleasure, desire, and fear, they are especially likely to recognize contradictory and unstable meanings.⁴⁰

Russian and Soviet Marxists shared the high-modernist attraction to order and legibility, to purity and clarity, in aesthetics as in politics.⁴¹ Many sought literally to "purge ambivalence" from the emerging socialist culture. Influential cultural officials repeatedly reminded worker writers that there could be no place in Soviet literature for "doubt" or "imprecision," that proletarian culture "requires clarity, precision, solidity, and a forged shape, not endless indeterminacy."⁴² Quite simply, a leading Marxist literary critic declared (with visible dismay and impatience), worker writers "cannot and ought not to know ambivalence [*razdvoeniia*]."⁴³ From the Marxist perspective, an effective revolutionary movement requires a solid, stable, and clear foundation of images, values, and ways of communicating, a clear and inspiring set of myths and ideals, a confidence in the future. And worker writers, as leading cultural representatives of the proletariat, the ostensible new ruling class, bore a particular responsibility to speak correctly and clearly. Unfortunately, Marxist intellectuals had to admit, many proletarians displayed a great deal of "agonizing ambivalence" (*muchitel'naia razdvoennost'*),⁴⁴ especially about touchstone questions of life's meaning, purpose, and direction.

The proletarian imagination described in this book suggests a great deal of heterodoxy in both working-class and socialist culture. Plentiful here are acts of subversive appropriation and willful protest—against autocracy and capitalism, and sometimes against the new Communist order. But the story is not simply one of difference and resistance. Doubt, ambivalence, and unresolved

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Rancière, *Nights of Labor*, 73, 86, 175, 185, 271, 376; Davis, *Return of Martin Guerre*, 40–41, 47, 51; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 10, 48–49, 56–57, 80, 85, 93, and passim; Lüdtke, *History of Everyday Life*, 9, 16–17. Prefiguring these arguments (and much closer to the subjects of this book), Mikhail Bakhtin developed an extensive argument about the persistent *raznorechivost'* (variously translated as heteroglossia, multivocality, and multilingualness) in all communication: the irresolvable "dialogue" within discourse and between discourse and the world: Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*; Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London, 1990).

⁴¹ For an insightful discussion of "purification" as the master narrative of the revolution—with strong echoes of Bauman's arguments about the modern "dream of purity" and Scott's arguments about "legibility"—see Clark, *Petersburg*, 3, 56–57, 60–62, 66, 69, 84, 209–11, 252, 290.

⁴² V. Polianskii (Pavel Lebedev-Polianskii), review of *Gorn* in *Proletarskaia kul'tura*, no. 5 (November 1918), 42–43, and review of *Pereval* in *Rabochii zhurnal* 1925, no. 1–2: 262.

⁴³ S. Rodov, "Motivy tvorchestva M. Gerasimova," *Kuznitsa*, no. 1 (May 1920), 23.

⁴⁴ A. Voronskii, "O gruppe pisatel'ei 'Kuznitsa': Obshchaia kharakteristika," *Iskusstvo i zhizn': Sbornik statei* (Moscow and Petrograd, 1924), 136. See also P. I. M., review of Aleksandrovskii, "Shagi," *Rabochii zhurnal* 1925, no. 1–2: 277.