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Agitating images

by

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Abstract

The title of this thesis gives away little beyond an engagement with the visual and the implication of some sort of trouble: *Agitating images*. In many ways it is a project defined by trouble: trouble that is analyzed and historicized but also trouble that is expected and invited. The agitation refers initially to the project of communist agitators working in the 1920s and 30s among indigenous Siberian peoples. Soviet society was at war with illiteracy, at war with backwardness and, in central Siberia it was at war with shamans and wealthy reindeer herders. In relation to images, agitation is something altogether different and my metaphorical leap from a communist agitator to image as agitator can only exist through analytical fiat. What are agitating images? I argue that all photographs are actually agitating, even the most mundane and transparent images are agitating. They pose as media amenable to interpretation and the ascription of meaning; in fact they undermine meaning and they undermine interpretation. I demonstrate this in three distinct parts of the thesis.

Part I offers a comprehensive articulation of my project. It is illustrated in a more or less conventional manner with archival photographs from Siberia. Part II is a demonstration of history and photography in conflict. I show how the Soviets—faced with an enormous inland territory and what was perceived as a culturally anterior population—developed the Culturebase, a unique technology to facilitate the shaping and manipulation of indigenous cultures. Part III of the thesis presents an

altogether different approach. In this section I eschew the conventions and limitations of the printed page and offer a digital alternative. The format of Part III is agitating as well. As a website it is a performative act of perpetual openness. Agitating images is ultimately not about the end of interpretation, ethnography, or history. Rather, it is a generative work that reflexively apprehends its own place in the production of knowledge.

Agitating Images

Staging

(in lieu of a preface)

. . . the more deeply it goes the less complete it is.

Clifford Geertz[1]

The research for this project has focused on two aspects of early twentieth century history in central Siberia. First is the project of culture shaping in the Turukhansk North. This culture shaping, alternately called sovietization, was a sustained and pervasive campaign to alter the culture of indigenous peoples and to help them reach a level of socio-evolutionary equality with their Russian comrades. I look at one of the key administrative technologies for undertaking sovietization in remote areas of Siberia: the *kul'tbaza* or culture base. The second approach in this project is to reflect on the histories and historiographies of sovietization through a critical engagement with archival photographs.

There are three parts to this dissertation. These parts are integral to a body of research and commitment but they stand in some autonomy from one another and this dissertation is best defined as an assemblage of fragments: archival documents, fieldwork, papers, books, and monographs. This is an assemblage of a representation of history from the fragments of archive and ephemera. In this sense history is found in the disorder and confusion of documents that circulate along increasingly decentralized paths and routes. I take assemblage as a structural element of the thesis. It is firmly grounded in a tradition of research "on the ephemeral, the emergent, the evanescent, the decentered and the heterogeneous, all the while not giving up on a long-established commitment to account for the structured and system in social life" (Marcus and Saka 2006: 101).

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1   (Geertz 1973: 29).

In this work historical fragments function recursively; they continuously re-emerge to challenge my narrative and to re-position themselves vis-à-vis new and different information. As I explain in the introduction to Part II, this is a nervous history. These recursively appearing fragments are meant to augment the perception of their contingency and highlight their inevitable divorce from original context. Just as my historical narrative re-assembles disparate elements of the past, knowledge formation, and fragments of discursive structures, it provides the raw material of historical research. The archival excess.

This 'staging' section delivers all of the critical information necessary to make sense of the three parts of the dissertation. Staging is a view of the structure that exists 'outside' of the central thesis. It functions primarily as an orientation to terms and structural elements that characterize the main bodies of the dissertation. This section also contains references to ground-laying works, to my own travels in Siberia, and to ideas formed while experiencing the land and its people. These travels led to my work in the archives that are referred to throughout this thesis.

While two parts of the thesis are bound together as more or less conventional arguments on paper. The third part exists outside the body of the thesis. It is an experiment in media and circulation and, to some degree the end of archives. It is a digital work, housed on-line and contingent on the internet for access and circulation. This third part re-structures my thesis according to the possibilities and logics of digital media. One example of such possibilities is a subsection of Part III that features an archival de-generator. This section includes the entirety of one archive that has been of critical importance to my research. This archive is presented on the website as a montage of two randomized photographs, permanently thrown into juxtaposition with one another. This format lends itself to a more complex and perhaps (ironically) more *tangible* experience of the archive *itself*, as well as an understanding of the mobility of the individual images. In any event this is discussed

in Part III which (re)presents the images and voices that informed my research in a format that is intentionally agitating. Through this agitation I hope to re-enchant the mundane realities and conjunctures of the researcher, the document, the subject, and the reader. After the critical orders and demystifications of Parts I and II, Part III attempts to undo and rectify by reinstating a degree of disorder, inconsistency, and contradiction. This move recognizes the structuring role of the archive in the production of history. Where both historical text and archive co-reside in the space of the work (or spaces of the work as it extends across media) the role of the author and the reader vis-à-vis the archive itself are placed into critical tensions.

Archives & Research

The research for this thesis makes use of documents located in a number of different archives in Russia. There are two principal sets of photographic images that are used in this project. The first is the collection of photographs from the Tura Museum Archive. This archive holds a collection of images that were bequeathed from the soviet ethnographer and administrator I.M. Suslov. Suslov's collection provides a curated assemblage of photographs chosen to represent the history of Soviet power in the Turukhansk North. The second set of images is the result of a major international project to preserve, digitize, and circulate archival photographs depicting scenes from Siberia prior to industrialization. As co-investigator on this project, I initiated and helped to organize, manage, and digitize thousands of glass plate photographic negatives in four different regional archives. I refer to this large and somewhat arbitrary grouping of photographs as the Endangered Archives Program Siberian ethnographic collection, or EAP collection for short.

In addition to archival research on photographic images, I have explored nu-

merous archives for textual documents pertaining to sovietization in the Turukhansk North and more specifically to the Tura culture base. Thus there are a number of archives which have played a central role in the production of this thesis. I am particularly indebted to the researchers and staff at the archives of the Krasnoiarsk Museum of Local Lore. I spent many hours in their library and offices in careful examination of print and photographic documents. I have also spent long hours in the Tura regional archives, the State Archives of the Novosibirsk Oblast (GANO), Krasnoiarsk State Archives, the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), and Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). In addition to these I am grateful to the staff at the Irkustsk Regional Museum archives (IOKM), the archives of the Museum of the Arctic and the academic reading room in the St.Petersberg Kunst-kamera.

Acknowledgements

My family must be at the beginning of this survey. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Lise, my partner, who not only read this dissertation but offered extensive editorial comments and advice. As importantly, she offered the support and space necessary to undertake the research for this (out of the home) and the production of it (largely in the home). I can't express my gratitude enough, at least not in words. Our children were ever present through this as well. Rowan was born just before I began my M.A. thesis and Corbin was born mid-way through this dissertation work. Life happens in the midst of writing and while R&C's mark may not be visible in this work, it is most assuredly there. My parents Ryan and Sue Campbell as well as Lynne and Doug Wilson have given me unconditional support over the years. The only possible way to repay them will be to reproduce their love and sustenance for my own children. *And so it goes.*

At the University of Alberta there are many people to thank as well. First and foremost is my supervisor Derek Sayer who provided me with tremendous opportunities and courage to undertake a sometimes obscure and challenging research project. Elena Siemens has also been my supervisor and has been a steadfast friend and mentor. Without her encouragement I doubt the project would have emerged at such a critical time.

The trajectories taken in this research project have been diverse and extensive. I've made trails out of Canada, though England, Scotland, and of course Russia. In each of these places and along each of these routes there are people to thank and recognitions to be made.

Abroad

David Anderson has been an important partner in much of my Siberian research. He has been a steadfast role model for committed scholarship as well as an important friend. My friend from Novosibirsk, Anatolii Ablazhei, has helped me in many ways and has also been a steadfast supporter of my research. I must also thank Anna Sirina, M. Batashev, N. Makarov, and N. Martynovich. There are of course many more who need to be acknowledged and I apologize for not naming you all here. Archivists and librarians, sociologists, archaeologists, and ethnographers from Tura, Krasnoiarsk, Irskutsk, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg have all helped this project along at various stages.

There are many friends in Tura that need to be thanked and it has been too many years already since I have seen them. Most especially I would like to thank the Khutukogir family for extending their support and their homes to me on my visits.

Table of Contents

Part III
Dangerous communications

List of Images

A note: Many of the images included here are fragments of larger images, which of course, are fragments of much larger scenes, events, experiences, etc. Each page is indexed to the relevant catalogue number of the photographic image from which it was excerpted. The accronyms refer to the archives, the first three-digit number to the box or lot and the second three-digit number to the item within said lot. These images can be explored in their fullness on the website:

http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/vcr/eap016/index.php

Part I

Part II

Forward

> The idea that culture is something to be produced, invented, constructed, or reconstructed underlined so much of the USSR's social vision . . . its stunning reach was perhaps nowhere more strikingly seen than in the ways it transformed the lives of the peoples living along its furthest borders.
>
> Grant 1995: xi.

Bruce Grant's book, *In the Soviet House of Culture*, presents one of the key narratives that initially piqued my interest in (literally) exploring Siberia and studying the histories of Indigenous Siberians; histories which have offered up both similarities and disjunctures to my earlier readings into aboriginal-state relations and 20th century colonialism in the Canadian North. His reference to the 'house of culture' offered a deliciously unfamiliar and enticing analogy for what appeared to be a qualitatively different form of colonial relationship. While Grant wrote about the Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island, I have studied the culture and history of Evenki-speaking peoples of the Enisei North. I have undertaken research into the striking cultural transformations that took place in the Soviet Union after the 1917 communist revolution.

The convolutions of power, articulated through centres and peripheries are at the heart of nearly every study of Siberia. As Bruce Grant notes, the engineered cultural transformations happened to people living on the *furthest borders* of the Soviet Union. From Moscow to the outermost settlements along the Pacific Ocean is a distance of over six thousand kilometers. My own paths, traced through the Russian Federation beginning in the mid-1990s, were primarily located in the Evenki Autonomous District (Evenkiia, EAO), a region that is at the geographical centre

of Russia. Ironically this geographical centre also represents a cultural and political 'fringe'. Thousands of kilometers from the rail and highway systems to the south, Evenkiia is connected to the rest of the country by shipping routes that rely on frozen winter ice roads, limited seasonal river travel, and air transport; even with present-day transportation technology, getting in and out of that area from urban centers in the south takes significant time and effort. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Evenkiia was known as the Turukhansk North and it was very much the edge of empire, although located in the very center of it. It is in this centre-on-the–edge that I, armed with Bruce Grant's concept of the house of culture, began my journey to unearth the structure of that house of culture.

While Bruce Grant takes the house of culture [*dom kultura*] as his central metaphor for soviet cultural transformation, my project is an attempt to look through the genealogy of the house of culture to its predecessor, the culture base [*kul'tbaza*][1]. For me, the culture base carries the same hint of estrangement and 'otherness' as did the house of culture when I first encountered it. It is a nomenclature that begins with a defamiliarization; an untranslatable word that signals difference and refuses easy containment and understanding. There is no parallel to either the culture base or the house of culture in the Canadian aboriginal experience of colonialism, though missions, forts, trading posts, mission schools, and residential schools were all (similarly) locations of cultural encounter, subjugation and (often) forced assimilation. The soviet culture base, however, was built on a very different paradigm. While it was indeed built to house the process of cultural transformation, it was designed *not* to assimilate or obliterate cultural difference; it was designed to discipline it. As a technology of discipline, the culture base was the first concrete

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1   The word is a contraction of culture and base (*kul'tbaza*) that I will refer to simply as culture base.

effort on the part of the soviets to bring socialist enlightenment to the farthest reaches of the taiga.

In my writings here, I use the first culture base, located in the Turukhansk North and constructed at the end of the 1920s, to anchor the historical and theoretically peripatetic explorations presented in my main dissertation. This culture base became known as the administrative town of Tura, and it is to this place that I traveled with my family in 1998, and where I encountered photographic archives housed in a small regional museum. From there in Tura I made many other trips and investigations. In particular I visited archives in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, and Krasnoiarsk.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the word "Siberia" continues to conjure up images of a distant, brutal, and cold land. A hundred years ago, Marie Antoinette Czaplicka (a Polish anthropologist and a lecturer at Oxford University) wrote that when she was a child *Siberia* meant one thing: "dire peril to the bodies, sore torture for the souls, of the bravest, cleverest, and most independently minded of our people" (Czaplicka 1916: 1). This was a place on the margins of "civilization," where the light of European science and reason rarely fell; it was replete with places of dark shamanic rituals where stone-age nomads wandered the icy tundra ceaselessly along paths as old as time. This was a land for the destitute exiles, for intellectuals and criminals; a prison with no walls. The Evenki historian V.N. Uvachan wrote that before "the October Revolution, the Turukhansk territory was a forlorn land of white silence and great sorrow. It was called 'the wretched Turukhansk' and the 'the prison without bars' " (Uvachan 1975: 17). It is this vast mythologized land that Communist agitators, instructors, and administrators set out

to permanently transform in 1917.

It is interesting to note that for many, in Europe and North America at least, Siberia continues to be one of the most mythologized, exoticized lands in the world, defined largely by its remoteness. While it is no longer so associated with political exile (though the infamous Gulags continue to feature prominently in histories and mythologies about Siberia), it certainly can still be seen as a site of 'dire perile' and 'sore torture' not least due to a famously brutal climate and harsh living conditions defined by little access to consumer goods and 'civilized' amenities. In the post-Soviet era this general perception is reasonably accurate for people living away from towns and cities that are more populated and well-connected through networks of transport and travel. Tura, the site of the first culture base, can be considered still as among those less accessible places. In the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, remotely located Evenki villages in Central Siberia had become increasingly cut off from regional and provincial centers by dysfunctional systems of transport which were the result of over fifty years of social engineering projects undertaken as sovietization, development, and industrialization by the USSR. Traditional economies and systems of mobility, cast as 'backwards' and inefficient, were re-constructed and replaced with heavily bureaucratized and centralized economies. As I noted in earlier research, the projects of socialist reconstruction did a great deal to alter, damage, and displace traditional Evenki economies and forms of mobility. Leaving in the wake of communism a critical isolation of de-mobilized and ghettoized Evenkis (Campbell 2003: 117).

And so, it is that central to my intellectual explorations is a consideration of the culture base's most potent residual artifacts: *photographs*. Producing a cultural history of this culture base requires a *composite staging*—that is, a production of

boundaries and territorializations around a theme—of sovietization in Central Siberia. It was not only the indigenous Evenki peoples of the Ilimpei Tundra who were sovietized, however. As discussed in my main text, the programs of sovietization considered and re-cast the entire landscape and the entire complex social and ecological relations encompassed by it. In choosing to label this process of sovietization a 'staging', I draw attention to its constructed-ness and the inevitable permeability (if not fallibility) of its output. I also aim to subject my own historical staging of sovietization to a set of theoretical propositions concerning the convulsive and unstable image of the everyday as it is marked in the photographic document in general.

The research for this thesis was focused not only on textual and archival research into the original sites of socialist construction but it also presents an explicit valuation of visual materials at various stages of my work. This approach deviates from typical representations of Russian, Soviet, and Siberian history, which until recently have paid little attention to visual culture.[2] My project aims to dwell on the surface of one particular Soviet development project and seeks to haunt its specific history of the Tura culture base with the visual artifacts of the era. As discussed in my dissertation text, the events following the establishment of Soviet power indicate that the projects of social engineering /sovietization can be regarded, along with architecture, film, visual and performing arts, and literature as an aesthetic as much as a political venture. Utopian visions and its imaginary were wrapped up in the pragmatics of revolution and socialist construction. Therefore, the research materials for this project include Russian and English language articles, books,

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2   Where studies have paid attention to visual culture, it has almost always concerned with Art and propaganda. The mundane visual ecologies of Russia and Siberia are largely absent from the field. One notable exception is Kivelson and Neuberger's 2008 edited volume, *Picturing Russia: Explorations in visual culture*.

reports, journals, maps, and monographs as well as a significant photographic record that has been preserved in a number of different archives and museums in Siberia and Russia.

It should be noted that the story that I attempt to capture of Evenkiia is not just a story of strangers who arrived with missionary zeal, and who transformed and obliterated what they saw as objectionable and deviant. The story of Evenkiia is instead a story of a carefully fostered and emerging intelligentsia. It is a story of Evenkis going to war in Europe, to labour camps on the Kolyma, to schools and colleges in Krasnoyarsk and Sverdlovsk, and to resorts on the Black Sea. Evenkiia's story rubs against the stereotypes of Siberian deprivation, cultural isolation, and backwardness. My dissertation is also predicated upon other historical circumstances and post-Soviet realities of the indigenous Evenki peoples of the Ilimpii Tundra and upon knowledge gleaned through my experiences among people living in remote communities.

I have had the pleasure of studying Evenki language and living and working with Evenkis in several villages and towns in Siberia. My introduction to Evenki culture came in 1995 when I lived in the Evenki-Sakha settlement of 'Olenek' located north of Tura. Since that time I have lived for weeks and months at a time in a number of towns, settlements, and encampments with Evenki people. The research I undertook in central Siberia between 1996 and 2001 resulted in a thesis on indigenous mobility in the post-Soviet era (Campbell 2003). In that work I outlined the way that Evenkis in the last decade of the 20th century were forced to navigate the residual landscapes of the soviet North. These landscapes included remote villages and consolidated settlements as well as local economies rendered quasi-dysfunctional after years of tinkering, manipulation, and neglect by the state. Over the span of seventy years, all aspects of life and labour were subject to the

modifications and cultural shaping of state planners. While there is a continuity of reindeer herding, fishing, hunting, and berry picking, all of these activities have been touched by the legacies of government rural planning (*zemleustroistvo*).

As stated earlier, my current project examines the era where the construction of soviet landscapes *began* and seeks to bring into the account the lives of peoples affected by those structures. (especially during the early period of sovietization)… While the rest of Russia was undergoing radical and bloody transformations, life on the land for most hunters and herders in central Siberia was not so intense. After the privations immediately following the revolution, when commodities were scarce, a kind of stability occurred; there were regular supplies of food, fuel, hunting necessities and more direct access to medical aid. Education began in earnest and Evenkis were welcomed as sympathetic communists. One early group of Indigenous students, taken on a tour of Moscow in the 1930s, wrote:

> We, excursionists and pupils from the schools in the Evenk National Area, have visited the museum home and the places where Lenin—the founder of the Soviet state and the leader of the world proletariat—was fond of relaxing.
>
> Today we are returning to the North, to the land of 'eternal snow and eternal suffering' as pre-revolutionary writers called it. But they spoke of times long past.
>
> We, the children of Evenkis, live a happy and joyful life. We enjoy broad opportunities to become engineers, teachers, flyers, etc.
>
> All that was given to us by the Communist Party founded by Lenin.
>
> Dear Lenin: we hold your memory sacred, and we shall study and work much better so as to be worthy Leninists.

> quoted in Uvachan 1975: 84.

For indigenous minorities in the north, early Soviet life was marked by

two significantly different operational paradigms. Immediately following the 1917 revolution, the period of socialist construction was undertaken as a multi-ethnic and powerfully utopian vision. In this period, ethnic groups were supported and encouraged to articulate their status as independent nations. Russian culture itself was often denigrated because it was perceived to be chauvinistic and associated with Tsarist imperialism, colonialism, and exploitation. While colonial exploitation was real and extensive, it also became a rhetorically formulaic basis for criticizing pre-soviet Russian culture. In the 1930s, under Joseph Stalin, the campaign against Russian chauvinism was reversed. (Slezkine 1994a; Martin 2001; Hirsch 2005). Terry Martin has noted that the Stalin-era ushered in important changes but these did *not* include the liquidation of the affirmative action programs aimed at developing ethnic/national cadres. I will leave this portion of the structure here, with a complex vision of a shared experience of the construction of the culture house as built perhaps somewhat willingly by the Evenki for whose transformation it was intended.

Agitating Images

Part I
Archives, histories, and sovietization in central Siberia

Introduction

Like any artifact consigned to a museum, archive, library, or collection—whether they are carefully wrapped, labeled, and placed in archival-grade boxes, or casually stacked in a corner amidst other historical debris—archival photographs lie mostly unknown and ignored until the day that they are pressed into service. Archival photographs are brought into the light by someone preparing a paper, calendar illustration, slide show, exhibit, article, or argument, and then circulated and seen in ways that neither the camera operator nor the photograph's subjects could ever have anticipated.

Agitating Images has emerged directly out of my work with archival photographs that depict scenes of everyday life in Siberia in the first decades of the twentieth century. I consider both the status of these photographs as archival

artifacts, as well as the powerful challenges they pose to history in their capacity to agitate against the words that we use to construct and contest the past. While focusing on this revolutionary and tumultuous period of Siberian history, my goal is also to draw attention more generally to how the project of writing the past as well as writing culture is affected by the circulations and non-circulations of archival photographs.

This study of photographic circulation and representation begins with an exploration of the historical circumstances surrounding the production of photographs in the first decades of the twentieth century. I look at the sites of photographic encounter in Siberia and explore the implications of their subsequent circulations and trajectories, of the paths they took to the archives, where they have been kept, and beyond.

The terrain of post-Imperial Russia was complex and multi-national. Most of Siberia, the territory east of the Ural mountain range, was sparsely populated forest and tundra inhabited by indigenous peoples representing over thirty distinct culture groups, primarily Evenkis (formerly Tungus), Yakuts (Sakha), Dolgans, and Kets. The indigenous peoples, known collectively at various times as aliens [*inorodtsy*[3]], natives [*tuzemtsy*[4]], and "small-numbered peoples of the far North" [*malye narodnosti severnykh okrain*], occupied themselves primarily with hunting, herding, fishing, trading, and gathering wild plants and berries. They had been tribute-paying subjects [*iasachniki*] of the Russian Empire since the 1600s when the Tsar's forces 'conquered' Siberia. By the early twentieth century, the indigenous peoples

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3   The term *inorodtsy* (which is typically translated into English as 'aliens') was legislated in 1822 in reference to the indigenous peoples living within the Russian Empire. Cf. Slocum 1998 for a more detailed exploration of the term.

4   The term *tuzemtsy* (usually translated into English as 'natives') is thoroughly examined by Sokolovski (2000; 2005) who also offers an excellent study of the term *inorodtsy*.

of the Siberian North had been engaged in commerce with European traders and their representatives for many generations, and had in many cases capitulated to the authority of the Russian Tsar and Orthodox Christian ministries.

In 1917 indigenous peoples were 'liberated' by Bolshevik revolutionaries and became the target of highly ambitious programs of cultural change and affirmative action. While there is a powerful critique of the Soviet regime for its oppressive techniques of domination (cf. Pika and Grand eds. 1999), the rhetoric of liberation should not be read as merely a cynical linguistic trick. For all the implicit and explicit critiques of the Soviet era, the communist revolution did not represent a simple exchange of colonial masters. Rather it brought into existence an entirely new paradigm for structuring inter-cultural relations and exerting state power. This new paradigm was forged under the rubric of Soviet nationalities policy but was based on a much more profound revolutionary élan and zeal for emancipation.

The transition period immediately following the 1917 revolution and subsequent civil war (1917-1921) was described in the language of the day as an era of socialist construction or Sovietization [*sovetizatsiia*], a process broadly understood to be advancing the collective of nations on a singular path of development toward a future form of Communism. In the northern forests of Siberia, Sovietization took the form of both economic modernization and state-sponsored evolutionism,[5] articulated according to the "Marxist-Leninist norms of social, economic, and political behaviour" (Aspaturian 1967: 159). Men and women acting as Soviet agitators, revolutionaries, and cultural workers dispersed across the Siberian

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5   O.Y. Artemova writes that Morgan's influence on Marx and Engels was so significant that "Soviet 'ethnological Marxism' formed a kind of symbiosis with classic unilineal evolutionism" (Artemova 2004: 81). The term, 'State-sponsored evolutionism' was coined by the historian Francine Hirsch (2005). In her book *Empire of Nations* she makes a strong case for understanding Sovietization as "an interactive and participatory process" (2005: 5).

North, tasked with the goal of asserting Soviet dominance and power through the establishment of communist ideologies. At the same time, the ruling Bolshevik party was developing and implementing programs of rapid economic modernization designed to permanently transform the so-called backward economies of the region. In effect the burgeoning Soviet regime implemented a new form of colonialism, though it took pains to distinguish itself from the Imperialism of the Tsarist era. Socialist colonialism in the Siberian North was distinguished by social and industrial development that sought the rapid incorporation of indigenous peoples into the state project.[6]

My own research in Siberia has been largely focused on the history and culture of the Evenki peoples living in what is now known as the Evenki Municipal District (Evenkiia, for short). This territory is located in the geographical centre of the Russian Federation and in the early twentieth century it was generally known as the Turukhansk North (or sometimes the Enisei North). It is a vast boreal landscape that lies between the Yenisei and Lena rivers. The Turukhansk North contained an area that was located a great distance from central hubs of transportation and cultural exchange. Small cities like Ekaterinburg, Novonikolaevsk, Irkutsk, and Krasnoiarsk had grown up along the Trans-Siberian Railway and these were connected to the flows of global culture. The Siberian North, however, remained remote from these cultural influences because of a poorly developed system of mechanized transport. The primary means of communication in the Turukhansk North was the Yenisei River, which flows north to the Kara Sea. Steamers navigated the Yenisei but rarely travelled up its tributaries, which were treacherous, with seasonal variations in flow and unmapped rapids. Rivers like the Podkamennaia

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6   Terry Martin developed the label "affirmative action empire" to describe the particular form of Soviet Imperialism (Martin 2001).

Tunguska and Nizhnaia Tunguska were only accessible by small boats pulled by hand and aided by sail. Many of the smaller tributaries (such as the Olenek in Yakutiia) were not mapped until the Soviet era. Beyond these rivers were forests that were explored by and known to reindeer herders, but few others.

The implementation of Sovietization in the Siberian North was initially dependent upon the organization of Soviet outposts called culture-bases [*kul'tbazy*]. While very little historical research has been undertaken on the culture-bases,[7] we do know that they were built as an initiative of the Committee for the Assistance of the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (or simply the Committee for the North). Culture-bases were built in key locations, forming a broad network across the vast expanse of Siberia.   The first culture-base was built along the Nizhnaia Tunguska river in the Yenisei North. It was conceived of as a cultural and political centre for the nomadic Evenkis who lived in the area. In 1927, after several years of planning, the director of the Krasnoiarsk Committee for the North, I.M. Suslov authorized a team to begin construction of several buildings at the confluence of the Kochechum and N. Tunguska rivers.[8] All of the culture-bases were operated by the Committee for the North until its liquidation in 1935, at which time they transitioned to full-fledged village or settlement-type village status. The Tungus culture-base, sometimes called the Tura culture-base, was officially named Tura in 1935 and became the

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7   Unless otherwise noted historical details concerning the Kul'tbazy are from my PhD research on the history of the Tura culture-base and are referenced by archival sources.

8   This outpost was officially called the Tura culture-base (Turinskaia Kul'tbaza), though it was also sometimes called the Tungus culture base (Tunguskaia kul'tbaza). The later moniker is a reference either to the dominant ethnic group in the region, the Tungus (now Evenkis), or simply to the fact that the culture-base was built on the river Nizhnaia Tunguska. The misnomer, Tungus culture-base, is instructive both for revealing one of the central aims of the culture-bases—to serve an single ethnic nation— but also for the manner in which the language of Russian imperialism persisted. According to Soviet policy, indigenous peoples would be called by their ethnonyms. There is a report in the GANO archive where every usage of the term 'Other' (*Inorodets*) is marked through with a line and replaced with the then more politically correct 'Native' (*Tuzemnets*).

capitol of the newly formed Evenki Autonomous Region.

The Committee for the North was established under the authority of the Central Executive Committee of Russia (VtsIK) to 'help' the indigenous peoples of the taiga and tundra in their cultural upbringing and to ease them out of their 'backwardness' ('*otstalost*'). From the earliest days of the revolution efforts were underway to generate support for socialism amongst the indigenous peoples. As M.A. Sergeyev noted,

> The committee was called upon to help realize the legal equality that was proclaimed by the 'Declaration' of 1917 and by the Constitution of 1918. It was given the task of uniting and organizing the small peoples, of awakening them to a recognition of their equality with other peoples, and of elevating them to a high level of development.

Sergeyev 1964: 491

In the 1920s efforts were made to create indigenous representative organizations (clan and nomadic Soviets), which in many cases simply replaced existing political structures developed under the Tsarist tributary economy. These projects were frustrated by the mobility of the 'natives' through their vast interior territories, resulting in a nearly ungovernable remoteness from state power. The project to build culture-bases was a resolution to this problem. The culture-bases were one of the Soviets' first concrete steps in advancing the goal of cultural transformation and incorporation. The locations of the cultural-bases were chosen with the dual criteria of remoteness from urban areas and accessibility for a dominant local indigenous population.

The culture-bases were not solely dedicated to cultural enlightenment; they were also meant to be centres for regional development and scientific exploration (Parkhamenko 1930: 125). In this way they differed from earlier colonial outposts like forts, missions, trading posts, and churches. Not only was the Tura culture-

base a new kind of project but for the indigenous Evenkis living near the Nizhnaia Tunguska and Kochechum rivers, the Tura culture-base became the first major and sustained colonial project in the area. In a territory which measures over a hundred thousand square kilometers only a handful of small cabins and chapels were ever built. Since the arrival of the Tsar's forces hundreds of years earlier central Siberia remained an area dominated by nomadic reindeer herders. To the Evenkis living in the area the culture-base was a truly novel construction that marked the arrival of an altogether different kind of newcomer. It was also soon to become evident that the Tura culture-base represented merely the tip of a massive cultural, military, political, and economic effort that would lead to unimaginable changes in the social-cultural landscape of east-central Siberia.

Archives

The counter-narratives of sovietization in central Siberia—those that are not part of the more or less official historiographical projects of Soviet scholars—exist through informal family histories, in popular media, and to some degree in the post-Soviet scholarship. Restorative (or revisionist) histories that avoid the panegyric of communist boosterism can and are being reconstituted through archival and ethnohistorical research (cf. Slezkine 1994, Grant 1995, Anderson 2000, Ssorin-Chaikov 2003 and Bloch 2004). Soviet practices of documentation and consignation of documents to archives were as thorough as many other modern colonial states. Ann Stoler argues that colonial archives should be examined as "both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves" (Stoler 2002: 87). Reading the socialist colonial archives against the grain allows for the production of counter narratives precisely by revealing the power relations that were implied and produced in archival acts. The sovietization of Siberia was an extension and transformation of Imperial era colonialism. While the soviets reinvented much of the administrative structure, other practices were maintained and expanded. As such, many of the Soviet-era standards for documenting and archiving had already been established in the nineteenth century. As Olga Glagoleva notes, "Russian bureaucracy was notorious for its strictness and exactness in documentation" (Glagoleva 1998: 29). This rigour carried through in Soviet practices as well; the importance of form and language in the structure of official documents was critical (and critically policed) in the Soviet era. This is evidenced in the remarkable conformity of documents found in both state and regional archives. Glagoleva remarks that V.I. Lenin was scrupulous in his approach

to documentation and that the rules of "Soviet office management . . . attempted to regulate all steps from the initial stages where documents emerged to the final procedures of turning them over to archives for deposit." (ibid.: 33).

There are two important points to be taken away from these observations about Soviet archives. Firstly, the material that has been consigned to most archives is highly structured and ordered, resulting in the production of particular kinds of readings, knowledge formations, or discourses. A contra-puntal reading of the archives, or reading them against the grain, is necessary to avoid the typical discursive blind-spots that are generated by the structuring effects of archival order and that have helped to shape Soviet-era historiography. The second point about Soviet bureaucratic standardizations must consider the production of documents on the local level or, as Stoler calls it, the production of archives as the "intricate technologies of rule" (ibid.).

Given the importance of documentation in the burgeoning soviet bureaucracy the role of soviet instructors and other agents among early native soviets must have been crucial—especially where there was almost universal illiteracy. The drive to create native intelligentsias may also have been propelled, or facilitated by a desire to off-load necessarily meticulous and typically tedious paper-work. The texture and character of the archives however are primarily determined by official records. Such records document apparent complicities of indigenous peoples in their own 'colonization.'[9] Thus the records of indigenous soviets and indigenous

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9   Francine Hirsch notes that in 1922 the State Colonization Research Institute (Goskolonit) was tasked with explaining how "in a Soviet socialist context . . . Soviet colonization policies would enable indigenous peoples . . . to 'attain a higher level of material and spiritual culture.'"(2005: 89). The history of the term colonization is contentious in the history of socialism as it was tied to histories of imperialism and subjugation. Hirsch's work masterfully details the complexities and contradictions that embroiled various levels of Soviet administration in debates over the framework for implementing communism in a multi-national state.

secretaries are not necessarily representative of larger indigenous assent to the soviet projects. Conversely there is scant evidence that such complicities can be read simply as falsified participation records. My own reading of the historical record suggests that they are best to be read as a rapidly emerging co-optation of indigenous peoples into a burgeoning intelligentsia (cf. Kotkin 2002).

The documents consigned to soviet archives have provided invaluable material for historians. Memoranda, agreements, notifications, policies, attestations, biographies, and reports are among the documents that help to trace the labyrinthine history of shifting bureaucratic structures. They also provide oblique reference to everyday histories and experiences that are not to be found in official archives. Most of the world is not caught in passing and preserved in archives, really there is very little that is harvested, or at least that has been the case for much of history. Even in this era of the digital archive, the absurd impossibility of an archive of everything is patently obvious. Ephemera is the name we give to that which is not admitted into the repositories of state memory. Using archival records to reproduce histories that have been permitted to dissipate into effuse pastness as ephemera is a matter of lateral methodologies. The fact that archival documents point inter-textually as well as extra-textually help us imagine what is not in the archive—both conspicuous and inconspicuous absences record what was allowed to pass as ephemera and what was consigned to the archival matrix.

The onerous task of drawing inferences out of stubborn policy statements has been the work of contemporary cultural historians. Writing history out of state archives is a challenging endeavour frustrated by the inherent limitations of the material, which by-and-large is constituted by inter-departmental correspondence, policy papers, and other textual artifacts. Soviet state archives preserve and naturalize

institutional histories as much as they inform and determine our understanding of Soviet history in general. The primary streams of Soviet history, aside from those produced by Soviet and Communist scholars and those produced by foreigners, is marked by access to archives, which until the era of Glasnost in later half of 1980s was tightly controlled and circumscribed by dedicated bureaucracies. As Donald J. Raleigh argues, the opening of the Soviet archives changed the very practice of Soviet historiography (2002: 18). Clearly gaining access to documents once proscribed and hidden from the view of most scholars allows for greater degree of historical accuracy and nuance. A more general shift noted by Raleigh however, is the degree to which accommodation and integration as aspects of everyday life in the Soviet era have been overlooked by ideologically-motivated desires to find opposition and resistance. Even so, the search for opposition and resistance "remains a popular theme not only because opposition is easier to document than accommodation, but also because opposition reveals historical agency, challenges stereotypes of a passive population, and further calls into question the totalitarian model" (Raleigh 2002: 20).[10] My examination of the culture-base as a technology of rule uses multiple historical narratives while recognizing the remarkable imbalances of power implicit in the expression of a highly centralized and militant state that sought at various times to accommodate, assimilate, and promote its subjects.

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10   Some exceptions to this tendency to overlook accommodation and integration under state communism include Caroline Humphrey's *Karl Marx collective* (1983) and later, Yuri Slezkine's *Arctic mirrors* (1994). These works are significant for the manner in which they have detailed the complexity of resistance —as well as accommodation— among indigenous peoples of Siberia. The head of the Committee for the North, was quoted by Slezkine as stating that the participation of indigenous minorities "as equal (not just in principle but also de facto) and active partners in the socialist economy" (Skachko in Slezkine 1994: 270).

Archival Photographs and Photographs as Archives

The photograph is a peculiar artifact and intermediary in the archive. Ill-fit and categorically awkward, the photograph in the archive seems to resist the very structure of the archive as a place of consignment. The photograph reaches out of the archive in ways that textual artifacts rarely ever do and it presents a queer logic that both duplicates and annihilates archival orders. In order to apprehend this queer logic I will reference two sets of photographs from my research in Siberia: the Suslov Collection and the Endangered Archives Programme: Siberia ethnographic collection (hereafter referred to simply as the EAP collection). The former is a collection of images gathered and curated by an individual (the ethnographer and Soviet administrator I.M. Suslov); the latter is a collection of images that can only be considered a collection because of a loosely applied classificatory scheme rather than any curatorial intention. They are very different kinds of collections and the photographs that are organized under their titles represent similarly different goals.

The photographs in the Suslov collection are held in the archives of the Evenki Region Museum of Ethnography in Tura. This collection consists of over two hundred carefully annotated photographic prints which were donated to the museum by the ethnographer and state agent I.M. Suslov in 1970. The EAP Siberia collection is quite another kind of archive. In 2005, with funds from the British Library's Endangered Archives Program, co-investigator David G. Anderson and I initiated a project to digitize glass plate negatives located in 'colonial' archives around Siberia. The goal was to digitize negatives depicting peoples, artifacts, and scenes related to the theme of indigenous Siberians prior to industrialization.

In the era before searchable digital databases, images depended even

less on description and more on systems of class-marks and catalogue numbers, which typically differ from archive to archive and are not infrequently internally inconsistent. Photographs in archives are treated as artifacts, not images. They are subordinated to the archival system of descriptors and class-marks[11] that requires them to be described so that they can be effectively re-discovered. Given their powerful rejection of simple classificatory schemes and taxonomies (that I describe elsewhere), photographs are susceptible to being hobbled by the application of simplistic categories: 'ethnographic' 'architecture', 'tree' etc. Where the tool of taxonomy is most blunt with photographs, they are merely grouped together under a single rubric: "ethnography" or under the name of a particular expedition.

A photographic collection in an archive is only as good as the descriptors applied to it, which vet and filter who, of the privileged, have access to it. The photographic descriptors thus structure systems of meaning and interpretation. With Michel Foucault's *Discipline and punish* the approach to archives shifted from an unmarked repository to an active agent in history (cf. Appadurai 2003: 15). Thus the archive has come to be seen as both a technology of rule and a site of knowledge production. Elizabeth Edwards notes, the "archive not only preserves, it reifies, it frames and sets meanings; it also structures silences." (Edwards 2001: 107). Furthermore, she cautions that "this does not mean that meanings in the archive are necessarily static" (ibid.). Carolyn Steedman also writes of the materiality of the archive when she states, that in Foucault's "*Archaeology of Knowledge*, the archive does not so much stand in for the idea of what can and cannot be said, but rather is 'the system that establishes statements as events and things'" (Steedman 2002: 2). The

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11   In Soviet archives class-marks were often applied directly to the documents and photographs accessioned by the institution. Class-marks help to generate a relational index from a catalogue or inventory to the artifact.

materiality of the archive, in other words, is how things are suspended in webs of human significance and the ongoing struggle for meaning, history, and remembrance. Ann Stoler reminds us, however, that colonial "archives were both sites of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed, and reproduced the power of the state" (Stoler 2002: 97). The interplay of photographs and colonial imaginaries is critical here but it is critical because photographs have largely been lost in the archives. Where as John Tagg (1988), Elizabeth Edwards (1992), and others have noted the powerful ideological power of photographs to contribute to colonial imaginaries as well as exertions of state power, photographs in the archives have also been crippled due to their fundamental incompatibility with the textual frameworks that govern archival research. Notwithstanding the exceptional form of socialist colonialism, photographs in colonial archives were often unable to reproduce the power of the state and often failed to play much of a role in the production of a socialist imaginary.

Photographs and archives share a host of other visual metaphors that are intimately tied to the modern state enlightenment thinking; they are clearly ordered under similar logics. I would like to push this comparison further; to suggest that a single photograph is not only like an archive but that it actually shares many of the same conditions of the archive. A photograph is an archive in its own right. It bears all the markings of what is typically considered an archive, not least of all the fundamental aspects proposed by Derrida in *Archive Fever*. The archivist Verne Harris reminds us that Derrida describes

> the structure of recording, of archiving, as involving a trace (text,
> information) being consigned to a substrate, a place (and it can be a virtual
> place) of consignation. So that for Derrida the archive is a conjoining of
> trace and substrate – writing on paper, painting on rock, cut on skin … there

is no archive without some location, that is, some space outside. Archive is not a living memory. It's a *location* . . .

One would be forgiven for thinking that Derrida was actually writing about photographs and *not* archives. Indeed if you replaced the word archive with the word photograph in the above quote it works just as well. The language of traces and substrates is the language of print-making, of photography, of writing with light. Traces and substrates imply originary encounters, though not origins in and of themselves. They imply mobilities, circulations, trajectories but also pauses, imprints, and other forms of static being. The logic of archives within archives, of the photograph as archive, points to an intersection of gazes as well. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins deploy this concept in their consideration of photographs from National Geographic magazines (1991). They note that National Geographic photographs of the non-Western other are,

> dynamic sites at which many gazes or viewpoints intersect. This intersection creates a complex and multi-dimensional object; it allows viewers of the photo to negotiate a number of different identities both for themselves and for those pictured; and it is one route by which the photograph threatens to break frame and reveal its social context.

> Lutz and Collins 1991: 134

Archives, too, are suspended in such intersections: disciplinary gazes and undisciplined gazes, historical, nationalist, affective gazes in the archives searching for fragments and evidence, or something else. Archival interlocutors foist their own disciplining practices on the closed-stack archives, mediating the information that emerges (or doesn't) from the depths. Photographs and archives, then, function in the same way, most significantly in the action of "fixing". In photography, this term refers to the technological innovation that allows once-ephemeral images to be

attached to metal, glass, paper, and cellulose. As Schwartz notes, "archives [have] also 'fixed' a moment in time, fixed the actions and transaction of state and church, corporate and private interest, 'fixed' recorded information in its administrative, legal, and fiscal context." (Schwartz 2000: 34). Furthering the connection between photographs and archives, Schwartz continues, "[a]rchive and photography promised possession and control of knowledge through possession and control of recorded information" (*ibid*). This promise of possession and control, of an establishment of history, returns us to the trace and its role in the production of historical knowledge. The trace is something that is observable. Paul Ricoeur, noting Marc Bloch's interest in the idea of the trace, remarks that apprehending the past "in and through its documentary traces is an *observation* in the strong sense of the word—for to observe never means the mere recording of a brute fact. . . . Not only does the historian's inquiry raise the trace to the dignity of a meaningful document, but it also raises the past itself to the dignity of an historical fact" (Ricoeur 1965: 23). Looking at documents as marks and traces, like looking at photographs, implies situated and embodied gazes. Looking is always an act of positioning, though as W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us, "vision is itself invisible . . . we cannot see what seeing is" (2002: 86). Documents in archives (including photographs)—though they may have never been touched by a historian, *per se*—are pre-established as historical facts by dint of inclusion in the archive. To return to Ricoeur again,

> The document was not a document before the historian came to ask it a question. Thus, on the basis of his observation, the historian establishes a document, so to speak, behind him, and in this way establishes historical facts.

> Ricoeur 1965: 23.

Archival photographs are structured and framed by presences in the archive and in the encompassing systems of archival order.

There are differences between the archive and the photograph-archive, of course, significantly, in that state and museum archives are notoriously solid and permanent technologies, whereas photographs are promiscuous and ephemeral. The mobility of the photograph—its capacity to circulate beyond the archive—is antithetical to the static location of the institutional state archive, and, of course, the photograph-as-archive is often materially part of the institutional archive. In considering the photograph in its archival-institutional setting, however, we can see how the archival edifice operates as a way-point in the circulation of photographic images, and most importantly, how this intersection, this stopping point, is tremendously important to the production of history. As articulated by Derrida, "consignation [of the archive] aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration" (Derrida 1996: 3).

The general lack of accessibility to archival photographs by historians, mixed with a general lack of methodology for conducting research on photographs, has rendered these photographs circumstantial to the historiographical project. Accessibility is partly determined by the technical and historical need to subordinate the photographic image to systems of writing, making the usefulness of photographs in archives largely contingent on the quality of descriptive techniques employed at the time of accession, of the creation of the archive, or of the photograph itself. Typically, photographic images have been treated as illustrative matter (decoration for the text) that are either meant to convey a kind of documentary truth to the essay ("this is real"), or to stand as evidence of an event ("this really happened," "she was really there," etc.), or are simply decorative (included as design elements meant to make the experience of reading better or more interesting). All of these

have their uses, though they are implicated in the hegemony of 'plain style' that slips past un-reflexive scholarship.[12] It is when photographs are used as illustration (in any combination of the ways noted) that the text is most susceptible to interpretive dissonance. In this sense they can act as *agents provocateurs*, volatile agents parading as innocent illustrations. Careful scholars are no doubt aware of this (even if it is not explicitly theorized *per se*) and respond with an avoidance of photography, or very careful selection which they know is less likely to undermine a written thesis, but I would suggest that a lack of clearly-defined methodology for the use of photographs in many academic disciplines has more generally led to an aversion to facing the challenges of dealing with photographs. Without strategies for working with the unwieldiness of images, those who use archival photographs in their study of the past are gravely susceptible to replicating the blind spots of the archive. Not least of all, photographs from the archives are easily mobilized under a methodological rubric of content analysis that lacks more keenly focused and skeptical modes of inquiry.

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12   The 'plain-style' here refers to the naive realist photography that seeks to minimize lens distortion, strange angles, weird subject matter, etc., in the belief that this delivers a greater degree of authenticity or objectivity.

Soviet Photography

Susan Sontag, among others, has argued convincingly that photography is one of the central arts of modernity (1977). Born in Europe at a time of intense industrialization and technological advancement, photography developed as a practice dominated primarily by scientist-artists. Until the development of popular Soviet photography after the Great Fatherland War (known as the Second World War in the West), Soviet photography was institutionalized in studio photography, art photography, photo-journalism, and expedition and scientific photography. Later, in the 1930s the emergence of an overtly propagandistic style of photography— whereby photographs were produced to carry particular messages and to manipulate belief—eclipsed many other forms of picture taking. Alexandr Rodchenko, for example, popularized a revolutionary style of photography. Such revolutionary photography was meant to provide transformative experiences and to help in the effort to upend false consciousness. 'Plain-style' photographs were created, framed, selected, edited, and manipulated to present a focused message, though they were at the time resolutely presented as transparent and free of ideology. Rather they occupied an unmarked ideological category that challenged the West's histories of capitalism and imperialism. It is expedition photography that most concerns my work. As with photojournalism, expedition photography was typically governed by the necessities of plain-style documentation, which nonetheless announced itself through its very claims to greater objectivity through repetition and standardization, which were the hallmarks of all 'scientific' photography.

I use the term "expedition photography" to include a range of photographic practices as well as to draw attention to the mobility of the photographer and the

photographs. This is also a term used by the Soviet historian of photography S.A. Morozov. Because of cumbersome equipment, limited supplies, and the remoteness of many shooting locations, great deliberation underwrote every decision about what would or would not be photographed. The photographs themselves were inevitably transported away from the location and moment of capture to a laboratory where they could be developed and printed. Photographs produced in the central Siberian taiga where hauled thousands of kilometers to be processed in distant cities. Aside from the mobility implied in the term "expedition photography," the name is superior to "ethnographic photography" because many of the early Soviet-era photographs, especially in the EAP Siberia collection, were not taken by trained ethnographers like Suslov.

Expedition photographs include pictures taken by geographers, geologists, biologists, as well as census takers and other government agents, and thus can represent a less formulated and purposeful gaze. While anthropologists tended to have particular agendas when they photographed indigenous peoples (such as tracing ethno-genesis through the study of faces and bodies, decorative patterns, or tools) expedition photographers represent a much wider range of intent and education. However, despite this range of intent, one thing we can see in the expedition photography from the period of Sovietization is how the institutional gaze of photography shifted from the representation of an exclusive or colonial 'Other' to an inclusive (though still other) state subject. One way of reading this shift is through the greater attention to naming the subjects of photographs. With earlier expedition-photography the subjects tended to be represented as ethnological types rather than individuals. The becoming-modern subjects of the Soviet multi-national state were often named in photographs. This can be read in a number of ways, not

least of all because captions and interpretations are most elusive, but also because the very idea of an institutional gaze collapses multiple practices of looking and being looked at. Aside from naming, the inclusivity of the Other was also constructed by proximity to modern affects. In the photographs of Baluev, from the EAP collection, there are numerous images of Evenkis as fully engaged participants in Soviet modernity: from the bodily discipline of exercising children under the watchful gaze of Stalin to orderly pupils gathered together for a geography lesson.[13] Are they learning their place in the world? Perhaps they are meant to be pointing their home to us: the absent presence in the room embodied by the photographer and the photographic apparatus. Surely this is staged? A performative modernity that documents the truth of a moment but one that is haunted by its implicit claims to universality and hope.

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13   kkkm_105-002; kkkm_154-009

Photographic encounters

In an article from the early 1930s, Suslov wrote that essentially nothing was
known about the Siberian Arctic and Subarctic prior to Soviet times: "Bourgeois
science of Tsarist Russia left us with an inheritance of completely insignificant and
questionable facts" (Suslov 1934). Suslov was expressing a growing tension among
academics across disciplines who were increasingly preoccupied with new regimes
of knowledge production, and who were making more or less radical changes in
their practice and rhetoric to meet the demands of Communism. In the increasingly
acrimonious political environment of the Soviet Academy,[14] the intellectual
tradition of ethnography in Russia—once a more-or-less typical nineteenth century
evolutionist school (Slezkine 1994; Hirsh 2005)—was becoming infused with
a Marxist critique and a demand for praxis. Ethnography in the Soviet era was
invested with a the "great ideological significance" that was a direct outcome of
the "theory of inevitable and universal social evolution from preclass to postclass
communal society [which] was at the very foundation of official Soviet ideology"
(Plotkin and Howe 1985: 257).

Suslov's condemnation of the "bourgeois science of Tsarist Russia" should
not be dismissed as mere Communist polemic or cranky vitriol; it expressed a deeply-
felt commitment to a new political and cultural project.[15] If pre-Soviet ethnography

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14   Throughout the revolutionary period, serious rifts in scholarly communities were cutting
through the universities at all levels. In 1917, for example, Suslov was part of a revolutionary
students' organization, one among many, that anticipated a substantial overhaul of academic
knowledge production.

15   Many key figures in Russian anthropology were socialists who, in the years following the
revolution came to make important contributions to the establishment not only of Soviet social
sciences but of Soviet policies as well. Their policy recommendations and projects have been
explored by Yuri Slezkine (1991), Francine Hirsch (1998), and others.

was concerned with the non-political pursuit of knowledge, Soviet ethnography

was focused on the identification and transformation of what it considered negative

cultural elements. The dominant pre-Soviet Russian ideology categorized indigenous

peoples as primitive and backward (occupying a pre-feudal evolutionary stage) and

while this idea persisted in the Soviet era, the Soviets viewed the so-called primitivism

in different ways. According to P. Tolstoy, early Soviet anthropology was dominated

by an interest in pre-class societies and an "uncompromising evolutionism" relying

on Marx's anticipation of the "reemergence of the archaic social type in the highest

form" (Tolstoy 1952: 10). This ideology, while generally celebratory, engendered a

kind of ethnographic urgency for fear that the cultures of 'primitive' people, which

would inevitably disappear, would soon become difficult or impossible to study.

Photography, in all of its applications and guises, was no less subject to the pressure

to articulate socialist concerns and party doctrines, in addition to the sense of

urgency to study cultures that would soon be assimilated under Sovietization. Indeed

the photographs can be seen to parallel a kind of Soviet salvage paradigm. Consider

a photograph from the Suslov collection that has been featured in the work of

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2007). {link to "subsection_ethno-correct}

Pre-Soviet ethnographers had shared many of the same interests as their

colleagues from other nations (especially those from Germany and America) and

the Russian Geographical Society published instructions for taking ethnographic

photographs in 1872:

> On the subject of taking ethnographic pictures it said, 'Particular attention ...
> should be paid to people's costume, every single pose, tools and household
> goods, and also paintings showing the use of any individual object; also
> dwellings, settlements, towns, etc., various paintings, scenes from public
> life, and pets.'
>
> Barchatova 1989: 81.

These typical pre-revolutionary ethnographic practices that later came under fire from the Bolsheviks are also outlined in this letter from Waldemar Jochelson to Franz Boas during the turn-of-the century Jesup Expedition in Siberia, where Jochelson writes:

> There are fewer measurements of the Yukaghir than the Koryak. There are so few Yukaghir in the first place, they are dispersed and move continuously so that the ethnologist in this polar country must be in constant search of them. Often we had to cover great distances just to get from one camp to the next. It often happened that we didn't find the tents at the specified location any more. However, every nomadic Yukaghir or Tungus we met, was held, measured, photographed and questioned.

quoted in Kendall et al. 1997: 24.

Pre-revolutionary photography espoused, then, documentary goals; photography was intended as a tool of scientific inquiry, recording ethnographic characteristics.

Socialist ethnographers, on the other hand, were starting to reject pre-revolutionary modes of inquiry and engagement; some advocated a new science, calling for new questions, but more often and most significantly for political praxis above all. New questions that did arise usually became mired by the constricted research framework imposed through Soviet (Marxist) political correctness based in the "criticism of bourgeois concepts" (Artemova 2004: 84). This in turn must have undermined the capacity to generate more reflexive ethnographies and nuanced research.[16] Such pressures might also be read in the shift away from earlier anthropological photography that focused on recording and cataloguing cultural

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16   Sirina notes that when she undertook her studies in the 1980s, Soviet ethnography "devoid of life that, in keeping with established canons, did not allow authors to show their positions or attitudes to the phenomena, events or facts they described" (Sirina 2004: 89). Artemova notes that early Soviet ethnology "pure analytical criticism gave place to ideologically motivated charges. Now it was not a shame to rely on insufficient data or to distort the data, but it was frightful to be accused of 'anti-Marxism' or bourgeois delusions such as 'relativism', 'diffusionism' and so forth" (Artemova 2004: 84).

'types.'[17] From a Bolshevik perspective, the old style of ethnography could do little

to help the indigenous people on their path towards progress; in Soviet ideology,

they were to be seen as Others in the midst of a transformation, no longer identified

as hunters and herders, but as named partners in Sovietization who were to be

participants in the development of a standardized form of nationalism. The first

Soviet trained ethnographers were sent to Siberia as "the first missionaries of

socialism to the primitive peoples of the north" (Slezkine 1994: 160).

The first culture base was an outpost built near the mouth of the

Kochechum River, on the right bank of the Nizhnaia Tunguska River in 1927. In

1931 the cultural base became the capital of the Evenki National District and was

simply called Tura. The Evenki National District became the Evenki Autonomous

Okrug in 1992 then the Evenki Municipal Region in 2007. Most commonly it is

simply referred to as Evenkiia. When Evenkiia was founded it was divided into three

regions: Ilimpii, Baikit, and Tungus-Chunski. The Tura cultural base was situated on

the southern border of the Ilimpii region (*raion*). Evenkiia itself is currently part of

the Krasnoiarsk Krai (Federal Subject) and the Siberian Federal District.

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17   There also appears to be a general move away from the extensive use of screens and
backdrops. In my work with thousands of ethnographic images from Siberia, I have found that there
are very few examples of backdrop photography after the 1920s. I take this to parallel the academic
shift away from the methods of turn-of-the century four-field anthropology. It might also be that
such images conjured up a colonialist sensibility that Soviet ethnographers were urged to reject.

*Surveillance and the performative aspects of
ethnographic photography*

A stranger trains his or her gaze upon the 'native' subject, culminating in an anti-climatic snap of the shutter and a pronouncement that the exposure is complete. The device and its products, in this archetypal colonial encounter, moved on with the photographer and rarely returned. After processing and printing, the photographic negative was typically put into storage and archived for future use. The photographic negative lends itself to the logic of the archive. Its superstructure providing a stable medium for continual return. The negative image eclipses the moment remembered; it overwhelms with its sensuous reference. The photographic encounter reproduces what Derrida has called the "archontic power," the power to consign artifact to archive, but also more: it is to gather and collect together within a unitary principle: "*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. . . . The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together" (Derrida 1996: 3) . The archon in my scenario is not only the photographer but the technology of the archive itself. Invested with the power to conserve (and to reject from conservation) the archontic function is as repressive as it is expressive. In the Soviet photographic archive this implicates the queerly anachronistic colonial gaze and the colonial powers of surveillance but also the anticipatory construction of history and memory through photography. The archive is, after all, as much about what is *in* as what is *out*. Photographs frame a 'scene' and framing is always about exclusion or, as Sontag writes, "to photograph is to frame, to frame is to exclude" (2003: 46).

The technology of photography is also a technology of privileged viewing of surveillance. The objects in the photographic apparatus are seen in a similar way that the prisoners in Foucault's model of modern disciplinary power are seen. Alan Sekula, who is one of the earliest photo-theorists to explicitly tie Foucault to the camera, notes how "photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other . . ." (Sekula 1986: 6). The geographies of power/knowledge articulated through critical readings of photography have since multiplied. Christopher Pinney remarks how photography and Foucault's notion of discipline not only "coalesce in a common language" (1992: 76) but are effectively interchangeable: photography can be "substituted for the idea of discipline/surveillance in almost all of Foucault's writing" (ibid.). To further this comparison, we can look at James Faris's study *Navajo and photography*, where he shows how the registers of surveillance-through-photography are marked as the normalizing gaze of the Western subject measured off the native other (2003: 14).

The majority (if not all) of the photographers whose images are collected in the soviet archives were male scientists or government agents. The cameras and their associated equipment and needs were costly and were typically only accessible to the rapidly disappearing bourgeoisie or people affiliated with the government. Indigenous Siberians in all cases I have studied were generally the subject of the photographs and not the photographers. Christopher Pinney delivers one of the most succinct and powerful readings of photography and anthropology when he lays out the matrix of "photography-vision-Western knowledge-power" (1992: 81). He writes, "in the context of colonialism, the 'divine' power of photography comes to reflect a Western technological and epistemological prowess" (ibid.). Re-expressed in terms of socialist colonialism the 'divine' is merely replaced with 'scientific' and

'Western' with 'Socialist' to produce a parallel map.[18]

As I have noted elsewhere, while photographs are documents with an indexical relationship to a particular place and a particular time, they are also—like the archive—exclusionary. Though they are rich in detail in comparison to other forms of representation they are also formative of partial and constructed ways of seeing and knowing. These photographs have as much to tell us about individuals, ethnic groups, and economies as they have to tell us about the specific power dynamics in which one group of people had the means to represent another. In the same way, we note that soviet photographers were historically men and not women and so were likely to shoot pictures that figured into the particular vision and ways of seeing typical to men of that era. The privileged view of women, of indigenous Siberians, as well as peasants and other impoverished people, are not present in the framing of the photographs. However because photographs present a uniquely sensual index to the past, because they present an excess of detail that speaks beyond our capacity to describe them, it is not impossible to read pictures 'against the grain' and to look into them for other histories. This implies an inquiry into the framing of a photograph as ideologically significant or meaningful. They are volatile documents that refuse historical projects that seek to provide neat, closed, and cleanly bounded historical claims.

Although it has been well documented that photographs have been used as a technique of state surveillance of its subjects (cf. Sekula 1986; Tagg 1988; Hayes 2000), their power to represent and contribute to a political or even disciplinary

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18   Indeed I wonder if the mistake of colonial studies thus far has been to tie it too tightly to Capitalism rather than enlightenment and industrialism. One is tempted to see this as an ideological blind spot of Western-marxist historians.

imaginary is nebulous and difficult to trace. Looking at a collection of photographs from various regional archives, it is nearly impossible to generalize concretely or to reduce them to a single articulation of meaning at the time they were taken. Indeed, the very profusion of images deflects this kind of work and points to a core problem facing the analysis of historical photographs: they show up the violence of abstraction and generalization, their irreducible particularity is a volatile agent in the work of interpretation. But it is not just a profusion of images in an archive that does this; individual photographs contain within them the capacity to agitate on this level as well, rejecting forms of reduction. I argue that a more effective approach to this problem is to consider photographic images as cultural artifacts, themselves suspended within the continuous possibility of circulation. Such an open circulation of meaning, however, should not preclude critical attempts to connect power to representation.

Given appropriate conditions and resources some comments (both general and specific) can be articulated about the reasoning behind the creation of the photographs: typically the documentation of an event, cultural type, landscape, or artifact. However, even if the photographer's original intention is known, an image (once it is produced) has a life of its own, quite apart from that of the people involved in the original photographic event. Reading the politics of the colonial encounter into the photograph is feasible, even necessary, but should not be the end point. As Sontag reminds us, "[w]hether the photograph is understood as a naive object or the work of an experienced artificer, its meaning—and the viewer's response— depends on how the picture is identified or misidentified; that is, on words" (Sontag 2003: 29). It is on this basis that I suggest that a more effective and interesting analysis should be applied to the manner in which photographic images

are used and how they are variably interpreted. Photographs in archives have tended

to frustrate such analyses. While they represent putative origins and are most

frequently apprehended as stable historical referents, they in fact only point more

deeply down the paths of interpretation. In *Drawing shadows to stone* Miller and Mathe

articulate this in the following way:

> for all its power to capture detail and represent reality, the photographic
> image—a unique impression of a single moment in time from a single
> vantage point in space— resists this urge to idealize the particular.
>
> Kendall et al. 1997: 21.

The selection and staging inherent in the photographic act, the way it is framed,

always point beyond the moment captured in the photograph.

While the secondary life of interpretation compares the image back against

the original intentions of the photographer (if they are known) or the cultural milieu

in which they were produced, there is no binding authority to these interpretations.

Most of them are based on generalizations about certain cultural or gendered

gazes. Where explicit historical information about the intent of the photographer is

available, the next barrier of audience perception is encountered, further frustrating

the analysis.   That is just as the analysis seems to close in on a dominant gaze, a

preferred interpretation, the seemingly transparent generation of meaning slips away

to counter-readings produced by photographs being presented in new and different

social contexts. In many ways histories of photography have much to learn from the

post-structural turn and the so-called 'death of the author' literature. (cf. Barthes

1967; Foucault 1984). For this project in particular, the most critical move is the

re-orientation of critique itself and the development of sophisticated multi-modal

analyses.   Succinctly put, the intersection of gazes that constitute photographic

meaning are multiple and mobile. It hardly suffices to claim that viewing images is

so particular that we cannot interpret them apart from the individual viewer. Indeed this radically individualist (anti-historical and anti-cultural) reading was not the thrust of either the work of Barthes or Foucault. For the sake of my work here, what I wish to take away from the death of the author moment is contingency of meaning not abdication of interpretation.

When looking at photographs it is important to avoid confusing the part for the whole; a particular instantiation of the image, the print, for the photographic image itself. Chris Morton articulated this point recently, in terms related to the publication photographs in anthropological monographs. Morton cautions us not to

> elide the distinction between the published image and the photograph as a cultural object … The conflation of these two categories with related but essentially separable trajectories means that object-led archival research is often replaced with image-led 'photo-technical,' observation…

Morton 2005: 402.

Morton's distinction of object-led and image-led research is useful in the instance of his argument but problematic if taken separately. Image-led research, for instance, is not necessarily dominated by 'photo-technical observation.' In fact Morton himself demonstrates that this does not need to be an either/or situation of looking at the image or looking at the image-object. If we shift the terms slightly to think of the image-object as an image-instance, we can reconnect two sides of what is ultimately the same coin. This further opens a space to think about encounters with projected images and, indeed, to think about an encounter-centered model rather than an object-centered model. This denies the transcendental thinking that may accrue around the object or artifact as Morton critiques with regards to the image. The image encounter typically privileges the circumstances of spectatorship: subject position, framing, context, and environment. The same photographic image and photograph (object) of Evenki children learning to read in a newly built classroom

will be variably interpreted in accordance with the social situation. It is this typical interpretation—surely not inevitable, but perhaps likely—that I hope to agitate and challenge.

In one of his reflections on photography, Jean Baudrillard wrote that "[m]ost images speak. Indeed, they chatter on endlessly, drowning out the silent signification of their object" (Baudrillard 2001: 141). I take this to mean that photographic images are like the world they re-present: they do not mean anything; they are always awaiting interpretation, or the ascription of meaning; they signify without end. This is also an allusion to their excess: their capacity to exceed whatever it is we try to say about them. It is the icon that becomes the successful model of embedded or foregone interpretation, but even icons fade over time and require work to sustain their iconicity. As Cornelia Brink has noted in her exploration of photographs

from Nazi concentration camps, when photographs become iconic, they "condense complex phenomena and represent history in exemplary form" (Brink 2000: 141). According to Sontag, "[a] photograph is only a fragment and with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck. It drifts away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading" (Sontag 1973: 71). What we *can* do with photographs is talk about interpretation; we can talk about dominant meanings, preferred interpretations, and we can talk about gazes (politics of desire and privilege embedded in modes of seeing) rather than pursuing a narrowly specific engagement with one particular theory of photographic practice. I am concerned by any instrumental appropriation of images that strips them of their particular histories and uses them to tell one story (which is typically articulated as the truth), using them as simple illustrations.

To some extent the curious effect of this can be seen in James Faris' examination of Navajo photography. Faris levels a powerful critique against the colonial appropriation of Navajo images (and subsequent construction or representation of Navajo) through the *misuse, mis-representation*, *mis-understanding* of photography . Faris claims (correctly to my mind) that photographs can be read against the grain to discover alternative narratives about their meaning. But he never quite extricates himself from the positivist language of interpretive closure. Thus photographs are (re)captioned with Faris' own commentary: "*Figure 50. 'Medicine Man.' W.L. Fetter, photographer 1890, Gallup NM. The man appears to recognize the complete absurdity of posing with bow, arrow, and quiver in the studio setting. . . .*" (Faris 2003: 90-91). The facetious tone undermines Faris' own position that Navajo have been mis-represented. By attempting to read a man's facial expression, "words do speak louder than pictures. Captions do tend to override the evidence of our eyes; but no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture's meaning" (Sontag 1973: 108). But this

is not simply my criticism or preferred approach to photography. I believe that the nature of photographs is such that they passively labour against interpretation. As with Baudrillard's insistent exploration of representation and the *real*, the photograph replicates the fundamental relativity of human experience.

Propaganda & socialist realism

Remembering that the 'backwards' indigenous minorities were implicitly

(and sometimes explicitly) considered to be children, the visual rhetoric of socialist

realism, which was already about social becoming, was even more poignant. It

was about growth (*podem*) and cultural upbringing with its attendant paternalism.

The messianic becoming of socialist realism is described by Sheila Fitzpatrick in

Everyday Stalinism: "Writers and artists were urged to cultivate a sense of 'socialist

realism'—seeing life as it was becoming, rather than life as it was—rather than

literal or 'naturalistic' realism" (Fitzpatrick 1999a: 9). While socialist realism was not

institutionalized until the mid-1930s, evidence of it as a form of propaganda and

political-correctness predates that. Photography played a central role in documenting

and propagandizing the Soviet way of life (both to itself and to the world at large).

V.I. Lenin is frequently cited as locating cinema in a position of superiority in the

arts, presumably for its capacity to operate as 'political education'[19] In his 1922

"Directive on cinema affairs" Lenin is quoted as stating:

> Not only films but also photographs of propaganda interest should be
> shown with the appropriate captions . . . We should pay special attention
> to the organization of cinemas in the countryside and in the East, where
> they are novelties and where, therefore, our propaganda will be particularly
> successful.
>
> Taylor 1991*: 56.*

Soviet photographers did not suddenly succumb to the modes of fascism implicit

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19   A fairly common stance that emerged after the revolution was that the photographic
image (in both photography and cinema) was the most powerful propaganda tool for its precision in
recording visual facts. Prunes notes that according to the soviet constructivist artist Gustav Klutsis,
"photography and the cinema caused a much stronger impression than painting on the (largely
illiterate) viewer for being 'not the sketching of a visual fact but its precise record.'" (Prunes 2003:
255).

in socialist realism and as such the categorization of any photographs as socialist realist is problematic. There were parallel photographic discourses and emerging ones; at the time of the October Revolution the research and development of photographic technologies around the world was progressing at a quick pace; chemical improvements, lens advancements, and machinery modifications were being made by professionals and amateurs alike. Relatively obscure chemical experiments which led to the development of photography in the early 1800s rapidly transformed the way that people apprehended the world. In the years leading up to the October Revolution in 1917, photography was undergoing its own populist developments, especially seen in the forms of dry-plate photography, cellulose film, portable cameras, faster lenses, and shorter exposure times. In many ways the revolution and civil war derailed photographic innovations in Russia while developments continued in the rest of the world. Most notably is the revolutionary introduction of inexpensive roll-film cameras and image processing in America and Western Europe. Access to these new technologies in Siberia, however, were frustrated by acute economic crises, Communist appropriations of equipment, and the widespread disarray of professional practice. Cellulose film-photography for example appeared much later in soviet Russia than it did in the West. The ironic outcome of this is that glass plates, which were still being used in expeditionary photography into the 1940s, have proven to be more stable and easier to preserve than the cellulose nitrate film. Whereas by the 1930s and 40s photographers in the Canadian North were shooting dynamic scenes of indigenous peoples inside tents, igloos, and houses, as well as difficult action scenes taken during the hunt (cf. King and Lidchi 1998), there are relatively few examples of this from pre-war Soviet Siberia. The parallel development of the Communist revolution and techniques for the mass-reproduction of photographic images (the half-tone printing process) fit tidily with

the Soviet embrace of photography as both a symbol of the new order of socialist modernity (evidence of technical mastery) and as a tool in the propaganda of the former Russian Empire. In 1923, around the same time that the new Bolshevik government settled into power, following the revolution and civil war, photographs began to appear regularly in the Soviet presses (Wolf 2004b: 108).

In parallel with the rise of the socialist realist aesthetic was the rise of socialist scientism, Soviet Russia's total exaltation of the technical mastery of nature:

> Soviet Russia embraced the Baconian ideal of technoscience—albeit in secular clothing—with unparalleled enthusiasm. Technology would not merely permit the building of the Soviet state, but would define its very character.

> Busch 2000:55

This was a vision which bound the success of the Soviet Union itself to the degree to which nature could be subdued through socialist industry. Next to collectivization, Soviet master narratives elevated technological mastery. A typical example of this in popular culture can be seen in the remarkable feats of human industry that are displayed in Victor Turin's film from the late 1920s, *Turksib*. The movie celebrates the construction of the *Turksib* rail-line from Central Asia to Siberia as a monumental victory over the immensity and force of nature, as embodied in the 'wastelands' of Siberia and Central Asia (Shlapentokh 1993: 93). The cultural imaginary articulated in *Turksib* was manifest across visual and literary media and persists as a dominant visual trope in the north: technology penetrates (with light and power) the dark-remoteness of the wilderness.

Similarly, the photographic truth value ascribed to photography ensured that it had a place as an objective tool for the observation of natural and historical phenomena. This in turn reflected its elevated role in the representation and construction of the Siberian imaginary. The role played by photography in constructing "imaginative geographies" (Schwartz 1996: 18) has been explored in relation to imperial projects in Africa (Hayes 2000; Buckley 2005) and North America (Tagg 1988, Faris 1996) but is largely unwritten in Siberia (cf. Anderson and Campbell, in press). Indeed the peculiar form of what I have (somewhat ironically) labeled 'socialist colonialism'[20] promises a novel twist on study the of photography and the colonial imaginary.

If socialist realist photography replaced anything, it was the kind of amateur

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20   The Soviet efforts, both real and rhetorical, to produce native self-governing bodies, framed by their vehement rejection of Imperialism and Colonialism produced what many foreigners sympathetic to the communist project saw as a model of local-national partnerships in modern governance (cf. Dunn and Dunn 1962; Mowat 1970).

expeditionary photography seen in the work of the writer and photographer Konstantin Dmitrievich Nosilov.   Nosilov was a writer, photographer, and explorer who is perhaps most famous for writing about his expeditions to the Yamal peninsula in the Western Siberian Arctic. This may not have been an intentional shift *per se* but an outcome of state-sponsored class warfare: there could be no more gentlemen travelers with cameras. Furthermore economic crises reduced the capacity of those with cameras to actually use them—especially considering that most chemical and photo supplies needed to be imported. Until the 1950s photography was institutionalized and professionalized, being used primarily by journalists, portraitists, and scientists.[21] That said, there are published cases of a critique of 'bourgeois photography,' though it is unclear who (in Soviet Russia) this could have been aimed at. In 1927, its second year of printing, *Sovetskoe Foto* published the following statement:

> The photo-amateur in the pre-revolutionary period was largely representative of the privileged and wealthy classes. ... The October revolution presented firm new challenges . . . Photography should be closer to the masses and find applications and tasks that are more broadly relevant to contemporary issues.
>
> My translation*, Sovetskoe Foto*, 1927 quoted in Abramov, nd.

While there is some evidence that amateur photographic movements persisted even through the most difficult periods of Soviet history (Biriukov 1999) most of these photographs have never been accessioned by state archives and thus remain in fragmented public collections as more or less ephemeral records.

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21   In the 1950s the first mass-produced Soviet cameras came off the line. The growth of photo amateurs (*fotoliubiteli*) is seen at this time as well (cf. Stigneev 2004).

From pictorialism to socialist realism,
or a nostalgia for the future.

If pre-Soviet expedition photography presented natives as anachronistic relics of an earlier evolutionary stage, socialist pictorialism showed them in a state of becoming.[22] There was a brief period where Soviet photographic pictorialism was attacked by the radical constructivists (cf. Rodchenko's *novyi lef*). Pictorialism itself might actually be thought of as essentially bourgeois (presenting a bourgeois vision of the idealized world - or a nostalgic one). But we might also consider Soviet propaganda as a kind of socialist pictorialism, according to the general definition of pictorialism as a movement of art-inspired photography that followed more or less conventional rules of figurative and expressionist painting. According to this rubric, allegory and expression, for example, had primacy over documentary representation. Socialist pictorialism can be seen to reflect a similar sentiment, but one that was governed by specifically Communist and utopian ideals. Just as in Japan, Europe, North America and elsewhere, Russia was part of a cosmopolitan and global flow of photographic visual culture. A typical articulation of pictorialist romanticism in Russia was *the peasant:* "Sergei Lobovikov (1870-1942) adopted [pictorialism] to render traditional peasant life, not as ethnographic data, but as an expression of nostalgia for nature and simpler times" (Marien 2006: 177). Under Socialist pictorialism, peasant life was simply exchanged for worker life. The idealizations were there, but the nostalgia was gone; that too was replaced with the messianism of Marxism-Leninism.

....

22   Pictorialism has a strong history in the West (America and Europe) but Russia had developed a tradition of 'Genre Photography'. While Genre photography is discussed in some western histories, it seems to have a more central place in Russian photo history.

The photographer I.I. Baluev can be seen to have produced the most significant body of propaganda style or socialist pictorialist photographs in the EAP Siberia collection. The photographs taken by Baluev generally represent a different representational impetus than the expeditionary photographs. Many of them would fit within the ideology of socialist realism. Quite possibly following the explicit directives of I.M. Suslov, Baluev produced a series of staged photographs within the Tura cultural base.

Orderliness and privilege was certainly not the norm in this era. There were hundreds of Evenkis travelling about this region of the taiga and the culture-base counted its beds only in the dozens in those days. This was an idealized vision, a selective imaginary. It was life as it was becoming: a hybrid statement of faith and fact. There is no doubting *that* man, *those* children*, or that* woman and her child, were there in that place, but what that meant and how that aligned with the actual/historical work of the culture-base is open to debate. While Baluev's photographs represented ideal moments in the culture base, they were not fabricated out of thin air. Almost certainly these photographs were reproduced and circulated and more likely than not they were used to extol the successes of this first foray into the Sovietization of the north and the cultural upbringing of the natives. But, as with all photographs the distance between the intended meaning of the image and its deployment in the world obscures a greater violence. As Barthes reveals, the "photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (1981: 91). Thus the willfully perverting realities of communist pictorialism generate fantasies of the present-becoming which must have been perceived as initimate otherings and outright fabulations: The doctrine of socialist

realism was couched in communist morals, "the cause of building socialism was greater than the individual, that the individual found self-realisation only by denying selfish interests, by dissolving individual will into the will of the collective, and by giving the self completely to the cause for socialism and in the striving for socialism" (Shearer 2006: 207). Baluev's pictures were also significant for their portrayal of the communist international, the specific mythology of inclusivity that promised the world domination of equality and peace. The indigenous peoples were presented as novelties: dressed up in the finery of civilization. In Vadim Volkov's exploration of culturedness [*kul'turnost'*] he describes the cultivation of soviet civilization—an emerging biopolitics and governmentality—whereby an individual's behaviour was modeled on specific regulations, rules and codes that governed bodily affects including manners, hygiene, dress-codes, "forms of conversation, the like" (Volkov 2000: 210). Photography shifted in this era, the inclusivity of the communist international pushed out the depiction of visible difference and replaced it with inclusion and co-operation. Photography came into the service of the new empire of nations.

At the forefront of the propagandization of non-literate peoples were photographs and films. The photograph was marked from the first days of the Soviet era for its truth value. Yet at the same time—though in different contexts— bourgeois photography from the 'West' was critiqued. American photography, as it was understood, replicated a commodity fetishism that veiled the inequalities inherent in capitalism; photography in service of capitalism effaced myriad problems like poverty, racism, and sexism. A Soviet or proletarian photography would not do this. Rather it would propagandize the successes of Communism, even if they were immanent. The hypocrisy of this position was conveniently ignored, possibly

argued away in the pragmatics of revolutionary Communism and the subsequent Sovietization. The growing bureaucratic oppressions and political repressions under Stalinist rule are well documented and belie the rosy picture of plenty that came to occupy a central place in Soviet visual culture.

While the fantasy of eventual civilization, peace, and wealth was apprehended as a real possibility and an immanent future, the spectacular and obscene performance of this eventually came to eclipse other forms of representation, leaving only fantasy. Slavoj Zizek makes a similar point in *The Parallax View* (2006) and *The perverts guide to Cinema* (2006) when he comments on the obscene spectacle of the Stalinist "kolkhoz musical." Zizek connects the psychoanalytic idea of the superego—"excessive terror, unconditional injunction, demand of utter sacrifice, but at the same time obscenity and laughter"—to Stalin's favourite genre of movie. In the *Universal exception* he writes that these kolkhoz musicals were the public face of Stalinism: "There are no traitors in these films, and life is fundamentally happy in them: the 'bad' characters are merely opportunists or lazy frivolous seducers, who are, at the film's end, re-educated and gladly assume their place in society. In this harmonious universe, even animals — pigs, cows and chickens — happily dance with humans" (2007: 134-5). Erica Wolf's examination of the development of soviet photojournalism between 1923 and 1932 notes how the "ideologically loaded" images were part of a dynamic and emergent form of photography (Wolf 2004b: 104). In her work on the dreamworlds of the "lavishly printed Soviet photographic propaganda magazine" *USSR in Construction* [*SSSR na stroike*] she challenges the message that was presumed to be inherent in the propaganda and ties it to an emerging "Stalinist elite as the primary ideal readership" (Wolf 1999: 54). As a publication for the Stalinist elite, Wolf argues that *USSR in Construction* helped to

produce "an image of Soviet society and industrialization that bolstered their sense of mastery and leadership" (ibid: 74). The culture-base photographs produced by Baluev bear all the characteristics of the photographs produced for *USSR in Construction*. While the audience of the photographs is unclear and indeterminate, the primary message of socialist plenty, civilization, and success is not. In *The Red Atlantis*, J. Hoberman identifies the core of Socialist Realism as a "combination of strict idealization and naïve, almost goofy idealism" (1998).

As director of the Krasnoiarsk Committee for the North, I.M. Suslov produced his own vision for representing indigenous peoples through photography in the memorandum, "Themes for a film about the North." This undated memorandum frames a project of cultural construction [*kul'turnogo stroitel'stva*] where Suslov outlines two categories of film, the first aimed at displaying the North and the toiling native masses. The second category of film was to build on these depictions to include "native everyday subjects" in order to popularize the lives, customs, and economy of the North in Russian cities and abroad" [GANO 354-1-246:108-109]. In some accounts, this might be seen as explicitly ideological. Indeed, if we're to ignore the cold war era stigma, there is little doubt that they were meant to be ideological. They were meant to carry a very specific message: the message of socialist realism.

Archives and the circulation of images

Photographs are rarely singular entities, as noted earlier they are gathered together as part of larger collections. These collections are composed of a sometimes surprising and peculiar assortment of images. They have been brought together in response to an impetus for preservation as well as procedural bureaucracy and performative modernity.[23] In other words, there is not always a visible, comprehensible, or remembered logic to the vast collection of images. The situation in these archives is not unlike that of colonial archives in Namibia as described by Carolyn Hamilton. Hamilton asks:

> what happens when the photographic archive has not been organised on longstanding bureaucratic principles (as is the case in Namibia) but has been assembled unevenly, haphazardly, anonymously - and is not easily rendered up for scrutiny, not through design but through lack of prioritisation? An entire new historiography has emerged about the metropolitan and imperial archive. . . but the Namibian case forces us to ask about the nature of the peripheral colonial archive.

> Hamilton 2002: 115.

Archivists have very particular techniques for justifying what should and what should not be included in the archives, but these are hardly universal or agreed upon and they are often simply unknowable. In the peripheral archive, often underfunded and staffed with untrained or less-trained archivists (though no less likely to be dedicated), photographs, especially glass plate images, have been a burden.

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23   Benedict Anderson famously marked out some of the accoutrements of modernity in *Imagined Communities*. Deborah Poole notes this as well though she cautions against reading these too functionally. In her examination of *cartes de visite* she notes that their importance in Peru was greater than community formation, "In exchanging cartes de visite, friends or acquaintances were offering not just things with a detached symbolic value or an arbitrarily defined monetary or exhance value. As emotionally invested images of the self these cartes contributed to the formation of a diffuse and powerful cultural and sentimental identity . . ." (Poole 1997 :112).

Given these conditions, I propose a methodology that embraces the hodge-podge of photographic images in archives and eschews the arcane orders imposed on images. To be sure, order is imposed on the collections but it is an order that is constantly in danger of being subverted by the logic of meaninglessness that governs the documents themselves. The absolute particularity of photographs refuses order and meaning. They are repeatedly categorized and tagged, subordinated to textual forms of representation, but they invariably exceed these—as though they were oblivious to our projects of history making.

Let us consider archives as technologies of discipline. The order of discipline in this case is the document, and subsequently, history. Disciplining documents, ordering them to say certain things, is the practice of history, and informs the 'vocabulary of modernity' as described by Schwartz;

> Emerging from late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century zeal
> for inventory and taxonomy, and paralleling the natural sciences' obsession
> with collecting and classifying specimens, archives and photography shared
> a vocabulary of modernity.

Schwartz 2000: 34.

And so, the voice of the archive is not the voice of the documents but the voice(s) of the imposed order and discipline or, the ongoing construction of insides and outsides. For, as Derrida has noted, "there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without an exteriority. No archive without an outside" (Derrida, 1996: 11). The discipline orders both the collections and the representations that end up being structured by these disciplines; thus, there are disciplinary reverberations that become almost imperceptible as they become more and more lodged into discursive frameworks. The more or less rigid parameters that index archival photographs are not simply about the organization of collections but rather the organization of knowledge. Just as the voice of archives

is shown to be a technology of order, the archive's gaze can be seen as disciplinary technology.

Thinking about the gaze implies the various imaginaries produced by archival collections. For photographic archives, two distinct gazes are in operation. Firstly, the historical institutional gaze constructs, and in the case of Siberia, it constructs through representation and 'remote rule'. Few of the people who actually made decisions about the lives of Siberians ever visited Siberia. For these remote rulers, photography played an important role in extending the imaginary, making it both more accurate and more efficient. Meanwhile, and ongoing, a second kind of gaze emerges from the metaphorical consideration of archives, the consideration of a collection of documents as an archive. The visual archive of Siberia consists not of written documents, but visual documents: mostly photographs, but also illustrations and films. This imagining produces my own archive, even if that personal archive consists only of references to particular documents. The technique of the archive— of any archive—is to put boundaries around a subject: to say that this is inside and that is outside.

Photographs from archives have the potential and ability to become mobile; to circulate. Over the space of many years photographic reproductions made their way into personal collections, museums, and archives throughout the Soviet Union. Some have had years of active service, their images illuminating the walls of museums, mounted and displayed, or pasted into photo albums. Some of the photographs were used as material for lectures: 'Soviet Reindeer herding,' 'How to battle shamanism'.[24] Still others were used to illustrate journal articles or books: as with Sergeev's *Non-capitalist Way of Developing the Native Minorities*. But most of the

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24   These are titles from real lectures developed by I.M. Suslov.

photographs have been quietly filed away amidst an ever-growing collection of visual records. Through duplication and copying the proliferation of each photographic image is potentially limitless. Conceptualizing their various trajectories and their connections to one another produces a vast and complex imaginary network.[25] The situation of the photographic image in the archive should be considered as the situation of a vast surrealist juxtaposition of disparities and incongruities.

The photographic images in the archives mirror thousands of moments, frozen in time, which are more or less haphazardly brought together under the organizing logic of the archive. They provide a fragmentary but compelling point of access to an indisputably past world, what Roland Barthes called the 'photographic referent' and 'that which once was,' or simply the 'absolute Particular' (Barthes 1981). They serve the double function of referring to the past but also *being* the past. Researching the collections of photographs from the archives can be powerfully destabilizing as well as compelling, if exhausting, work. Susan Sontag has characterized photographic collections as "an exercise in surrealist montage and the surrealist abbreviation of history" (Sontag 1973: 68). The photographs, apprehended in the chaotic disorder particular to these archives also remind me of how William Burroughs describes the everyday 'facts of perception':

> Take a walk down a city street and put down what you have just seen on canvas. You have seen a person cut in two by a car, bits and pieces of street signs and advertisements, reflections from shop windows — a montage of fragments. . . . Writing is still confined in the sequential representational straitjacket of the novel . . . Consciousness *is* a cut up; life is a cut-up. Every time you walk down the street or look out of the window, your stream of consciousness is cut by random factors.
>
> Burroughs 1993: 61.

....

25   Nonetheless the relative rarity of photography at this time in history wouldn't make that project entirely unthinkable.

If surrealist montage and dadaist juxtaposition are the effects of working with photographic archives then as a historical researcher I am faced with the dilemma of my own normative gaze. The task at hand is always imposing an order on the collections, of extricating meaning from the morass. In her book *Dust*, Carolyn Steedman reminds us that the archive

> is not potentially made up of everything, as is human memory; and is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away that is the unconscious. The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there.

> Steedman 2001: 68.

This serendipity speaks again to excess and a potentially limitless subject. But she is not talking about photographs. A photograph, if it is not potentially made of everything, certainly comes closer to it than colonial reports, ledgers, and other artifacts found in most archives. The "mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there" (ibid) not only describes the photographic collections but the individual photographic image as well. It speaks to the excess of meaning that haunts interpretation. The Finnish artist Jorma Puranen has articulated this sensibility as well:

> Working in a photographic archive is a strange experience: you are faced with boxes and boxes of images of dead people, even entire nations. At times, these material objects - faded, ripped and worn-out photographs of people long deceased - become vivid and strongly present. The faces are either un-named, or accompanied with careless translations and, frequently, misunderstandings. Some faces look familiar, as though one had seen them in other archives or on the pages of books.

> Puranen 1999.

The strangeness of the experience is, despite an impulse to order, essential to the texture of knowledge. To omit this strangeness through practices of representation is reductive of the everyday. Michael Taussig has observed the tendency in

ethnography to write away the bits that don't fit and he argues for a practice that doesn't efface the untidiness of history:

> As with any social science, including history, anthropologists explain the unknown in terms of the known. There is resistance to leaving weirdness weird, and no recognition of the stuff that won't fit. For that would threaten the basis of the academic claim to mastery underlying our professorial -- no less than professional -- claims to authority.

<div align="right">Taussig 2003.</div>

Photography complicates this picture by providing what appears to be the known. As apparently simple documents of truth and precision photographs are mobilized to anchor textual arguments in something more real, something like evidence or witness.

Agitating images

Ultimately, the image can be dangerous because it fails to fulfill the promise of representation, it is deception, illusion; but it can also be dangerous because it succeeds too well, becomes simulacrum, a replacement or substitute.

Jervis 1998: 283

The intentionally nervous and tentative historiography I propose is built on a critique of representation and the scholarly imagination. It also shares some intellectual lineage, perhaps counter-intuitively, with modernist artists, activists, and theorists. In Russia we can look to Dziga Vertov, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Viktor Shklovsky to recognize a similar impetus to dislodge the mundane practices of looking that prevent us from seeing the world as it is. But where these figures offered a positive response, a 'real' world that was veiled by ignorance, I see fields of dissent and contention: irresolvable processions of signification. Photographs in the archives do this for me more than any other artifact. Their relentless pull to the absolute particular, paradoxically existing only as the image, seem to mock interpretation. It is tempting to respond that it is the task of the researcher to put order to folds and fissures of meaning and interpretation, to make sense out of it. But I read the photographic image as a refusal to participate in the production of history. Archival photographs only appear passively to await the ascription of meaning, through the inscription of captions. In truth they are volatile agents that agitate against interpretation.

The archival significance of the photographs I have been working with in central Siberia is doubly powerful because they occupy both positions of literal and metaphorical archive-ness. Not only do they reside in the archive but they are also

the substance of archive (of memory, of command and the power to state, but also of The State). As archival metaphors, photographs are contained and treated; they frame the world and in turn are framed by it. It is essential to recognize that these two aspects are inseparable. Barthes wrote that the "[t]he Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both: the windowpane and the landscape, and why not: Good and Evil, desire and its object: dualities we can conceive but not perceive" (Barthes 1982: 5-6).

Photographs of the everyday become significant through not only the event-ness of the photographic performance but also their preservation and their circulation. This circulation works as a kind of double life, especially in the digital age of image proliferation where photographic images are presenting themselves more rapidly and more pervasively in new cultural contexts and media environments. What is interesting about this is that the sensuousness of the photo-image can transcend its second-life, its interpretations and captions, and point back to the everydayness of life: the photographs have been unarchived and have literally travelled through time to the present; a picture of something that once was. It is almost as if the photo-image is constantly seeking to return to its referent, it is always indicating from which way it came, recalling Walter Benjamin's recollection of Paul Klee's painting 'Angelus Novus': The angel is swept up in progress but forever looking back from whence he came:

> The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

> Benjamin 1969: 257-8

There is an inevitability to photographs, maybe a tragedy and longing or just a fecund

nostalgia, but in their codification as history they remind us that history must fail. Their flat refusal to behave as stable signifiers echoes and intensifies the incredulity of everyday life in the face of theory and representation.

The photographs I have encountered in the archives are remnants of the everyday. They are not all readily identifiable as 'events'; perhaps their event-ness has passed along with the identities of many of the subjects. Their dominant role now is to be part of an 'era' of 'the past' of Sovietization in Siberia. But they won't let me do that, because as long as there is someone to look at them, there is the capacity to be struck by the ephemeral beauty of lingering campfire smoke and an Evenki family's tent in the faded background, and to wonder what has been left out.

Agitating Images

Part II
The years are like centuries

A nervous history of sovietization in central Siberia

> The old Evenk calendar and a laser device are depicted side by side in this photopanorama. Ages have passed between the birth of the one and the other, but actually only half a century separates them in the history of the peoples of the Soviet North.
>
> Caption for a photopanorama, Uvachan 1975.

This is a nervous history of culture shaping in central Siberia. More specifically, it is a nervous history of the Turukhansk North in the years before the formation of the Evenki National Okrug on December 10, 1930. It is a nervous history, as all histories should be, because of what it doesn't say.

Don't we write history in confidence? Why would one write an intentionally nervous history? And, what is a nervous history anyway? If we start with the title of this section, "A nervous history of sovietization in central Siberia" we can see that there is already an affirmative statement of happening. Sovietization. Whatever that is. I will tell, I assure you. Central Siberia is a place. Literally the center of the Russian Federation, not Siberia itself. And those borders have changed so much in the past centuries. And those changes matter, or they have mattered. They are boundaries between one district and another, one Gubernia, Krai, or Okrug. These boundaries are not exhaustive by any means, they are only one system of mapping possibility, but they have been tenacious in their technologies of permanence; less maps of the mind, more maps of power and authority. These boundaries have cut peoples apart and brought others together, they've reconfigured spaces of mobility and patterns of communication. But none of that is specifically what this is about,

except insofar as they make this history nervous. They light up its closures with questions and contestations. This is a nervous history because I know of no other way to do it. It is—following Walter Benjamin's refusal of surrealism's dream fetish—a constellation of waking.[1] This history is a fool stripped naked and playing in the city square showing up custom's public secret and anxiously awaiting the tasers. I am nervous about what this history is and what it does. But it is more than that too. And more importantly it is an honest history, it knows it is a nervous system built on closures and capitulations. The history is engineered as in invitation to its own interiority. It is made to be a nervous system in the way that Michael Taussig means when he writes that "even while it inspires confidence in the physical centerfold of our worldly existence . . . and as such bespeaks *control, hierarchy,* and *intelligence*—it is also . . . somewhat unsettling to be centered on something so fragile, so determinedly other, so nervous." (Taussig 1992: 3). The incongruity of history

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1   Max Pensky (1993: 201) quoting Walter Benjamin from *Passagen-Werk,* Benjamin (1983-84b, 2-3). Pensky writes: "The 'constellation of waking' is thus a dialectic that incorporates at once the redemption of the object and, if no longer the 'representation of the idea' . . . the explosive shock of recognition by which the mythic character of historical happening becomes visible, loses its stranglehold on collective consciousness, and reveals itself as only one possible historical alternative" (Pensky 1993: 201-2).

and critique without an authorial voice may be an illusion; what if history and critique are only possible in the wake of authority's unmasking?

The interventions here, that are meant to show up the system's 'nerves,' are photographs. Or rather, photographic fragments; close-ups. They are cut and processed but they retain their elemental character of photographic-ness. The photo-element: that undeniable umbilicus to reality, to that which once was, as Roland Barthes once put it. The photographs are connected to this nervous history by proximity and touch. In another instantiation they might be deployed in their entirety and used to illustrate my ideas: "This is a shaman," "This is his drum," "Here is his grave:" self-contained systems of re-signification. What do these fragments do? To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. What I want them to do is this: I want them to suggest intimacies otherwise effaced by my little history. I want them to draw you in to an encounter that once was as well as to the conditionality of this work. I want them to counter-intuitively liven up the page as a constellation of waking; an illumination of the project's own impossibility.

The close-up is typically understood as pure intention, my fragments work in this logic but they also refuse it. They are not always about something other than an abstract reference, an obtuse and affective pastness of human-machine-human encounter produced in the photographic moment. If the logic of the close-up is to de-contextualize "by depriving the image of spatial coordinates" (Bogue 2003:79) the logic of these photographic fragments is tied to the thesis-as-extended caption.

There is no easy connection: pure trust.
The kind of trust that builds the authority
of photography (I saw this), ethnography (I
was there), and criticism (I read this). The
structure of authority is not obliterated
by the photographic fragment, rather it is
agitated by it. Like the close-up—Deleuze's
"affection-image"—the fragment "has a
face as receptive immobile surface, receptive
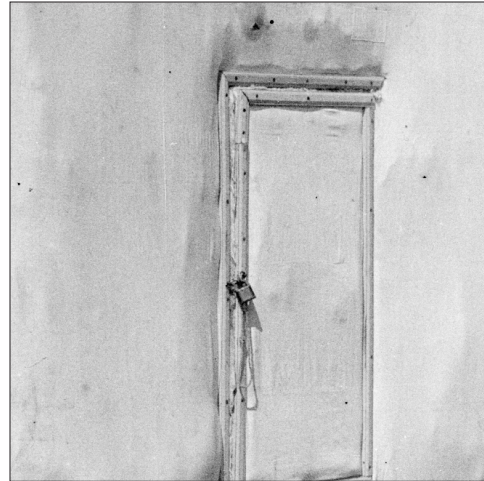
plate of inscription, impassive suspense: it is a *reflecting and reflected unity*" (Deleuze

2005: 87). The faciality of the photographic fragment is a surface that belies

unknowable depth; unmade connections: a "reflecting and reflected unity." To carry

on with the metaphor of the nervous system, the face is also of this bodily unity

but it deflects attention from a greater system. The face in this logic is the public

secret. The front and the robe of power. The nervous system is still there in its

receptivity and its anxiety. The photo-fragment turns out to be no fragment at all,

at least no less than the photograph it was taken from. In so obviously fragmenting

the photographic image, the structure of reality's violent rendition is implicated.

The reality of photography's violent rendition is drawn into a poetics of implication

that passes through the photographer, the archive, the reader/spectator, and the

photographic subject. The structure of historical authority and closure is agitated by

competing narratives, alternatives, and possibilities. It is a nervous history.

The Evenki System of Paths and the Turukhansk region

No sweeping geographical or historical label, such as the 'Russian Empire' or the 'Soviet Union', can provide easy generalizations about the Turukhansk North prior to the arrival of Cossacks or rifles, flour or other trade goods in the sixteenth-century.1 There were people, speaking a variety languages and dialects and occupying themselves in many different activities. Ancestors of the Evenki, Sakha (Yakut), Dolgan, Yukhagir, Ket, and other peoples, intermarried, avoided one another, fought, and traded. For the purposes of this thesis it is more or less adequate to note that for hundreds of years prior to the arrival of the Russians, there were predominantly Evenki-speaking peoples living in the territory that is now known as Evenkiia, in central Siberia. If the cultural scene in sixteenth-century Siberia is poorly detailed, knowledge about Evenki culture, as late as the end of the nineteenth-century is not much more developed. The Soviet ethnographer Glafira M. Vasilevich once commented that the social and political organization of Evenkis in the Turukhansk North, in the late Imperial era, was poorly understood (Vasilevich 1972: 160).

At the end of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth-century, Evenkis were called Tungus. The name Tungus was used to describe a number of different Indigenous Siberian peoples speaking a group of languages known as Tungus-Manchu. Evenkis, Evens, Orochis, Nanai, Udege and others were grouped together under the generic moniker of Tungusik (language speaking)

....
1   The Mongolian Khanates are worth mentioning, they no doubt put pressures on the Yenisei North but there is no clear evidence that they were collecting tribute or taxes from the Indigenous peoples there.

peoples (Shirokogoroff 1929). The Evenki-speaking peoples had homelands throughout central and eastern Siberia as well as the Russian Far East. Along with others labeled Tungus, the Evenkis are most well known for their nomadic mode of life and their spiritual culture: they are almost invariably represented as nomadic reindeer herders and shamans.[2] Through a history of forced sedentarization and engineered culture change—in addition to less violent cross-cultural interactions, affirmative actions, and incorporation in a modern state—many Evenkis were drawn first into the tributary system of the Russian Empire and then into the cosmopolitan multi-national culture of the Soviet Union.[3] While reindeer and shamans are key in the symbolic worlds of the Evenkis, by the last decades of the twentieth-century, many individuals had little direct experience with either. Nonetheless, today they continue to be Evenkis; they are embedded in cultural continuities, actively identify as Evenkis, and participate in the ongoing reproduction of their cultural heritage.

Evenkis were never 'simply' hunters and herders (or shamans, for that matter). While this configuration privileges the economic and reproduces a now-tired cliché, it is has been an effective, if reductive, shorthand for stating that the principal fashion that they made their way in the world was through hunting, fishing, and herding. An understanding of cultural identity is complicated by the instability

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2   The word shaman is derived from the Evenki term *khaman*.

3   For Western ethnographies of the Turukhansk North see Anderson 2000, Ssorin-Chaikov 2003, and Bloch 2004.

of economic taxonomies that are at best poor records of past lives: hunting, herding, trapping, fishing, gathering plants and medicines, scrounging, foraging, trading, borrowing, lending, crafting, divining, transporting, re-producing. The economies were and are complex and it is a disservice as well as a misrepresentation to refer to Evenkis simply as hunters of the north, reindeer herders, or shamans.

In twentieth-century anthropological discourse, their "way of life" has been canonized as *hunting and gathering* or, in the English tradition, *hunting and collecting*. These terms are at least capacious enough to consider what is traditionally thought of as women's work, such as plant and berry gathering—though gendered patterns of labour have not always been so clearly marked by Evenkis, or at least they were flexible enough to warrant a caveat about generalizations of gendered labour practices (cf. Bloch 2004).[4]

The Russian ethnographer Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff wrote the following characterization of Tungus mobility in the early twentieth-century:

> In accordance with the acquired knowledge of the primary milieu the Tungus have worked out their system of migrations, also imposed by their chief industry of hunting and reindeer breeding. . . . We have seen that the Tungus have created a system of communications, the paths. Indeed, in the eyes of the people accustomed to the railways and artificially erected high-roads with bridges [and] dams, the system of Tungus paths would not seem to be a technical achievement, a cultural adaptation. However, it is not so when one looks more closely at the phenomenon.

....

4   There is one photograph, for instance, of two Evenki women with rifles and traps, demonstrating that hunting was not solely the domain of men.

Shirokogoroff 1935: 87.

In this passage Shirokogoroff highlights the cultural genius of the Tungus system of paths. The appreciation of such cultural logics was an emerging ethnographical discourse in the early twentieth century that persists as one of the foundations of social cultural anthropology a century later. The Evenkis of the Turukhansk North were no less than the masters of living in the boreal forests of central Siberia. The nomadic life sustained and reproduced ancient social relations. Through careful acts of dwelling and travelling through known places in the landscape, the Evenkis created a meaningful world around them. Hunting reindeer and moose, trapping sable and squirrel, picking berries, gathering medicine, and setting fish weirs were all activities governed by the seasonal round and enacted through inter-personal, inter-family, inter-clan, and inter-cultural relations.
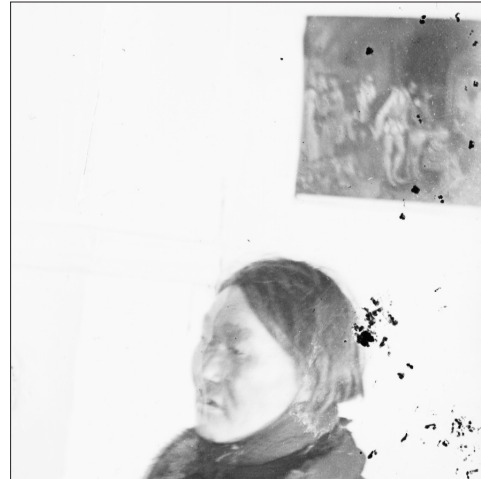
Had photography existed so many years ago, we might have had more sensuous documents to remind us that the Evenkis were more than hunters and as such not reducible to economic categories. Such details are also evident in local ethnographies and storytelling. They constitute a unique counter-point to more generalizing historiographies. The sensuous details of photography remind us how inadequate these terms are: to label a man a hunter and to look at a picture of a hunter produce dramatically different results. Whereas the former may conjure up a wide and personal array of images (from Robin Hood to Leatherstockings to Dersu Uzala) the other clamours out against that classification pointing in myriad

directions: "is that a pipe in his hand?" "Where did it come from?" "What kind of tobacco did he use?" "Where did he get the tobacco?" And so on.

There is a critical difference here between the search for hidden categories that is produced by close textual and ethnographic readings and the implicit resistance of photographs to the taxonomies we 'discover.' Peter Burke describes the task of the historian in his work *Eyewitenessing*:

> The historian needs to read between the lines, noting the small but significant details — including significant absences — and using them as clues to information which the image-makers did not know they knew, or to assumptions they were not aware of holding.

> Burke 2001: 188.

This methodology of image-led historical investigation implicates and activates the photographic image through careful scrutiny and dialectical reasoning. Following this methodology however may further reinforce a historiographical tendency to foreclosure that ignores the significant agency of photographs. Such an agency is explored elsewhere in my project. It is also addressed powerfully in much of the recent anthropological work on photography[5] that refuses to allow photographs to settle into materialistic particularity: "orality penetrates all levels of historical relations with photographs, not simply in terms of verbalizing content, but of the

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5   Several particularly important edited collections include Edwards' *Anthropology and Photography* and Pinney and Peterson's *Photography's Other Histories*.

way the visual imprints itself, is absorbed and is played back orally . . ." (Edwards 2001: 94). Photography has not only changed the way that the past and Other can be represented through more sensuous and accurate representations, it provides the material for categorical rejection of traditional pronouncements, closures, statements, and authorities. Historiography fails when the photograph is mistakenly reduced to a more or less static historical resource and seen, much like archives, as direct records of the past, bearing witness and embodying past ways of knowing. As I argue here this is an irresolvable ambiguity that must navigate between everyday lives and the necessary closures we develop to talk about them. The critical point is not writing away this ambiguity but, as Michael Taussig suggests, allowing "oneself to be brought face-to-face and remain within the ambiguity, grasping it whole, so to speak" (Taussig 1999: 107).

Irrespective of my own critiques of historical and cultural representation, it is undeniable that nomadic mobility has been one of the defining characteristics of everyday life for Indigenous peoples in Siberia. In Evenki culture reindeer hold a central symbolic place. Indeed, across the Siberian North reindeer are iconic. There are great herds of wild reindeer in Siberia. Some migrate great distances, others are more or less non-migratory and dwell in local forests, hills, and mountainous areas. In addition to these wild reindeer, many indigenous Siberians raise domesticated reindeer. While some peoples, like the Chukchi or Khanty, raise large herds of reindeer, most Evenkis have traditionally kept domestic reindeer as a form of

transport rather than as food. Evenki reindeer herds traditionally consisted of far fewer reindeer than they would if they were being raised for meat. Reindeer mobility enables hunting for meat and fur-bearing animals, trading, visiting friends and family or sites of worship.

The utility of reindeer became apparent to newcomers to the region; to the Russians, the interior regions of the Turukhansk North, the lands beyond the rivers, were vast and impenetrable. Horses and other pack animals were poorly adapted and singularly useless in face of radical extremes of temperature and climate, challenging terrain, and unfamiliar plants for

fodder. The Yenisei River provided a major navigable river for European traders and the Podkamennaia Tunguska and Nizhnaia Tunguska Rivers offered some transport opportunities for shallow bottomed-boats. This left an interior of forests, bogs, lakes, and small rivers only rarely visited by non-indigenous peoples. The American anthropologist Henry Usher Hall describes the Turukhansk District in the early 1900s as network of waterways and highways:

> On the banks of the river one does not speak of being in the tundra. This
> is a highway which connects the settler or transient voyager with a living
> world; to the nomad of the tundra, it is only a place to which one comes
> with nets to get supplies for the winter larder or to pay in labor some part
> of the debt which the trader will never wholly write off. To this class of
> sojourners upon the river the waste of waters in the great stream-six miles

wide, a little below-shows no friendly, familiar face. When the time to strike his tent comes he does not say, it is true, "I am going home," but "I am going to the tundra, "which is, in effect, the same thing. Then he packs his tent and so much of his catch as the traders have left him, and his scanty household goods, upon two or three or half a dozen sledges, and, since snow has not yet fallen or at any rate is not yet deep, harnesses four or five reindeer to a sledge, instead of the winter team of two, and is whisked off over the low hills to the wide spaces where he can call his soul and his time his own.

<div align="right">Hall 1918: 8</div>

When Russians wanted to travel through the taiga in the Yenisei North they generally hired Tungus guides and their reindeer. Reindeer are the most efficient and effective means of travelling across great areas of forest, bog, and tundra, and many Evenkis worked in the burgeoning transport industry as freight drivers, chauffeurs, and guides until they were displaced by motorboats, snow machines, bi-planes, and helicopters. First they moved missionaries and the occasional explorer; then, in the Soviet era, they helped move everything from the mail to scientists and their exploratory equipment.

Reindeer ownership is typically identified as one of the key elements in an Evenki economy and was understood by Soviet analysts as the source of wealth that differentiated between impoverished and wealthy Evenkis—a point that had great relevance as the Soviets accelerated and provoked rural class war in the 1930s. Indeed, according to the class hierarchies imposed through Marxist rationale, those who were mobile controlled the means of production, reindeer, and hence became wealthy through accumulation and—and this is where it is most contentious— exploitation. Because not all Evenkis owned reindeer, they were not all equally mobile and this was the basis for class differentiation. Though I treat this issue with some more detail later, it is important to note that the outcome of this rationale

ranged from exile to imprisonment to confiscation of reindeer and general socio-economic marginalization.

On the other end of the spectrum of class affiliation were the most impoverished Evenkis: reindeer-less Evenkis [*bezolennyie*]. These Evenkis were "semi-sedentarized" and appear to have lived year-round near lakes where they could fish.[6] Soviet ethnographer B.O. Dolgikh described the "Olenek Tungus," for instance, who kept few reindeer, as being primarily interested in "hunting wild deer, especially in areas where the herds of wild deer crossed the Olenek River. An unlucky autumn hunt for wild deer had the onerous result that the whole population went hungry" (Dolgikh 1960: 450). In fact, a good portion of those Evenki living in the Ilimpei area of the Turukhansk North (Surinda, Ekonda, Viliui river area) were largely semi-sedentarized, living year-round [*postoyannyi*] or at least through the winter in semi-permanent wooden and bark lodges [*balagani*] and living primarily off of the fish they caught in the lakes.

While Soviets saw the distinction between reindeer herders and these sedentary or semi-sedentary Evenki as a class distinction, it is worth considering that the (semi-)sedentary life may have been a life-style choice rather than one imposed by social inequalities. According to the Soviet anthropologist Tugolukov, in 1822 when the missionary Ioann Petelin travelled to the source of the Viliui river from Yakutiia,

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6   It would be very interesting to explore the relationship between the Reindeer Saami and the Fishing Saami in comparison to the Reindeer Evenki and Reindeer-less Evenki.

he encountered Tungus at Lake Surinde, whom he described as being "honest, poor in clothing, but content and happy with their situation" (Tugolukov 1960: 150, *my trans.*).[7]   Compared to this characterization, accounts from the early Soviet period are much more critical of Evenki impoverishment. This is due partly to a necessity or proclivity to read exploitation and class differentiation in all cultural situations but also was no doubt a result of seeing the effects of starvation that followed a succession of poor hunting seasons and an epidemic of small pox in the early 1920s. The explorer Fridtjof Nansen, who recounts a story of the smallpox epidemic from his travels in 1913, offers one earlier account of the epidemic:

> With contributions from the Siberian members of the Duma the Red Cross Society sent out an expedition from Krasnoyarsk, but too late in the spring, when the snow had already begun to melt. They got past Turukhansk, but could not penetrate any farther into the tundra on account of the state of the ground. They went far enough to find tents where all was still ; the occupants lay dead within, five or six of them, and outside lay the dead reindeer . . . In some tents they found people still alive, but in a terrible state, without fire and nearly starved to death, covered with sores that were not yet healed. How many such tragedies the great tundra conceals!
>
> Nansen 1914: 166.

While Evenki peoples lived on the margin of the Russian Empire, it is crucial to remember that they lived at the centre of their own social worlds. The people living

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7   Poverty, as seen by lack of jewelry as well as poor cloth and canvas, is noticeable in Naumov's photographs (with the exception of the Chirinda Princelings).

in the inland territories of the Yenisei North at the beginning of the twentieth-century were mostly Evenki, Yakuts (or Sakha), and mixed Evenki-Sakha. The Evenkis living here were typically referred to as Tungus until the mid-twentieth-century. They would have been included in the Turyzh clan of Tungus in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

Prior to this, they were generally included in various different, if poorly documented and understood (by Russians), clan affiliations. Tugolukov writes that at the turn of the nineteenth-century, Ilimpii Evenkis had their own Ilimpii Volost[8]. In 1824, the Ilimpii administrative 'clan' was comprised of 10 actual Evenki clans (Gurgugir, Eldogir, Kombagir, Oegir, Udygir, Khirogir, Khukochar, Khutokogir, Emidak, and Ialogir). The relationship of the Administrative Clans imposed by the Tsarist system of tribute and more indigenous forms of governance is another area that is poorly documented. Likely they existed as overlapping and interacting formations of power.

While Evenkis traditionally lived and hunted in relatively small family groups, their larger clan affiliations helped to mediate their relationship with representatives of European power. This is a point articulated in the work of the ethnographer Lydia Dobrova-Iadrintseva, who wrote one of the first Soviet ethnographies of the Turukhansk region (1925). According to the Oxford anthropologist, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Dobrova-Iadrintseva "argued that the Russian indigenous administrative

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8   A *Volost'* is an administrative unit of Tsarist Russia. The *volost'* as a territorial unit was replaced in the Soviet era by the '*raion.*'

practices and fur trade were crucial to the survival of stateless, kin-based communal structures, she analyzed larger systems of inequalities, tax-collecting 'districts,' and administrative 'clans' constructed by the Russian state" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003:81).

Russian Imperial era

> The Tsarist empire was of course a self-avowed empire, a polity that was self-consciously imperial, and one that . . . strove to impress its imperial status upon its subjects and upon others through elaborate ritual. Russia's tsars openly sought to cultivate an imperial reputation as recognition of their rightful rule and propagated the greatness of their imperial enterprise as a foundation for domestic and international authority.
>
> Beissinger 2008: 1.

Russians and representatives of the Russian Empire arrived in the Enisei river basin in the seventeenth-century. Their first base in the area was Fort Mangazeia: this marked the beginning of Russian imperial colonialism for the Indigenous peoples living around the Enisei river. For the nomadic peoples of the Siberian North, colonialism under the Tsars meant subjugation to a host of official and unofficial roles and rules. To ensure complicity with new orders of power, military forts and bases were built on navigable river ways. Indigenous peoples were obliged to pay tribute to the Tsar in the form of valuable animal pelts, and they were categorized as tribute payers [*iasachniki*]. By the nineteenth-century, Siberia had, geographically speaking, become an integral part of Russia. As the geographer Mark Bassin describes it,

> Although Siberia was seen by many European Russians as a foreign Asiatic colony, it was at the same time somewhat more than this. The simple circumstance of territorial contiguity with the metropolis—a geographical arrangement shared by no other European empire—together with Siberia's large and long-established Russian population made it possible to see the territories beyond the Urals as a continuation or extension of the zone of Russian culture and society.
>
> Bassin 1991b: 766

In the process of annexing the northern lands, the northern peoples too were

annexed. But they remained aliens to the dominant Russians and were colonial subjects of the Tsar. Their responsibilities as the Tsar's subjects were enshrined in a system of tributary payments called *iasakh*. The *iasakh* system would become one of the primary points of socialist agitation against the Tsarist system in the North. It is well documented that tribute payers received little protection from the Tsarist regime and that they were often victims of corrupt merchants and officials (Slezkine 1994). Indeed it seems that this exploitation was almost a structural phenomenon, resulting from the inefficiencies of remote rule. Tsar Peter I ("Peter the Great") undertook administrative reforms in the early 1700s and made efforts to control the lawless exploitation of the natives but these were largely unenforceable. While the Siberian Governorship [S*ibirskaia Gubernia*] was created in the seventeenth-century, it was not until the nineteenth-century that significant changes would be effected (Raeff 1956).
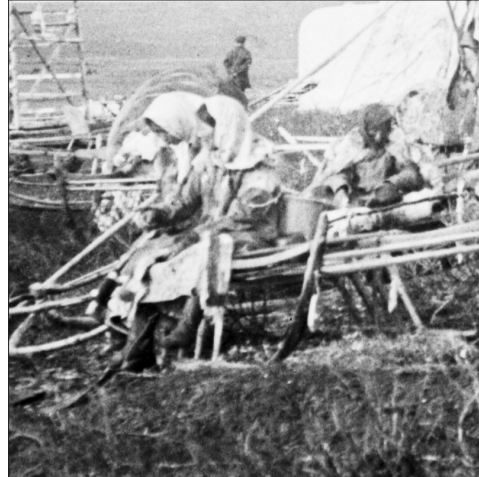
While Tsarist Russia was an undeniably colonial empire, the nature of its colonialism was different than that of most other colonial powers.[9] With the exception of Alaska, the colonial landscape was divided only by distance and not by bodies of water. As the writer and critic Andrei Siniavskii writes, Russia "assimilated neighboring lands, which were not considered colonies at all, but an integral part of the state, of a single indivisible Russia" (Siniavskii 1990: 240; see

....
9   China is a major exception that comes to mind.

also Bassin 1983).   According to Snow, the "Tsarist government in Siberia was a huge administrative complex, employing thousands of people" (Snow 1977: 31). By the time of the 1917 revolution Siberia was understood to be part of Russia and was included by default in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

The Bolsheviks had their own complicated relationship with colonization, but for the most part "colonization" was associated with European, bourgeois, capitalist imperialism. According to the Soviet model that developed, Russia, and later the Soviet Union, would empower its ethnic (national) minorities and put an end to Imperial rule in the North. This was largely possible because Siberia and the Far East had been incorporated as a part of Russia in both practice and imagination.

The process of colonization of the North actually began in the seventeenth-century. The historian Bakhrushin wrote, "by the petition of traders and industrialists, the Samson Novatskov cartel expedition was outfitted in 1629 for the pacification of the Tungus of the Lower Tunguska River" (*my trans.* Bakhrushin 1929: 79). The iasak-men moved quickly and B.O. Dolgikh writes that by the mid-1600s, Tungus from the Olenek region (hundreds of kilometers to the East) were paying iassak at Lake Yessei (Dolgikh 1960: 443). While no navigable rivers serve it, lake Yessei became an important settlement linking the Enisei River to the Lena. The largely river-bound invaders made few incursions into the interior, known as the Ilimpei Tundra. The Ilimpei area became historically important to the Soviets

as it was part of a region that existed outside established corridors of travel and transportation, it was remote, inaccessible and largely unknown.

According to the anthropologist V.V. Karlov, at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth-centuries, trade relations seriously altered the economy of the Evenki population of Siberia (Karlov 1982: 106). Karlov goes on to note that by the end of the eighteenth-century, the Evenkis' trade with Russian peasants in the south had increased and had become an essential component of their economy and cultural tradition (ibid: 107). It is worth noting, however, that Karlov also marks out the Ilimpei tundra as one of the most independent or "pure" locations in Siberia: In the deep interior (from the middle of the Nizhnaia Tunguska and north) the Evenki economy was more independent from trade (than it was with Evenkis in the South).

The Russians, with the significant exception of traders and missionaries, were rarely active in the inland regions of the Enisei North. The Ilimpei Tundra, like some areas of the Far East and Far North, was noted for its remoteness (cf. Hall 1914). Administrators seemed most content to survey the nomadic and wandering "aliens" through tribute ledgers rather than through significant or sustained contact. In many ways, the territorialization created by a concert of pre-tsarist clans and

Russian-imposed clan structure served to solidify actual social relations within the Evenki speaking groups. According to nineteenth-century reforms, elders or 'princelings' represented Indigenous clans. These positions were appointed (or at least approved) by the local Governor. The clan elders were responsible for the collection of *iasakh* from their people and for submitting the tribute to the Tsar. According to Shimkin, "In the eighteenth century much of the old leadership was assimilated into the tsarist bureaucracy . . . Kin based units became, to a considerable extent, administrative, territorial units" (Shimkin 1990: 320). In the Turukhansk North, the tribute was paid at annual "festivals" in Mangazeia or Monastyrskoe, and elsewhere (like Turukhansk, a town on the left bank of the Enisei River). In addition to the trade fairs, there were clan and family meetings or gatherings called *suglani*. These were meetings that occurred on an annual or semi-annual basis. While *suglani*, as a form of political organization, preceded the era of Tsarist tributary relations, they were also transformed through the new conditions of subalterity under the Tsars. The institution of the Suglan, was appropriated and refashioned in the Soviet era, as an acknowledgement of local autonomy. This continuity however was also susceptible to critique and would later be criticized for simply replicating patriarchal and bourgeois inequalities when the communists organized clan soviets. In spite of the discouragement by communist organizers, many same elders who were the princelings prior to the Soviet era were elected to chair the Soviets in a new era of socialism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).

Some of the earliest significant ethnographic research on the Ilimpei Tundra was produced by A.F. Middendorf between 1843 and 1844, although it seems that the ethnographical observations were sometimes only incidental to Middendorf's broad research and survey program, which included the study of permafrost, botany, and zoology.[10] While Middendorff was

sympathetic to the Indigenous Siberians (Tammiksaar and Stone 2007: 208), the work was undertaken within a salvage paradigm, whereby symbolic and material culture was seen to be rapidly and inevitably disappearing. The outcome of this was a great focus on the collection of ethnographical data and cultural artifacts. M.G. Turov (1990: 15) notes that Middendorf recorded data on the hunt of wild reindeer, tundra reindeer husbandry, and systems of mobility.[11] Middendorf's book *Travels in the North and East of Siberia* was published in German in 1845 and in Russian in 1860.

In the nineteenth-century , the Tsarist administration split Siberia into two "general-governorships": East-Siberia and West-Siberia. These general-governorships were then "divided into gubernii" or provinces (Shishkin 2000: 102). Important reforms were undertaken in 1822 after many years of corruption, excessive exploitation, and amid growing criticism. Around the time of Speranski's

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10   As a scientific discipline, ethnography was seen often as only a sub-set of geography and natural science; anthropology did not begin to comprehensively distinguish itself from other disciplines in Western Europe until the early twentieth-century.

11   It is worth noting that Middendorf's Siberian expedition in 1845 took over a month to travel overland in the winter from Krasnoiarsk to Turukhansk. (Shimkin 1990).

reforms time Krasnoiarsk became the capitol of the Yenisei Gubernia; a position of governance it maintains to this day. The boundaries of the Yenisei Gubernia are roughly coterminous with those of the Krasnoiarsk Krai today. The Turukhansk district was a division of the Yenisei Gubernia, with Turukhansk as its capitol. Beyond these larger territorial divisions, several other layers of administrative responsibility were assigned. In their article "A history of Russian administrative boundaries (XVIII - XX centuries)" Merzliakova and Karimov write:

> There were several types of special division besides administrative *gubernia* and *uezd*. Since 1864 the country was divided into court districts. A group of *gubernia* was a subject of one district court. There was diocese division set by the Orthodox Church. There existed also military districts subordinated to Governor general, and some other types. Special court, military and other units usually included several *gubernia* or even did not correspond to the framework of administrative division. This was a form of "division of powers" in geographical space.
>
> Merzliakova and Karimov 2001.

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, what is now known as the Yenisei North was known as the Turukhansk Krai. This is a territory that includes the remote areas of tundra and taiga referred to in this work. The Krai was governed by the administrative center called Turukhansk. The village of Turukhansk was founded in 1609 and was recognized as an important settlement and waypoint for marine traffic. There was a key Orthodox Mission there that operated as a hub for much of the Church's missionary work prior to the revolution. The Yenisei River

(like all the rivers flowing north to the Arctic ocean) was of primary importance, especially before the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway. When the railway arrived in Krasnoiarsk at the end of the nineteenth-century , the importance of the river capitals diminished and southern cities serviced by the railway rose in importance as commercial and administrative centers.[12]

In that era, the seat of power moved from Turukhansk, south to Yeniseisk, and then eventually to Krasnoiarsk. Yeniseisk began as a fort in the early 1600s and was the most important administrative and commercial centre along the Yenisei until the construction of the railway. By the end of the Tsarist regime Krasnoiarsk eclipsed the Yenisei River settlements in importance.

Soviet and Western historiographers have emphasized a chaotic and lawless era under Tsarist rule. While the state promised protection to the Indigenous tribute payers [*iasachniki*], there was little recourse for Evenkis and others who were exploited and abused by various traders, administrators, and officials. The rampant exploitation of the Indigenous peoples became an important point upon which the Bolsheviks would claim liberation of Siberia from the oppressive Tsarist regime of tribute payment. Not only was the system of *iasakh* unjust, but there was relatively little protection offered. This point was also forcefully articulated by Soviet historians searching for a baseline of oppression and exploitation (cf. Turov 1990 and Karlov 1982).

....

12   The Krasnoiarsk terminus of the Trans-Siberian railway was completed in 1898.

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, Turukhansk was the most significant settlement in the area. It was the site of large trade fairs and it boasted a monastery. It is also infamous as a site for exile in both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes (Stalin being the most famous exile). Turukhansk is located at the junction of the Yenisei and Nizhnaia Tunguska Rivers. The 1897 census reports 200 people living there, but the population in the area seems to have fluctuated significantly (Uvachan 1959). Sometimes Turukhansk is known as New Mangazeia, so-called because of resettlements there after Mangazeia, a settlement on the river Taz (west of the Yenisei), which was destroyed by fire. Mangazeia was the center of the Uyezd (a major territorial division in seventeenth-century Russia). Around 1670, Turukhansk (New Mangazeia) became the new capital of the Yeniseisk Uyezd. In 1909, the administrative center was moved across and up the Yenisei River to the settlement of Monastyrskoe, which was located on the mouth of the Lower Tunguska River (Nansen 1914; Hall 1918). Monastyrskoe came to be called New Turukhansk, and eventually, just Turukhansk. (Dolgikh 1960: 120).
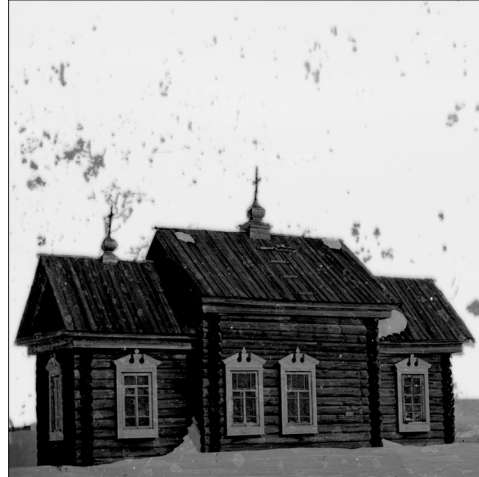
Initially, any place beyond navigable rivers was considered excessively remote and was only visited by adventurers, scientists, priests, and traders, such as Father M.I. Suslov, who travelled extensively and regularly through the inlands of the Yenisei North. Some of the earliest non-Russian ethnographers, Czaplicka and

Hall, made an expedition to Siberia around the time of the revolution. In 1914 they travelled to "find 'the most primitive and comparatively the purest type of race' of Siberian native, 'the Tungus' (Czaplicka 1917: 290)." (Collins and Urry 1997: 18). On the other hand, it wasn't until the Soviets had been in power for over twenty years that they began to invest heavily in transforming the entire social landscape any place beyond the navigable rivers. Even then, the cost and challenge of travelling through the central Siberian taiga was tremendously limiting.

Looking at a map of the area, it is evident that there are large areas that were so 'deep' in the taiga that the gaze of both Russian and Soviet regimes fell far short of the standard elsewhere in Siberia. Where explorers and traders failed to enter the taiga, they succeeded in drawing the Evenkis out, through trade fairs and trading posts. According to Karlov, "at the beginning of the 20th Century on the Podkamenaia and Nizhnaia Tunguska rivers there were already established trading posts and permanent factories. . . On the Nizhanaia Tunguska basin: Tura, Vivi, Agata, Kosoi Porog (Bolshoi Porog), and in the middle Yessei. Many of them featured a warehouse that was open year-round and salesmen" (Karlov 1985: 111).

The Orthodox mission in Turukhansk (Monasterskoe) oversaw a number of small churches in the Ilimpei tundra, notably on Lake Yessei and on Lake Chirinda. Traders also built remote trading posts along the rivers. These were not year-round or permanent posts but small wintering huts that were probably poorly furnished and outfitted. There was one near the mouth of the Kochechum, along the Nizhnaia Tunguska River. This fort has been commented on by a number of historians and appears to have been owned by the 'tungusnik' Savel'ev. Russians also relied on 'batraki' who were typically native reindeer herders. One scientific expedition passed through this area between 1873 and 1875. This was the Polish exile A. Chekanovski's expedition, along the Nizhnaia Tunguska River to Olenek and on to the Lena River. This was a route that Suslov's grandson would map out in the 1930s. The expedition was well funded by the Geological Society as it explored an unknown river system.[13]

In addition to the tribute collectors, Orthodox missionaries, who brought their messianic ideologies of both submission and salvation, colonized the North. Their missionary efforts were not accepted in full, however. Instead, ethnographic and historical records suggest that many Evenkis practiced a spiritual syncretism that combined Orthodox Christianity with non-organized religious practices that included shamanism and other forms of spiritual mediation. The Christianity of the Evenki therefore included remnants of earlier religious practices.

....

13   Noted in *Developing Siberia (Osvoenie Sibiri)*. Novosibirsk State Oblast Scientific Library.

The Monastery, located at the confluence of the Nizhnaia Tunguska and Yenisei Rivers was an important site of commercial and spiritual pilgrimage. Aside from the annual Turukhansk trade fair, there are also many stories of Evenkis travelling to Turukhansk to visit the monastery. Orthodox missionaries based their ministries out of the Troitskiy Monastary and travelled broadly through the taiga east of the Yenisei River. One of the central figures in the Yenisei Missionary Society in the late nineteenth-century was Father Mikhail Ivanovich Suslov (Anderson and Orekhova 2002: 89). Suslov was the patriarch of a family whose history is bound up with the history of the indigenous peoples of the Turukhansk North. M.I. Suslov had an extensive ministry throughout the Turukhansk taiga and tundra that serviced distant parishes like those at Yessei and Chirinda.

Father Mikhail Ivanovich Suslov had come to the Yenisei North as an Orthodox missionary and by the end of the nineteenth-century he had become "a central figure in the Yenisei Missionary Society . . . [He] devoted his entire life to serving one of the most remote corners of Imperial Russia and did so with a great sensitivity to local language and custom" (Anderson and Orekhova 2002: 89). His grandson, Innokenti Mikhailovich Suslov would become a critical figure in the Soviet projects of culture change.[14]

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14   Mikhail Mikhailovich Suslov, was a catechist (katezikhator, a kind of lay-missionary) serving the interior of the Turukhansk territory.

Innokentii Mikhailovich Suslov was born in Turukhansk in 1893. He grew up in a family attuned both to the missionary history of the Orthodox Church and the local nuances of belief, history, and language. He himself, however, entered a program in geography and ethnography at St. Petersburg University in 1912 after schooling in Yeniseisk. At this time he began his studies under the famous Russian ethnographers, Shternberg, Petri, and Shirokogoroff.

Towards the end of the Tsarist empire.

In Russia, as in the empires to the west, the character and significance of
colonial domains were represented in terms of categories and attributes
meaningful in the first instance to those doing the representing . . .

Bassin 1991b: 792.

While the rule of Siberia was re-organized under Siberian Governorship
in 1708 and new boundaries were drawn in 1719 (creating five provinces) it was
not until the second decade of the nineteenth-century that administrative reforms
brought regularity and stability to the Russian Empire in Siberia (Raeff 1956). The
most significant changes in Siberian governance occurred under the reign of Peter
I. For many years the Tsar had been planning a re-organization and restructuring
of the rule of Siberia, which until then had been haphazard and ill defined. In 1819
Peter I appointed M.M. Speranski governor general of Siberia with the special task
of surveying the territory and recommending a plan to restructure governance. For
the Indigenous peoples, the most significant outcome of this was in Speransky's
1822 "statute for the administration of the indigenes"...

Five major principles of the Statute were: 1) divide the natives into
the three categories of settled natives (*osedlyye*), nomads (*kochevyye*),
and vagrants (*brodyachiye*); 2) for the nomads and the vagrants, the
administration should be based on their old customs, but these had to be
better defined and organized; 3) the police functions of local authorities
should be of only a general supervisory nature, the internal autonomy of
tribes should be left untouched; 4) freedom of trade and industry should
be protected; 5) taxes and tribute should be made proportional to the
abilities of each tribe and be imposed at regular intervals.

Raeff 1956: 116.

Significantly the categories of settled, nomadic, and wandering (or vagrant) demark

forms of mobility. Mobility, as theme runs through this history as a critical idiom helping to define everyday life in the Turukhansk North for both the Indigenous peoples and the newcomers [*priezhie*]. While Speranski's statute committed these to policy in 1822, they would continue to be used to define Indigenous Siberians into the Soviet era. Nomadic ways of travelling and living on the land were institutionally categorized as unequivocally other to civilized and, eventually modern ways of being. The modern view of nomadic mobility as ultimately different, strange, and apparently irrational was one of the ideological foundations that would ultimately lead to the widespread 'sedentarization' programs in the Soviet era. Bruce Grant notes "an integral part of [Speranski's] plan was the eventual conversion of the nomadic and wandering peoples to a settled way of life" (Grant 1995: 42). If it began with Speranski, it did not end until over a hundred years later when reindeer economies were fully industrialized and sedentarization fully realized.   In addition to the taxonomic system imposed by Speranski, the 1822 Statute of Alien Administration instituted a new order of tributary relations with something called the 'administrative clan.' These clans would later form the basis of Clan and Nomadic Soviets.

Despite Speranski's reforms little is said to have changed to improve the lot of Indigenous Siberians. One Soviet historian claims that injustice flourished until the October Revolution:

> The administrative system in the North of Yenisei Gubernia is shocking.
> The lives of the native people have been put into the hands of a band of
> criminals consisting of the local Turukhansk administration and dealers,
> united by their common interest in exploiting the native population,
> who act under the guise of law and authority because the territory is so
> secluded and remote. The local administration and dealers hold sway over
> the soul and body of the native...

cited in Uvachan 1975: 48.

The turmoil of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia had effects that filtered out into the taiga of the Turukhansk North. Indigenous minorities were navigating a quickly changing socio-political landscape in the second decade of the twentieth century. Cultural mediators and newcomers shifted in both name and practice; socialist missionaries replaced orthodox missionaries. The presence and duration of the newcomers intensified as did the their interventions into the character of everyday life.

Evenki New Life: Foundations of Soviet modernity and socialist culture-shaping.

To explore the history of Soviet power in central Siberia I tie in the biography of Innokentii Mikhailovich Suslov, the grand son of the missionary M.I. Suslov who had served the remote taiga and tundra of the Turukhansk North. Innokentii Mikhailovich was a critical figure in the history of sovietization of central Siberia. I will return regularly to his story as I work through some of the relevant contextual histories that bear upon the sovietization projects of the late 1920s.

The history of the communist revolution in Russia is typically recounted in terms of the waves of protest and civil unrest that eventually led to the October Revolution in 1917, when the Russian Provisional Government was overthrown by Bolshevik-led revolutionaries. Petrograd (known as St. Petersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad, and now St. Petersburg again) became the centre for Soviet revolutionary power: the actualized utopian dream of emancipation. The decade leading up to this final *coup d'etat* was characterized by generalized social turmoil and upheaval. Not only was Russia dealing with growing civil discontent but it was also embroiled in the first world war which began to cost Russian lives as early as 1914 and which helped to foment an overwhelming popular disenchantment with the ruling aristocracy. Idealists, revolutionaries, and others gathered in centers like Moscow and St. Petersburg but also in distant corners of the Empire. They set about on a host of revolutionary and emancipatory projects that ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Russian Empire and its replacement by a socialist state.

Despite over a decade of civil unrest and struggle people in Russia carried

out the mundane tasks of living. Even revolutionaries (at least those that where not exiled to Turukhansk or Sakhalin Island) visited loved ones, met for tea with friends, and read books. I.M. Suslov began his studies in Geography during this period of time. The key cultural centers in the Russian empire were St. Petersburg and Moscow. Their universities and technical institutes drew students not only from European Russia but, from Siberia as well. In this respect they were not unlike other Imperial centers of power that benefited from the flows of wealth and knowledge carried on the tide of colonial exploitation. In 1912, Innokenti Mikhailovich Suslov entered the department of natural sciences (specializing in geography and ethnography) at the University of St. Petersburg. He writes that he maintained a strong interest in the Far North and the unknown lands within Russia. He actively studied the geography and the peoples of the Turukhansk territory, working under the direct supervision of a radical group of ethnographers, including Shternberg, Petri and Shirokogoroff. Suslov undertook his studies at a time of great upheaval and change. In 1905 there was a massive uprising (revolution) that resulted in some concessions to reform but ultimately to a reinforcement of the autocratic rule of the Tsar's bureaucracy. By 1915, though, his studies were cut short with the mobilization of students to participate in the defense of Russia, during the First World War. Suslov was stationed in the southern Urals until 1918 when he volunteered with the Red Army which was formed by the Bolsheviks after the successes of the 1917 revolution. From the earliest days of the Revolution local level struggles lit up across the Russian empire. In the years following the October

Revolution a civil war was fought as various factions struggled for supremacy. The Red Army was tasked with fighting both the Imperial German Army and the various forces of Tsarist supporters that made up the White Army. Ending participation in the European war, the communists focused on fighting a civil war and consolidating their power. Battles with the White armies flared up across Russia and Siberia in a civil war that lasted until 1923 when the last anti-communist resistance was extinguished.

As the Communists (led by the Bolshevik faction) solidified power, they began to expend more energy on building social and economic foundations for communism. In 1921 Suslov was consigned to cultural-enlightenment work, an on-going project to disseminate communist ideas and generate support in rural areas. Cultural enlightenment offered a powerful foundation for political socialization. Both of which operated within a broader paradigm of social transformation; Soviet cultural enlightenment is better understood as an inheritance of pre-revolutionary Russian thought, than a radical historical rupture (White 1990: 33; see also Badcock 2006). The continuity of cultural enlightenments projects offered a legacy of methods in public education and activism from which agitators and revolutionaries in Siberia could borrow and build. The language of enlightenment had a broader meaning than that applied to drawing backwards Russian peasants, ethnic nationalities in central Asia, and 'primitive' natives into the modern world. The liquidation of illiteracy was a critical platform:

In the countryside, cottage reading rooms were established as centres for literacy teaching and simultaneously for establishing Communist Party influence . . . However, the cultural-enlightenment network in the countryside was much weaker than it was in towns.

White 1990: 34.

Communist cultural-enlightenment work had its roots in established techniques of agitation [*agitatsiia*] and propaganda. Leading among the aspects of cultural-enlightenment work was the liquidation of illiteracy, which was seen by many (among them V.I. Lenin) to be the most critical step in the war on backwardness. "While we have in our country a phenomenon such as illiteracy it is difficult for us to speak of political education . . . An illiterate person stands outside politics; he has first to be taught the alphabet. Without this there can be no politics, without this there is only rumour, scandal, gossip and prejudice, but no politics" (Lenin 1917[1]). Among the non-Russians the project required not only the eradication of illiteracy but in many cases the creation of dictionaries and the construction of a written language itself. Illiteracy and cultural backwardness were seen as serious impediments to full inclusion in the shared experience of Soviet culture. There is no room to fully consider the Soviet enlightenment projects here, it is however critical to note how these operated as foundational logics for the technologies of cultural transformation. The culture bases were cultural-enlightenment bases. Cultural-enlightenment meant giving "the entire population of the Republic" the opportunity to "participate consciously in the political life of the country" (Decree on literacy of 1919, quoted in White 1990:

....
1   Quoted in Taylor 1971: 562.

34). Nomadic reindeer herders, like the illiterate peasants that took pride of place in the revolutionary imagination, were seen as philistines capable of dragging the communist project down, or at least stalling it, with their anachronistic beliefs and practices.

In her study of revolutionary cultural enlightenment projects among rural peoples of Russia Sarah Badcock notes that a remarkable

> feature of cultural enlightenment work was the way in which the wholesome messages it wished to convey were sweetened with music and simple joys. Singing, theater, public spectacles, and funfairs were all regarded as important vehicles for the enlightenment process.
>
> Badcock 2006: 628.

After his service on the front I.M. Suslov joined one of the more interesting experiments in socialist agitation and cultural enlightenment. In 1919 he began to work on the specially outfitted agitation trains [*agitpoezd*] that were sent along the rail system to bring revolutionary views and engage in consciousness-building in rural areas. This mobile outfit was not only created to foster support for the communist project at the time of civil war, it also launched some of the culture-shaping projects which began with the war on backwardness in rural Russia, Central Asia, and Siberia—as soon as the rail lines were secured by the communist revolutionaries, agitational trains were sent out to propagandize the peasants and former colonial subjects. The agit-trains were part of broader agitational-propaganda enterprises that were organized through various institutions but came primarily under the jurisdiction of Narkompros, the Peoples' Commissariat of Enlightenment. The art historian

Annie Gérin notes that propaganda can be understood as technology of socialization that "became instrumental in creating common vocabularies, thus paving the way toward a shared culture" (2003: 19). The structure of the mechanism for agitation, education, and propaganda, according to Richard Taylor, "eventually combined a network of stationary *agitpunkty*, placed at strategic points, with a number of travelling agitational trains. The trains were to act as the vanguard of revolutionary agitation, while the *agitpunkty* concentrated on propaganda saturation of the population" (Taylor 1971: 566). The *agitpunkty* (agit-station) and *agitpoezdy* (agit-trains) were not the only tools for mass agitation. Taylor also remarks on the *politdoma* (political houses), "stationary centres for in-depth propaganda saturation of the local population" (ibid). These combined projects show the importance of propaganda for the Bolsheviks:

> The use of agit-trains represented an enormous investment by the Bolsheviks in the value of propaganda. In all, five trains and one river steamer saw service. Each of the trains consisted of between sixteen and eighteen carriages and was staffed by a total of about 75-80 technicians, between fifteen and eighteen political instructors and a Red Army unit for defense. They each had a cinema, a radio station and a printing press. The exterior walls were brightly painted, initially with allegorical scenes, such as a dragon threatening to devour the Revolution and being challenged by the Red Army in the guise of St George, but later in more soberly realistic fashion.

Innokenti Mikhailovich Suslov's autobiographical sketch [*kharakteristika²*] does

not reveal where he traveled when he worked aboard the agit-trains. He did write,

however, of the importance of the instructional/agitational choir. He worked as

deputy head of one *agitpoezd* as well as director of its chorus until 1922, when the

project was liquidated. Suslov notes that his "Revolutionary Oratoria"—a history of

revolutionary action set to music—was written during his travels with the agit-train:

> using a choir with accompanying orchestra it was performed in Siberia
> around two hundred times. in addition to this I wrote national melodies
> of the Kirgiz, Tatars, Teleuts (Kuznetskikh), Iakuts, and Tungus, and
> others. I reworked and popularized these as choral music which was
> performed as a cycle of ethnographic³ concerts in Omsk in 1922.

Suslov. GANO f354-1-350.

Suslov's cycle of 'ethnographic concerts' is not only interesting as an element in

a larger program of cultural transformation and civil war, it is also a project that

suggests a radically different notion of ethnography than that which developed in the

later half of the twentieth-century. Rather than operating as a detached observer,

Suslov and other radical ethnographers used their specialist knowledge to engineer

cultural change. However given Suslov's training and interests, the 'ethnographic

concerts' reveal a unique sensibility that tied the production of the knowledge

through ethnographic research to the Marxist projects of cultural transformation.

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2   The Soviet archives contain many short kharakteristiki (personal biographies or character
references) which were part of the new bureaucratic culture of the revolutionary government.
One historian of Soviet social history, Ilya Zemtsov, writes that the kharakteristika was an official
document "that desribes the personality and activity of Soviet individuals and evaluates their standing
in the eyes of the authorities. . . . Character references report the extent to which a given person
conforms or does not conform to the prescribed modes of behavior in the USSR, that is, whether he
or she is or is not politically 'reliable.'" (Zemtsov 1991: 41-42). As attestations of an individual's class
purity, these kharakteristiki populate the archives as coded biographies, weighted by the threats and
promises of solicitous and anxious bureaucracies. See also Fitzpatrick 1993.

3   The use of term ethnographic here should be read as synonymous with 'ethnic' or 'non-
Russian.'

In addition to his cultural-enlightenment work, in 1920 Suslov became a member of *Sibnats,* the Siberian division of the Peoples' Commissariat for the Affairs of the Nationalities (*Narkomnats*). Narkomnats was an organization operated primarily by trained ethnographers or those sympathetic to an ethnographically informed approach to revolution and culture change. According to the historian Francine Hirsch, the official role of Narkomnats was to "win non-Russians over to the side of the revolution" (Hirsch 2005: 65). In his role with Sibnats, Suslov participated in the initiative to organize the first All-Siberian meeting of natives, which took place in Omsk on March 20, 1921. This meeting brought together the first wave of Indigenous representatives and cultural elite under the direction of communist administrators and activists.

Since the first days following the October revolution the Communist Party concerned itself with building and consolidating power throughout the vast Russian Empire. The transitional government of the nascent Soviet state faced the challenge of convincing diverse national populations and ethnic groups (many of which had no sense of ethnic nationalism) that they were not only a legitimate force, but an inevitable one. To organized and politically savvy nations and ethnic groups, they offered—at least nominally—national autonomy, so long as it was apprehended within the parameters outlined by Bolshevik communism. An element of this project was called *sovietization,* which was a general paradigm for cultural overhaul. In soviet phraseology it signified a shift in 'mentality' (in addition to the necessary shift

in practice).

The project of sovietization in Siberia involved thousands of villages and settlements throughout the North. While the communist party had inherited Siberia when it overthrew the Tsarist governmental structures there were many smaller countries and national groups that represented potentially unstable borders. The discourse on nationalism and nationality policies was directed towards the burgeoning Soviet republics. Within the Russian Federation itself the various ethnic groups (nations, peoples) were seen differently. It is critical to understand that the Siberian North (and Siberia in general) was seen as in integral part of Russia whereas Central Asian states were less certain partners in socialism. Discourses on colonialism and imperialism tended to concern larger ethnic groups like the Buriat, Tuvan, Chechens, etc. The Indigenous minorities of Northern Siberia were generally excluded from the discourse of nationalism because they were understood to be outside of history (Slezkine 1994) or, anachronistically, prior-to history. As sparsely numbered peoples (malochisleniy) they received extra attention through state subsidy, special consideration, and affirmative action.

Soviet historiography tended to view Siberian history as an array of

fragmentary details needing to be arranged according to the Marxist-Leninist narrative of historical materialism: "history progresses through the development of the productive forces" (Marcuse 1958). Soviet historical materialism was economically deterministic; Soviet historians for most of the Soviet era were governed by rigid ideological orthodoxies. Since the end of the Soviet era, if not earlier, historians in both Russia and the West have focused their attention more on a reflexive historiography that considered the past in Siberia as more than decorative superstructure to larger economic struggles. Such a reflexive historiography has considered, among other things, the social construction of Siberia and Siberians within discursive frameworks. This work has seen Siberian history as an indeterminate field of diverse cultural activity. History in the later sense was divorced from the Marxist-Leninist mythology of progress that had given form to Soviet historical materialism. Yuri Slezkine, for example, presents the history of Europe and Siberia as a series of transformations in the way that Indigenous peoples were represented by the invading, colonial, and dominant powers based in European Russia (1994). This series of transformations is characterized as beginning with a perception of Indigenous peoples of Siberia and their relationship to the state essentially categorizing them as other (other than Russian, other than citizen, and usually other than Christian) and ultimately subaltern to the Russian cultural majority. In this sense, a generalizable cultural imperialism intensified over the centuries of 'contact,' the height of which was a long period of forced assimilation and overt

culture change that began with the

communist revolution.[4]

ГОДОВОЙ ЦИКЛ
ПОЛЯРНОЙ НОЧИ, ДНЯ
и СЕВЕРНОГО СИЯНИЯ.

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4   Slezkine's 1994 book Arctic Mirrors was published at a time when scholarly research in English on the history of Siberia was particularly slim. An emerging cadre of historians and anthropologists were descending on Siberia) notably David Anderson, Bruce Grant, Marjorie Balzer, Gail Fondahl, ; earlier scholars include Dennis and Alice Bartels, Caroline Humphrey, Ethel Dunn). For those studying indigenous peoples and the history of colonization in Siberia, it was a crucial and welcome history of the colonial experience.

Revolution in the Turukhansk North

The narrative of struggle and revolution, followed by years of dedicated agitation, education/enlightenment and cultural and economic re-construction has both general characteristics and particular instances. Immediately following the 1917 revolution, power in the Turukhansk North was seized, thanks in part to the concentration of exiles and prisoners stationed there. It wasn't until the summer of 1918 however that Krasnoiarsk, which far to the south, was won by the communists. The amalgamated effects of the "Imperialist War" (1914-1918), the 1917 October Revolution, and the Civil War that followed resulted in shortages of food and supplies throughout the North.

> During the Imperialist War [aka WWI] and the rule of Kolchak, the economy in the north was completely ruined. Coercion and extortion were practiced on an unprecedented level. The yasak was doubled. All principal branches of the economy—reindeer breeding, trapping, and fishing—were spoiled.

> Uvachan 1975: 69.

The vulnerability of the Indigenous peoples of the central Siberian territories during the period of the October Revolution and the Civil War was due in part to the importance of trade goods and the failure of these to circulate into the more remote regions of central Siberia (Karlov 1985: 112).[5] Between the time of the October revolution in 1917 and the construction of the first cultural base in 1927, the socialist interventions in the taiga were limited. They succeeded primarily in delivering emergency assistance and failed primarily in institutional development. The actions were aimed at aid and ending the crises of sickness and starvation. The vulnerability of the 'natives' to sickness and starvation was taken to be a fundamental

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5   Tugolukov also notes disease and sicknesses that killed many Evenki households in the 1910s and 1920s. (1980: 148-149).

condition of their backwardness rather than an effect of Russian Imperialism or the communist revolution.

> during the prolonged period of the imperialist and civil wars the situation of the population of Siberia deteriorated catastrophically. The curtailment of trade communications with the southern regions, the sharp drop in production and reindeer-herding . . . completely ravaged the inhabitants. More than 60% of the hunters were left in 1924 without firearms . . .
>
> Sergeyev 1964: 490.

The immediate need for aid and assistance bolstered the moral authority of the Communists. What was a situational series of hardships and tragedies linked to epidemics, epizootics, exploitation, etc. came to be seen as an endemic vulnerability.

The cure and prescription, of course, was Soviet modernity: state sponsored cultural shaping and grooming. The limited response (or the lag in development) was a function, in part, of organizational challenges, the cost of sending expeditions to the remote tundra, and more pressing crises in other parts of the former Russian Empire.

Immediately after the seizure of power in 1917, socialists in Siberia began to organize workers, soldiers and peasants (Naumov 2006: 157). The primary unit of organization was the *soviet*.[6] Bolshevik revolutionaries organized the Central Siberian Bureau in Krasnoiarsk, sanctioned by the Bolshevik party in Petrograd. Naumov writes that in October 1917 there "was a total of around 10,000 Bolsheviks (out of 350,000 party members) in Siberia" (Naumov 2006: 159). The Siberian Bolsheviks helped establish networks of workers, co-operatives, and soviets and generally worked to ensure the stability of communist rule while the Red Army fought against

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6   Soviet translates literally as a 'council.' The organization of local representation through soviets is a legacy of the 'grassroots' history of communism in Russia. In the post-revolution era, soviets became the organizing principal for representation and participation in society.

residual forces supporting the Tsar or simply opposing the Communists bid for hegemony.

While struggle for power continued into 1922 and later, Soviet power in the Yenisei North was consolidated in 1920, when the revolutionary committee sent a telegram to Lenin stating the success of the Turukhansk territorial congress. "Generally speaking, the Bolsheviks seized power in a peaceful way" (Naumov 2006: 160). In 1918 early plans to sovietize Siberia were drafted and approved by local revolutionary committees. This initial sense of sovietization was principally concerned with the election of soviets across Siberia in a bid to establish stability and a face of government rule. Later sovietization would take on a more comprehensive tone that implied overt culture shaping and radical cultural transformation. The establishment of soviets was only the most preliminary move. Ultimately sovietization meant the implementation of soviet culture; not only was every nation represented through the hierarchies of soviets but every nation conformed to the general and increasingly specific forms of soviet culture.

If the first wave of sovietization was geared towards the generation of stability and the articulation of Soviet power, cultural change was an implicit component of second wave sovietization. It is also something that for many years was largely overlooked. Stephen P. Dunn and Ethel Dunn noted a kind of blind spot for the period of the 1920s and 30s in Siberia:

> Since this was the period when culture change was proceeding most

rapidly and sometimes violently, concrete data on the techniques of culture change are also lacking or are present only in schematic form. The investigation of the history of directed culture change which must be carried out largely from non-ethnographic sources and probably on the spot-is an item for the future agenda.

Dunn and Dunn 1962: 328.

In the Siberian taiga sovietization began with the reconstruction of regional politics. Turukhansk, Eniseisk, Krasnoiarsk and other centers of Russian power had been turned over relatively quickly to rule by Revolutionary Committees and representatives of Soviet power. In the taiga Russian power was already diffuse and the communists had to contend with imbrications of Indigenous forms of goveranance which were more or less synchronized with orders formed under Tsarist rule. The first step was to break the rule of the 'princelings' and implement a new structure of governance and representation. The so-called 'princelings' were a local level of hierarchy that had developed under the tributary system of imperial Russia. They were to be replaced by representative governance in the form of clan Soviets (*rodovoi sovety*) (Iurtaeva 1966: 21) and they were the most basic form of representation. Each clan soviet sent representatives to the local Native Executive Committee (*TuzRIK*): It was the job of the clan soviets to explain and clarify decrees and instructions (orders) of the government, undertake measures to improve

economic and cultural level of the clan, concern with healthcare, supervise the obeyance of the rules of exchange, assist in the different forms of cooperatives and native sections of the economy, observe the health condition of reindeer herds etc. (Iurtaeva 1966: 21-22).

In a rather mundane ledger of tsarist-era capitalism, it is reported that in 1922 the kulak Iakunia Gaiul'skii sold one pound of gunpowder for fourty squirrel hides and one pound of tobacco for twenty squirrel hides. Uvachan chides that "just like before the revolution, poor Evenkis were doubly oppressed" (my translation, Uvachan in aaeao f.98-1-37: 5). As I have noted elsewhere, the representation of the pre-Soviet era as a time of unbridled oppression was an important historical trope for Soviet historians. Such details worked metonymically to represent an entire era and to retroactively justify the project of socialist emancipation. Uvachan's note of the persistence of capitalist exploitation into the revolutionary and civil war era serves to illustrate the challenge of sovietizing remote areas of the Siberian North. Furthermore, this point works to dramatize a narrative of monumental achievement whereby the heroic efforts and sacrifices of the Bolshevik activists to bring the light of socialist modernity into the darkest and most primitive corners of Siberia are tried not only by backwardness and remoteness but also by the agency of oppressive and greedy merchants.

With a wide-spread and remarkably well-established network of support, Soviet planners were able to call on representatives from even the most obscure parts of the former Russian Empire. Not only was the aim to root-out dissent and capitalist exploiters but also to inject sorely-needed cash into the struggling Soviet economy. Party leaders left no doubt in the minds of Siberian communists that the North mattered, at least in rhetoric. It represented both untold wealth and unpoliced borders. The leader of the

Bolshevik party, V.I. Lenin is often cited
by Soviet historians for acknowledging or
remarking upon the vast potential wealth
that could be derived from Siberia. Where
many in Europe apparently thought
of Siberia as a barren wasteland, some,
including Lenin, saw otherwise. In a 1918
paper titled "The immediate tasks of the
Soviet Government" Lenin writes that the
development of Russia's natural resources
"by methods of modern technology will
provide the basis for the unprecedented
progress of the productive forces" (1972:
238).

The industrial development of
Russian natural wealth is an important
founding narrative of the Soviet North
and communist Siberia. In the South, along the Trans-Siberian rail line the dual
aim was to extricate anti-communist elements and to secure the transport network
along the world's longest border, whereas in the North, communists had the luxury
of a singular (if singularly challenging) goal of 'organizing' the natives [*tuzemtsev*].
The implication of organization was work with Indigenous individuals and groups
sympathetic to the revolution in order to establish local cadres of communists. This
was a kind of internal colonialism. Based on the model of Soviet colonization
[*kolonizatsiia*], natives would become the most valuable and effective colonizers,

or partners in their own colonization (Hirsch 2005: 87). The perversity of this

mentality could only be a result of socialist messianism that had a blind spot for its

rhetorical contradictions. On the one hand the communists vociferously denounced

the imperialist colonialism of western Europe, on the other they re-deployed colonial

techniques to their own ends, ignoring the obvious fact that colonialism and national

autonomy were conceptually antithetical. Francine Hirsch outlines the philosophical

gymnastics necessary to effect this:

> '*Kolonizatsiia* as we understand it now within the borders of the USSR'
> is not the 'robbery of parts of the Union, of former colonies, by the
> RSFSR, the former metropole'; nor is it the 'movement of Great Russian
> peasants to the Siberian or other 'expanses' to satisfy their land hunger.
> Soviet *kolonizatsiia* they explained, 'flows from the needs' of colonized
> regions.

<div align="right">Hirsch 2005: 90</div>

As a term *kolonizatsiia* did not last very long. Perhaps it was too honest a display of

the true relations of power or it did not reflect the anticipation of 'true' national

autonomies under socialism. As a non-official description of Indigenous-state

relations, however, *kolonizatsiia* effectively describes the situation in Siberia through

to the present day. As Aleksandr Pika wrote in his introduction to the edited volume

Neotraditionalism in the Russian North, "in certain respects, the former policy of 'state

paternalism' continues, with funds being distributed randomly and meagerly. Central state organs have been exercising limited administrative (rather than juridical) control over the situation in the north, both in order to reign in particularly odious forms of exploitation of small peoples and to ameliorate what they can" (Pika 1994: xxii).

At the time of the revolution and during the civil war Indigenous minority groups, for the most part, did not present a threat to the new regime. Other non-Russian nationalities were another matter: Tuvans, Buriat, and Yakut, for instance were seen as numerous enough, with enough of a consolidation of people and a nationalist consciousness that they could pose a threat if they were not rapidly incorporated into the project through enticement and coercion. Those ethnic groups in Central Asia and along the European border of Russia constituted yet another layer of threat. The Indigenous minorities were generally seen as primitive and insignificant in their capacity to actively disrupt anything more than local-level organization. While for many Russians the Indigenous peoples were unforgivably (or embarrassingly) backwards, others tied to them a mythology of purity and authenticity. Indeed, in the anachronistic primevalness, they were considered by Soviet ethnographers to be primitive-communists. The idea of primitive communism was supported by Lev Shternberg and Vladimir Bogoraz's school of evolutionist anthropology and it was legitimized by Marx and Engles' interest in the work of the American anthropologist L.H. Morgan (Grant 1995). Indeed Engles' had commented positively on the work Shternberg had done with the Nivkhi on Sakhalin Island in the Russian Far East. In the later regard, they were held in high esteem. The two images of Indigenous peoples represented a spectrum of thoughts and approaches in the established government. Varieties of impressions formed a dominant paradigm in Soviet thought that was not unlike the *noble savage* of Western Europe. Yuri Slezkine writes at length about this in *Arctic Mirrors*:

> in the Bolshevik scheme of things, the other side of outright savagery
> was primitive communism, which meant that the outright savages could
> be expected to become excellent students of scientific communism
> and eventually 'the propagandists of the ideas of sovietization and
> communism.

Slezkine 1994: 147.

Debates in Moscow and Petrograd (St. Petersburg/Leningrad) consumed the attention of ethnographers and others concerned with the revolution in the North. It was one thing to say that the 'natives' were primitive communists, it was another thing to have actually spent time living with them:

> The Soviet Union was outwardly born as a post-imperial form of power, a civic multinational state that aimed to modernize the societies it ruled and to transcend national divisions in the name of class solidarity. Soviet rulers vociferously rejected the application of the term empire to their state, and indeed, as Terry Martin has noted, specifically designed Soviet ethnofederalism as a way of avoiding such analogies. . . . Yet, as we know, the Soviet state ultimately died widely construed as an empire and is routinely referred to as such today. As Ron Suny has written, the Soviet Union did not begin as an empire; rather, it became one.

Beissinger 2008: 1.

Early organization in Turukhansk

Once the Turukhansk Revolutionary Committee [*Revkom*] was formed, it set about the task of figuring out how to control its new territory. Inspectors[7] were sent to travel the territory and report back to the Revkom. After 1920 the provisional government represented by the Revkom was replaced with a Regional Executive Committee [*Raiispolkom*]. According to one report from the late 1930s, titled "Description of the Ilimpii region of the Evenki National district of Krasnoiarsk Territory," there were eight Clan Soviets formed in the Ilimpii taiga in 1924 which were part of a much larger territorial unit subordinate to the Turukhansk Raiispolkom[8].

> Work among the natives in the Yenisei North was aided with four inspectors. Their job was to organize clan soviets and lead meetings of these soviets, collect observations on the economic conditions of the Native economy. The kraiispolkom hired inspectors based on their preparedness, familiarity with ethnography, the material and spiritual culture of northern peoples, as well as state laws of the RSFSR.
>
> Iurtaeva 1966: 22.

The work of the inspectors was challenging because many of their subjects were nomadic hunters and herders who were perennially travelling through their clan territories and who were rarely easy to locate. Administrative centers like Turukhansk were responsible for enormous territories sparsely populated with highly mobile hunters and herders. Recommendations in 1919 included the

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7   The inspectors were officials who exercised the "supervision and control of the correctness of action subordinate bodies and persons (financial Inspectors, school inspectors, sanitary inspectors)" (my trans. Bolsh. Sov. Entsiklopedia).

8   "Kharakteristika: Ilimpiiskogo raiona Evenkiiskogo Natsional'nogo okruga Krasnoiarskogo Kraia" Signed by the head of the Executive Committee of the Raisovet: Kombagir. (AAEAO 1-1-242:10)

construction of a 'Tunguskaia Lavka' a (Tungus Store) in the Ilmipii Tundra; a call

to create auxillary trading posts in a number of places around the Turukhansk krai

as well as to help with medical and veterinary aid. These measures would help to

solidify support for the Union and aid in fighting agitation against the Union. One

report notes that "if these measures are not followed the natives will quickly die

off and this government will lose untold wealth . . . the Union should send out an

expedition to investigate the life of the natives in every respect.[9]

In the earliest years following the revolution there were some efforts made

to support impoverished and starving northerners. One Soviet historian, P.N.

Ivanov, notes the distribution of tonnes of grain or bread to starving natives in

the early 1920s (1966: 6). He goes on to state that thanks to the generosity of the

Party, starvation was liquidated in the north by 1923. Supplying remote settlements

throughout Siberia was huge task that was entirely reliant on the pre-established

riverine networks. These efforts required a very rapid seizure and control of the

transportation networks. A regularization of aid began to be established in 1925

with the construction of 'khlebopasny' stores (emergency grain-supply stores). In

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9   26 april, 1919. signed V. Trofimenko from Podkamennaia Tunguska: kkkm 7886/193.

1925-26 there was a major Red Cross mission to the Ilimpii Tundra (and more generally to the Yenisei North). Curiously it was criticized by one Soviet agent for failing to recognize the 'degeneration' of the natives. I.M. Suslov saw the situation as a critical failure of the soviet communism that nearly a decade after the October Revolution, natives in the Russian Federation were still intermarrying, practicing shamanism, suffering from sickness and hunger, and generally living outside the pale of Soviet modernity (GAKK 1845-1-143: 126).

This suggests a concern not only with the control of Indigenous social organization but also with the subjugation of Indigenous bodies. Suslov's statement is reminiscent of early twentieth-century eugenicists and it implies a biopolitics of reproduction that had some currency with Soviet ethnographers.[10] The historian Christina Kiaer has done some work on socialist eugenics. In her essay "Delivered from Capitalism" she notes that Anatolii Lunacharski (the Bolshevik revolutionary and first Commissar of Enlightenment, *Narkompros*)

> wrote a film script celebrating the Lamarckian idea that eugenics could make people into 'captains of the future' rather than 'slaves of the past.' In this example of a totalizing Bolshevik vision, the transition to the socialist future would be accomplished by the destruction of all the unacceptable elements of humanity had inherited from the capitalist past.

Kiaer 2006: 189.

The gathering of information about the natives was identified as an essential step in the implementation of communism. The goal of socialist construction in Siberia began with reconnaissance: a rapid study and evaluation of the territory. The Ilimpei area—the lands between the Yenisei and the Oleneok, north of the Nizhnaia Tunguska river—was recognized as one of the least known regions in Siberia. In

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10   Christina Kiaer (2006) has written on eugenics in Soviet Russia, which "becomes a means to produce a specifically socialist Soviet subject" (2006: 184).

the first years following the revolution the inspector Elizar Sergeevich Savel'ev was appointed to report on the "Ilimpii Tundra", the land east of the Yenisei river (AAEAO 27-20-2).[11] V.N. Uvachan writes that Savel'ev traveled from Turukhansk to the Ilimpii tundra in October 1923, returning to Turukhansk in March of 1924, living 168 days in the Tundra and covering

an area of 3.5 thousand kilometers. At this time he organized four Clan Soviets in the Ilimpii territory: Chirinda, Chapogir (Miroshkol), and Pankagir (Liutokil) (Uvachan 1984: 83). Inspectors continued to travel to these remote territories and file reports to feed a growing bureaucratic structure of governance; plans were drafted for the supply of grain rationing stores, the employment of touring physicians and veterinarians, as well as the on-going organization of natives into clan soviets.

The Evenki response to the new political situation is difficult to gauge because the only published records of their 'voices' are through the reports of Nomadic Soviets or officially sanctioned denunciations and accusations. Reading the historical documents against the grain is crucial in this project. On the one hand the communists were implementing new programs of aid and leveled promises of an enfranchisement that must have sounded appealing (if implausible). The Imperial system of 'princelings' implemented under Tsarist rule—which was the state of affairs for many generations— was initially adapted to the new organizational

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11   The inspector along the Podkamennaia Tunguska was I.D. Potapov. F.E. Golovachev worked as inspector of the Taz Tundra. (Uvachan 1984: 84).

systems imposed by the Soviets. Wealthy and respected reindeer herders simply became the representatives on the regional executive committees. But it is doubtful that they became the target of anti-exploiter (anti-kulak) campaigns until the 1930s. The intial focus seemed to be on 'Tungusniki' and other foreign traders and exploiters who made a career out of poor dealings with the local Evenkis.

The communist revolution seems to have affected the Yenisei North mostly in aftershock. In my readings there are no accounts of violent upheaval or overthrow in the taiga. It is however reported that throughout the Turukhansk North an epizootic of Siberian sores (*sibirskaia iazva*) killed many reindeer. Uvachan notes this as having occurred between 1921 and 1923 (1971: 157). The main reports come from the inspector Sav'evlev and is also corroborated in Yuri Slezkine's book, where it is noted that widespread suffering in the North occurred due to a shortage of essential food and supplies (such as flower, salt, sugar, rifle shot, etc.).

The goal of socialist development was to create a sympathetic and self-governing nation that would clearly submit to and participate in the communist project. There was no generalizable block of resistance to this effort and some Evenki peoples were quick to comply to (and benefit from) plans for a new life under Soviet rule. In the Yenisei North, at least, there was no invasion by military force, and for the most part there was no overt or large scale violence leveled against the Evenkis by the state. The hegemony of Soviet rule replaced the hegemonic power of Tsarist/Orthodox rule. It has been noted elsewhere that "ordinary people ... did

not simply experience Soviet rule but to varying degrees implemented it, sometimes against their wishes, sometimes in their acts of soldiering and revenge" (Kotkin 2002: 45). This is a point echoed and articulated throughout the literature (cf. Grant 1995; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).

In the first years following the revolution Evenki participation in the new socialist articulations of power became inevitable and it wasn't long before impoverished Evenkis were coaxed by Bolsheviks into transforming their poverty into class-based victimhood. Where local struggles came to be articulated in terms of new Soviet laws, the application of class differentiation was crucial but knowledge of the structure of class differentiations was largely unexpressed and only quasi-established until the polar census of 1926-1927. In *The Social life of the state in Subarctic Siberia*, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov notes how the state 'incorporated a Marxist reading of inequalities both into their vision of the larger Siberian political economy and that of small-scale networks and communities." (2003: 55). He cites a 1921 report from the head of the Krasnoiarsk museum, Tugarinov, reporting that the Tungus living along the Podkamennaia river "are shy and distrustful, and they hide, among other things, the fact that they have preserved the institution of the clan princes, because they are afraid they could be punished for maintaining it"

(Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 55). Clearly some Evenkis were avoiding the Bolsheviks. Others however were co-opted, at least to some degree, into the Soviet project. The class purity of what were perceived to be impoverished Evenkis would give them access to power within the new soviet

structures of rule. But Marxist-derived social classes could not be easily applied, especially where social relations were built on alien notions of reciprocity and kinship.

As socialist ideologies began to take root among some Evenkis who were co-opted into the project of socialist *kolonizatsia* it became easier to instigate antagonisms. Whether these were true class antagonisms or local disputes re-articulated in communist idioms is challenging to say. Testimonies against exploitation by shamans, for example, may be read either as coaxed by communist agitators, local disputes transcoded into Soviet power structures, or genuine statements by communist converts, or a mix of all of the above. One such testimonial, dated 1935, recounts the tragic story of a child fallen ill in a small community named Vivi. The accuser charges that his wife and the force of custom pushed him to submit his ill son to the shaman for healing. The shaman, according to this man was a fraud. He tried to heal the child and failed, leading to the death of the child (AAEAO 1-1-22). Had Russian medicine been available, presumably the child would not have died. This story become apocryphal as a testimony to the development of class-consciousness and, ultimately, class-antagonism.

When considering early Soviet political organization it is vital to understand that it was a volatile era where organizations and affiliations changed rapidly. Hirsch's account of the competition of vision between Gosplan and Narkomnats prior to 1924. The role of the Communist Party vis-a-vis the Soviet State Apparatus

was in continual flux.[12] While the cultural base was being constructed (as a project of the local Krasnoiarsk division of the Committee of the North) there were also party representatives as well as local initiatives to create co-operatives. In other words, while it is useful to talk about the Communist Party, the actual organizations and representatives were often working at odds with one another.

When the Soviets first began to work in the Turukhansk North they were faced with "with more or less reactionary survivals (*perezhitkami*) of the partriarchal-clan structure, for instance (Kalym, patriarchal slavery, etc.) as well as kulaks, former princelings, and shamans. Greater and more sustained interventions were called for that would allow for the "liberation of the clan soviets from the impact of kulak shamans and general improvement of Soviet work in places." The tool for implementing class war was the culturebase it would not only allow for a steady demonstrational environment for Soviet modernity but it presented a sustained intervention that would allow for the efficacious isolation of exploitational elements. (AAEAO 1-242: 10).

Part of the altruistic justification for sovietization was the emancipation of the 'natives' firstly from Tsarist survivals (corrupt and self-serving officials, priests, and traders) and secondly from themselves (shamans and wealthy reindeer herders). Of course, for most communists there was no need for justification of the project and its inevitability was self-evident; in this logic the instructors, agitators, and functionaries [*chinovniki*], were merely handmaidens in the natural will of social evolution. The battle took place on several fronts, one was the education of the native masses and the other was the eradication of the exploiter classes.

....
12   In archival research this is doubly important because the formal organization of the archives is represented by this fundamental split. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union the division reflected by the autonomy of Party Archives and State Archives.

The exploiters of the 'Tungus' natives actually had their own name: 'tungusniki' and there is frequent use of this term in the archival literature. A photograph produced during the 1926/27 Polar Census, by N.V. Sushilin actually labels the subject of the photograph "Tungusnik-Angarets M.I. Sizykh with his family."[13] As such it can be seen as a professional categorization, albeit one that was profane and would subject its recipient to state repression. For the most part it is used to describe non-tungus exploiters or in a less critical vein, simply those who traded with Tungus. One good reference describes a Russian hunter as a former Tungusnik (GAKK 1845-1-66: 44). Documents like

this recall a time when identity was irrefutably tied to power. Success in early Soviet Russia was heavily bound up in the politics of identity and class purity. Thus a former 'Tungusnik,' if not outright persecuted, could expect little advancement or possibility of aid within the regime. They were considered Kulaks and were roughly analogous to the infamous NEPmen[14]. One census enumerator offers an account of a Tungusnik who operated on the Lower Tunguska river in the 1920s. When

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13   This photograph is part of the Polar Census photo album: KKKM 7930-1/10-03.

14   NEPmen (*nepmenshi*) was a derogatory term used to describe people who benefited from Lenin's New Economic Policy era.

the Evenkis came to trade, he would invite them to drink for several days before beginning the transaction.

> Here is how the Tungusnik merchant counted: Right before the eyes of the Tungus, he shows the fox-pelts and and says: "One, two, three, three, two, three, four, five, one, two, three, four, four. In all that amounts to five pelts"

<div align="right">AAEAO 24-1-6.</div>

This kind of account (of which there are many) became an important narrative in the socialist liberation of the 'toilers of the north.' In 1920 the Siberian Revolutionary Committee annulled all debts for hunters, trappers, and fishers. Further measures against the exploitation of natives and against exploitational elements were taken: On the 5th of May, 1923, the Yenisei Gubispolkom enacted a compulsory decree on the measures to protect northern natives of the Yenisei-area against market exploitation by private traders (Ivanov 1966: 7).

The master narratives of progress and modernity central to the Soviet world-view were tantalizingly relevant in the Yenisei North. "The peoples of the North had no time to pass through the stage of industrial capitalism; the Great October Revolution saved them from it" (Uvachan 1975 :37). Cultural and economic development of the North was becoming a priority and the historical determinism which framed northern development was formulated and codified "in a theoretical package known as the non-capitalist path of development (*nekapitalisticheskii put' razvitiia*)"(Anderson 1991: 18). Anderson outlines this in greater detail and shows the genealogies of the ideas that underwrote soviet developmentalism. Crucial to this ideology and as noted above was the special evolutionary position occupied by the Indigenous Siberians.

Surveying the North

The first steps to bringing socialism to remote areas in the North was the establishment of co-operatives and simple production units (PPOs), as well as a variety of Soviet-types: native soviets, clan soviets, village soviets, and nomadic soviets. Iurtaeva notes that one of the first priorities for the new revolutionary committees (*revkom*) was ensuring regular provisions to remote northern settlements (1966: 17). Co-operatives performed this important task and quickly became entrenched as important social and economic organizations in the Siberian North. The challenges faced by the Bolshevik government when it considered revolution in the Arctic were formidable. As I have noted elsewhere the North presented such a vaster territory that military victories were not necessarily co-terminus with actual control of territory. Without established networks of transportation the Bolsheviks were unable to replicate techniques of agitation they used in other parts of the Russian Federation.

> Moscow left the administration of Siberia to local soviets, Party cells, and executive committees, but these units were most often tiny and primitive. As a result, actual responsibility for the region fell to the Siberian Revolutionary Committee (Sibrevkom); the Siberian Bureau of the Party Central Committee; and the regional executive committee of the Urals, based in Sverdlovsk (currently Yekaterinburg).
>
> McCannon 1998: 21-22.

The actual work of what McCannon calls 'primitive' cells, soviets, and committees began with an accounting of northern lands, peoples, and state assets. Inspectors were sent out to surveil deep into more or less uncharted territories. In February of 1921 N.E. Arkad'in (an Evenki man appointed to head the Turukhansk department of Native affairs) made an expedition to the Ilimpii tundra. In his report, he noted
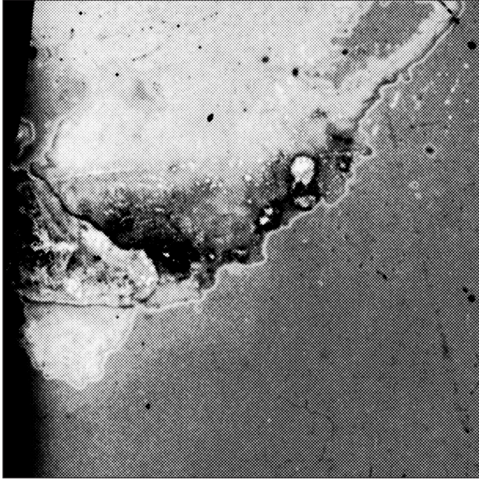
the difficult economic situation of the Indigenous population. At a meeting of the Regional Executive Committee it was decided to send rapid aid of food and equipment, entrusting Arkad'in to prepare a reindeer caravan to deliver products to the 'starving natives.' According to Iurtaeva, this action marked the first concrete steps of the organs of Soviet power to bring planned and regular interventions to the people of the Yenisei North (Iurtaeva 1966: 19). The Yenisei Gubernatorial Executive Committee established a project of inquiry titled "The situation of nomadic soviets of the Turukhansk Krai." This project assigned northern inspectors and undertook the first steps towards the organization of regional organs to represent nomadic natives. (Sergeev: 219).

After 1922 the Turukhansk Krai was divided into four enormous inspectorates. E.S. Savel'ev was appointed inspector of the Ilimpii Tundra and maintained the role of 'instructor' for the Turukhansk revolutionary executive committee until 1926 (GAKK 1845-1-63: 5).[15] In 1922 the Turukhansk Kraiispolokim also established a department of native affairs, the head of which was the Evenk, Nikolai Egorovich Arkad'in. (Iurtaeva 1966: 19). Beyond this appointment Arkad'in's role in the history of sovietization is unclear. The inspector Savel'ev, on the other hand produced several important reports on conditions in the tundra regions east of the Yenisei river. Soviet ethnographer V.A. Tugolukov writes about Savel'ev's reports on the Ilimpii 'tundra:'

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15   I.D. Potapov was the inspector for the Podkaemmaia Tunguska (AAEAO_27-20).

128

Ice fishing on lake Murukte was done by representatives of the Turyzh clan. The inspector wrote that in their unenlightened darkness, they believed in all devils and shamans.

Savel'ev explained that in the hunger of 1921 Ilimpii Evenkis slaughtered over two thousand domestic reindeer for meat, the result of which was that many were left without reindeer. In 1923 this was the situation for 15% of the households.

In the region of Ekonda lake between 1919-23, 26 people –or five chums- died from starvation.

Savel'ev led a general meeting in Chirinda of the Ilimpii clans and succeeded in organizing a communal herd of 500 reindeer 'for the aid of impoverished Tungus.' A significant part of this herd (300 head) was driven to Ekonda lake and redistributed on loan to Evenkis.

Tugolukov 1980: 148-149.

While Tugolukov reports that five households from the Ekonda region perished in a famine of 1919-1923, the earlier Soviet historian V.N. Uvachan, ascribes hardships and suffering primarily to the pre-Soviet era. Presumably he was selectively recounting events in what amounts to a pangyric to Soviet Socialism. Uvachan's blind spot however was a fairly common type of ommission. He reports on one hunter's letter to the local Evenki-language newspaper, *Evenki New Life*: "Those were hard times [before the revolution] Evenks were dying out. One spring 30 families perished near Lake Ekonda. . ." (Uvachan 1975: 59). He may have just

as easily described the epidemics and hungers that followed the revolution. This selective historiography helps to develop a baseline for saluting the arrival of soviet modernity in the taiga. When Uvachan did acknowledge suffering in the Soviet era, it was seen as strictly a transitional phenomenon; a result of the incomplete

implementation of socialism or of active resistance from counter-cultural and counter-revolutionary elements. In other words, where hardship was manifest in the early soviet era, it could be explained as a byproduct of backwardness that both anticipated and justified industrial modernization and cultural sovietization. Either way, suffering was understood as an effect of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism as well as cultural backwardness. Where it persisted, if it was officially recognized at all, it was seen to be symptomatic of residual effects of imperialism, intentional sabotage, oversight, or a lack of prioritization in the unfinished project of Sovietization.

If the work of the instructors was a preliminary incursion of Soviet ideas and observation in central Siberian Taiga, the work of the agitators represented a second wave of activism. When soviet agents (instructors, agitators, educators, and inspectors) began to arrive in the Yenisei North they brought with them an established and growing set of conceptual tools meant to facilitate the transformation of taiga nomads. The techniques for agitating among the natives were publicized through educational bulletins, newsletters, and journals. Agitators and educators shared their experiences and approaches in cultural-enlightenment work

(Badcock 2006). Many of these techniques were borrowed from Orthodox Christian missionization. Indeed the parallels are striking. Slezkine notes the parallels in terms of hygiene and campaigns against dirt in the 1930s which "advocated the old missionary method...: convert women first, for it is women who are the homemakers, the housekeepers, and the educators" (Slezkine 1994: 156). Alexia Bloch's (2004) study of residential schools in Soviet Siberia is another example of this. The rhetoric of the early techniques of culture change were also less differentiated than the state planners would like:

> In the civil war years, some Bolsheviks had used an old-fashioned civilizing-mission rhetoric to justify Soviet economic policy. In a 1920 speech, Grigorii Zinoviev had declared that the Soviet regime takes 'these products which are necessary for us, not as former exploiters, but as older brothers bearing the torch of civilization.'

> Hirsch 2005: 88.

There was, in actuality —and to no surprise— a great deal of 'bleed' from one regime to the next, from overt techniques of missionization to language itself.

Agitators and instructors were part of the infrastructure of the Sovietization. While the 'instructors' mentioned above seem to be party agents contracted to help and monitor the various native soviets. It is not clear how or if they differed from 'agitators' of whom I have seen no records. My sense is that agitators had the job of instilling class consciousness in 'ignorant' peasants and workers. In the *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life,* Iliya Zemtsov writes that "the underlying task of the agitators is to extol communist principles and ideas, to glorify the Soviet way of life, to exhort people to
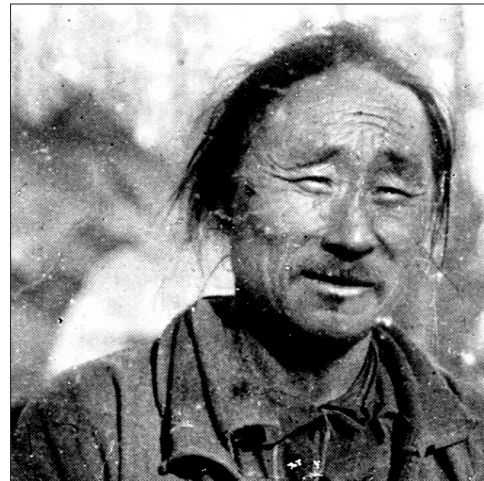
live up to the proclaimed standards of communist morality, and to propagate the view that the communist way of life is right beyond any doubt, as well as to discredit capitalist mores and values" (Zemtsov 1991: 12). Class consciousness followed the Bolshevik Party's interpretation of Marxist class formation which was adopted as the officially recognized system of social classification in the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick 2000: 15). Fitting Marxist economic classes to the Russian scene was not always easy. Fitting it to the scene in Siberia required even greater feats of creativity, obfuscation, and intentional ignorance. The Bolshevik focus on class war—essentially a war against exploitation and inequality— was brought to the taiga and articulated initially as a war against capitalists and exploiters. The success of the revolution was celebrated as the end of the Tsar's *iasak* system and the implementation of socialist aid projects. Their express aim was not primarily as the cultural upbringing of the natives, but as the deliverance of the natives from abject poverty and exploitation.

The radical re-visioning of social relations was articulated by Bolshevik revolutionaries as a commitment to liquidate tradition (in both Russian and non-Russian society) and replace it with a comprehensive communist modernity. The process for attaining this new civilization is described by Daniel Peris in terms of a wide-ranging Bolshevik agenda that concerned "not only political and economic

relations but also culture, education, women, family relations, and language. One of the most dramatic points on this agenda foresaw the metamorphosis of Holy Russia into an atheistic Soviet Russia." (Peris 1998: 1).

The idea of backwardness was
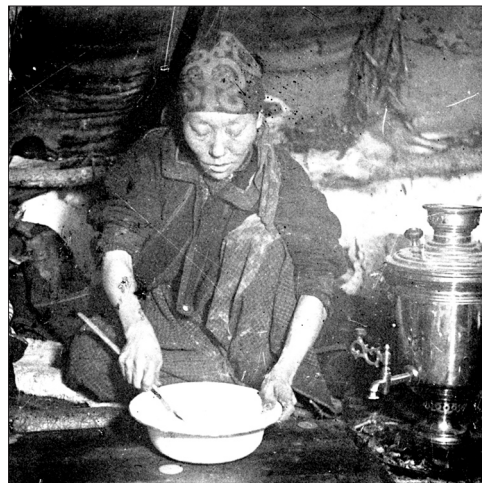
central in the efforts to construct the Soviet Union. To the most radical Bolsheviks backwardness was more than a small hurdle, it was an abhorrent state of being that threatened the Project and affronted the spirit of the revolution. Indeed backwardness was an offense that could be overcome only through a total program of modernization; an offensive against backwardness and vestiges of archaic cultural practices. Fitzpatrick writes that 'backwardness' "stood for everything that belonged to old Russia and needed to be changed in the name of progress and culture. Religion, a form of superstition, was backward. Peasant farming was backward. Small-scale private trade was backward, not to mention petty-bourgeois . . ." (Fitzpatrick 1999: 15). In the Siberian scene this was reformulated with backward religion being shamanism, backward social relations being the perceived patriarchy of Indigenous societies, and backward economic practices being reindeer herder and hunting, tradings posts, and merchants.

First wave of sovietization

> The Communist Party considered it necessary to involve the natives in the Soviet system, but as there were no industrial workers or proletariat, and no class consciousness or revolutionary feelings among them, a great deal of Marxist theorising and practical experimentation was required in order to decide upon the appropriate form for native Soviets by 'adapting them to pre-capitalist conditions'. This indeed became the principal theme of Soviet ethnographic studies of Siberia in the 1930s.
>
> Forsyth 1992: 245.

The first Evenki Clan Soviet was elected in 1926 (Uvachan 1975). Only a year earlier the Siberian region (Sibirskii krai) was created and the Siberian Revolutionary Committee (*Sibrevkom*) was replaced by the more permanent Siberian Regional Executive Committee (*Sibkraiispolkom*). (Shishkin 2000: 116). The dizzying array of organizational and institutional structures that were assembled and disassembled in the first decades of the Soviet era were no doubt bizarre to remotely located Indigenous peoples. Regional instructors, however, seemed to make the most of this by focusing on the development of local-level representation in the form of soviets, suggesting that the turmoil was temporary and that the intent was to work towards stability in the supply of goods and services as well as greater degrees of autonomy. The election of soviets was seen as the first step in re-structuring native social organization; though in many ways it essentially re-established pre-soviet representative organizations. After ousting of the *tungusniki*—the merchants and traders who capitalized on the exploitation of Indigenous peoples—the first order of business for the socialist newcomers was establishing a cadre of natives who could represent their brethren to the new political order. As I have noted elsewhere, this was articulated within the rhetoric of (r)evolutionary progress:

> Leninist Nationality Policies (politics) offered an opportunity for pre-capitalist peoples the opportunity to cross (progress) to Socialism without passing through the capitalist stage.
>
> Ivanov 1966: 5.

The 'opportunity' for these pre-capitalist peoples presented by the insipient state was sometimes called korenizatsiia (cf. Blitstein 1999).[16] *Korenizatsiia* (literally, nativization) was a policy of "making use of people native to an are in leading posts etc." (Smith 1962: 187). *Korenizatsiia* was also seen as a way of generating broader support for soviet communism in a multi-ethnic environment. As Lewis H. Siegelbaum describes it, "korenizatsiia represented a victory . . . for the national communists who had been urging the party to make itself and the new political order more comprehensible, accessible and therefore legitimate in the eyes of the non-Russian peoples" (1992: 125).

Social organization of the Evenkis of the Yenisei North at the time of the revolution in 1917 had been integrated into larger systems and networks for centuries. While the nomadic hunters and herders were familiar with some aspects of Russian culture and rule, they were very much on the outside of it. Their invitation to participate in the new order was truly revolutionary.

> All clan soviets of a given district were to send their representatives to the district native congress, which was to elect the District Native Executive Committee (*Tuzemnyi Raionnyi Ispolnitel'nyi Komitet*, abbreviated TUZRIK).
>
> Slezkine 1994: 159.

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16   While korenizatsiia is a term I have not seen in the archival literature, it certainly describes the process of constructing an indigenous intelligentsia which is a well documented phenomenon.

One report from 1926, "On the question
of the organization of native village or clan
and regional soviets" states that there were
three Clan Soviets operating on the right
bank of the Yenisei in the Ilimpii tundra
[GANO 354-1-86]. The three clan soviets
in this area were: Ilimpii, Pankagir, and
Chapogir. The Ilimpii clan soviet consisted
of 1460 souls (Dusha) and they traveled

nomadically [nomadized *Kochuiushchie*] in the N. Tunguska basin, from lake Chirinda,
Murukta, Ekonda, and others. The center for them according to the report was
either Chirinda or Tura.[17] The Pankagirs and Chapogirs each were comprised of
over two hundred individuals. The former gravitated toward lake Vivi, while the later
considered Tura their center.

According to Yuri Slezkine, Clan Soviets were the favoured model for native
self-government, but alternatives and variations existed (Slezkine 1994: 173). For
example, archival documents refer almost interchangeably to 'Nomadic Soviets' and
'Native Soviets.' Though there is some evidence that Nomadic Soviets replaced Clan
Soviets. For example by 1939, before major programs of village consolidation and
forced sedentarization, there were nine nomadic soviets in the Ilimpei region of the
Evenki National District (AAEAO 1-1-171).

Either way, they were typically subordinated to any local Russian Soviets
and were almost always under the direction of Russian 'instructors'. The native
and nomadic soviets were local-level elected organizations that were the lowest in a

....
17   GANO 354-1-86.

chain of soviets leading up to the Central All Union Soviet in Moscow. Governance of Indigenous peoples was also initially controlled through a number of special statutes and provisions. The most important of these was the provisional statute. Slezkine notes that this provisional statute was supposed to reintroduce some order to 'native administration' but that it was frustrated and blocked by indifference and antipathy to the project:

> Most local Russians opposed or ignore native self-government, and district executive committees refused to spend their limited resources on clan soviets.

<div align="right">Slezkine 1994: 173.</div>

While many local level communists may have seen little to be gained from intervening in the most remote areas of the taiga, there were others who saw the sovietization of the north as important if not essential. One organization, noting the work of the ethnographer Vladimir Bogoraz, noted that "native peoples who 'know the flora and fauna' and the precious metals and minerals of a region were 'best suited' to 'exploiting that region's natural riches.' [Furthermore, they] suggested that natives and outsiders work together to further the 'economic and cultural development ' of the Union's 'outlying territories.'" (Hirsch 2005: 91). Imagining what was essentially an extension of Tsarist imperialism and colonialism as a partnership was a critical, latent, and effectively residual ideological artifact that underwrote most of the projects undertaken in the name of sovietization.

Nationality policies

There are general characteristics of sovietization and state building that were common in the development of socialism both in Russia and other Soviet republics. These characteristics were the foundation of the Bolshevik project which might simply be called Soviet modernity. They are marked by shared experiences and variable degrees of participation and co-optation. Such shared characteristics are the technics of rule where state planners created and fostered socialist-consciousness based on ethnic nationalism. Yuri Slezkine writes that

> the founders of the Soviet state believed that the way to unity lay through
> diversity and that by promoting ethnic particularism (within certain limits
> and to much acclaim from the presumed beneficiaries), they were bringing
> about socialist internationalism and Soviet modernity.

> Slezkine 2000: 232.

In response to the variegated character of the Russian empire Bolsheviks fostered the development of nationality policies that were an important part of revolutionary agitation even prior to 1917. That focus, however, was primarily directed towards the large ethnic groups, many of whom had a strong sense of modern ethnic nationalism (from Ukrainians in Europe to Kirghiz in Siberia). This would have important ramifications for the smaller and less nationally conscious ethnic groups, like the Indigenous minorities in northern Siberia. The development of nationality policies concerning the Northern Minority Peoples under Soviet rule has been a major focus of anthropological and historical study by Western scholars.

> For ideological reasons many Marxists were vehemently opposed to
> the very idea of acknowledging ethnic identities through a federal state
> structure. ... This ideological principle existed at different strengths
> throughout the Soviet era. Simultaneously, Marxist theory saw the
> emergence of nations as a logical stage in the evolution of the dialectical
> historical materialism and could hence be fitted into a Marxist framework.

As such, Orthodox Marxists considered it a part of the necessary
development of pre-capitalist societies en route to Socialism.

<div style="text-align: right">Cornell 2001: 39.</div>

Even before the revolutionary uprisings of 1917 the Russian Communist Party had developed a powerful set of ideas around national autonomies and centralized authority. The organ established to work out the details of this was the Peoples Commissariat of Nationalities (*Narkomnats*). Narkomnats worked under the assumption that Communism would not be achieved overnight and that interim measures would be needed to achieve their goals. Pragmatically this allowed for the development of a theory of federation, where roughly autonomous nations joined together in a union of nations (what would become the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).

There was a great deal of concern in the ruling Bolshevik party over the relationship between the new Russian Republic (RSFSR)[18] and the emerging Soviet republics on its border. The new state was under internal and external assault and did not develop a sense of security until the end of the civil war. Because of these other priorities, national construction and socialist development in the North among Indigenous minorities was haphazard and somewhat arbitrary. Iurtaeva and others note that socialist construction among the northern natives began immediately after the 1917 revolution by both central and local Party organs (Iurtaeva 1966: 17). However, it was not until the Polar Department was created in 1922 that a coordinated plan began to emerge that was specifically tailored to the Indigenous peoples of the North.

Two years later the Committee for the Assistance to Peoples of the Northern

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18   Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Rossiyskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika, RSFSR)

Borderlands (Committee of the North) was established. "Everyone agreed that
to ensure correct progress through education, every ethnic group needed its own
intelligentsia, and that meant that some [groups] had to be trained faster and more
thoroughly than others" (Slezkine 1994: 157). The intelligentsia was meant to
operate as a form of internal colonization. Thus a cadre of natives would become
"active participants in the Soviet project, who were 'doing the colonizing' of
their regions and were not 'being colonized.' (Hirsch 2005: 253). The models for
implication and assimilation were being developed around the Russian Federation
with other nationalities as well as with Russia's own peasants. Exploring the work
to draw the Russian peasantry into the Soviet project, Orlando Figes has focused on
the role of language and rhetoric (Figes 1997: 324). The goal in the Russian country
side was the same as it was in the Siberian North: "The dissemination of the
Revolution's rhetoric to the countryside—the development of a national discourse
of civic rights and duties—[in order to] create the new political nation dreamed of
by the leaders of democracy" (ibid.).

Early soviet activists were concerned with cultivating a non-imperialist
and non-colonialist approach to their
sovietization efforts. As Hirsch(2005)
has outlined, sovietization was not to
be colonialism(though it was certainly
perceived as such abroad). Colonialism and
Imperialism, after all had been forcefully
criticized in Marxist-Leninist doctrine.
The meeting transcriptions, acts, reports,
and other fragments of bureaucratic
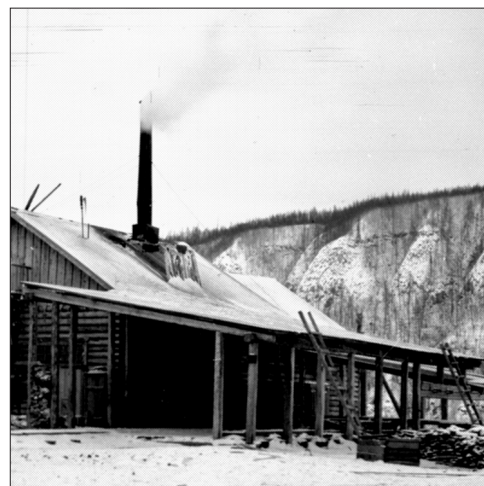
habit and ritual that I have studied also document an era of language shift. The ideas of rights and duties along with civic participation and inclusion were part of a larger shift in language itself. The rise of a new revolutionary lexicon was another example of everyday acts of implication that drew people into a mindfulness of change and state hegemony. Tungus was used interchangably with Evenki for many years, it persists today as well, though it has a strong derogatory overtone. When culturebase was first established it was alternately known as the Tungus culturebase and the Tura culturebase. The official recognition of ethnonyms. In archival documents from the early Soviet era the term *inorodtsev* (alien) is often used to describe Indigenous peoples. In other cases the term *tuzemtsev* (native). There are cases where an individual has gone through a document to correct it, an onorous task for the editor, scratching out the colonial/imperialist residue inherent in the language itself; so that *inorodtsev* is there/not there on the same page as *tuzemtsev*. Evenkis are briefly caught in an act of erasure by fiat, their identity announced, recanted, and revealed: aliens, not-aliens, natives. Words such as *dusha* (soul), used in reference to individuals counted in a census, were not completely expelled from written lexica until the 1930s when the anti-religious campaigns were most broadly applied and Christianity was surgically removed from

governmentality.   By the 1930s the residue
was gone and everyone knew the sanctioned
lexicon.

Cultural enlightenment and revolutionary evolutionism

While there was little tolerance for 'backwardness' and tradition in the early years of the revolution and civil war, it was not until Stalin's first "Five Year Plan" in 1928 that the state truly mobilized for a total war with tradition and non-progressive cultural elements. Sheila Fitzpatrick refers to this as a "second declassing"— a second thrust to liquidate class difference (1999: 11). The war against tradition, however, appears to have been geared more towards stamping out what was considered to be the most deplorable cultural elements of backwards societies. This war in many ways was a battle developed around the cultural practices of Russian peasants and Muslims of Central Asia. "The 'darkness' of the peasants—and its inherent dangers for the Revolution—was the constant refrain of democratic agitators in the countryside during 1917" (Figes 1997: 323). Targeted 'elements' included vendettas, murder, abduction of women, forced marriages, and the buying and selling of women. From the earliest stages following the revolution, the Communist Party states that it would "help 'the toiling masses to liberate their minds from religious prejudices' by 'organizing on a wide scale scientific-educational and anti-religious propaganda" (Read

2003: 39). By the mid-twenties this had become entwined in a growing and diverse bureaucracy that monitored and maintained the full industrialization of society.

The various decrees, laws, and provisions that were initially developed for expediting the war on tradition did

not have as much relevance among the Evenkis and Yakuts of the Yenisei North.
Nonetheless, as with other policies, they were adapted to fit. One account notes that

> Shamans persuaded their fellow countrymen not to send their children to school, frightened with all kinds of horrors those who turned for medical assistance to hospitals, threatened with the revenge of the spirits those who followed the advice of veterinarians, visited the community centre, or went to the cinema. During rituals shamans often did direct anti-Soviet agitation work, … spoke viciously and heatedly against schools, made use of the religious superstition of the backward and illiterate population, called people for not sending their children to boarding schools.

> Gurvich 1971: 82, quoted in Boulgakova 2003.

Unlike Orthodox Christianity, there was no centralized and bureaucratized hierarchy of power to target. Shamans were often virtually indistinguishable from other Evenkis (at least to the Russians). Their capacity to disrupt the work of 'socialist enlightenment' was seen as a potential threat. The real persecution of people identified as shamans and kulaks came once an Indigenous cadre had been developed. These individuals had more or less accepted the ideals of socialism including the narratives of soviet messianism and the implicit call for class-war as a tool in cultural revolution. It is in such spaces that local political struggles could be played out, using the ideological framework of Marxism-Leninism to selectively

(and cynically) persecute individuals. Both Balzer (1990) and Boulgakova (2003) make reference to this: Boulgakova writes that it was the first wave of students indoctrinated in socialist ideals, including atheism, who led the persecution of shamans: "Vladimir G. Bogoraz confirmed that the representatives of the Indigenous people acted not only as

executors of the represssions, but also as initiators of the fight against shamanism" (Boulgakova 2003: 145).

This was also an era of experimental utopianism in Russia and Siberia. The 1920s was a unique moment in the development of the Soviet Union. As Stites wrote: "It is no exaggeration to say that almost the entire culture of the Revolution in the early years was 'utopian.' All the arts were suffused with technological fantasy and future speculation: Constructivist art, experimental film, 'rationalist' architecture, Biomechanics, machine music, Engineerism, and many other currents" (Stites 1989: 172).[19]

> "For the Bolsheviks, it was imperative that Russian society be 'reclassed' forthwith. If the class identity of individuals was not known, how was it possible for the revolution to recognize its friends and enemies?" (Fitzpatrick 1993: 749).

The class analysis of the Indigenous Siberians grew out of the approach developed for Russia's 'rural labourers': "a tripartite classification according to which peasants were either 'poor peasants' (*bedniaki*), 'middle peasants' (*seredniaki*), or 'kulaks,' the last being regarded as exploiters and proto-capitalists." (Fitzpatrick

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19   But what had this to do with the deepest (gluboki) corners of Siberia? Was the Tungus cultural base not also tied up in a utopian dream? Crossing a mountain of 100 years in only five! What courage! But the oppressive banality and massive weight of the brutal environmental conditions, multiplied by distance from civilization must have tempered such dreams. Perhaps these utopianisms were most visible in the transformative possibilities of juxtaposing a 'stonge-aged' hunter next to a radio apparatus. There are plenty of pictures of Evenkis in camps with tents, dogs, and reindeer. Then a few, identifiably 'propagandistic' photographs, staged with Evenkis in the class room, in the hospital, or the dormitory. If this could be achieved in the space of a few years then what will come in 10 or 20?

1993: 751). The reports from the early inspectors made explicit use of this language, applied haphazardly atop the typonomies of the Speransky reforms (noted earlier), that divided the 'natives' into settled (*osedlyi*), nomadic (*kochevniki*), and wandering (*brodiachi*).

The mobility-oriented classification system is a powerful way of understanding the varieties of Indigenous culture and lifestyle. The three categories of mobility (wandering, nomadic, and settled) were seen as stages in cultural evolution and were thus tied to the state-sponsored evolutionism necessary to participate fully in the Soviet project. A parallel schema, which was perhaps less confined to anachronisms implicit in the evolutionism, read a kind of primitive class structure into these categories. The emphasis on settlement that would come with the construction of Communism was not simply a move to administrative efficiency and economic productivity but an implicit sign of cultural progress and of class mobility. The application of class typologies was not without its problems. Fitzpatrick notes that the Bolsheviks applied a flawed class analysis to society, they turned it into a political tool, and "corrupted it as a sociological category." (Fitzpatrick 1999: 11).   Extending this implication of a corrupted category, Fitzpatrick argues that class was significant in Soviet society as an official "classificatory system determining the rights and obligations of different groups of citizens . . . [it] was an attribute that defined one's relationship to the state" (Fitzpatrick 1999: 11). Beyond the class consciousness and class conflict encouraged by itinerant instructors and agitators, there was little

that could be done in the 'tundras' without a significant and enduring soviet presence. In other words real instruction and agitation required presence and duration. It also required a population that wasn't dying from starvation and sickness.

I.M. Suslov's experience in the Yenisei North complicates this picture of class ascriptions. As an ethnographer, he was interested in documenting and explaining the everyday and symbolic worlds of Evenkis yet as a socialist agitator and administrator, he was interested in culture change. Suslov was one of the academics that Yuri Slezkine had in mind when he described a movement of "populist ethnographers-turned-politicians [who] subscribed to the idea of progressive change brought from the outside" (Slezkine 1994: 150). To Suslov culture was seen as a mutable set of practices that could be adjusted and engineered; moulded and shaped to fit the messianic ideals of communism. For the ethnographers of the Committee for the North, the Evenkis as with other nomadic peoples, were in need of a careful and guiding hand. It was not until 1924 that Suslov would play a genuinely transformative role of instructor and steward who could shepherd the Evenkis toward a prosperous, stable, and communist future. This role was also espoused by Iulian Bromlei—one of the key ethnographers of the Brezhnev era—who recognized sovietization as an experiment conducted on a grand scale, not in a laboratory, but in the streets, fields, and the forests of Russia (Hirsch 2005: 309). Bromlei writes the following passage that makes explicit the important role and complicity of ethnographers in the program

of cultural shaping:

> As is known, without ethnographic knowledge it is impossible to work out the correct outlook toward the economic-cultural legacies of peoples, to separate the content of progressive rational traditions from harmful anachronistic manifestations. For over fifty years, our government has used the recommendations of ethnographers in connection with economic reconstruction, culture, and lifeways, specifically, in planning new types of settlements and housing and the working out of new rituals in to combat such harmful survivals of the past as the remnants of the inequality of women, polygamy, and religious customary traditions.
>
> Bromlei 1981 in Shimkin 1982: 696.

One of the more remarkable examples of the ethnographically informed forced cultural change is that of I.M. Suslov's *Shamanism and the Struggle with It*. Published in various versions from a monograph to a serial publication in *Soviet North* (*Sovetskii sever*, 1931) and the *Antireligious-ist* (*Antireligioznik, 1932* titled: "Shamanism as an impediment to socialist construction") Suslov calls for an elevated place for the battle against shamanism in the class war in the North.

Slezkine quotes P.G. Smidovich from 1928: "The natives still depend on the elements, still starve after a bad season, and are still decimated by epidemics in the absence of medical help" (Smidovich 1928 in Slezkine 1994: 179). There was a concern that the North and remote rural centres were being left behind in the rush to communism. What was seen as a general failure to 'raise the cultural level' of Russia's native peoples led to the development of the committee for the North in 1924.

Committee of the North

In the Tundra of the Turukhansk North the Evenkis and Yakuts strove to maintain their traditional modes of travel and living quite apart from the drama of the revolution: the fracturing politics that embroiled those concerned with crafting government and the advancement of state socialism and international communism was of little relevance to the lives of those living in tents travelling ancient migration routes through interior forests of the Yenisei North. The cumulative effects of Revolution and Civil War in addition to a small pox epidemic and an epizootic of Siberian sores, however, generated a desperate situation. Attempts to deliver aid, economic reconstruction, and the stabilization of a network of distribution were generally too late, too few, and too poorly funded to match the grandiose promises of the Soviet Instructors and Inspectors. When the Russian Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics had finally been secured and the civil war was officially put to a close the real work of building communism began. While the Revolutionary Committees in Turukhansk and Yeniseisk were surveying the interior forests and developing early cooperatives and soviets, they had no substantial presence beyond the Yenisei.[20] Throughout Subarctic and arctic Siberia were many unexplored areas, vast taigas and tundras that were still the domain of nomadic hunters and herders.

While representative governments were established in Krasnoiarsk, Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg), and other locales east of the Urals, the majority of the Siberian territory remained undeveloped and largely unexplored by Europeans. Industrial development had occurred only along major transport routes: rivers

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20   Furthermore, they were subordinate to the Siberian Bureau (representatives of the Bolsheviks) in Krasnoiarsk.

and rail lines[21] and the south was disproportionately populated compared to the North. In many ways arctic and Subarctic Siberia was as unknown to those living in Krasnoiarsk, Irkutsk, and Sverdlovsk as it was in European Russia. While many of those Bolsheviks who found themselves in government had spent time in Siberia as exiles of the Tsarist government[22] few had any knowledge of the vast territories beyond the established villages and settlements located along Siberia's river highways.

The Soviet state was struggling with the implementation of socialist ideologies across a multi-ethnic landscape. At the same time it was evident that in general they knew very little about the Siberian taiga. The abundance of natural resources in Siberia was legend and many claimed that the North held untold wealth yet it was clear that there was a great deal of work to be done before they could even conduct the necessary surveys that would confirm these rumours. Large tracts of land were more or less unexplored and major rivers, like the Oleneok, had not even been mapped.[23]

A group of ethnographers who were involved with Narkomnats (the Peoples' Commissariat for Nationalities) were well aware of the status of the

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21   The North sea route was significant for shipping, whaling and other mobile ocean industries but had no permanent colonial settlements of any note. Cf. Robert North (1972) for a discussion of industrial development in the Soviet North (1978).

22   Josef Stalin was sent to Turukhansk in 1913; Lenin was exiled to Krasnoiarsk in 1897.

23   While I cannot explore this here, I.M. Suslov undertook the task of mapping the Olenek river in the early 1930s. His Atlas of the Olenek river helped to open the river to larger transportation networks making it possible to build the Olenek culture base in Yakutiia.

Siberian North, both as a potential resource colony and as a site of growing crisis among the Indigenous peoples who continued to suffer from exploitation and seemingly endemic poverty. Narkomnats, according to Francine Hirsh "relied on professional ethnographers from the imperial regime for ethnographic knowledge about the lands and peoples of the former Russian Empire" (2005: 84).[24] This knowledge was built on late 19th Century ethnological theories as well as ethnographic and informal reports and museum exhibitions. Photographs also played an important role documenting the margins of the Soviet state. By providing reliable forms of testimony and document photographs not only illustrated oral reports but they also populated the imaginaries of state socialism.

In 1922 Narkomnats already had plans for an 'Ethnographic Bureau' which

> was not an unscientific 'humanitarian' scheme that would impede local development, but rather a bulwark of economic modernization. . . . 'Without scientific knowledge about geographical conditions and familiarity with national particularities IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GOVERN TO THEIR BENEFIT different peoples and not waste strength and resources on unneeded experiments.' [25]

Most importantly the ethnographers in Narkomnats argued for an organization with authority that ran directly through Moscow, rather than having to deal with potentially corrupt and prejudiced officials in Siberia or at least Siberian officials whose grasp of Siberia was beholden to the connected southern swath of land

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24   Francine Hirsch has an excellent discussion of the role of Narkomnats and Gosplan in planning the future of the new Soviet Empire (pg. 84).

25   Hirsch 2005: 85; quoting a memo from the head of the Narkomnats.

that was temperate and amenable to
more familiar European-style economies
(cities, farms, agriculture, mining, etc.).
The Siberian North, was not only seen
as impenetrable and inscrutably other to
European Russians, it was also seen as such
by those living in more 'civilized' places
in the south of Siberia. In response to
the request to create more direct channels
between the Siberian North and Moscow, the Presidium of the All-Russian Central
Executive Committee (VtsIK) created the Committee for the Assistance to the
Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (or simply Committee for the North). Thus in
1924, the first centralized body governing Indigenous peoples in Russia was founded
(Slezkine 1994: 158).[26]

I.M. Suslov was working with cultural enlightenment projects when the
former members of Narkomnats formed the Committee of the North. In 1925
Suslov joined the Committee of the North as director of its Krasnoiarsk division.
Given the importance of the Siberian division to the Committee of the North
it is remarkable how little has been written on Suslov's role. I.M. Suslov came
into his position in the Committee of the North with considerable experience on
the 'cultural front' but that the culturebases proposed by the Committee of the
North leaned heavily on earlier experiences with cultural intervention and other
technologies of propaganda saturation.

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26   P.G. Smidovich was head of the Committee of the North in 1924.

The state-wide prioritization of developing the economy through modern industries which included the exploitation of natural resources was not lost on the Committee of the North. They acknowledged the vast wealth located in the north but they argued that "only the well-adapted natives could exploit that wealth; hence, the disappearance of the natives would turn a potentially rich country into a frozen wasteland..." (Slezkine 1994:138). In this way a protectionist and paternalistic program of culture shaping was presented as the most pragmatic way forward. Nonetheless it remained at its core a cultural enlightenment and civilizational mission.

The Committee for the North played a formative role in the development of indigenous-state relations in the Soviet North.

> The committee was called upon to help realize the legal equality that was proclaimed by the 'Declaration' of 1917 and by the Constitution of 1918. It was given the task of uniting and organizing the small peoples, of awakening them to a recognition of their equality with other peoples, and of elevating them to a high level of development.
>
> Sergeyev 1964: 491.

Until the establishment of the Committee of the North in 1924 the vast territories of Siberia and the Far East were irregularly served by a network of instructors and inspectors based out of administrative centers, like Turukhansk and Krasnoiarsk. As I noted in the last section, socialist work or development in the Yenisei north following the 1917 revolution was limited. Their task of drawing the natives into socialism was troubled not only by language and cultural barriers but by the fact that the

logic of communism translated poorly into the life-experience of nomadic hunters and herders. For this reason the socialist project in the Yenisei North was at first more of an aid project and a project of institutional reform than one of cultural transformation. There was simply no infrastructure to support a venture for an expansive cultural revolution. The Soviets who did pass through promised that the new regime was a regime of equity and fairness. They promised that Lenin would get rid of exploiters of all kinds, they would provide stability, and bread and shot. The many promises that were made were expressed by itinerant state representatives; there was virtually no sustained presence beyond Turkukhansk.

The Committee of the North had a central administrative unit based in Moscow with regional units in major cities across Siberia. The Siberian branch of the Committee of the North was founded on the 26th of November, 1924. The Yenisei Provincial committee of the north was created on the 17th of March, 1925.[27] I.M. Suslov was its director. He later transferred to become head of the Krasnoiarsk Committee for the North. The primary goal of the Committee of the North was

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27   AAEAO 27-20-01.

the Sovietization of the North. The committee represented a centralization of the task of sovietization in the North. With autonomy from regional level politics, they brought new hope to a venture that was sporadic and haphazardly applied.

The Committee of the North prioritized the collection of "'information on the life and the needs of the small peoples and to study their history, their culture and their way of life'" (Sergeyev 1964: 491). Prior to the establishment of the Committee early instructors and inspectors had offered provisional surveillance of the Turukhansk North. Their reports and observations pointed to a complicated social landscape that was threatened by the rapid deterioration of civil and state institutions. Their recommendations called for an increase in state intervention as well as the production of more detailed knowledge about the inhabitants of the Turukhansk North, their economy, and the territory's natural wealth. The Committee of the North continued the work of the first inspectors as it organized expeditions and conducted research on the various Indigenous peoples living throughout Subarctic and arctic Siberia.

> The work done by these expeditions and the local materials brought back
> by them made possible an accurate listing of the groups belonging to the
> 'small peoples' and also served as the basis for the most important steps
> in their improvement (the organization of soviets on the lower levels,
> regional delimitation according to nationalities, organization of land
> management, reconstruction of the economy, etc.).

Sergeyev 1964: 491.

This statement is a significant articulation of the paternalistic ethos of cultural transformation. The idea of improvement, as I have shown, was a critical element of Soviet cultural evolutionism. But improvement and self-amelioration was not only expected of 'backwards' natives, it was an overarching mythology of early soviet culture. Attwood and Kelly trace the history of the symbolically charged 'new man' and 'new woman' by the mid-1930s. The new soviet person

was "seen to have resulted not only from private moral choices . . . but from coherent programmes of socialization and behaviour transformation, what Lunacharskii referred to as 'the process of production' of new types of human being. . ." (1998: 256). Cultural construction promised pervasive and intimate re-alignment of everyday moralities. These moralities were trained on a universal ethos of socialism that proposed an entirely new social subject that annihilated sexual, ethnic, racial, and class differences.

The Committee of the North emerged as the agency most capable of undertaking the cultural transformation of Indigenous minority groups in the Siberian North. In the early days it helped to set up central co-operatives for purchasing goods and equipment and for selling furs, fish, berries, and meat. The Committee helped to organize over-land transportation, which continued to be an industry dominated by traditional forms of reindeer mobility until the advent of mechanized snow travel in the late 1960s. Reindeer transport was used all year round but was the only mode of transport in the winter. In navigable waterways boats powered by steam, sail, and oar plied the navigable waterways. When going against the current they were often hauled along with ropes and pulled by men walking along the river banks. Along the Lower Tunguska river there were only two times a year when the water was high (deep) enough for steamers. One of the first references to the Soviet use of reindeer caravans is in the Inspector's visit to the Ilimpii Tundra. As I've noted above, prior to the Soviet era, reindeer caravans were hired for

missionaries (Anderson & Orekhova 2002) as well as explorers (Hall 1918) and other agents of the state.

According to Slezkine, while protecting the natives from exploitation was one of the most important tasks, "the Committee's true and sacred vocation was to assist the small peoples in their difficult climb up the evolutionary ladder" (1994: 155-6). Evolutionism was a dominant idiom in official discourses as well as in popular culture. For the Committee, "[c]ultural progress meant getting rid of backwardness, and backwardness, in the very traditional view of the committee members, consisted of dirt, ignorance, alcoholism, and the oppression of women" (Slezkine 1994: 156). In other words sovietization was a war not only on mentality but on the very bodies of the people implicated. Immediately after its creation, the committee for the North set about planning for the construction of a network of socialist outposts in the most remote areas of the Russian North. This was identified as a set of "concrete measures for delivering aid to the natives" (AAEAO 27-1).

Committee for the North oversaw a number of critical projects until it was formally liquidated in 1935. The cultural bases had the most lasting and significant impact of the committees various projects; they were the most significant for their sustained and focused presence in the most remote areas of the Soviet North. It was widely recognized that attempts to draw the natives into more socialist modes of exchange had failed. In 1925, according to I.M. Suslov, the Committee of the North ordered the construction of three experimental projects in remote areas of

the Siberian taiga and tundra. These were to be established at the sites of major native nomadic encampments. One of these was called the Tugus culturebase:

> The mouth of the Kochechum river was a central point for four to five thousand nomadic Tungus, dwelling on a territory of around one million square kilometers. The cultural base is located in the center of these nomads. It is an experimental-demonstrational scientific establishment which uses its network of subsidiaries to work on the organizational and demonstrational character. Showing what will later be organized among the remaining larger nomadic groups of Tungus.[28]

The Tungus Culture base was a utopian socialist outpost situated in one of the most remote locales of Siberia. The outpost was planned and constructed under the leadership and direction of Innokentii Mikhailovich Suslov. At the time, Suslov was the chair of the Krasnoyarsk division of the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (Committee of the North, Komitet Severa, for short. Suslov played an important role in the success of Committee of the North's projects in Krasnoiarsk. His knowledge of the Yenisei North and his position within Soviet institutions as well as the anthropological establishment allowed him to make informed decisions about a little known territory and to garner a powerful role as a cultural broker or intermediary.

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28   Suslov, GAKK 1845-1-143: 126

The years are like centuries:
A little history of the Tura culturebase.

The Tura culturebase stands as a beacon of the first socialist culture in the North.

Uvachan 1984: 100-1

The Committee of the North built culturebases across the Siberian Arctic and Subarctic in an attempt to establish a solid foundation for Soviet power in the least populated and most remote locales of the Republic. The culturebases had several key functions, chief among them was the staging of broader and more intense programs of forced cultural transformation or culture shaping. In 1929 at the Sixth Plenum for the Committee of the North then director Petr Smidovich proclaimed that they would "draw the class line across the natives"[1] at soon as the edifices of Soviet power were developed in the northern areas of Siberia. As such, the culturebases were seen as a temporary staging point in a larger project; the culturebases provided the structural framework for developing Soviet power in remote regions where it was otherwise impossible to sustain programs of aid, instruction, and agitation.

Amir Weiner defines the Soviet enterprise as an "unfolding revolutionary transformation of society from an antagonistically divided entity into a conflict-free, harmonious body" (Weiner 1999: 1114). This was certainly the case in the Russian North as it was elsewhere. It was also a very real enterprise and though it failed in

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1   Quoted in Slezkine 1994: 192.

many ways[2] it also had important success
and ramifications—not least of all the
national mythology of a harmonious and
progressive society The initiative to build
the culturebase was a recognition that the
territory of central Siberia (and the other
northerly and remote areas of Siberia) could
not be successfully incorporated until there
was a sustained presence of communist

activists and agitators. In other words, it was a response to the lack of a centralized
and orderly plan that could accommodate what was seen as a special situation in the
North.

According to the Marxist philosophy which underpinned policy and action
in the Soviet Union, society was seen as a mutable and historically particular
assemblage. Cultural revolution was a necessary rite of passage or travail across
which all nations (and proto-nations) had to traverse. This view of obligatory
cultural transformation, according to Amir Weiner, "went hand in hand with a
continuous purification campaign seeking to eliminate divisive and obstructing
elements" (Weiner 1999: 1114). The Siberian landscape itself was cast, perhaps
not unsurprisingly, as one of the major obstructions. Along with other exploiters
the land beyond the navigable rivers was seen as a major obstacle to socialist
enlightenment. The nomads had to cross a mountain of one hundred years not only
so they could participate as equals but because they were seen to be most suited to

....

2   Peter Holquist warns that a failure to consider institutionalization and internalization of
violence as a technique fails to grasp a central feature of Soviet life: "actual instances of applied
violence [should not be] treated as a rupture or deviation from a supposedly more normal Soviet
policy" (2003: 19).

drawing out the primeval wealth of the land.

The central challenge in the vast Siberian tundras was the lack of state presence. It was not enough for agitators and instructors to venture out into the forests and along the rivers to work among the natives. They realized that the construction of socialism would be impossible until they had a sustained presence in remote regions throughout Siberia. This meant transcending the late-imperial geographies that had limited state intervention to the river ways. It meant building outposts in the least known places and the most remote regions inhabited by indigenous peoples (Gurvich 1971: 23). For the inspecting gaze of the Soviet rulers to truly penetrate the primeval darkness of the tundra, they would need a new sensory technology: the culturebase.

In the years following the October Revolution, the failure of the Communist Party to make transformative inroads beyond the major rivers in the Siberian North prompted a call for an expansion of the Soviet frontier. To do this, they needed to build a new front-line for civilization. Towns at the confluence of major rivers were no longer adequate to subjugate the enormous interior territories. It was simply too difficult to enact cultural change on the scale called for by Moscow with so

little sustained contact between soviet workers and nomadic reindeer herders. They required a more sustained presence in the interior. As a sensory technology, the culturebase operated as a relay for information about the taiga and its inhabitants. As I have noted, greater interventions would follow—though not necessarily based on the knowledge produced by the sensory apparatus.

As a material intervention into the everyday lives of Indigenous peoples, the culturebase was a technology of rule but it was also a technology of vision. Scientific practices of looking were staged out of the culturebases and these fed back into policy which shaped further interventions into the lives and lands of the Indigenous peoples. Francine Hirsch notes how "revolutionaries and experts intentionally used census-taking and border-making (along with other means of classification and delimitation) to transform local identities" (Hirsch 2005: 146 fn. 1.). The culturebase was designed as a technology of rule and transformation. Nicholas Dirks writes that "Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest" (Dirks 1996: xi). Bruce Grant (1995) notes that the culturebases were one of the central means employed by the Committee of the North in achieving three goals: native self-government, economic reorganization, and social enlightenment. He describes the culturebases as "all-purpose social service centers that would serve as the main avenue for information collection and program implementation" (Grant 1995: 72).

There are instances where data were clearly collected and used for purposes of

domination, the Polar Census provides a good example of this. As do the various map-making projects. But these products are also cultural texts that have diffuse meanings and uses. Photographs were not always, or even necessarily used as instruments of rule. As David Anderson has noted, the data from the Polar Census was rarely cited or used. This is not to deny the instrumental role of these technologies of representation in the banal expressions of rule (and even state sponsored terror and violence) but they can not be reduced to the category of the machinery of totalitarian rule either.

What the Committee of the North created was a mediating technology that was expected to buffer and protect the minority Indigenous peoples from exploitation, starvation, and sickness. It was also interventionist, though, and was built to draw Indigenous peoples in to the Soviet project and to prepare them for full participation in the imminent communist utopia. The following, according to a memorandum from the director of the Krasnoiarsk regional Committee of the North, were the instructions or recommendations for representing the culturebase in film:

Themes for a film on the North

Protocol for cultural construction in the North. December 6, 1928.

Category I: The first category includes special films that should be shown in the North among the native masses.

Native Soviets and courts

Demonstrate the work of the best Clan Soviets. A general meeting of different tribes. Comparison of obsolete forms of collective rights with the modern Soviet laws. Ideal native court and compare it with the court of the old princes. Promoting the best ways of collecting and organizing all-clan and parish meetings through comparison with existing methods. The reasons for the reluctance of the rich attend the general meetings. Coverage of the individual moments of organized protection of the poor against exploitation by the rich. The Constitution of the USSR, illustrated with pictures of the various congresses.

Schools and questions of enlightenment.

The problem of an ideal native schools. Popularization of the work of modern schools in native areas, Tomsk workers school [*rabfak*] and native workers school in Leningrad. Ideal 'house of the native' [*dom tuzemtsev*] house, reading, red Chum. Show the campaign against illiteracy in the cinema and radio in action. Comparison of the rigidity and resistance of some natives to the need for sending their children to school, with the conscientious parents who understand the importance of school. Local cell of the Komsommol (youth wing of the Communist party) among school children and its work. Anti-religious and anti-shaman work at the school.

Industry and hunting.

Advantages of cooperation with *Gostorg* (State Trade Organization). Trade before and now. Influence of the rationalization of trade to increase food production and exchange. Comparison of old traps and new methods of hunting. The advantage of the collective over individual work. What is a veterinary cooperative and what is the structure of the entire system. Damage caused by shamanism in the fisheries and hunting.

Medical work among the natives.

Comparison of the sanitary-hygienic conditions of housing of different peoples of the North. Illustrative facts concerning the grubbiness separate tribes, especially Yuraks. Ideal results of health education in their adaptation to contemporary native dwellings. The advantage of cottages over tents [*chum*] in the forest zone. Which epidemics exist among natives, how to fight them with the help of a physician, promotion of prevention and quarantine. Comparative methods for treatment used by the shaman and the physician. Popularization of the work of the hospital, itinerant clinics and the medical clinic at the culturebase.

Veterinary help for the natives.

Techniques and methods for the treatment of deer. Education of natives in the application of liniment. The advantage of treatment of the mange using the

gas chamber. Promotion of the veterinary station at the Tungus culturebase. Demonstrative facts about the propagation of epizootics in deer.

Zootechnical work on Reindeer

Demonstration reindeer nursery, including its profitability. Type and breed of deer by geographical area. Altai maral, Karagass deer, reindeer (Tungus, forest, Samoed). The degree of hardiness and the use of different breeds of deer. Influence of different methods of deer feeding on the development and improvement of its breed. Advantages of organizing nurseries over the individual production of large reindeer herders.

Category II: The film should consist of the elements listed in order in category one, invested with an artistic form with the inclusion of aboriginal everyday subjects. Films in category II offer material for the promotion of life, welfare and economy of the North in the Russian cities and abroad.

Innokenti Suslov[3]

I.M. Suslov's "Themes for a film on the North" are framed as a project of cultural construction [*kul'turnogo stroitel'stva*] where he outlines two categories of film: The first being content produced explicitly for the 'native masses of the North', the second category of film was to invest artistic form in the depiction of scenes from everyday subjects in the lives of Northern natives. Films in the second category were to be used in the "promotion of life, welfare and economy of the North in the Russian cities and abroad."[4] The implication of the latter category was that it would not only be educational but would help to advertise the good works of the new socialist regime. From the earliest days the culturebase was identified as a significant project worthy of documentation and promotion. To some degree all Soviet projects were deemed worthy of attention or at least were identified as potentially useful in

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4   GANO 354-1-246:108-109.

the development of official Soviet visual culture.

While Suslov's instructions are more or less generic they seem to have had at least one direct application: *Tungus s Khenychara,* a narrative film directed by Kinosibir's Manuel Bol'shintsov. This film was shot in 1930. According to one author, the film crew "traveled to a real village on the Lower Tunguska (not far from Turukhansk). The main roles were filled by Evenkis — two young men and a girl. At the time of filming it was their first time seeing a city, steam boat, and locomotive . . ." (Kuzmenkina 2007). The limited descriptions of this film that I have located indicate a close fit with the themes for a film on the north written by I.M. Suslov.

Suslov's instructions were consistent with ideas debated in the nascent Soviet cinematographic and cultural enlightenment circles. In particular the 'cinefication' of the countryside and the documentation of Soviet cultural and economic construction were critical projects. Denise Youngblood (1985), an historian of Soviet cinema, describes Soviet cinefication as a push to circulate films in the countryside primarily as a means of education—which she curiously segregates from propaganda. The documentation of Soviet projects was to be represented in newsreels, which were "part of almost every cinema programme from the mid-1920s" (Roberts 1999:1). Such newsreels and other promotional material were important in developing a sense of Soviet community; as Sheila Fitzpatrick writes, "the Soviet government had positioned itself as the repository of national sentiment and patriotism" with

its various "nation-building and national-strengthening projects" (1999: 225). The recognition of the promotional and historical value of the Culturebase indicates the degree of sophistication brought by the Committee of the North to this project.

A 1925 budget plan for the Tungus Culturebase included photographic, phonographic, and cinematographic equipment and supplies. Nearly two-thousand rubles were budgeted for three thousand photographic exposures—a 'meager' ration for up to twelve workers. The budget notes that it was expected that some of the wealthier workers would bear the cost of more photographs on their own. The photographs were split into 1800 glass plates and 1200 frames of Kodak roll film. They also called for two thousand meters of reel film (for a cinematograph) and one hundred cylinders for audio recording.[5] While I have not encountered any suggestion that film reels and audio recording supplies have survived, there are many photographs in the various archives that not only document the history of sovietization in the Turukhansk North but that also conform to Suslov's thematic categories. Elsewhere I discuss the work of the photographer Baluev, who produced photographs that most clearly embody Suslov's visual narrative.

The culturebases were never simply implemented as demonstration villages, designed for internal and international propaganda. At best the propaganda value of

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[5] There is no evidence that all of these supplies were ever purchased. I have seen no records of film being shot at the culture base nor of audio recordings having been made. This is not to say that they don't exist, simply that they are not located or indexed through conventional means.

the culturebases was a fortuitous byproduct of socialist construction, a convenient spectacle of modernization that offered the always-popular visual juxtaposition of traditional and modern, wood and steel, simple and complex—these are visual tropes which were central to Soviet cultural revolution. The Committee of the North developed the culturebases as a project that simultaneously satisfied the need to create exploratory bases for resource evaluation and extraction in remote areas of the North, support the growth of a native intelligentsia through direct and regular contact with ideological and procedural instructors, and to help the general indigenous population out of their backwardness and straight into modern industrial communism.[6] The culturebase was to be an elaborate set that was mounted as drama and spectacle; it was an intervention that relied on socialist realism's master plot of a triumph in a war against backwardness (Slezkine 1994: 29). The temporal play of visual juxtaposition of primitive/modern is of utmost importance because the culturebase was built as a satellite in what was understood to be fundamentally anachronistic space. The Tungus culturebase, the so-called "city of the Tungus" was the epicenter for a new socio-spatial relationship that re-mapped the landscape and monopolized the mundane cartographies of everyday nomadic life as it was lived in the northern forests.[7]

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6   The Committee of the North gave careful and extensive instructions in their plan for the surveying and construction of culturebases in the Far North. (GANO F354-1-297:26)

7   In the context of a modern city Zigmunt Bauman writes that "[f]rom the point of view of spatial administration, modernization means monopolization of cartographic rights" (Bauman 1998: 40)

City of the Tungus

We will give our children to be taught when the city is built.[8]

The culturebases built by the Committee of the North were different than other colonial instruments of subjugation, assimilation, and rule that included reservations, missions, and residential schools. The culturebase represented a modern socialist complex aimed at raising the cultural [*kul'turnost*] level of all aspects of life (Sergeev 1955: 262). The 'City of the Tungus',[9] as it was promised and along with the other ethnic culturebases, was a direct result of implementing the nationality policy cautiously advocated by Lenin[10]. As I have noted elsewhere, Soviet nationality policy was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union would be a multi-ethnic state, "that all ethnic groups were entitled to their own duly demarcated territories, that all national territories should have political and cultural autonomy, and that the vigorous development of such autonomy was the only precondition for future unity" (Slezkine 1994: 154). Practically this was undertaken by developing a broad base of support for Soviet power "beginning with the intelligentsia" (Suny 1994: 212). Where there was no intelligentsia, one had to be made. The culturebases fit into the scheme of the nationality policy by providing an environment to foster and shape this new intelligentsia and to create the foundation for a future national capital—a

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8   Turyzh clan meeting, January 13, 1926. (GAKK 1845-1-20: 198)

9   GAKK 1845-1-20: 198. The moniker 'City of the Tungus' is also noted in Anderson and Orekhova (2002).

10   Terry Martin notes how Lenin saw nationalism a trick of the bourgeoisie but that he also recognized that it was necessary: "By granting the forms of nationhood, the Soviet state could split the above-class national alliance for statehood. Class divisions, then, would naturally emerge, which would allow the Soviet government to recruit proletarian and peasant support for their socialist agenda" (2001:69).

prospect that would be realized in the 1930s. Mixing techniques of cultural
amelioration developed for Russian peasants with strategies for offering support to
the sympathetic intelligentsia of non-Russian nations, the Committee for the North
set about their plan to build culturebases in remote areas of Siberia that fell out of
the immediate influence of larger administrative centers.

The Tura culturebase operated as a locus for both Evenki and
Russian imaginaries. It was productive of anachronistic spaces which provided a
foil for the burgeoning socialist realism and utopian dreams of plenty. Evenkis
and Yakuts coalesced around the carefully chosen locale of the culturebase, which
operated as a dispensary for modern artifacts. They were furnished with a radio
station, photographic, cinematographic, and audiographic gear, as well as a panoply
of wondrous and strange devices needed for medical and veterinary practice. Steam
ships began to plod against the strong current of the Nizhnaia Tunguska, they
carried labourers and supplies of food and other things rarely seen before the late
1920s. It was a spectacle, a sight to be seen and one that was engineered to be seen,
as Suslov suggests in his instructions for the visual representation of the North.
Like a magnet it drew new machines and new people. It generated promises and
hopes, many of which were fulfilled. It also marked a bi-directional staging point.
Indigenous people who were co-opted, as well as those who were forcibly carted off,
began their journey out of the taiga at the culturebase.

The new space carved out by the culturebase had become a place in its own
right. It was constituted through an array of

> particular moments in such intersecting social relations, nets of which
> have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one
> another, decayed and renewed. Some of these relations will be, as it
> were, contained within the place; others will stretch beyond it, tying any
> particular locality into wider relations and processes in which other places

are implicated too.

Massey 1994: 120.

As Massey's quote suggests, a place needs to be understood through social and temporal registers—the culturebase was thus more than an instance of Soviet colonialism; more than a cultural technology of rule. It mattered also in terms of local-level allegiances and politics. Most importantly, it mattered as a dynamic site of affective and sensuous encounter. In the beginning there was nothing that compelled Evenkis the visit the culturebase: They went there of their own volition, some to satisfy curiosities while others went to escape poverty, hunger, and sickness or else to join in the construction of a new world order.

Multiple clans and families were brought together under the organization of the culturebase which fostered an ethno-nationalist discourse that cut across clan and family affiliations, re-mapping identity according to modern ethnic national affiliation (cf. Anderson 2000 and Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). Local politics began to re-orient around this disruption to established forms of power and authority. The Tungus culturebase was imagined by its Soviet planners as a cultural and political centre for the Evenkis as an emergent nation. The transition and transformation from non-centralized ethnic/linguistic group to a fully articulated modern ethnic nation (under communist permissions) characterizes the Soviet project which actively sought to
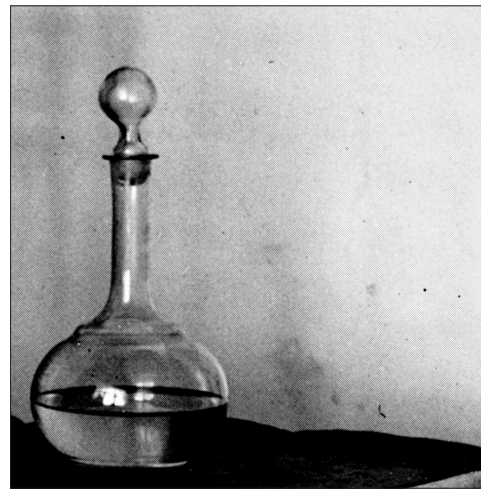
re-inscribe the established rules and orders that governed life in the central Siberian forests. The emplacement of the culturebase was a crucial move and an anticipation of the particular form of remote modernity, which hybridized techno-scientific practices and performances with re-formulated traditional economies.

In a 1925 meeting of the presidium of Turukhansk Executive Committee, the former inspector Savel'ev disagreed with creating a single culturebase to serve the entire region. He is noted as saying that there should be not one but several culturebases built to serve not only the Tungus, but all the peoples of the region. This position was also articulated in a 1928 planning document from the Committee of the North: "For peoples who are very widespread, split into several diverse branches, several bases are necessary" (GANO 354-1-297: 8-9). Arguing for several culturebases for a single nationality was at odds with one concept of the culturebase, as a staging point to becoming a national capital. In the Soviet 'empire of nations,' each nation would be equal and in the optics of the state real 'self-determination' was crucial. In the early 1920s the Communist party affirmed that the "Soviet state would maximally support those 'forms' of nationhood that did not conflict with a unitary central state, namely national territories, national languages, national elites, and national cultures" (Martin 2001: 73). In the context of 'backwards' national minorities, as I have shown, the culturebase would be the first step towards fulfilling this goal. Thus ethnic groups who previously had little sense of themselves as modern 'nations' were directed in the appropriate ways of presenting themselves and of thinking of themselves in terms of Marxist

idioms of nationality born of Western philosophy and political thought.

The Soviet writer Nikolai Nikolaevich Mikhailov wrote about the culturebase in his English-language book *Land of the Soviets*. With characteristic promotional flair (not unlike descriptions of the Canadian North from this time) Mikhailov describes the culturebase in action:

> When a hunter or a reindeer breeder arrives at the culturebase, he is provided with food and a bed. He is taken to the museum showing the natural resources and economy of his region. He is shown the workshops, and if necessary his gun, sledge, or clothing is repaired. He learns how to look after the animals in a nursery, how to skin the animal and how to cure the skin, how to stock fish and how to treat sick reindeer. A physician examines the hunter in a clinic and gives him medication if he requires it. The new arrival goes to a bath, visits the cinema, and listens to the radio.

> Mikhailov in Lamont 1946: 136.

The arrogance of this statement would be laughable if it were not so violently enforced. What precisely did the herder think about being shown "the natural resources and economy of his region"? How bizarre it must have been to see newcomers [*priezhie*] take such a detailed interest in their affairs. Whatever the perception of this queer spectacle on the part of the nomadic hunters and herders, it was soon evident that Soviets didn't just come to dispense aid indiscriminately; they came to purify the Evenkis, whom they saw as having been polluted by centuries of oppression under exploitative capitalism. As Ssorin-Chaikov notes, backwardness was marked—only second to capitalism—as the "state's most significant 'other'

"(Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 15-16).

In the excerpt from a letter to the Committee of the North that opens this section, the Evenkis of the Turyzh clan are presenting their case against another Evenki clan. They are each vying for the culturebase to be build in the their own territory.[11]

> We aliens - Tungus of the Turyzh clan, Ilimpei region all as one deliver our 'thanks' to the Soviet government.
>
> We wish for a city to be built at the mouth of the river Tura. This is closer for us to come in the winter. The road is good and near. Tura we know. . . At Vivi a city is not needed, we have never been to Vivi. We do not have many reindeer. To go to Vivi is far.
>
> We need schools, we also need a hospital to heal people and reindeer. We need cheap bread and other products.
>
> We will give our children to be taught when the city is built.
>
> *Turyzh clan meeting, January 13, 1926.*
>
> GAKK 1845-1-20: 198.

By the time the first stage of the Culturebase was completed some Evenkis had already begun to be incorporated into Soviet society. As I have noted above, the agitators and instructors had been working and consciousness raising in the Turukhansk North since the October Revolution. It is impossible at this point to separate 'genuine' expressions of Soviet affinity from those voiced by the literate

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11   This quote raises several important questions. Chief among them is the degree to which the Evenkis understood what the culture base was to become. Could they know what a city was? Furthermore, as with most Soviet documents of this nature, the author of the statement needs to be examined for veracity.

non-indigenous secretaries that wrote such letters on behalf of non-literate nomadic and clan soviets. The development of a fully invested Evenki intelligentsia was in full advance. Specialized training schools were being established and soviet culture was being fostered on a number of fronts.

Building the Tungus Culturebase

In the life of the Turukhansk krai, since the moment of its conquest by Russians, there has not been seen such work and such construction as is currently being undertaken by Soviet Power. By granting full political rights of small nationalities of the North, Soviet Power has fully raised the economic and cultural lives of the natives of the Turuhansk North. From eight different nationalities, with 15-16 thousand people nomadically travelling over the tundra and the forest-tundra on an area of approximately one million, six hundred thousand square kilometers.

Work plan of the Turukhansk culturebase.[12]

The Committee of the North expressed an interest in situating a culturebase between the Enisei and Lena river basins in a place that would be an ideal staging point to extend permanent cultural aid for the local native population of Tungus (GAKK 1845-1-20: 30) — 'cultural aid' meant *pod'em:* cultural uplifting, with all its connotation of progress and backwardness; modernity and tradition. The area between the Enisei and Lena rivers was rightly identified as space that escaped the gaze of the state where capitalism and backwardness could fester. The Tura culturebase was located at a distance of around 2700 kilometers from Krasnoiarsk in a location where around five thousand small, dispersed, groups of Evenkis congregated (Sergeev 1955: 263).

The location eventually chosen for the Tura culturebase was at the

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12   GAKK 1845-1-125.

conjunction of the Nizhnaia Tunguska and Kochechum[13] rivers. This was the location, or near the location, of a former trading post. Prior to the revolution, at the mouth of the Taimura river, which flows into the Nizhnaia Tunguska river, the merchant [*kuptsa*] Suzdalev had a trading post [*torgovaia zaimka*] (GANO 354-1-25a: 34). A site for capitalist trade was also considered to be a good site for socialist enlightenment. Trading posts were routinely criticized by communists in Siberia as the apex of capitalism as an exploitative, cruel, and immoral form of social organization.

> The site for the construction of the Tura culturebase was chosen after a special expedition to the encampment of the Chapogir clan Evenkis who travel around the confluence of the Kochechum and Nizhnaia Tunguska, in the very spot where the Russian merchant, Tungusnik Savvateev built a cabin where he sold to natives. The natives traded their furs for flour, oil and other products.
>
> AAEAO 27-20-02.

The elimination of the trading post and its replacement by a the culturebase must have been seen as a properly revolutionary act. Assuming the merchant's operation was truly exploitative many Evenkis no doubt saw some continuity in the hegemonic presence of newcomers. But where one had the monopoly on foreign trade goods the other undertook an audacious expansion of this monopoly that would supersede the traditional system of paths and replace it with new ways of being and new forms of sociality.

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13   In early documents, I have noted reference to Tura as the local name for the Kochechum river. Sometimes there is reference to the culturebase being constructed at the confluence of the Nizhnaia Tunguska and Tura rivers.

Situating the Tungus culturebase

One planning document from the Committee for the North emphasizes the uniqueness of the situation in the Siberian North:

> In choosing the sites for a network of native culturebases in the North above all is dictated by ethnic details. . . . It is important to note that remote and out-of-the-way regions require a special approach rather than the typical approach to soviet construction.[14]

In order to fully carry out its required tasks, instructions for choosing the placement of a culturebase included:

1. Locating it at the heart of the bulk of nomadic natives

2. Accommodating a large number of reindeer, including those in a reindeer nursery, experimental deer, reindeer at the veterinary clinic, and the reindeer of visiting natives. All of this requires the necessary pasturage.

3. In order to fully guarantee that the culturebase has fuel and to achieve its tasks a site should be chosen that has a good forest (or peat or coal).

4. Must be able to develop ways and means of communication between the director of a culturebase and the centres which offer provisions.

5. The possibility of harvesting local sustenance (meat and fish).

6. Remoteness of the culturebase to the most well known and already established places of trade (furs and wild deer). [15]

In the mid-1920s the engineer M.I. Penin was contracted by the Committee of the North to choose the site for the construction of the Tungus culturebase. He writes that he received instruction from Moscow to search for a site for the outpost, with

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14   GANO 354-1-297: 8-9.

15   GANO f354-1-297.

a comfortable route of communication that would become a cultural center that could serve the maximum number of Tungus natives who were more or less needing cultural and material aid (GANO 354-1-25a).

A 1925 meeting of the Turukhansk Executive Committee was called to discuss comrade Penin's expedition to locate a site for the Tungus Culturebase. According to Penin's report, the Culturebase would concentrate on offering medical and veterinary services as well as a school. He also noted that the Culture could broaden the capacity of expeditions to explore remote areas of the tundra. It was further argued that scientific research at the Culturebase could speed up significant advances in reindeer, hunting, and trapping industries (GANO 354-1-25a).

In response to a claim that the central task to the Tura culturebase should be co-operative and economic work, the future director of the Tura culturebase, Babkin responds that they are heartily interested in raising the cultural level of the aliens and that the central concern of the Tura culturebase will be the reindeer economy. In the transcripts from this meeting one member of the committee states that the culturebase would be a site for constant ethnographic observation. (GAKK 1845-1-20: 124). This observation further demonstrates how the imbrications of ethnography and statecraft created a radical ethnographic laboratory for the study and transformation of culture. The culturebase was an instrument in this laboratory, its purpose not only surveillance but also the enactment of Soviet social science.

Another engineer, named Sokolovskii, was contracted to plan and build the culturebase in Tura. The first stage of the culturebase was to have three buildings: 1. Veterinary station, 2. Medical station, 3. Learning station. (GAKK 1845-1-20: 162-163).

Several boats were sent to build the culturebase In 1927 there were two

steamers. "Kooperator" and the barge "Dudinka". These boats carried labourers and supplies. The labour force was augmented with local Evenkis, some of whom had already settled more or less permanently in the area. It is proudly noted in the caption to one archival photograph that Evenkis helped to build the culturebase, they were the first labourers, and they were paid the same as Russian labourers (EOKM 2341_no.47).

Tungus Culturebase in action

Let us hope that this young man will not become a shaman, as there is a centre of cultural work organized by the Soviet power at the mouth of the Kochechumo River, which is able to deter the *ayami, khargi* and *khovon*, who are trying to settle in him.

Suslov 1931: 126 quoted by
Boulgakova 2003: 148
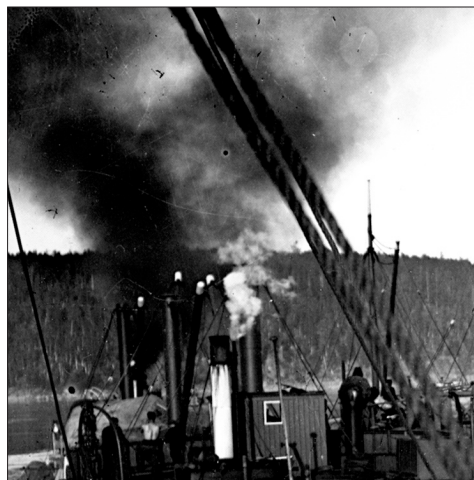
In the passage above I.M. Suslov is making a reference to the Cultural Base, which was at the time in its earliest incarnation. Suslov not only offers the nascent Culture Base as a prescription for backwardness but he also legitimates the Evenki world view and spirituality through his recognition of their spirit world. In other words, for Suslov anyway, the battle between progress (communism) and backwardness (shamanism and traditional forms of clan organization) was a battle between legitimate world views. There is no doubt that Suslov felt his world view was singularly correct but in this statement we see a recognition of ideology and culture that was not ubiquitously held. It is an important nuance in mentality that does not condescend to Evenkis (and Evenki ways of knowing the world), rather it attempts to work within their logical framework to undermine the abhorrent elements of Evenki spiritual culture that Suslov understood to be a disempowering form of mysticism.

Crucial roles in administration of the Tungus Culturebase were given to those with records of service to the revolution and the Bolshevik party. The first

director [*zaveduiushii*] of the culturebase, for example, was Filipp Iakovlevich Babkin (Red Partisan and hero of the Civil War, former Chairman of the Turukhansk Regional Soviet). Innokenti Mikhailovich Suslov was another proven agent of socialism. But he represented something else as well. Whereas Babkin and others had shown dedication and loyalty as Bolsheviks or through their service in the Red Army, Suslov was an ideologue, a scholar and a missionary. Vladimir Bogoraz, one of the founding figures in Siberian ethnography[16] (and a Bolshevik revolutionary) describes a new program for Northern Siberia:

> We must send to the North not scholars but missionaries, missionaries of the new culture and new Soviet statehood. Not the old ones but the young ones, not the experiences professors but the recent graduates, brought up in the new Soviet environment and ready to take to the North the burning fire of their enthusiasm born of the Revolution, as well as the practical skills perfected by revolutionary work. Before they begin their work, these young agents of the Committee of the North must receive complete and thorough academic instruction—primarily in ethnography—but in the North their main work will be practical, not academic, in nature.

> Bogoraz 1925 in Slezkine 1994: 159-60.

Bogoraz could have been describing Innokentii Mikhailovich Suslov in this passage: he was young, experienced, trained in ethnography, had a proficiency in Evenki, and was knowledgeable of the North.

In the same year that the construction crews arrived with materials to build the Tungus culturebase an epidemic of measles, transmitted through Turukhansk, swept through Agata, Chirinda, Murukhta, and Essei. A report held in the Krasnoiarsk State archives notes that in 1927, 326 natives living along Enisei coast and along parts of the Nizhnaia Tunguska river died of measles (GAKK 1845-1-181: 500). While epidemics raged through the taiga, reindeer herders had to contend

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16   Bogoraz along with Lev Shternberg and Vladimir Jochelson organized the Institute of the Peoples of the North and they were active with the Committee for the North.

with epizootics as well. Their reindeer were suffering from sickness and disease. One of the first culturebase meetings called together Evenkis living in the area to talk about the mange, a sickness that was killing off their deer:

> Comrade F.Ia. Babkin asked them 'do you want your reindeer to be healthy?' the natives all answered 'we want'. 'Did you understand everything that was said?' the answer: 'we understand'.... Beginning on the 2nd of December until the 12th of May from afar, by themselves and in groups or three or four people, there was an almost endless stream of visitors to the culturebase.... In all there were 84 visitors ... from morning till night they were wandering around the buildings of the culturebase...

> KKKM_r(pi)s 8471/416: 152.

In 1929, in its second year of operation, it is reported that there were 4,956 Tungus in the area of the Tura culturebase. 1,852 of them were serviced by the culturebase. Most of those not served by the culturebase, that is those who did not visit the culturebase (either due to distance or refusal), were from the territory to the south of the Nizhnaia Tunguska river, closer to the Podkamennaia Tunguska river. (GANO 354-1-295: 5)

The players were suitably revolutionary: The first director of the Tura culturebase was the revolutionary F. Ia. Babkin. Babkin had participated in the Enisei uprising in the early years of the revolution and was active as a Bolshevik. The first doctors were S.N. Bushmarin, D.A. Kytmanov, and L.A. Simonov. They came to the culturebase armed with an array of equipment not only for healing the bodies of the native workers but for conducting scientific experiments as well.

They were physicians and adventurers.
Apparently the doctor Simonov came to
Tura as a doctor however one document
suggests he had a much broader interest:
"Simonov didn't only heal and medicate,
he also studied the people's language,
folklore, and Evenki ethnography, knew
songs, stories, legends, and history"
(EOKM 2002). The veterinary support
was identified as an essential part of the soviet outpost and was tied in the a
rationalization of local economies. The first veterinary doctor was V.I. Pal'min.

Along with the veterinary center, the medical clinic was a crucial and
relatively straightforward operation. That is, unlike the cultural enlightenment
projects—criticized for their weakness and failure of implementation by Babkin in
his report on the 1927/28 work year (GAKK 1845-1-143: 1-39)—these operations
had readily developed tools designed to meet the needs of the populace. This is not
to say that the application of modern medicine was unproblematic. With fourty to
fifty percent of the Tungus suffering from Tuberculosis (GAKK 1845-1-143: 130)
there was an immediate and pragmatic call for efficacious cures. The tuberculosis
problem, however, has proven to be elusive and continues to disproportionately
plague Evenkis and other northerners almost a century later (Shimkin 1990: 323).

The immediate concerns of the culturebase seem to have been medical and
veterinary operations because of their relative ease of identification and the more or
less technical resolutions offered. Though education was valued it was less tangible
and would pose different problems than the manifest and corporeal misfortunes of

sick bodies. Most reports from the early years (1927- early 1930s) are about curing sicknesses and fighting epizootics. The battle with epizootics and a re-construction of the reindeer industry were targeted for expansion in anticipation that they would contribute to the economy of the fledgling state. Reindeer (more than furs and fish) were identified as the primary source of capital in the region. Indeed trapping and the pelt industry are rarely mentioned in these early years—perhaps tainted through its association with Tsarist Imperialism which built its system of dominance and exploitation around the production of animal pelts. This however would not last and fur-farming would soon became an important (or symbolically important) component in the re-construction of northern economies.

An institution of enlightenment

The culturebases were engines of cultural transformation that were tied to a powerful mythology of socialist enlightenment. Consider the full name of the culturebase: Institution of cultural-enlightenment [*kul'turno-prosvetitel'nye uchrezhdeniia*]. Education and enlightenment were identified as primary tasks of the culturebase. In the socio-evolutionary rush to modernity, the Indigenous minorities were seen to be in need of enlightenment and cultural uplifting. The liquidation of illiteracy and a broad program of ideological construction were core activities undertaken in the full-service institution. The director of the Tungus culturebase F.I. Babkin has left a trail through the archives that provides fascinating detail of the day to day workings of the outpost. In the following passage he carefully documents the operations of the culturebase in a work plan for the year 1927-1928:

November:

1. Opening of the night school for adult Tungus and Russians so as to evaluate the number of people interested in learning.
2. Prepared a report on the Sovietization of the natives of the Turukhansk krai for the day of the tenth anniversary jubilee of October...
3. Opening of a library in the Cabin of the Native.
4. Organization of checkers and chess games in the Cabin of the Native with a maximal attraction of the natives

December:

1. Lead a discussion whenever Natives arrive about the Committee for the Small Peoples of the Northern Borderlands.
2. Lead discussions on medical questions
3. Lead discussions on the question of reindeer mange and the struggle

against it.
4. Lead discussions about why native co-operatives are necessary

January:

1. Lead discussions on veterinary questions
2. Lead discussions on medical questions
3. Lead Lenin-day, prepared a report on the life and actions of Lenin
4. Lead discussions on share-holder co-operatives with many of them in the Integral [co-operative] 'Chuvakan'

February:

1. Lead discussions on the Communist Party.
2. Lead discussions on medical questions
3. Lead discussions on veterinary questions
4. Prepared a report on the work of the Culturebase for the volost Native Congress

March:

1. Lead discussions on medical questions
2. Lead discussions on how the Rights of Co-operatives are supposed to work.
3. Lead the international day of women, 8 March, with a maximal attraction of natives. Prepared a report on the meaning of this day.
4. Lead discussions on veterinary questions

April:

1. How should the Native VIKs work [provisional executive committees?]
2. Which sicknesses are suffered in the co-operative and how do they need to be healed
3. Lead discussions on medical questions
4. Lead discussions on veterinary questions
5. Prepared report on the results of the work of the residential school

culturebase director – Babkin.[17]

Soviet cultural projects and the transformation of everyday life is described by Sheila Fitzpatrick as a litany of civilizational imperatives that includes: "spreading literacy, introducing hygiene, abolishing superstition, encouraging a rational scientific view of the world, discouraging drinking and wife-beating" (Fitzpatrick 1999: 205-6).

...
17   GAKK 1845-1-125.

Comparing twentieth century history of the Canadian north to Siberia Dunn and Dunn (1962) characterized the cultural revolution in Siberia as a program of 'directed culture change.' It was a broad and sweeping program of cultural modernization and sovietization and the culturebases marked the first concerted and sustained effort to actually institute directed culture change among the natives.

> Native cultural bases have the goal of quickening and facilitating the attraction (*privlecheniie*) of small numbered peoples of the northern regions of the RSFSR to the general work of labourers in the Republics for the construction of soviet culture under the conditions of national self-determination. In the future the cultural bases should become political and cultural centers for these nations.

GANO 354-1-297: 2-3.[18]

Alexia Bloch's *Red ties and residential schools* explores the Soviet system of residential schools that were established to educate the children of nomadic hunters and herders. She notes that the residential schools "brought indigenous Siberians under the purview of the state, and more than any other institution, came to define the identities of the Evenki" (Bloch 2004: xv). The intervention of the residential schools in the lives of young Indigenous people was near total but they need to be understood as part of the larger program of cultural change. The pedagogical assault on the young was formative and formidable, but it took place as part of a larger campaign to transform everyday life. There was no time to educate only the children, everyone was required to participate in the project of cultural modernization. The residential schools

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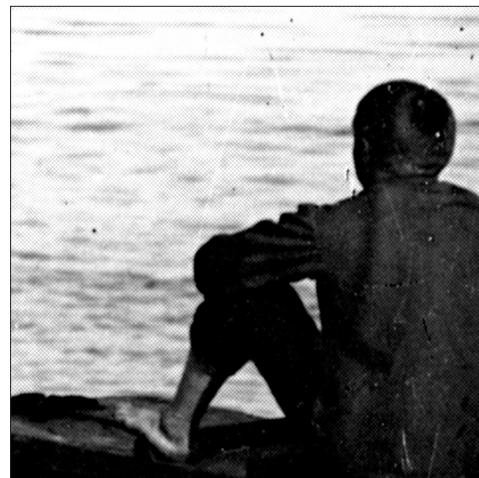
18   See also Parkhamenko 1930: 125.

emerged out of the culturebase. According to the construction plan reports, due to a lack of construction materials, the residential school, which was to be built in 1927, had been deferred. Nonetheless, with a teacher and teaching supplies they were able to begin schooling 10-15 Tungus in November of 1927 (GAKK 1845-1-143: 131).

As I've noted above, Babkin complains in a report on activities for 1928/1929 that cultural enlightenment was the weakest of all the activities undertaken by the culturebase. He ascribed this weakness to the 'objective character' of the situation. The Tungus, he writes, are constantly moving about and are scattered and would only come to the culturebase from time to time. (GAKK 1845-1-143: 1-39). The best time for this work, he notes, is when the Tungus are sitting in one place, fishing for instance and they can be gathered together to talk to about various things; in the winter, this is simply impossible (ibid.). The revolutionary celebrations held at the culturebase, however, attracted the Tungus, especially when there was food and gifts.[19] The complaint against nomadic mobility intensified the sense that nomadism was thoroughly incompatible with modern soviet life. This is an example of the underlying ideological force that would give rise to enforced sedentarization of the 1930s; along with the rationalization of the economy through the organization of collective farms and, later, state farms.

By the time the Tura culturebase was constructed there was already a heavy concentration of impoverished [*bedniak*] Evenkis living near or along the Nizhnaia

19   This point is actually more complicated as Babkin complains about that the Evenkis seemed to expect gifts every time they came to the culturebase.

Tunguska river, where there was both fish and the possibility of receiving aid from Ensoiuz (Yenissei Union) or other organizations set up on an *ad hoc* basis to fight starvation.[20] A key component of impoverishment, of course, was immobility rendered through a state of reindeerlessness. The soviets seized on to the idea that class war among nomadic hunters and herders needed to be tied to reindeer ownership. Their surveillance practices in the first years tended to focus on the documentation of wealth accumulation in the form of reindeer. The culturebase was thus an important tool not just for drawing in Indigenous peoples for transformation and cultural purification but as a staging point to further penetrate the territory of Central Siberia. By 1930 the Committee of the North was calling for the collectivization of reindeer and the reconstruction of the rural economies. This central mandated dictation of economic reconstruction meant the subjugation of previously autonomous reindeer herding co-operatives. Such an act of overt transformation required policy and muscle.

20   I.M. Suslov's father was apparently involved in choosing the location of the Tungus Culturebase. According to Anderson and Orekhova, Mikhail Mikhailovich Suslov "is credited with founding and directing the first Soviet outpost at the mouth of the Kochechum river in 1925" (2002: 92).

Anticipated resistance to the plan was dealt with by a call for the programmatic elimination of the wealthy classes (*raskulachivaniia*) through the liquidation of the kulaks and the rich (GANO 354-1-316).

The culturebase as a scopic regime

The culturebase was meant not only to draw Indigenous peoples into Soviet modernity but also to function as a staging outpost for natural resource exploration. The scientific gaze which looked out from the culturebases sought desperately needed resources that could help to fill the coffers of the Soviet Union.

The role of the culturebase as a staging point for natural resource expeditions should not be underplayed. It was a consistently circulated point that Siberia contained untold wealth and that the underdeveloped transportation network (Pechenkin 1988: 79) was the main thing preventing a direct flow of wealth from the coffers of the taiga and tundra. The culturebase offered an ideal staging point for geographical and geophysical expeditions. The pool of local expertise as guides as well as overland transport (reindeer) was essential for expeditions. The primary and most efficacious form of transport in the taiga continued to be dominated by reindeer, which remained in the control of indigenous minorities. This is also noted by Constantine Krypton, who writes in 1954: "The only means for penetrating and crossing the northern spaces are the reindeer, and they are controlled by the northern nationalities" (Krypton 1954: 343). Furthermore the culturebase offered a stable locale to store gear, recuperate, and stage further expeditions.

The scientists that based their operations out of the culturebases were not only mineralogists and other natural resource scientists. The culturebases were important for a whole generation of ethnographers who were able to launch ethnographic research from these remote outposts. Sergeev (1955) lists a number of ethnographers who made us of culturebases as staging points for their research: A. Apollov, I. Arkhincheev, N. Bilibin, N. Naumov, N. Nikul'shin.

> Before the war, the so-called 'culturebases' were devoted to the study
> of general culture and the culture of local nationalities, 'within the
> framework of Soviet reality.'
>
> <div align="right">Krypton 1954: 356.</div>

In 1929, Turukhansk district appears to have had 4 culturebases (Turinskaia, Khatangskaia, Tazovskaia, Piasinskaia). The Committee of the North was moving ahead with their network of culturebases in remote and out-of-the-way locales. They present a plan to build sixteen culturebases between 1928 and 1933, as part of the first five-year plan. (GANO 354-1-297: 8-9). In his work on art and propaganda at the time of the revolution and subsequent civil war, Richard Taylor describes the Russian Republic immediately after the revolution as a:

> A vast country with a widely-scattered population and a rapidly
> changing war from required above all a mobile and reliable medium of
> communication between the centre and the regions, at least until the
> situation had stabilized. The structure of the *agitprop* machine eventually
> combined a network of stationary *agitpunkty,* placed at strategic points,
> with a number of travelling agitational trains.
>
> <div align="right">Taylor 1971: 565.</div>

> In 1927, the Soviet Union began establishing 'culturebases' in Evenki
> territory. The first opened at the mouth of the Tura River in October
> 1927 and included a boarding school for Evenk children, a health clinic,
> a bathhouse, and a community center. A library and theatre were quickly
> added, and more culturebases were soon established for the Evenk.
>
> <div align="right">Olson 1994: 227-228.</div>

This is a typical and imitative summary of what the culturebases offered. From their inception, the culturebases have been simply and inadequately described as a roster of services with the rough implication of state sponsored indoctrination. Of the 'culturebases' and other soviet cultural interventions, Krypton notes the preparation of a special native cadre or intelligentsia was a parallel to the 're-education' of

the northern nationalities through "culturebases, traveling so-called 'red tends,' agitations stations, lectures, and wherever possible, radio" (Krypton 1954: 354). By the late 1940s these interventions were a kind of belated sovietization. Even the Tura culturebase which began operations in the late 1930s represented a late intervention relative to less remote locales.

> 'Experience has shown,' Pravda reports, 'that propaganda and agitation are most efficient and effective when carried on in the language of the local populations. Talking through interpreters does not always produce the desired results.' The same paper points out that in the Chukchi Okrug alone more than 300 agitators and propagandists who speak the local languages, are carrying on political work among the population.
>
> Krypton 1954: 355.

Krypton is noting a significant change in state ideology. From the construction of a new Soviet culture (albeit one based heavily on Russian ideals) to the construction of a Communist Russian culture; teaching the natives to become acquainted "with the cultural achievements of the great Russian people" (Krypton 1954: 356; citing Budarin 1949).

In the absence of any historical work on the culturebases, the passing references to this technology of rule have been reproduced over the years, for the most part, from secondary sources. The most significant of these comes from basic descriptions of the services offered by the culturebase model in the publication of the Committee of the North, *Soviet North* [*Sovetskii Sever*].

An example of unacknowledged importance of the culturebases can be

seen in P.L. Trofinmov's article "The
history of public education in Siberia at the
time of the second five year plan (1933-
1937)". Though he notes advances in the
liquidation of illiteracy, giving statistical
figures and context to the history of the
literacy movement, he makes no reference
to the culturebases in the construction
of socialism in the north. He writes that
according to the 1926 polar census numbers, prior to the first five-year plan, 13.6%
of Evenkis in Eastern and Western Siberia were literate (twice as high as the rate
among nentsi, mansi, and khanti) (Trofimov 196 : 142)
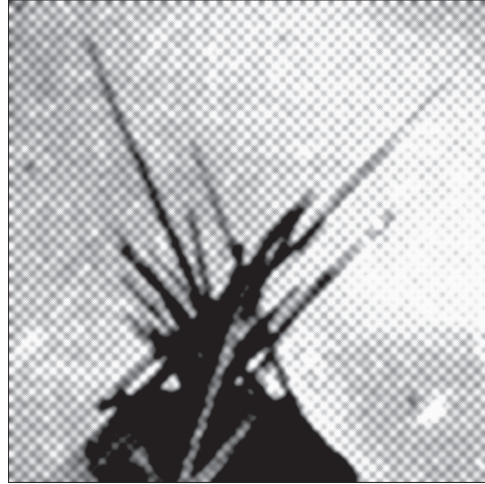
      A.P. Kurilovich offered a description as well in his report on the culturebase
from 1928:

> What is the Tunguskaia culturebase? The culturebase is a cultural village:
> school, hospital, vet clinic, zoo clinic, house of the native, cooperative,
> Clan soviet, KKOV, meteorological station, banya, leatherwork shop,
> canning shop, radio station, reindeer and water transport, emergency
> grain-supply store, hunters supply, nurseries, etc. Agencies gathered in
> the centre of the Tungus nation, under the direction of the All-union
> Communist party.

GAKK 1845-1-143.

To suggest that the culturebases were simply a kind of community center is to
underestimate their vital role in the first stages of sovietization. Then again, the
Dunn's sympathetic view of the soviet project is evident in the title of their paper
"Directed Culture Change." This is actually an important nuance that is worth
exploring. Is it more appropriate to speak of forced culture change or directed
culture change? The nationalities policies and the basic ideological support for

international socialism, opposed to the more chauvinistic and fascistic tendencies of the single-party state decorate this question with a variety of important differences. To be sure there were Evenkis that were very quickly incorporated into systems of governance. This affirmative action to create autonomous and self-determining modern political nation was a far cry from the enforced ghettoization and assimilationist policies of the British Empire and Canada.

> The infrastructure established in Tura, as in the other culturebases, was staffed by Soviet personnel who were determined to encourage literacy, instill European ideas of hygiene and medicine, promote new veterinary cures for reindeer, and create structures for indigenous self-government. The system of residential schooling, as one component of the 1920s culturebases, was meant to funnel children from their herding groups into town centers for education.
>
> Bloch 2005: 241.

This repetitive list of features was not only a casual repetition of features of the culturebases, it also referenced earlier cultural-enlightenment projects. The list of features is remarkably similar to that noted by Richard Taylor:

> it is worth noting that the design included a library, schoolroom, canteen, cinema and stage with, for larger centres, the addition of Komsomol and party rooms, a chess room and a music room; in many ways they resembled a modern community centre in their amenities.
>
> Taylor 1971: 566.

This kind of a list might be seen as a literary sub-genre, the intended effect being a recapitulation of Soviet successes and advances. A kind of mantra for success.

> The first culturebase was established at the junction of the river Tura and the Lower Tunguzka in 1927 and became the administrative centre of the Evenki okrug. A second base was established in 1928 at Khoseda-Khard for the Nentsi on the river Adzva, a tributary of the Khoseda.
>
> Koutaissoff 1951: 121.

This description of the culturebase is formulaic and appears over and over again in the literature.[21] In a similar fashion, the culturebases themselves were formulaic, they were essentially a communist franchise for Sovietizing remote regions of Siberia and the Far East.

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21   Aside from those already mentioned or quoted see Leonov 1928: 103; Dunn and Dunn 1962: 330.

Culturebase Conclusion

In *The Road of the Northern Peoples to Socialism* (1971), Evenki author V.N. Uvachan wrote in a celebratory tone that, "The Evenkis, in a single nomadic migration, crossed a mountain of one hundred years from clan organization to socialism" (1971:4). The language of Uvachan's book is typical also for its formulaic praise of the Soviet state. Bruce Grant has noted that native voices for most of the Soviet era offered "effusive testimonies to the success of Soviet government, which tell us mainly about the formulae of patriotic texts" (Grant 1995: 6). Some more or less typical examples follow:

> We, the Tungus of the district of Agata, recognize Soviet power as our working people's power, we need it. . . . Soviet power does not allow the poor to be cheated, it looks after all peoples. . . . The Tungus meeting of the Turyzh clan regards tsarist policy as unjust. We heartily greet the Russian workers and peasants who have overthrown the tsar and the bourgeoisie. The meeting expresses its belief that Communists and Bolsheviks are the real defenders of the working people. [22]

V.N. Uvachan was in a fairly unique position as a representative of the native intelligentsia. In the foreward *The Peoples of the North and their Road to Socialism*, the Soviet historian A.P. Okladnikov writes: "This son of an illiterate Evenk hunter became a college instructor! Those who regarded the Tungus as an inferior people, doomed to perpetual backwardness, would have never believed it" (1975: 12). Whereas most native voices were more or less ciphers (editorially selected,
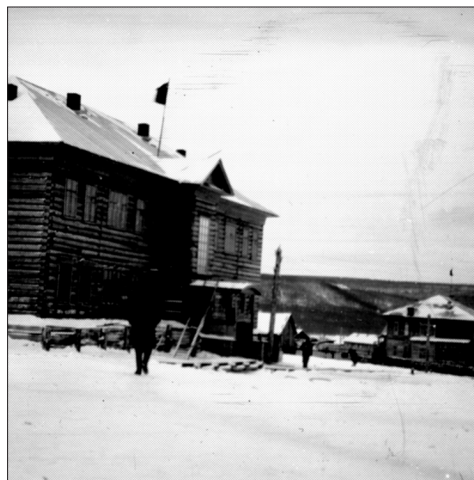
....
22   Agata, Bachinskaia, and Turizh Evenkis quoted in Uvachan 1975: 102.

transcribed, and represented by non-natives) Uvachan carried the authoritative weight of ethnic belonging, furthermore he was not only a 'voice' but an author, if one who was fully committed to the narrative of Soviet enlightenment.

The archives do not reveal a hidden thread or narrative that makes sense of sovietization. Those narratives are constructed by sociologists, ethnographers, and historians, as well as history buffs and ad hoc researchers looking for genealogical roots, evidence of past wrongs, identity, or to satisfy some passing curiosity. The small details and fragments of past worlds can be read and augured for deeper meaning or they can be coaxed to reveal unseen connections. They are animated by living minds and re-circulated in unanticipated ways.

This is about the idea of the culturebase. As a homeland. But a homeland for what. This was the dreamworld aspiration of soviet socialism. "Of course they want self-determination" Family and clan differences aside, the culturebase-as-utopia became a model to which the Committee of the North was able to pitch its project. Not withstanding some Yakuts living on lake Essei (who were seen as an ethnographical anomaly due to their use of reindeer instead of horses, as is typical of Yakut peoples, for whom the horse is typically seen as central symbolic, iconic, and even ideological motif)[23] the Tura culturebase was, for most purposes a Tungus culturebase (as it was often called). But it was not just a Tungus culturebase, it was to be the Tungus city, the national homeland for the Tungus -- soon to be self-realized Evenki -- peoples.

The culturebase is a widely cited example of Soviet modernization projects in Siberia. Given its importance as the largest material intervention, the first real

....
23   cf. Gurvich's book Culture of the Northern Yakut-reindeer herders (1977) deals with questions of ethnicity and economy.

staging of Soviet power and ideology in remote locales it is a remarkably understudied institution. Though it is widely acknowledged and referenced, the culturebase is not explicitly studied. It exists largely (in both Soviet and Western scholarship) as a portable list of services. As I have shown it was much more than this, not only a technology of surveillance but a carefully constructed apparatus for cultural transformation. Many of the culturebases seem to have simply transformed into settlements and villages. "Soon the bases became real towns, 'centers of economic and cultural life' of the northern peoples" (Sergeev 1955: 264). Some, like the Tura culturebase became administrative centers of the Autonomous ethnic regions. Over time as industrial mining and exploration expanded, waves of workers and their attendant support structures arrived.
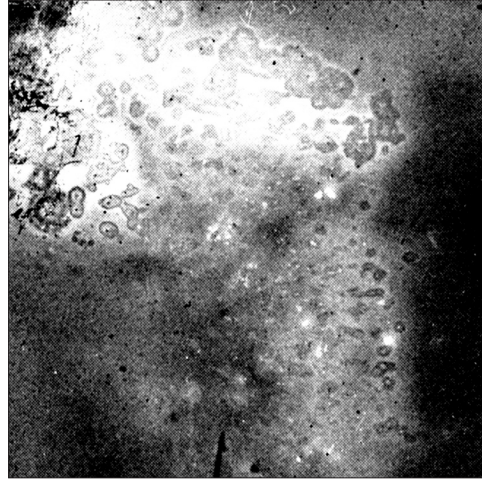
It is important to consider how little the culturebases have been explored in the historical literature. The reason they have not been recognized and studied as critical moment in the northern cultural revolution might include the fact that they were by-and-large ephemeral, they were a staging process and may be seen as only a bureaucratic detail. Within ten years most culturebases had become villages [*pocelok*], towns [*gorodok*], and administrative centres [*stolitsa*]. The entire project of sovietization of remote areas of the North is the story but the culturebases mark the beginning of this story in so far as they were the first concrete signs of state presence. While the church had built missions (Turukhansk) and churches (Yessei,

Chirinda) and the market system under Tsarist rule had produced irregular trading posts (often nothing more than izby) it was not until the culturebases were built that a sustained presence of Russians (and other Europeans) was made. Along with the culturebase came new demands. The old systems of 'princelings' (*kniazy*) and tribute payment were replaced by chaotic regimes of collectivization, taxation, debt-relief, state gift-giving, residential schools.... the new Soviet System (if it could be called a system... at least one that was characterized by constant shifts in policy) was performance of reward and punishment. Sustained support in the form of grain-supply stores and provisioned warehouses as well as entertainment/enlightenment such as reading corners, movies, music nights, and schools. Orthodox-socialist codes of behaviour were more deeply and profoundly applied than those of the old church. Pushing the rights of women and lectures on the self-serving motives of professional shamans must have seemed odd to Evenkis coming out of a brutal small-pox epidemic. One of the most profoundly interesting questions, is probably unanswerable: what did the Evenkis think of all this?[24] What did they make of the parades? The offers of support and the imperatives to adopt new ways of living must have seemed peculiar. There had, however, been several generations of Evenkis acquainted (albeit to a much less intensive degree)

....

24   There are, to my knowledge, no Evenkis who have written counter narratives to the dominant mythos of socialist salvation from primitive ignorance and poverty. Rousseau's notion of life as nasty, brutish, and short continues to hold power in the historical imaginary of many Evenkis I have spoken with. Indeed almost fifty years after Sahlins' "original affluent society" the mythology around so-called primitive life continues to denigrate non-western, non-state subjects.

with Russians and with indirect rule (demands of tribute payments, of support for the church or mission). If trade was never undertaken on equal terms for the Evenkis of eastern Siberia it was nonetheless cast as trade. The new conditions brought about under socialism were something altogether different. The means of production (did this include tents, cook pots, and stoves as well as reindeer and rifles?) would be collectivized. They were to be donated to the new Kolkhozy or Sovkhozy, only to be redistributed again on new terms.

> Combining the functions of cultural enlightenment, medical services and political propaganda with the economic role of fur-trading posts, the 'culturebases' were intended as the first step in the process of subordinating the Tungus to the economic system of the Soviet Russian state. Gradually they also became the nuclei of settlements and assumed the role of administrative centres for the native territories.

> Forsyth 1992: 253.

The modification of class structures for the result of cultural and economic restructuration followed the lines of imposed hierarchies from the Tsarist era. Dunn and Dunn note:

> These features, particularly the artels, were used by the Soviets as a basis for reconstruction. For instance, reindeer herding brigades were at first set up along clan lines even in kolkhozy where a number of clans were represented. It was found that in one clan brigade the earnings were being shared out equally, according to clan custom, rather than being allotted on the basis of work actually done...

> Dunn and Dunn 1962: 331-2.

Soviet authorities used sovietization to demonstrate to the world how generously

the State cared for the wellbeing of the indigenous peoples and minority ethnic groups. (Zibarev 1972, Uvachan 1977). Their work was compared with capitalist imperialism and the ongoing colonial regimes of the early twentieth century. Siberia was either seen as an indivisible part of Russia (and hence not colonialism at all) or as a site of Russian socialist benevolence; whereby soviets worked to raise the cultural level of the primitive and backwards peoples to that of the modern partners in the Soviet project. This later point was explicitly weighed against the histories of discrimination, conquest, and outright genocide that were generated in the colonial encounters. In this context colonialism carried its most pernicious and polluted connotations. It is ironic then that in some cases the term was used, albeit in a carefully circumscribed manner.

The Marxist-Leninist focus on international communism gave was to a surge of Russian chauvinism under Stalin in the 1930s. While the first years immediately following the October Revolution were concerned primarily with offering material aid and securing the borders against opponents to the Bolshevik Party. After the end of the Civil War, with the advent of the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands, the policy towards indigenous minority groups shifted to fostering local elite and drawing them into the lap of Soviet culture. The more militant interventions came in the 1930s and 40s with rapid economic rationalization, nationalization of property, war against so-called kulaks and shamans, and forced labour to support the defense of Russia against the menace of Nazi Germany, etc.

As Shnirlman writes, "From the late 1930's the main goal of the central authorities was to finalize integration of the ethnic minorities into mainstream society" (Shnirelman 1994: 203).

Decisive successes: Living socialist realism

In the first years following the October Revolution in the Turukhansk North
the management of industry and wealth distribution under a nascent bureaucracy
had led to considerable overlap and confusion over jurisdictional boundaries and
policy enactments. The Committee for the North had been created to give some
supervision to the vast northern lands of Siberia and the unrepresented indigenous
minorities living there. Their initiative to create cultural bases as sustained
technologies of supervision and intervention established critical inroads for cultural
transitioning. The time the Tura Culturebase was completed in 1928 coincided with
an ambitious project to overhaul the economy of the Soviet Union.

A five-year plan developed in 1927 proposed a universal project of
reconstruction, modernization, and industrialization that was dictated by resolution
of the Central Executive Committee in Moscow. This became known as the first
five-year plan (1928-1932). At this time, under the increasingly autocratic rule
of Stalin, the economic planning and development of the RSFSR became more
and more improvisational, acquiring "a dynamism of its own" (Kenez 2006:
90). At a time when local representations of state institutions and bureaucracies
were becoming entrenched and pervasive, creating a kind of stable government
presence, policies established by an increasingly centralized government created an
environment of near continual re-invention and instability.

Sheila Fitzpatrick has written that the "transformational rhetoric of
"mastering" (*osvoenie*) the vast underdeveloped regions of the Soviet Union" thinly
veiled the fact that "its 'backward' targets were often explicitly identified as non-
Russian, and the reality of the situation was that a model from the (Russian) capitals

was being brought, with crusading zeal and sometimes with violence, to the (largely non-Russian) hinterlands" (Fitzpatrick 1999b: 208). As I have shown, the imperialist rhetoric was already present in the Soviet enlightenment projects. The perception that Russia was in an economic crisis due to cultural stagnation became a matter of national security. The RSFSR's hinterlands were the most 'underdeveloped' territories distant from navigable waterways and other systems of communication and effective surveillance. Thus the transformational rhetoric of the first Five-Year Plan was at least a nascent interest, if not a critical component of the first inspectors that set out to examine Soviet Russia's largely unknown inland empire of the Turukhansk North.

The increasing centralization of governance and policy was at odds with the continued effort to build and foster autonomous socialist nations. While the rhetoric of socialist internationlism was not diminished the autonomy of anyone other than the Russian Communist party to offer direction in the project was increasingly weakened.

The general character of social transformation and economic reconstruction in the North appears to trace an arch towards the implication of indigenous peoples in the surge towards universal sovietization. Stalin's rise to power, for example, marked the beginning of the end for the 'ethnographical approach' to northern development (Slezkine 1994; Hirsch 2005). The Committee for the North was no longer able to act as a buffer to the state's headlong rush to modernization,

easing nomads through evolutionary stages and honing national consciousness and identity. Under Stalin a new Russian chauvinism emerged that tended to equate progress with Russianness, which according to Slezkine "was assumed to be largely transparent, meaningless, and therefore equal to modernity (the default culture, as it were)" (Slezkine 2000: 231). Non Russian cultural manifestations tended to be seen as backwards and abhorrent when they were not directly mirroring the Russian tinged cultural orthodoxy of socialist modernity. In many ways, though not all ways, the internationalism that had been a part of the earlier revolutionary cultures and movements fell away. Fitzpatrick notes that the cultural revolution "unleashed a utopian internationalism opposed to all national cultures and, above all, Russian culture" (1999a: 207). The fear of Russian chauvinism was noted by Lenin who, along many others, argued that Soviet internationalism needed to actively avoid a noted conservative tendency to privilege Russian culture. The rise of Russian chauvinism in the 1930s, while tempered by official policies of internationalism, was largely unabated due to its hegemony within the ruling elite of the RSFSR. Thus, by the mid-1930s many forms of internationalism were scuttled and a new program of Russification was unleashed in a 'great retreat' from a nationalities policy that did not give primacy to Russian culture (Fitzpatrick 1999a: 208).

In 1931 the Tura Culturebase became the capital of the newly formed Evenki National District (which became the Evenki Autonomous District in 1992). The

transformations in Soviet policy under Stalin re-visioned the character and direction of the Soviet Union. In a speech from 1931 Stalin stated: "We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under."[1] In the 1930s investments of capital for infrastructure development of natural resource extraction had intensified. The journal for the Committee for the North, *Sovetskii Sever* documents the increases and intensifications of development and resource extraction for this period. In addition the journal outlined cultural advancements and successes in the North.

The cultural bases represented a moment of Marxist-Leninist internationalism that gave way under Stalinist autocracy to a Russian nationalist chauvinism. Sovietization shifted its emphasis from the development of instruments for co-optation and cultural promotion to instruments of forcible culture change. This shift, however, was tempered by the continued reliance on the rhetoric of equality among nations and the national mythology of progressive communism. National self-determination had become the founding narrative of the Soviet Union; its progressive rhetoric was aggressively promoted within and without the state. The actualization of this in central Siberia came finally with the establishment of National Districts (*okrugi*). The Evenki National District was officially formed on December 10th, 1930 with Tura as its administrative centre. The Tura Culturebase

....
1   J.V. Stalin, *Works* (London, 1955), vol.13, pp. 33-44. Quoted in Welch 1999: 164.

saw only three years of full operation
before it was refashioned. The transition
from cultural base to administrative centre
meant greater state-wide recognition. The
implication of this was a greater degree of
state subsidization but also an increase of
scrutinization and an overall increase in the
intensity of external intervention.

Evaluating the lack of actual
autonomy of the National Districts does not preclude consideration of some
of the significant benefits. Even in the absence of actual autonomy or *real* self-
determination (instead they received a quasi-self determination within a highly
structured and limited field of possibilities) the affirmative action of the state created
opportunities and delivered services and support that were unimaginable in other
areas of the Soviet Union and that had never before been offered to indigenous
peoples of the Turukhansk North. The rapid incorporation indigenous peoples
into a leadership cadre alongside the development of indigenous intelligentsia
has made it impossible to make any kind of pronouncement concerning state
colonial domination. Soviet nativization
[*korenizatsiia*] was specifically designed
to implicate non-Russians in the Soviet
administrative apparatus. "The nativization
policy was a clear attempt to create, with the
utmost speed, a larger and better educated
labor force so as to rapidly industrialize the

country" (Grenoble 2003: 44).

National regionalization (*natsional'noe raionirovanie*): "This was a standard element of the 'Leninist nationality policy,' which assumed that the Soviet federation consisted of ethnic groups, that all ethnic groups were entitled to their own duly demarcated territories, that all national territories should have political and cultural autonomy, and that the vigorous development of such autonomy was the only precondition for future unity" (Slezkine 1994: 154). While indigenous representatives were fostered, trained, and encouraged to play greater and greater roles in the governance this shift was not immediate.

A cadre of Evenki intelligentsia were already in training when the culture base was built. The first group of students (Uvachan, Kaplin, and Sochigir) began studies in Irkutsk in 1928; soon fluent speakers of Russian were participating in the administration of the Evenkia Autonomous District. They became the cultural brokers for their brethren—though the field of articulation of specific needs and political direction existed in an increasingly limited field available to nominally autonomous regions.

By the 1930s the Soviet Union was deeply engaged in the performances of modern statehood. It crafted its identity through both internal and international discourses. The Soviet Union's social imaginaries and their interpellated audiences produced a number of registers through which subject positions were established. Direct and sometimes brutal power of the state was offset by diffuse implications

of social actors all of which were filtered through collective experiences and aspirations. Spectacular feats of industrial progress were often at the forefront of national mythographies, which were more or less reliant on the foundational story of revolutionary triumph over tradition. Maurice Meisner notes that "Lenin always deplored Russia's cultural backwardness — and, indeed, at the end of his life partly attributed the spiritual and political degeneration of the Revolution to the lack of *kulturnost'*" (Meisner 1985: 290). In this sense, *kulturnost'* can be seen as an intimate branch of sovietization that above all else valued commitment and sacrifice.

Siberia, as I have shown, offered a provocative illustration of Soviet power. Vast geographical distance, cruel inequalities, deeply lodged superstitions, and profound ignorance presented a formidable, if largely fabulous, opponent. The tropes of triumph that reinforced the apparent successes of soviet modernity abound. Geographical expeditions and the scientific development of new technologies came together with major long-distance flights that were publicized as the victorious annihilation of space. More than this, the extremes of the Soviet Arctic presented another degree of challenge. On class of cultural revolutionaries working on the front for sovietization were the so-called heroes of the air whose "polar exploits were featured almost endlessly in the mass media" (McCannon 2003: 241). Jan Stepanovich Lipp was one of the first aerial adventurers and he played a major role in the development of a nationalist ideology. Along with land and sea-

based polar explorers Lipp participated in signifying a massive national territory that was advancing toward a new future.

In 1935 Lipp made a stop over in Tura on one of his aerial expeditions. He laid out an aerial route in his small plywood open-cabin PO-2 and he ushered in a new era of aerial mobility. The victory over space was significant not only as a propaganda exercise but as a matter of state rule. The impracticality of governing the vast inland territories of Siberia through steamships and reindeer routes was more than a little incongruous with the self-image being crafted by the state. Air travel was more than a promotional stunt, though. It actually extended the capacity of the state to survey the Turukhansk North.

Just as the Soviet Union crafted its identity in its mission, Tura and the Evenki National District were encouraged and instructed to do the same. The program of official national identity construction included support and promotion of national languages, arts, economies, schools, libraries, and archives. The status of a National District carried with it the expectation to adequately perform the rituals of state representation. Such performativities included the preliminary services offered through the culturebase (school, physician, veterinarian, library, theatre, post, etc.) and extended further to include a regional newspaper among other things. The first issue of the media outlet representing the Evenki nation was called Evenki New Life and its first run was in 1933. Evenki New Life featured articles in both Russian and Evenki. Radio communication was well established by this time as well and was

beginning to find its way to connect remote communities with the regional centre. One example of this is a request from 1934 to have radio tower built in Chirinda, the centre for a native soviet located several hundred kilometers north from Tura. Chirinda along with other small way points and nascent villages were recognized as emerging centres of native life which required more than the weak connection of a postal system reliant on reindeer caravans.[2]

Yuri Slezkine argues that while the Committee for the North was committed to the idea of long-term education it was never fully implemented before the committee was liquidated (Slezkine 1994: 156). The idea was not entirely abandoned, rather the institution and to some degree its vision for cultural transformation were forsaken in favour of more aggressive forms of culture shaping. 1930 request for 3000 roubles to maintain the 'Red Tent' program in the Turukhansk region (GANO 354-1-316). The Soviet government "worked out written alphabets for these groups and established numerous schools and cultural bases in the different National Districts." (Lamont 1946: 136). The progress was by no means straight forward—the Great Fatherland War interrupted Soviet industrialization and the total re-structuring of the reindeer economy in Evenkiia was not fully realized until the 1950s and 60s. Despite great pronouncements of expectation and achievement development in the Turukhansk North rarely lived up to the hype. Decisive

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2   GANO 354-1-316.

successes described by V.N. Uvachan were not revolutionary but the result of a decades long quasi-systematic project of cultural shaping. Kolarz comments on some of the problems in articulating the state's plans for affirmative action:

> A school inspector of the Evenki National Area still complained of the 'acute shortage of national teaching cadres'. These cadres were trained by the teachers' training college of Igarka, but hardly any graduates came from there into the Evenki area. Nor could the Evenki area send anyone to the Leningrad Institute because no young people with sufficient education were available. Under these circumstances, said the inspector, the overwhelming majority of the teachers in the Evenki National Area were Russian, of whom only a few had good command of the Evenki language.
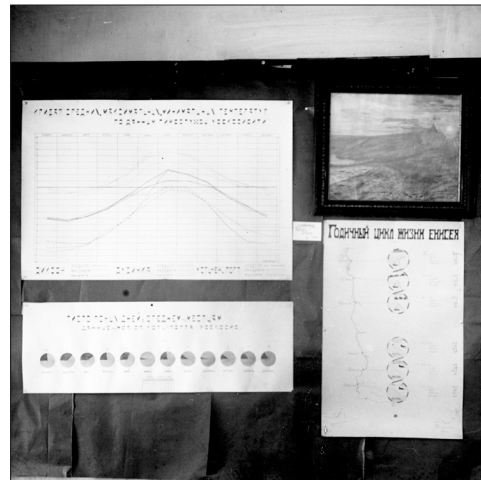>
> Kolarz 1952: 63.

Sovietization was about the construction of a new social body. It involved a radical restructuring of social relations that actively sought to draw in the most disenfranchised of people living in the realm of the Russian Empire. The Soviets not only were concerned with the construction of this new social body, from the individual to the collective, cutting right through cultural, ethnic, clan, tribal, and familial ties, they were also concerned with making this transition as dramatic and celebratory as possible. The Soviet cultural revolution[3] in the North linked political change to all aspects of life, implicating material culture and social relations. Sovietization was centralized and it was paternalistic. Decrees, mandates, and protocols were communicated to the remotest outposts. These, perhaps more than anything, are the most remarkable artifacts to be found in the archives today.

While great Soviet exhibitions are often lauded for their spectacular displays of socialist aspiration and triumphalism (cf. Bonnell 1997; Stites 1989) there were myriad localizations of cultural enlightenment work. Libraries, museums, school

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3   Michael David-Fox examines Soviet cultural revolution as a "contested and remarkably wide-ranging rubric, one that bridges myriad projects of internal and external transformation and illuminates the dynamics between them in the turn from the 1920s to the 1930s" (David-Fox 1999: 182).

entry halls, and former churches were appropriated as public areas suitable for propagandizing the masses. In 1930 I.M. Suslov, then head of the Krasnoiarsk Committee for the North developed a museum exhibition that would celebrate "five years of activity for Soviet power in the North."[4] It is unclear if this exhibition was ever mounted but as a point of imaginary historiography, we might consider what this show would have looked like in 1930.

The First Five Year Plan was coming to a close as was the tenure of the Committee for the North. Fifteen years of violence and turmoil caused by social and economic reconstructions were represented through the filters of propaganda and socialist realism. These representations produced historical mystifications and alchemical transformations of memory and experience. Class war mixed liberally with a war on perception. It must have generated a kind of profane illumination; the world as remembered through the greasy lens of post-Revolutionary Soviet imagineering. Through exhibitions as well as posters and other circulars both history and the everyday were refashioned as sites of perpetual exploitation and struggle. Soviet modernity delivered a new symbolic order that collapsed time and difference. Bolstered by the triumphs of the Communist party, Soviet modernity was propelled by revolutionary zeal and righteous momentum; it offered a narrative of mastery and messianic inevitability. The mundane experience of everyday life

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4   GANO 354-1-316, dated 18-II-1930, no. 116

in the Turukhansk North was drawn into a charged moral field of stagnation and progress. The projects of cultural enlightenment were pervasive, though not always necessarily persuasive. Regardless, these projects were backed by the unprecedented investments of a state that had suddenly become preoccupied with each of its citizens. Bureaucratic organizational culture—the institutionalization of power through the rationale of paper, communications, and archives—was the unmarked category of order upon which Soviet modernity and socialist realism were staged. Even in the most remote depths of primeval Siberia socialism was performed in a spectacle of coloured posters, new technological artifacts, and the looming promise-threat of overwhelming change.

Agitating Images

Part III
Dangerous communications

Dangerous communications

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Agitating Images

Active Denial Systems
(in lieu of a conclusion)

> History resembles photography in that it is, among other things, a means
> of alienation.

<div align="right">Krakauer 1969: 5</div>

The purpose of this thesis is to answer a question that has haunted me since I began my fieldwork and archival research: what is the role of photographs in the construction of history? The complex articulation of time and space that is played out on the surface of a dusty print only hints at the larger complexities that bind photography to contemporary historical understanding. History and photography are read through one another until they become inseparable: (the text is disseminated, the image is exhibited). In my thesis, the interpenetrations of historical and photographic gazes are aligned to focus upon the 20th century project of sovietization in north central Siberia. The re-emergence of the Russian imperial project as socialist colonialism and its first steps to the imposition of a modern landscape in Siberia is simultaneously constituted and dissolved through photographic documents.

My work demonstrates how history can be seen as being staged through various approaches to and motives for photography. The photographs that I refer to throughout my dissertation documents the first years of Sovietization in central Siberia. They function as an articulation of the principle that the histories that photographs represent are always socially constructed and polysemic. This ongoing-construction, in turn, forms an ever-receding horizon of deferred and negotiated meanings. However it also presumes that there is a dominant reading, a grain, to which we have analytical recourse. Photography and history are embedded in articulations of power and knowledge. I explore the tension surrounding the perception of photographs as producing a discourse vs. photographs as re-producing

objective truths and I propose that they are operating simultaneously as both.

In a social constructionist critique of photography, staging the photographic event is the first order of editorial selection that occurs in a long chain of choice and serendipity that will thoroughly undermine the putative objectivity of the photographic document. I see this critique as part of a much larger project concerned with submitting historical inquiry and interpretation to critical scrutiny. This critique, then, is a powerful challenge to the naive idea that a photograph is merely a reflection of what is out there in the world; yet it can also become an overzealous polemic, overwriting the irrefutably sensuous reflections of the world produced by cameras.

An alternative approach to understanding photography and history is to consider the social practices of looking that in many ways predetermine both what is seen and how it is seen. Photographs participate in this by being records of how the world was seen and what in the world was seen (and thereby suggest what is *not* seen in the world). Yet they also exceed what it is that was seen in them in the first place. They are both constructed and mimetic. Photographs resist or prevent the absorption of meaning (or historical meaning). Their radical particularity agitates against generalizations. Photographs have the capacity to disrupt oppositions and associations produced in purely textual regimes of representation.

Traditional historiography not only makes a selective representation of history (which all historical writing must do) but it simultaneously produces an effective denial of its own selectivity. I think of this effect as an *active denial system* (ADS) that neatly conceals and obscures the troubling or agitating details of everyday life of its own conditions of being and production. The *active denial system* generates

its own agnotology[1] as a means of producing historical truths. In other words it is a disciplinary apathy that engineers ignorance as a structural byproduct of its inquiry. The trick is not in the intensive generation of ignorance though, it is an inverse operation; a magic that is "efficacious not despite the trick but on account of its exposure . . ." (Taussig 2006: 123). Michael Taussig's exploration of the efficacies of public deception and collective belief through the idiom of "the skilled revelation of skilled concealment" (ibid.) provides a compelling example. Building on Marcel Mauss' study of "corporeal techniques" Taussig proposes an intricate series of provocations to think through the faith and skepticism that offer a stage for both magic and ethnography.

I articulate my own sense of the intimacies of revelation and concealment through the *active denial system*, a term borrowed from the United States military. While my *active denial system* is an effect of authority and representation the US military have a more acute awareness of its power to control (or, rather, create) space. Developed by the military subcontractor Raytheon, the ADS is a directed-energy non-lethal classed weapon that uses electromagnetic radiation waves to extend the military's sanction for righteous violence.

> Active Denial emits a focused beam of wave energy that travels at the speed of light and produces an intolerable heating sensation that causes targeted individuals to flee. The sensation immediately ceases when the targeted individual moves away from the beam.[2]

The curious name evinces a kind-of Freudian slippage in language. The name for this device comes from a military term: "Area Denial Weapon." These are weapons

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1   cf. Proctor and Schiebinger 2008.

2   Quoted from the Raytheon company website (Raytheon.com/newsroom/feature/ads_03-08). Last verified April 15, 2009.

designed to prevent an adversary from occupying or traversing an area of land. The so-called "millimeter-wave" technology apparently causes only the sensation of pain but leaves no visible trace. While the name implies the strategic control of territory through non-lethal force, it doubles as a strategic control of language. The rhetoric surrounding the deployment of terms like "stress position" (torture) and "collateral damage" (allowable civilian death) suggest that military technologies today require their own euphemisms and sleights-of-hand. The active denial system, which leaves no visible mark of damage on the subject, produces its own ignorance, its own system of denial against culpability. I trans-code this term with not a little irony to highlight the implicit power relations that historians have in constructing the past. I argue that a more honest historiography builds its own limitations into its rhetoric.

The militaristic/disciplinary metaphors are reminiscent of two streams read alternately and in parallel. But there is also the Benjamin's state of emergency; his history as something else something less opaque (or is it transparent) as what I have come to think of as History. Taussig works with Benjamin's state of emergency as well:

> "The tradition of the oppressed," [Benjamin] wrote at the end of the 1930s, "teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule." This was not only an attempt to designate a reality . . . It was also designed to provoke a radically different way of seeing and reacting to history, because in a state of siege order is frozen, yet disorder boils beneath the surface.
>
> Taussig 1992: 10.

The seizure of order, or the caesura it produces, is an effect also explored by Roland Barthes in 'The discourse of history' (1981). In this short article Barthes describes the "uniformly assertive" and "affirmative" character of historical discourse: "The historical fact is linguistically associated with a privileged ontological status: we

recount what has been, not what has not been, or what has been uncertain. To sum up: historical discourse is not acquainted with negation (or very rarely, in exceptional cases.')." (Barthes 1981).

Photographs, like historical discourses, seem to produce their own certainties. They tend to be apprehended within the *active denial system* and to generate powerful effects of realism. And like the discourses of history, though less forgivably, photographs are often implicated in the active denial of the visual sensuousness of the everyday. It is my thesis (to restate it again) that photographs contain within them the capacity to undermine the denials and closures implicit in historical discourses. To include a photograph may superficially illustrate the idea of the historical argument but it also contains the seeds of destruction or marginalization of that argument. The excess of the everyday that constantly threatens to overwhelm or obviate interpretation agitates against representation. This is what makes it dangerous.[3] History is an active denial system that obscures the messiness of the ordinary or everyday.

The challenge of working within the delimitations of epochs and eras shows up the fundamental dilemma of historiography: the application of boundaries. In many ways historians are judged, in part, by how well they have drawn the lines— whether the looming pasts have been neatly eviscerated or tidily contained. My contention is that photographs present ways of accepting and even highlighting loose ends; of undermining (or at least unnerving) history's own project or, at least, undermining a certain kind of authority upon which our historical projects rest). In Sigfried Kracauer's critique of historiography he writes that "the mirage of unity can be authenticated only by chimerical evidence" (1969: 174). The image of illusion

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as a powerful agent in the writing of history forms a centre piece to his essays. "The past is threaded with unaccountable changes and incoherent compounds of events which stubbornly resist the kind of streamlining required by general history" (Kracauer 1969: 175). It is this "streamlining required by general history" that is most challenged by the inclusion of photographs in my thesis. David Rodowick engages with Kracauer's critique of history through photography as well. He writes:

> By transposing and therefore unavoidably reducing the multiple experiences of daily life, photography and history are understood by Kracauer as complementary modalities because they are able to comprehend this reality by selectively giving it form and rendering it accessible and cognizable to a critical and self-reflective consciousness.

> Rodowick 2001: 149.

Photography's privileged access to the everyday and the ordinary provides the ground of refusal for interpretation and its necessary reductions.

Photography's own genealogy provides a useful extension here. In *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* Sarah Kofman notes that the camera obscura has been understood as a metaphor for forgetting: the transient but sensuously compelling image in the camera obscura flits across the surface only to disappear again. The technique for fixing images, developed in the mid-nineteenth, would appear to solve this and present a new metaphor, one of remembering. The privilege of forgetting, linked to the camera obscura is agitated by the threat of remembering linked to photography. In the *active denial system*, the kind of remembrance made possible by photography, the inscription of light, points to an entirely situational and sensuously particular moment.

The potentially infinite number of inquiries that can trouble a history are typically written away. Writing a history is a lesson in writing away the awkward bits and the parts that do not fit in order to make order. This disciplining of the scholar

has important ramifications for the history. While I may produce a perfectly good and passable history of sovietization in central Siberia it is no less precarious for being acceptable. At some point we learn to not ask questions: "That part of my research is over!" or "I cannot know *that* before I publish *this*." So the detail can be duly noted or simply ignored. One example of this selective forgetting that haunts me comes from surveying the photographs in the archival collections I have studied. These photographs have been used in the construction of my own historical knowledge and discourse. Counter-intuitively their role has not been to illustrate this historical knowledge. Rather I use them to agitate against it, to reveal its limits and its failures. These archival photographs offer unresolved (or irresolvable) questions which can only be dealt with through willful ignorance, marginalization (as a footnote), or theorization of their troublingly loose ends. To allow these historical nerves to hang out untidily from the history is to invite trouble and that is precisely what I am interested in doing here. The trouble I wish to invite is not through textual opening but rather visual opening.

The *active denial system* of contemporary historiography has no place for these openings that are only pointed up in the disciplinary nervous system. Maybe the *active denial system* is part of the Nervous System, Michael Taussig's response to the precariousness of the social sciences. The *active denial system* , whatever it is, must certainly be an artifact of modernity's fantasy of progress and enlightenment. It is a public secret that refuses its own public (or refuses to look in its own mirror). Taussig writes: "Might not the whole point of the [nervous system] be it's always being a jump ahead, tempting us through its very nervousness towards the tranquil pastures of its fictive harmony, the glories of its system, thereby all the more securely energizing its nervousness?" (Taussig 1992: 2). The *active denial system* is perhaps less

nervous, less unsettled (unless of course it is just node in the nervous system!).

The *active denial system* produces its own fictions of stability and closure to veil its reliance on precarious and effuse systems of knowledge and ignorance. Through the mundane and systematic denial of fissures and incompatibilities, the *active denial system* removes culpability. It is a machine after all. We are just operators. Like the soviet census takers behind their cameras. The midwives of history, we can't be held responsible for the beast that is delivered. Don't shoot the messenger. This is the effect of the *active denial system*.

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