

Kurapaty: Belarus' Continuing Debates

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The paper investigates past and current research on the executions at Kurapaty, in the northern suburbs of Minsk, Belarus, in 1937–41, covering the period from the discovery of mass graves in the 1970s to the establishment of an official monument in late 2018. It deals with several issues: archaeological excavations of the site in the 1980s and 1990s; the numbers, ethnic origin, and identities of the victims; the continuing debates between the authorities, scholars, and the nationalist opposition; the protection of the site from various incursions; and the role of Kurapaty as an alternative national symbol to the Great Patriotic War victory. It also looks at Kurapaty victims in the context of the Stalin Purges in the USSR as a whole. The authors conclude that while the number of deaths and the scale of repressions did not differ significantly from the Soviet average, the impact on the modern state has been largely concealed because of the politicization of the event, and the tardiness and unwillingness of the post-independence government to peruse the harsher aspects of the Stalin era.

Keywords: Belarus, Stalinist Purges, Kurapaty, Belarusian Popular Front, Memory, Poland, World War II (1939–41)

Soviet Entrepreneurs in the Late Socialist Shadow Economy: The Case of the Kyrgyz Affair

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Supported by new archival material, this article delves deeply into one landmark criminal case to explore key aspects of the social, economic, and cultural history of illegal production and markets in the Soviet 1950s–60s. The goal of the article (and the larger project from which it draws) is to use archival research to shed light on major themes in Soviet history. It touches on three important and promising fields: everyday life under late Soviet socialism; the vibrant history of crime and law in this period; and the history of entrepreneurial activities within the hyper-centralized state-planned economy, focusing on the dynamics of the shadow economy. The so-called Kyrgyz Affair, a famous and expansive shadow economy operation centered in clothing factories in Frunze (Bishkek), Kyrgyz Republic, is at the center of the article. I argue that the scope, sophistication, ambition, and success of this and similar operations helps us understand a significant reason why Nikita Khrushchev decided to introduce the death penalty for aggravated cases of theft of state property and bribery in 1961–62. Associated with and fully permeating the shadow economy, one sees many varieties of practices, attitudes, informal institutions and agreements, and relationships.

A Tower of Tangled Histories: The Upper Silesia Tower in Poznań and the Making of an Unromantic Poland, 1911–1955

PATRYK BABIRACKI

Engaging with regional, international, and spatial histories, this article proposes a new reading of the twentieth-century Polish past by exploring the vicissitudes of a building known as the Upper Silesia Tower. Renowned German architect Hans Poelzig designed the Tower for the 1911 Ostdeutsche Ausstellung in Posen, an ethnically Polish city under Prussian rule. After Poland regained its independence following World War I, the pavilion, standing centrally on the grounds of Poznań's International Trade Fair, became the fair's symbol, and over time, also evolved into visual shorthand for the city itself. I argue that the Tower's significance extends beyond Posen/Poznań, however. As an embodiment of the conflicts and contradictions of Polish-German historical entanglements, the building, in its changing forms, also concretized various efforts to redefine the dominant Polish national identity away from Romantic ideals toward values such as order, industriousness, and hard work. I also suggest that eventually, as a material structure harnessed into the service of socialism, the Tower, with its complicated past, also brings into relief questions about the regional dimensions of the clashes over the meaning of modernity during the Cold War.

Historicist Architecture and Stalinist Futurity

ANTONY KALASHNIKOV

Architectural practice in the Stalinist USSR saw the sudden and rapid revival of historical forms and styles. One approach interprets this development as part of a reactionary shift in Soviet temporal culture, a "Great Retreat" across all spheres of social and political life. The rival conception sees in historicism an aesthetic of "timelessness" and "perfection," which expressed Stalinism's self-characterization as an eternal, utopian present. This paper presents a third perspective, arguing that the revival of historicism stemmed, paradoxically, from a future-oriented impulse. This revolved around the charge that Stalinist architecture "immortalize the memory" of the era, to ensure posterity's gratitude and admiration. Accordingly, Stalinist architects drew upon supposedly enduring historical styles, which they expected to remain understandable to future generations. Further, time-tested traditional materials, forms, and decorative mediums were employed to ensure the physical durability of Stalinist architectural monuments. The paper concludes by situating this logic in the global context of interwar monumental architecture and considering some implications for our understanding of Stalinist temporality.

Keywords: Stalinist architecture, neoclassicism, historicism, memory, temporality

The Bestseller, or The Cultural Logic of Postsocialism

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When the word “bestseller” entered post-Soviet Russia, it was invested with transformational power to remake postsocialist culture according to capitalist models of exchange. From its appearance in the early 1990s to its apotheosis as the name of a new literary prize in 2001, the bestseller demonstrated the active power of cultural categories. It built a data-gathering apparatus around itself, shifted the ways that authors, publishers, and audiences interacted with each other, and even generated new modes of collective creativity specific to capitalist markets for culture. Applying insights from actor-network theory and object-oriented ontology, this article focuses on the bestseller, decentering authors and other human agents. The bestseller is shown to be more than a mediator between market forces and other literary actors; it is an active force (a “real object,” in the terms of object-oriented ontology) that plays a central role in the postsocialist formation of “cultural capitalism,” or the system of cultural production and consumption based on market value, fungibility, and exchange.

