Environmental Subjectivities from the Soviet North

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Interaction with the material world was an important, if underappreciated, element in the formation of Soviet subjectivity. It influenced everyone from dedicated conservationists and committed industrialists to victims of state violence. Indeed, engagement with the natural world shaped many people's selfhood in ways that both resembled the effects of the rise of environmental awareness worldwide and bore distinctions tied to the Soviet project. Specifically, environmental subjectivity in the Soviet Union was distinguished by the impulse in many people to simultaneously exploit and protect nature and by the way that the state's punitive use of harsh natural conditions affected individuals.

Over the past several decades, two scholarly literatures that address the issue of subjectivity have arisen alongside each other, but they have rarely, if ever, mingled. Whereas Soviet historians have interrogated autobiographical practices as mediums for articulating alternative forms of socialist individuality, political ecologists have analyzed how marginalized peoples, through their dealings with governments and international organizations, came to accept their own role in environmental stewardship. In this essay I put these two parallel literatures in conversation with each other and reveal the fruitfulness of bringing the notion of "environmental subjectivity" into the study of the Soviet past. A focus on environmental subjectivity helps insert spatial and material interactions into a field that has sometimes over-privileged the impact of discourses. Bridging the two literatures also contributes to political ecology and comparative environmental history by expanding the concept of environmental subjectivity beyond an individual embrace of environmentalism to encompass personalized attempts to reconcile ecology and economy as socialist imperatives. This moment is opportune for synthesis as well because scholarship on both environmental subjectivity and Soviet subjectivity has been moving from a primary concentration on rhetoric to an additional consideration of material factors.

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Political scientist Arun Agrawal developed the idea of environmental subjectivity in order to capture the evolving attitudes of villagers in the Kumaon territory of north India toward the forests surrounding them. Specifically, he uses the rise of "environmental subjectivity" among the local population to account for a shift in behavior from protesting conservation policies of the British Raj by setting forest fires in the early twentieth century to perceiving themselves as the key protectors of woodlands by the 1990s. For Agrawal, environmental subjectivity involves "people who have come to think and act in new ways in relation to the environmental domain" and for whom "the environment constitutes . . . a conceptual category that organizes some of their thinking."[1] Agrawal's view adheres to a post-structuralist understanding of subjects and subjectivities as being brought into being largely by specific discursive conditions and the micro-effects of power. But other scholars have expanded the notion of environmental subjectivity to include engagement with the natural world more generally. Building on theories of geographer Nigel Thrift, sociologist Mark Stoddart argues: "Our sense of self is discursively mediated but also develops through interaction with physical environments and their non-human inhabitants . . .'environmental subjectivity' refers to the formation of identities, beliefs, and practices in relation to non-human nature."[2]

Sharing some of the same theoretical inspiration for investigating subjectivity as Agrawal (namely the work of Michel Foucault), Russian historians have examined how people in the Soviet Union negotiated selfhood within a non-liberal polity. Many of them see the USSR's anti-capitalist socialist project as bringing about distinctive forms of subjectivity with new relations between the individual and the collective. These scholars have been primarily interested in the more remarkable examples of Communist Party members undertaking rituals of public penance, reflective autobiographical writing, and periodic self-criticism in order to align themselves with the Soviet state, while acknowledging that subjectivities remained flexible even during the heights of Stalinist totalitarianism.[3] Much additional commentary has followed in response to this "Soviet subjectivities" school, including skeptical appraisals, applications of the question of subjectivity to different types of cultural expression and social actors, and extensions of the analysis of subjectivity into later historical periods.[4] Some more recent contributions have paid attention to the effects of material interactions on subjectivity, including sensory and corporal experiences in film and literature.[5] Beyond the body,

1. Arun Agrawal, *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (Durham, 2005), 7, 164–65.

2. Mark C. J. Stoddart, *Making Meaning out of Mountains: The Political Ecology of Skiing* (Vancouver, 2012), 108. Here Stoddard references: Nigel Thrift, "I Just Don't Know What Got into Me: Where is the Subject?" *Subjectivity* 22, no. 1 (May 2008): 82–89.

3. Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Igal Halfin, *Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self* (Seattle, 2011); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006). Space limitations prevent me from being bibliographic in my citations in this article.

4. For a recent contribution, see Anatoly Pinsky, ed., *Posle Stalina: Pozdnesovetskaia sub'ektivnost', 1953–1985 gg.* (Saint Petersburg, 2018).

5. Emma Widdis, "Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity," *Slavic Review* 71, no 3 (Fall 2012): 590–618; Julie Draskoczy, *Belomor: Criminality and Creativity in Stalin's Gulag* (Boston, 2014).

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historian Alexey Golubev proposes the concept of "elemental materialism" to "trace and describe the social power of things, especially their relationship with Soviet selfhood" and Colleen McQuillen argues that some Soviet science fiction evinces the influence of non-humans, "specifically those comprising our physical environment, on the physiology and subjectivity of humans."[6]

A "neo-materialist" approach to subjectivity requires some theoretical elaboration. The physical environment acted as a force in subject formation in the Soviet Union, but not in the way described by long-discredited theories of environmental determinism. Thinkers like Jane Bennett, Timothy LeCain, and Bruno Latour have offered alternative avenues for seeing how the material world, including elements of the physical environment, inserts itself into the development of subjectivity. Attending explicitly to matter itself, these scholars have challenged the putative binary between nature and society and compelled consideration of mutually influential actors, including non-human actors, within assembled networks.[7] What Latour calls "actor-networks" include a collection of mediators in which privilege is afforded to neither the willful agency of the individual nor the determining force of structures. Instead, "an actor-network is what is made to act by a large star-shaped web of mediators flowing in and out of it," meaning it is an unstable assemblage of connected elements within the material world.[8] From this perspective, subjectivity becomes more visible when scholars consider engagement with such assemblages that include physical objects and non-human beings. Or, as Latour writes: "Subjectivity is not a property of human souls but of the gathering itself."[9] Through this "gathering" or assembling, interactions with the natural environment help formulate subjectivities and shape the intimate interior feelings that one experiences as selfhood.[10]

Indeed, it is also through the pervasive influence of material interactions with the physical world, and not solely from the connection between environmentalism and the self, that one sees the full significance of Soviet environmental subjectivity. Thus, this discussion extends beyond individuals connected to the environmentalist movement to propose that environmental subjectivity might have been a widespread phenomenon. I argue that the Soviet

6. Alexey Golubev, "Elemental Materialism: Objectifying Power and Selfhood in the Late USSR, 1961–1991" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2016), 23; Colleen McQuillen, "Human Adaptation in Late-Soviet Environmental Science Fiction," in Colleen McQuillen and Julia Vaingurt, eds., *The Human Reimagined: Posthumanism in Russia* (Boston, 2018), 102.

7. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, 2010); Timothy LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge, Eng., 2017).

8. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 217.

9. Ibid., 218.

10. Scholars of state-socialist countries have already shown how materials in the environment can function as actors affecting economic activities and politics. This essay brings this capacity for influence into the realm of the personal. See Zsuzsa Gille, "From Nature as Proxy to Nature as Actor," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–9; Zsuzsa Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary* (Bloomington, 2007); Andy Bruno, *The Nature of Soviet Power: An Arctic Environmental History* (Cambridge, Eng., 2016); Bathsheba Demuth, "The Power of Place: Ideology and Ecology in the Bering Strait, 1848–1988" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2016).

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Union produced both familiar and distinctive environmental subjectivities that relate to the material interactions occurring there and to the political and ideological project of the socialist state. Soviet environmental subjectivities fit within a pattern that connects Indian peasants, Greenpeace activists, businesspeople involved in sustainability, and government bureaucrats in many countries to the emergence of the "environment" as a new arena of activity. But beyond this shared experience, Soviet environmental subjectivity possessed two distinctive traits. First, environmental subjectivity in the USSR frequently involved a dual desire to both use and preserve nature. This trait allowed environmental subjectivity to appear in individuals who could fairly be described as *anti-environmentalist* and even *non-environmentalist*. Second, the Stalinist state often resorted to using harsh natural conditions as a tool for re-forging and punishing individuals, thereby manipulating subjectivities through material means. This latter characteristic gave a special potency to the material world in the creation of *Soviet* environmental subjectivities.

In order to elaborate how environment subjectivity operated in the Soviet context, this article analyzes the lives of three individuals who incorporated the environment into their selfhoods: Oleg Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, Leonid Potemkin, and Inna Tartakovskaia. Each of them lived through the entirety of Soviet history. They were born before the revolution of 1917, came of age during the upheavals of Stalinism, and passed away either just as the country ceased to exist or sometime afterward. Beyond lifespan, they were all united in having resided for a time as migrants on the Kola Peninsula in the far north. Living and working in this difficult, yet transforming, northern environment affected these three in varied ways that I will discuss. My biographical sketches rely on the written record, privileging ego-documents like diaries and memoirs when possible. Yet my neo-materialist approach attends more to locations where engagement with the material world, including labor in it, affected the assembled self. The written descriptions of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, Potemkin, and Tartakovskaia thus provide inroads into the role that material mediators played in altering subjectivities, especially through interactions with physical surroundings and experiences with animate and inanimate objects.

These three lives reveal different sides of the relationship between nature and the self and build on each other to argue for environmental subjectivity's pervasiveness. The story of conservation scientist Semenov-Tian-Shanskii reveals how the politics of nature protection in the USSR allowed for explicitly environmentalist subjectivities to emerge. It also shows how he himself developed a strong and enduring connection to a polar landscape. Communist geologist Potemkin strove to align his combined interests in exploiting and safeguarding nature with his effort to deliberately construct a socialist personality. His case makes it clear that even opponents of strict preservation could interact with the environment as a constituent of the self. With Tartakovskaia one sees authorities' reliance on the environment as a means for bringing individuals into the Soviet fold and their use of nature as a weapon in state repression. Since she wrote less about her environmental concerns than the other two, the example of Tartakovskaia also illustrates how Soviet environmental subjectivity existed beyond direct engagement with environmentalism and environmental politics.

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The Making of a Soviet Environmentalist

An explicit version of Soviet environmental subjectivity can be seen through the life of an aristocratic ornithologist who protected a parcel of the Arctic landscape from 1930 to 1990. Oleg Izmailovich Semenov-Tian-Shanskii belonged to an elite scientific family of the tsarist era. His grandfather, geographer and statistician Petr Semenov, was a leading member of the Imperial Russian State Geographical Society for decades. Just over a month after Oleg was born in Saint Petersburg in October 1906, Tsar Nicolas II appended the suffix "Tian-Shanskii" to the family's name in recognition of the grandfather's exploration of the Tian Shan Mountains in Central Asia. Alarmed about disappearing forests, desiccating grasslands, and diminishing populations of valued animals, some of Oleg's uncles had lobbied for the state to organize a network of nature reserves in the years before the Russian Revolution of 1917.[11] Though this family background predisposed Oleg Semenov-Tian-Shanskii to a life in science and nature protection, it was his interactions with northern landscapes and experiences with Soviet institutions that made him into an environmentalist.

During the revolution, his family retreated to its estate in the Tambov province. Eleven-year old Oleg began to keep a lifelong diary just as the Bolsheviks seized power. Many scholars have highlighted diary writing as a major means of self-fashioning in Russian history.[12] Semenov-Tian-Shanskii's diary served as a vehicle for developing his personality in part through its phenological character. Every day weather conditions and changes in the surrounding environment determined the notes of the young Semenov-Tian-Shanskii. Already studying Latin in 1918, he offered formal classifications for the flora and fauna encountered on the estate, paying particular attention to the various bird species. From his family he learned to take photographs of the animals and plants he observed for later analysis. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii also developed an aesthetic appreciation for nature in his childhood, labeling it beautiful and expressing awe at phenomena like the northern lights. This mixture of the classificatory and aesthetic echoed the sentiments of romantic naturalists—it was not by chance that he was reading the book *Observations of a Young Naturalist* at the time.[13] Even in childhood, love for the natural world comprised a significant side of his self.

It would be premature, however, to draw a straight line from these youthful interests to Semenov-Tian-Shanskii's later status as a Soviet environmentalist

11. Valerii Berlin, "Khraniteli prirodnogo naslediia," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 3–7; V. E. Berlin, "O. I. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii—ekolog i kraeved (k 100-letiiu dnia rozhdeniia)," *Tretie Ushakovskie Chteniia: Spornik nauchnykh statei* (Murmansk, 2006), 283–89; Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington, 1988), 16–22.

12. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*; Anatoly Pinsky, "The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 805–27.

13. Oleg Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Dnevnik iz Petrovki (1917)," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 2 (1998), at http://www.arctic.org.ru/1998/2_6_98.htm (last accessed August 20, 2018); Oleg Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Dnevnik iz Petrovki (1918)," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 2 (1998), at http://www.arctic.org.ru/1998/2_7_98.htm (last accessed August 20, 2018); O. I. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Khibinskii dnevnik," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 99–149.

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who criticized overhunting and industrial pollution. On hunting, for instance, his disposition changed from wonder at knowing nature through killing animals to moral offense at excessive human predation. Throughout his youth and early adulthood, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii remained enamored with hunting wildlife. Reports of accompanying relatives on the prowl developed into culinary descriptions of the "dark meat" taste of the partridges he shot in adulthood. Partridge hunting scratched the itch of his scientific curiosity as well, since "the very mating ground is interesting."[14] As he worked as a meteorologist in the Khibiny Mountains on the Kola Peninsula in 1930, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii collected data about birds and other species. Yet his conclusions about the impact of human activities on natural systems might have still gone in a number of different directions.

A key change occurred later that year when botanist German Kreps invited Semenov-Tian-Shanskii to join him at the newly established the Lapland nature reserve (*zapovednik*). In the years after the Bolshevik Revolution, conservationists succeeded in convincing authorities to take advantage of the new state-controlled property regime and create a system of nature reserves that afforded exceptionally-robust ecological protection. These nature reserves were intended to exclude all non-scientific human activities in perpetuity.[15] As Kreps described it, the Lapland nature reserve would aim not only to restore a threatened population of wild reindeer, but also to preserve "the entire geographical landscape in natural inviolability."[16] Many of the scientists involved in nature protection exhibited a deep sense that their personal life missions were wrapped up with this objective. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii wrote that "work observing and studying nature is more to my liking (*po dushe*)" to explain his choice to join the project.[17] Outdoor labor in the northern environment seemed the best option for developing himself at the onset of Stalinism.

Indeed, the creation of this protected conservation area occurred at the same time that the Stalinist state began its breakneck program of rapid industrialization and collectivization. Within a month of starting his fieldwork, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii embraced a more oppositional stance toward industrial expansion. On November 2, 1930, he recorded some "very troubling news" that geological discoveries of copper and nickel in the Monche tundra meant that extraction would soon begin there. These metals in the ground threatened a personally important project. The "entire nature reserve . . . will be ruined since the exploitation of one of these essential parts of the territory of the nature reserve will soon bring about the disappearance of the animal."[18] His pessimism proved unwarranted this time—in part because the reserve staff managed to adjust the territory's borders and in part because delays in

14. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Khibinskii dnevnik," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 104, 105; Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Dnevnik iz Petrovki (1918)," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 2 (1998).

15. Weiner, *Models of Nature*.

16. German Kreps, "Dikii severnyi olen´ na Kol´skom poluostrove i proekt organizatsii laplandskogo zapovednika," *Karelo-Murmanskii Krai* 6, no. 10–11 (October-November 1928): 37.

17. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Khibinskii dnevnik," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 139.

18. Ibid., 148.

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industrializing the Monche region gave wild reindeer time to recover.[19] Yet concern about the negative effects of industry on the northern environment stayed with him and became more pronounced.

Semenov-Tian-Shanskii spent the entire 1930s working at the Lapland nature reserve. With Kreps, he reacclimatized beavers to the region and witnessed the reindeer stock rebound to healthy levels.[20] The scientific staff there studied Arctic mammals and birds, snow cover, and the dynamics of lichen growth. Shortly after Kreps was forced off the reserve for political reasons in early 1937, Mariia Vladimirskaia, a graduate student and the future spouse of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, joined the scientific staff of the nature reserve. Birds helped bring them together as the two bonded over a shared interest in avian life. As the Second World War approached, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii helped convince authorities to expand the boundaries of the reserve to accommodate new migrations of the area's wild reindeer.[21] Stationed in Karelia during the war, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii gathered observations about birds that he would incorporate into later research. As one biographer exclaims, "A naturalist and at war a naturalist!"[22] After the war, he defended his dissertation on Kola moose and undertook zoological expeditions around the USSR before returning with his wife to the Lapland reserve in 1949.[23]

From then on, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii's environmental subjectivity related to his concern over poaching and the improper hunting of animals. Though he maintained the view that the reserve staff should be allowed to hunt and fish non-threatened species for their own consumption, he was aghast at the predation of wild reindeer that occurred during and after World War II. Explaining the significant drop in the wild reindeer population that greeted him when he returned, he wrote: "Culling was begun in the first year of the war under the flag of supplying the Soviet Army. In the course of time the initial goal was forgotten. Only the urge to 'warm one's hands' did not disappear, to despoil that which the nature reserve should have protected."[24] People's abandonment of an ethic of stewardship during desperate circumstances only strengthened his own resolve.

19. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Murmanskoi oblasti (GAMO), fond (f.) 773 (Lichnyi fond V. I. Kondrikova, 1929–1936), opis′ (op.). 1, delo (d.) 6, ll. 165–72, 223 (Perepiska po sluzhebnym voprosam V. I. Kondrikova, July-December 1931); GAMO, f. 773, op. 1, d. 2, l. 171 (Perepiska po sluzhebnym voprosam V. I. Kondrikova, 1929–1930); GAMO, f. 773, op. 1, d. 51, ll. 194–95, 523 (Perepiska po sluzhebnym voprosam V. I. Kondrikova, January 9, 1935–April 30, 1935).

20. A. Mikhailov, "Bobry v Laplandii," *Leningradskaia Pravda*, April 27, 1935.

21. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. A-358 (Glavnoe upravlenie okhotnich´ego khoziaistva i zapovednikov pri sovet ministrov RSFSR i ego predshestvenniki, 1933–1990), op. 2, d. 111, ll. 1–18, 20–34 (Ochet Laplandskogo goszapovednika o nauchno-issledovatel´skoi rabote za 1938 g.); Valerii Berlin "Suprugi-uchenye," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 153; GARF, f. A-358, op. 2, d. 32, ll. 10, 18–24 (Materialy po istorii i organizatsii Laplandskogo goszapovednika, November 1933-September 1940).

22. V. V. Bianki, "Naturalist-ekolog Oleg Izmailovich Semenov-Tian-Shanskii (1906–1990): k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia," *Russkii ornitologicheskii zhurnal* 15, no. 335 (2006): 1012.

23. Berlin, "Khraniteli prirodnogo naslediia," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 7.

24. GARF, f. A-358, op. 4, d. 1521, l. 21 (Vzaimotnosheniia dikogo i domashnogo severnogo olenia, 1958–1962).

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By contrasting himself with others, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii revealed an ethnic dimension to his environmentalism as well. He considered a group of indigenous Sami reindeer herders who resided nearby to be "the primary poachers on the territory of the nature reserve."[25] Their affront to the reserve's protected status outraged him: at one point he decried the "barbarism" of shooting female reindeer in their third trimester of pregnancy.[26] Seeing animal preservation not simply as his chosen occupation, but a defining trait of his personal morality, Semenov-Tian Shanskii lobbied successfully to exclude the Sami reindeer herders from the area.[27]

His environmental advocacy also concentrated on defending the Soviet system of protected nature reserves, which was enduring a major setback in the early 1950s. Along with most of the reserves and territory within the state system, authorities liquidated the Lapland nature reserve in 1951. Reassigned to the Pechora-Ilych nature reserve elsewhere in north, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii campaigned relentlessly for the reversal of this decision and eventually prevailed. The Lapland nature reserve re-opened in 1957.[28] The flip side of the state's capricious relationship to nature protection was that it also fostered the conditions for such passionate environmentalists to appear.

After the Lapland reserve's restoration, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii became considerably more vociferous in his criticisms of Soviet hunting regulations and, especially, poor practices of bird predation. In a 1960 report to the Main Administration for Hunting and Nature Reserves, he complained about the use of the slogan "exterminate ravens," since "nothing is said about how to exterminate them. As a result, 'hunters,' who in the summer enter the forest with rifles under the guise of exterminating ravens, will end up poaching. A raven is harmful only in places where many waterfowl nest . . . [but] is completely harmless in the Lapland reserve."[29] In his view ecology determined when and where human predation was appropriate, but instead improper policies were enticing hunters to be environmentally destructive. Especially blameworthy was the dolling out of prizes and the reliance on helicopters for hunting bears, which he thought "should be prohibited."[30] Another major problem that prevented "rational" hunting was the "poor work" of the nature reserves' security staff. Their dreadful "material situation" and frequent "inebriation" caused them to "not always feel the state significance entrusted

25. Ibid., 72.

26. Ibid., 85; O. A. Makarova, "Dikii severnyi olen´ Kol´skogo poluostrova v kontse XX—nachale XXI vekov," *Nauka i biznes na Murmane*, no. 4 (August 2003): 43; Douglas Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley, 1999), 125–26, 467.

27. For an account of this episode, see Andy Bruno, "A Tale of Two Reindeer: Pastoralism and Preservation in the Soviet Arctic," *REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 6, no. 2 (2017): 251–71.

28. O. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, *Laplandskii gosudarstvennyi zapovednik (nauchno-populiarnyi ocherk)* (Murmansk, 1960), 7–8; Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, 128–29, 232, 258.

29. GARF, f. A-358, op. 5, d. 101, l. 9 (Doklady direktorov zapovednikov i ikh zamestitelei po nauchnoi chasti na Moskovskom soveshchanii, November 21–24, 1960).

30. Ibid., 12.

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to them."[31] Semenov-Tian-Shanskii wanted the security guards to imbibe an environmentalism comparable to the conservation scientists.

Beyond these writings, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii used photography to engage with natural environments. Art historian Ruth Iskin argues that "human subjectivities are transmuted in their interactive play with the apparatuses and media of their time," especially through twentieth-century photography.[32] For Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, cameras were standard equipment in the field since his youth, often brought alongside hunting rifles.[33] He relied heavily on photography for documenting the nature reserve's activities, including in his study of avian life and in the aerial images used to estimate the wild reindeer population. As Semenov-Tian-Shanskii accrued pictures of lichen and other flora in the 1960s and 1970s, he observed the mounting ecological destruction perpetrated by the Severonikel´ nickel smelter in nearby Monchegorsk. Patient photographic data enabled a 1977 study that established the awful effects that pollution was having on taiga vegetation in the area.[34] Henceforth, the environmental concerns and actions of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii shifted toward the public denunciation of industry.

During the 1980s, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii heaped scorn on Soviet industry for the pollution it was generating. He attacked the "sword of smoke from the Severonikel´ combine" in an article in *Pravda*. Having already damaged trees on a fourth of the territory of the Lapland nature reserve, the nickel plant threatened to turn the protected area "into the same sort of wasteland as the outskirts of Monchegorsk."[35] He argued, "it is necessary to increase its territory so that its landscape will fully serve as a model of the primitive nature of the region."[36] Semenov-Tian-Shanskii had more success in aiding this piece of land than in curbing pollution overall; Soviet authorities soon nearly doubled the size of the nature reserve but failed to significantly reduce pollution from Severonikel´.[37]

His deep attachment to Lapland nature and its role in forging an environmentalist self remained with him until the end. The Kola landscape had become his home. In a response to a journalist's question late in his life about what it takes to be involved in conservation work, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii replied, "Above all being principled and [having] irreproachable integrity in

31. Ibid., 2, 9, 11–12.

32. Ruth E. Iskin, "In the Light of Images and the Shadow of Technology: Lacan, Photography and Subjectivity," *Discourse* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 60.

33. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Dnevnik iz Petrovki (1918)," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 2 (1998); Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Khibinskii dnevnik," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 99–149.

34. GARF, f. A-358, op. 4, d. 1640, ll. 1–86 (Vliianie promyshlennogo zagriazneniia na vidovoi sostav, rasprostranie, rost, i razvitie lishainikov v raione g. Monchegorska, 1973–1976); Valery Barcan, "Nature and Origin of Multicomponent Aerial Emissions of the Copper-Nickel Smelter Complex," *Environmental International* 28, no. 6 (December 2002): 451–56.

35. O. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and V. Kriuchkov, "Visit dym nad zapovednikom," *Pravda* (October 10, 1980).

36. Ibid.

37. V. E. Berlin, "O. I. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky—Naturalist, Researcher, Citizen," in *Laplandsky Zapovednik: Year-book of the Laplandsky State Nature Biosphere Zapovednik*, no. 7 (2005–2006), 8.

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relations to nature and people. For the study of nature and its protection, genuine people with hot blood and devotion are needed."[38] Intimate and honest connections to environments required the appropriate personality traits in his view. As a final act, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii chose to honor this intimacy by having his remains buried on the territory of the nature reserve after he died in 1990.

The case of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii reveals several features of environmental subjectivities in the USSR. First, it was certainly possible for concern about protecting ecosystem integrity to ascend to the height of one's sense of their moral place in the world. The institutional and legalistic structures of the Soviet Union created room for individuals to experience the natural world and commit themselves to it. Here his path led him through helping set up a nature reserve, protecting a specific species, fighting over-hunting, and drawing attention to industrial pollution, but others pursued different means. Related to this *environmentalist* subjectivity, the biography of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii provides an example of how the scientific and technological obsessions of the Soviets could become manifest less in a bombastic battle with nature than in a hermetic harmony. Though Semenov-Tian-Shanskii was notably pronounced in this regard, the widespread embrace of mushroom and berry picking and summer cottages among Soviet urbanites speaks to a more general desire to occasionally escape into nature. Finally, this conservationist's daily engagement with a discrete landscape and responses to changes to it expose a role for material actors to shape subjectivities. Diana Mincyte's study of way that everyday interactions with crops and animals affected peasant subjectivities in Soviet Lithuania suggests that this type of environmental influence was a broader phenomenon.[39]

Material Encounters of a New Man

Communist geologist Leonid Alekseevich Potemkin came from a very different world than Semenov-Tian-Shanskii. At one point in 1918, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii recorded laughing at some begging village children; around this time Potemkin was reduced to pleading for food from strangers and stealing flour from a nearby mill.[40] The two contemporaries also developed into individuals with very different views about the place of technology and industry in the world. Whereas Semenov-Tian-Shanskii was an environmental purist, Potemkin was a staunch optimist about technological solutions. Yet, despite his very different life, values, and opinions, Potemkin also found his selfhood influenced by engagement with the natural world.

In many ways the life of Leonid Potemkin is ideal for investigating environmental subjectivity in the USSR. While he certainly had less environmental concern than Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, Potemkin might have been the

38. Berlin, "Khraniteli prirodnogo naslediia," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (2004): 7.

39. Diana Mincyte, "Everyday Environmentalism: The Practice, Politics, and Nature of Subsidiary Farming in Stalin's Lithuania," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 31–49.

40. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, "Dnevnik iz Petrovki (1918)," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 2 (1998); Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York, 1995), 276–77.

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closest thing to the Soviet New Man. In his book on Stalinist subjectivity, historian Jochen Hellbeck offers a deep reading of Potemkin's diary and letters from the 1930s. He argues: "For Potemkin the development of this 'personality' (*lichnost'*) was the central theme of the age, and accordingly also of his personal development. More deliberately than other diarists, he situated the record of his personal life in the revolutionary narrative of the emerging socialist personality."[41] Interviews conducted near the end of Potemkin's life in 2007 left Hellbeck convinced that he had not stopped "living the Soviet dream" and still sought "to achieve a consonance between subjective experience and objective reality."[42] It is telling, therefore, that the natural environment influenced the self-fashioning of this true believer in the Soviet project, especially once environmentalism appeared as a global movement in the 1960s.

Potemkin's parents and siblings welcomed him into the world on January 12, 1914 in the southern Urals. They had been of modest means, but his father's death from tuberculosis and the material dearth of the Russian Civil War threw them into desperation. As an adolescent, Potemkin recalled supporting collectivization amid the unease of his fellow villagers and began to keep a diary as "a tool of introspection and self-improvement."[43] Committed to the Soviet cause, Potemkin joined the Komsomol in 1934 after enrolling in a mining institute in Sverdlovsk the previous year.[44] With growing confidence, he wrote of himself as possessing an "inclination toward the engineering of men's souls" and dreaming "about the ideal of my personality. . . . We need to create ever more, ever better for mankind, in this we find the self-satisfaction of the personality, the eternal limitlessness of the blooming of life, like the eternal flow of matter."[45]

Matter mattered to Potemkin. His diary entries and Hellbeck's interpretations speak to the ongoing, though uneven, significance of materiality for his selfhood. A sincere dialectical materialist, Potemkin sought to toe an orthodox Marxist line about the rootedness of social circumstances and human consciousness in material conditions. More than this philosophical position, however, he extolled objects as vital metaphors for Soviet communism. Current workers were like graphite in the process of being transformed into diamonds, making people "noble, bright, and clear as crystal."[46] Hellbeck comments on the esteem Potemkin afforded to a paperweight he owned that was made out of the same type of marble as the Lenin Mausoleum. This object can "be read as a symbolic substantiation of Lenin's body and Leninist ideology. The veneration with which Potemkin treated this artifact speaks for itself."[47]

Willfully embarking on a difficult path of attaining an idealized Soviet selfhood, Potemkin often obsessed about his own mental and physical weaknesses. Despite the performative ebullience of his diary entries, Potemkin was

41. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 226.
42. Jochen Hellbeck, "The Last Soviet Dreamer: Encounters with Leonid Potemkin," *Cahiers du monde russe* 50, no. 1 (January-March 2009): 140, 147.
43. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 231, 226–35.
44. Ibid., 241, 261.
45. Garros, Korenevskaya, and Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror*, 254–56, 259, 271.
46. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 235, 260.
47. Ibid., 225.

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in many ways also a psychologically tortured soul, suffering a nervous breakdown at one point in the middle of the 1930s. To overcome his mental anxiety, he sought to strengthen himself physically. He maintained that "physical exercise is a progressive force, a force that opposes slavish submission to the weaknesses of the body."[48] This worry about his gendered body exemplifies a real-life phenomenon that literary scholar Lilya Kaganovsky observes in cultural products. She re-reads the socialist realist protagonists in Stalinist novels and films—the New Soviet Men—not as "untroubled Soviet heroes, virile bodies, and heteronormative paradigms of masculinity" but as occupying "damaged male bodies."[49] In light of Kaganovsky's insights, Potemkin's coping with physical inadequacies appear as not countervailing, but paradigmatic, evidence for his striving for an ascendant personality.

Potemkin also tried placing matter over mind. Physical training served as its own avenue for self-forging, as he sought to fulfill the demands of Soviet masculinity through strenuous labor in nature. Possessing a yearning for an urban, cultural, and intellectual life that transcended his upbringing, Potemkin initially viewed physical pursuits in the outdoors as a chore and at one point despaired that the "work of a geologist is a parody of my desires . . . [and] the death of my ideals."[50] Yet the experience of geological labor altered this view and helped him cultivate a socialist personality. Potemkin described his struggles with the elements during geological prospecting in the summer of 1936: "Running in the heat in my heavy overalls from one mine to the next other (sic) and lowering myself all sweaty in the cold bowels of the earth I meticulously and unhurriedly did my surveying and sampling work. But by evening a cold had manifested itself. I felt indisposition and my enthusiasm was replaced by dissatisfaction with the cold."[51] This potency of the elements to infect his body, ruin his mood, and challenge his manhood soon became narrated as a setback before his triumph over nature. After rest, he reported returning to his energetic engagement with surveying work as if the fate of the world depended on it: "I burn with passion to grasp the secret of nature in the bowels of the earth. Cheerfully, with mischievous pleasure I climb down holes not adapted for climbing."[52]

In the 1930s Potemkin also developed strong anthropocentric views on nature that would later appear in his opinions on environmental protection. While he acknowledged the aesthetic value of beautiful outdoor scenes, Potemkin disapproved of a friend who wrote him: "Nature in no way is created for human happiness."[53] By way of contrast, nature for Potemkin existed exclusively for humankind to enjoy. This attitude burgeoned in him as Potemkin became a full member of the Communist Party in 1941, prospected for copper in the Caucasus during World War II, and led an exploration crew in the newly acquired Pechenga (Petsamo) region on the Kola Peninsula from 1945

48. Garros, Korenevskaya, and Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror*, 278.

49. Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, 2008), 3.

50. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 261.

51. Garros, Korenevskaya, and Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror*, 288.

52. Ibid.

53. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 271.

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to 1948.[54] This land, according to Potemkin, possessed "great and diverse" natural resources—"a treasure chest of nickel and copper."[55] His team of geologists discovered new deposits in Pechenga that helped turn the region into a new industrial center of the Soviet Arctic.[56]

Furthermore, labor in a northern landscape forged a dualistic understanding of nature in Potemkin. As he extolled the beauty and richness of the "rapidly and joyfully flourishing nature" of Pechenga, Potemkin also saw the natural environment as a "serious adversary."[57] In one instance his team persevered through road access being "cut off by snow drifts" in the long winter and still exceeded their production quota for drilling.[58] Such activities earned him approval as a "politically developed" communist: a party evaluation from 1946 praised Potemkin for overcoming "the difficulties of work in the polar region."[59] His view, however, was not that harsh nature should simply be defeated. Instead, dialectical engagement should lead to mutual improvement. As he wrote at the time, the "natural resources of Pechenga and the enormous scale of the planned socialist economy will ensure the rapid economic development of the region. On the foundation of natural resources, the full-blooded life of the Soviet population will flourish thoroughly."[60]

As he rose within the industrial and geological bureaucracy back in Moscow (becoming a deputy Minister of Geology of the Russian Republic in 1965), Potemkin also embraced an official type of Soviet environmental activism.[61] Notably, he joined the leadership of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP).[62] This multi-million-member organization had lost its teeth as a conservationist critic of wanton industrial expansion as Communist Party members like Potemkin filled its ranks. Historian Douglas Weiner dismisses the environmental ethos of these individuals by describing "VOOP bureaucrats" whose culture had "more in common with the Mafia" than "foreign environmental activists."[63] While Weiner is correct that people like Potemkin always put Soviet communism first, the incorporation of concerns about nature into their political activities was still a notable historical phenomenon. By the 1980s, Potemkin drew attention to the threat of

54. Garros, Korenevskaya, and Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror*, 251.

55. L. Potemkin, "Istoriia pechengi i ee bogatstva," *Poliarnaia pravda*, January 12, 1947, 3; L. Potemkin, "Istoriia pechengi i ee bogatstva," *Poliarnaia pravda*, January 2, 1947, 3.

56. L. A. Potemkin, *U severnoi granitsy*: *Pechenga sovetskaia* (Murmansk, 1965): 227–62.

57. Potemkin, "Istoriia pechengi i ee bogatstva," *Poliarnaia pravda* (January 2, 1947), 3; Potemkin, *U severnoi granitsy*, 281.

58. GAMO, f. P-359 (Pechengskii raionnyi komitet KP RSFSR, 1946–1991), op, 1, d. 6, l. 2ob (Protokol 1 Pechengskoi raionnoi otchetno-vybornoi partiinoi konferentsii, July 13–14, 1946).

59. GAMO, f. P-359, op, 1, d. 10 (Protokol zasedanii biuro Pechengskoi RK VKP/b/, 1946), l. 197 (Kharakteristika L. A. Potemkina).

60. Potemkin, "Istoriia pechengi i ee bogatstva," *Poliarnaia pravda* (January 2, 1947), 3.

61. Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 229.

62. GARF, f. 10174 (Potemkin Leonid Alekseevich, geolog, partiinyi rabotnik, zamestitel´ ministra geologii RSFSR [1965–1975], 1914–2007), op. 1, d. 5, l. 5 (Spravka Min. geologii SSSR i Prez. Tsentral´nogo Soveta VOOP o sluzhebnoi i obshchestvennoi deiatel´nosti Potemkina L. A., 1974–1980).

63. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, 402.

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climate change, calling for "international agreements to stop what is called the human factor deteriorating the atmosphere of our planet, staving off the threat of a warming climate and the ruin of the ozone layer."[64]

The sincerity in Potemkin's trajectory toward an environmental consciousness can be seen most visibly in the topics of the three books he penned between 1965 and 1977. In his first monograph he focused on the history of the industrial development of the Pechenga region, in the next on Lenin's view on mineral resources, and in the third on mining and environmental protection.[65] The genuine incorporation of nature protection into his personality also developed through the diary he kept during the Brezhnev years. In addition to often recording his activities as a VOOP member from the late 1960s into the mid-1980s, Potemkin strengthened his aesthetic appreciation for nature.[66] Frequent strolls in Cherkizovskii forest in Moscow and visits to nature reserves and woodlands elsewhere in the country allowed him to listen "to the echoes of Russian nature."[67] This time, more mild outdoors than the polar north rejuvenated Potemkin: "Nature diverted and calmed, having restored spiritual forces."[68] In 1982, Potemkin explained that "my enthusiasm for voluntary work in ecology" related to VOOP's "creative relationship to inspirational goals" and gave him "moral satisfaction."[69] His diary also reveals his interest in philosophical and artistic ideas about nature in this period. He read Renaissance thinkers, treatises by Russian radicals from the nineteenth century, and ecologically-themed fiction in order to deepen his knowledge about the "development of ideas about nature."[70]

Potemkin's reading of philosophies of nature informed the approach that he took in his 1977 book, *The Protection of the Subsurface and the Natural Environment*. In what was putatively a technical manual about optimizing mining techniques, Potemkin waxed lyrical about humankind's relationship to the natural world. He strove to further develop the dualistic understanding of relations to the environment that he already articulated in the 1940s. The protection of the subsurface entailed its own selection of practices to reduce wastes during mining and processing that did not necessarily require concern about safeguarding ecosystems. But Potemkin's argument in this book was that it led directly to the proper approach to reducing negative environmental

64. GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 40, l. 3 (Spravka Potemkina, chlena Tsentral´nogo Soveta VOOP, 1969–1982).

65. Potemkin, *U severnoi granitsy*; L. A. Potemkin, *Lenin i razvitie mineral´noi syr´evoi bazy* (Moscow, 1969); L. A. Potemkin, *Okhrana nedr i okruzhaiushchei prirody* (Moscow, 1977).

66. I read through Potemkin's diaries for 1966–1969, 1972–1974, 1977–1978, and 1986–1987 and he frequently mentioned VOOP lectures and meetings. GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 55 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1966); GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 56 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1967–1968); GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 57 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1969); GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 58 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1971–1972); GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 59 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1973–1974); GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 61 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1977–1978); GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 65 (Dnevnik Potemkina L. A., 1986–1987).

67. GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 57, l. 350ob.

68. GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 58, l. 68.

69. GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 40, l. 5.

70. GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 59, ll. 19, 264, 291; GARF, f. 10174, op. 1, d. 65, l. 29.

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impacts overall. He saw "no antagonistic contradictions" between the rational expansion of industry and the protection of the environment.[71] Indeed, Potemkin believed that the superior Soviet socialist system allowed his country to find a balance that eluded the capitalist world. "Communist society is able to ensure the genuine harmony of technical progress and nature, the optimal combination of the development of the mining industry with the tasks of improving the environment."[72]

This issue of improvement was significant, since Potemkin insisted that socialist nature protection was "not a yearning to preserve it in a previous condition, to return to the past" or other "such manifestations of atavism, with the abstract defense of the 'interests' of wild nature."[73] Here the contrast with Semenev-Tian-Shanskii's efforts to preserve parcels of territory unsullied by human activities is striking. Nevertheless, Potemkin advanced his own anthropocentric environmental vision: "The protection of nature—this is the needed and useful change and improvement of the environment for man."[74] Such enhancement involved reclamation and other efforts, which would nullify any temporary destruction of natural landscapes that occurred.[75] Though he came to them through communist thinking, Potemkin's ideas bear striking similarity to many of the technological optimists who have opposed environmentalists in the west. More significant, however, were Potemkin's laborious efforts to reconcile environmental concerns with endless growth. In contemplating seriously how to bring together his geological, ecological, and political work, he developed his own breed of environmental consciousness that fit well with how he viewed himself within Soviet society.

Potemkin lived over three decades after his retirement in 1975, witnessing the end of Soviet communism. He maintained allegiance to the Soviet system for the rest of his life and at one point suggested that perestroika proved that Stalin had imprisoned too few state enemies. Though it is unclear whether Potemkin's environmental outlook continued, he remained convinced that socialist industry was superior to capitalism. Despite the notorious pollution in the Pechenga region, he responded to a question from Hellbeck about the corrupt privatization of the nickel works there with abiding confidence: "I simply didn't expect any better from capitalism . . . I feel as if I stand on a higher position than other people. I can see over their heads, over the current era."[76]

Ideological true-believers like Potemkin had obvious reasons to engage with Marxist notions of historical materialism and dialectical views of nature. Subjectivities that entailed an anthropocentric, yet constantly relational orientation toward the natural world were available to committed communists in the Soviet Union. The deterioration of environmental conditions and the rise of environmentalism also affected the range of subjectivities. Though unwilling to express opprobrium about their country's environmental neglect like

71. Potemkin, *Okhrana nedr i okruzhaiushchei prirody*, 196.
72. Ibid., 8.
73. Ibid., 162.
74. Ibid., 166.
75. Ibid., 131–47, 168–93.
76. Hellbeck, "The Last Soviet Dreamer: Encounters with Leonid Potemkin," *Cahiers du monde russe* 50, no. 1 (January-March 2009): 151–52.

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Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, people of Potemkin's ilk were eager to add environmental concern as a Soviet value worth extolling. They were prepared to go through complicated, if incoherent, mental gymnastics to smooth over the contradictions between industrialism and conservationism. To sum, varieties of environmental subjectivity existed not only among oppositionists, but also among the entrenched party elite.

Ecological Entanglements of a Woman in Exile

Far from an intelligentsia conservationist or a New Soviet Man, another individual who spent time in the far north drew on interactions with the natural world in defining herself. Inna Lazarevna Tartakovskaia was one of the many imprisoned as enemies of the people in the 1930s whom Potemkin still denounced in the early 2000s. During her own long life, she did not participate directly with conservation or strive to create a communist environmental consciousness. Instead, her reflections centered on the enthralling, painful, and thoroughly environmental experiences she had had as a "pioneer of the north" and a victim of Stalinist repression.[77] Exile into forbidding landscapes served the Soviet state's approach to individuals in varied ways—unfamiliar environments could both remake and traumatize a person. Weaponized nature certainly manipulated Tartakovskaia's subjectivity, but she also ended up developing strong personal connections to some of the places where she had been compelled to migrate. Moreover, her case shows how environmental subjectivity encompasses a greater array of material relationships than those overtly related to questions of conservation.

Born to a Jewish family in Odessa in 1907, Tartakovskaia made her way to Leningrad in the 1920s with dreams of becoming a professional ballerina. While working as a typist at a state-run bank, she met a manager there—the previously married, Communist Party member Vasilii Kondrikov—and the two soon wed. In the autumn of 1929, the couple learned that Kondrikov was being assigned to head a new apatite-processing firm in the uninhabited Khibiny Mountains in the polar north. Kondrikov apparently embraced the challenge of the new position, meeting with government leaders and scientists at the couple's apartment. But Tartakovskaia despaired at giving up her ballet ambitions for the wilds of the Arctic and initially protested against the suggestion of Leningrad Party Chief Sergei Kirov that Kondrikov "send your wife to study and then she will help you."[78] The internal material world of her dancer's body was more central to her selfhood at this point than engagement

77. While only recorded in the 1970s and 1980s, her reminiscences still served as a template "for tracking the self in time." Post-facto memoirs obviously present an alternative glimpse at the self than contemporaneous writings and possess politics that reflect the moments in which they are produced. Yet according to literary scholar Irina Paperno, a "fusion of memoir and diary" often occurred in records of the Soviet era. "Both allow for the self to be linked to the evolving historical time." Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memories, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca, 2009), xiii, 7.

78. "Boi za nikel´: Vospominaniia I. L. Kondrikovoi-Tartakovskoi," *Monchegorskii rabochii,* September 13, 1986, 3–4; Tat´iana Shishkina, "Pamiat´o nem khranitsia zdes′," *Khibinskii Vestnik*, September 16, 2004, 6; I. L. Tartakovskaia, "Nachalo," in G. I. Rakov, ed., *Khibinskie Klady: Vospominaniia veteranov osvoeniia Severa* (Leningrad, 1972), 60–61; "Boi za nikel´," *Monchegorskii rabochii*, September 16, 1986, 4.

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with the external environment. Nevertheless, the men prevailed in forcing her to abandon ballet.

Tartakovskaia's career trajectory allowed new material substances to affect her assembled self, as she shifted from perfecting the movements of her own body to manipulating the chemistry of ore mined from the ground. She enrolled in the Leningrad Mining and Processing Technical School, where she concentrated on developing procedures for enriching ore from the Khibiny Mountains. As a student, she divided her time between staying with her husband for fieldwork in the far north and focusing on her courses in Leningrad. In June 1935, she completed her degree and began to work at the enrichment factory of the Apatit enterprise.[79] Over these five years, this territory in the interior of the Kola Peninsula had undergone major industrial expansion with the aid of various forms of forced labor (declassed peasant migrants or Gulag prisoners), and Kondrikov headed many of the new installations. Tartakovskaia's own work in the Khibiny Mountains involved chemical experiments with flotation reagents, such as oleic acid and peat tar, used for processing local apatite ore.[80] Laboratory interactions with these compounds comprised part of her environmental experiences in the north.

Similarly, the outdoor nature of the Kola Peninsula sparked vivid memories of her life there. Like many migrants to the north, Tartakovskaia recalled the natural environment in the region as both an obstacle and an inspiration. For instance, she described the difficulties that related to "the harsh and unlivable character of the north" and bemoaned a deadly avalanche that occurred in December 1935 as an example.[81] Sometimes she contrasted the region's environment with the goals of Soviet development, as when she noted: "The worker did not come to us here out of a love for the northern lights, but in order to labor and live in human conditions."[82] Yet Tartakovskaia also found Kola vistas that had been foisted upon her to be breathtaking. Romantically reminiscing about a "marvelous morning of the northern summer" when she traveled across a lake between industrial sites, she poetically described the scene: "The smooth surface of the wide lake disappeared in the distance, merging with the blue sky in a misty haze. Clothed in the green attire of the shore, the steep promontories that jut out into the lake gave way, opening a vast expanse. Mountain peaks soared as far as the eye could see. Everywhere was forest, forest."[83]

This duality alone resonates with Potemkin's views of northern nature, but Tartakovskaia also afforded the Soviet project with the capacity to improve the natural world. On a trip to the Murman coast, she was taken with the more striking perennial polar day and with the rocky Kildin Island, which was home to a nature reserve for Arctic fox. She observed that the Aleksandrovsk port, which was "completely devoid of vegetation" and had been "a place of exile" before the revolution, now possessed "the most interesting museum of

79. Tartakovskaia, "Nachalo," in Rakov, ed., *Khibinskie Klady*, 63; I. L. Tartakovskaia, "Fersman i Kondrikov," *Zhivaia Arktika*, no. 1 (October 2001): 35.

80. Tartakovskaia, "Nachalo," in Rakov, ed., *Khibinskie Klady*, 64.

81. "Boi za nikel´," *Monchegorskii rabochii* (September 18, 1986), 4.

82. "Boi za nikel´," *Monchegorskii Rabochii* (September 23, 1986), 3–4.

83. "Boi za nikel´," *Monchegorskii rabochii* (September 11, 1986), 3.

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sea flora and fauna. In a large aquarium with separate partitions, strange fish swam that we had not seen before and such astonishing flowers grew that it was hard to look away from them."[84] As a technician and spouse of an industrialist, she believed that deliberate human actions, such as the creation of this museum, enhanced the region's nature.

Tartakovskaia's discussions of engagement with the material world indicated the ways that the environment affected her selfhood. She found her place in the far north through this work in and experiences with elements of the physical environment. Such material interactions validated claims to have achieved something valuable by helping install and operate industry there. Environmental engagement of this sort has likely contributed to subject formation in many polities. Yet it is telling that by sending people to peripheries to rapidly industrialize the country, the Soviet project forced such environmental interactions on individuals.

Tartakovskaia's life in the Khibiny Mountains did not last very long after she moved there permanently in mid-1935. Denunciations of her husband Kondrikov for disrespecting party members, wasting funds, and behaving unscrupulously began to accumulate. In March 1937, the secret police arrested him as an enemy of the people and on August 25 executed him in Leningrad.[85] A month later police agents arrested Tartakovskaia. She recalled feeling "a bit of horror and a bit of curiosity" as a car took her in "absolute darkness" to a holding cell.[86] Confined there for weeks, the humiliating physicality of being a captive body overtook her. While awaiting interrogation, she shared a cell and a common toilet with many other women. "My God, how terrifying it is to remember. The most intimate human functions occurred before our eyes." She experienced "cystic neurosis" and "constant hunger," remembering decades later "the disgusting smell of the rotten cabbage" that she was fed.[87] The corporal revulsion she felt during this detention resulted from potent physical experiences that gave substance to her oppression during those weeks in a cell. Violent deprivations of incarceration and interrogation have often been employed by states hoping to break down individuals.

Yet the Stalinist state in particular used the difficult natural conditions of much of northern Eurasia to torture victims. Tartakovskaia was given an eight-year sentence in the Gulag. Exiled to Siberia, she endured two years in the Tomsk region and then went to the camps at Kolyma.[88] Fellow Gulag survivor Varlam Shalamov, who overlapped with her there, offered a view of the environment as complicit in their oppression in *Kolyma Tales*. He wrote: "Nature in the north is not apathetic or indifferent—it is in a pact with those who sent us here."[89] For Shalamov, collusion with state repression instead of

84. Tartakovskaia, "Nachalo," in Rakov, ed., *Khibinskie Klady*, 62.

85. Sergei Tararaksin, *Sudeb sgorevshikh ochertan´e* (Murmansk, 2006), 81–90.

86. I. L. Tartakovskaia, "Kazalos´, my v kamere symasshedshikh . . ." in V. E. Levtov, ed., *Budni bol´shogo terrora v vospominaniiakh i dokumentakh* (Saint Petersburg, 2008), 137–38.

87. Ibid., 137–39.

88. Ibid.; "Zhertvy politicheskogo terror SSSR," Memorial, at, http://lists.memo.ru/d32/f109.htm (last accessed August 20, 2018). Tartakovskaia recalled bravely crying "aren't you ashamed" at the sentencing agent when learning this fate.

89. Varlam Shalamov, *Kolymskie rasskazy* (London, 1978), 94.

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with socialist accomplishments defined the natural environment in such a setting. Tartakovskaia expressed a similar sentiment about the complicity of "climate and nature" in exacerbating the viciousness of authorities.[90]

Indeed, the miseries of deprivation can transfigure prisoners' personalities. Historians have recently observed divergent effects of material dearth on gendered subjectivities in particular. Discussing the blockade of Leningrad, Alexis Peri posits that "the violence of starvation" altered bodies, serving to erase "conventional signs of sexual difference. . . . It grew harder for the diarists to delineate, based on physical evidence, between male and female or masculine or feminine."[91] But in a study of women prisoners in communist prison camps in Poland after the war, Anna Müller notices a different dynamic: "Stalinist prisons were sites in which the irreducibility of human biology and the extraordinary human capacity of self re-creation intersected." Prison "strengthened traditional gender norms" as "many women prisoners used their bodies as the most visible and obvious element of their identity."[92]

The Gulag environment affected Tartakovskaia's subjectivity both through Müller's gendered reinvention and Peri's de-gendering. Her stint in prison overlapped with the system's most lethal period in the early 1940s, when wartime scarcity and exposure to the unabated elements killed and injured many in the camps. The cold of incarceration mangled the former ballerina's body decades later, when Tartakovska lost her legs as a delayed consequence of frostbite she suffered while imprisoned. Yet while in the Gulag, she took advantage of an opportunity to renew her interest in dance and even performed in a prison camp ensemble.[93] This return to dance can be seen as accentuating aspects of her identity from before the Stalinist era.

Released early in 1943, Tartakovskaia was at first required to stay in the town of Magadan near the Kolyma camps. Reunited with her son, who had survived the siege of Leningrad while living with an aunt, she continued the bodily labor of dancing at a local theater. A neighbor recalled Tartakovskaia as "very kind" and remembered discussions of her previous life on the Kola Peninsula. The family eventually returned to Leningrad and Tartakovskaia was rehabilitated in 1956. While reintegration must have proved challenging, Tartakovskaia successfully resumed her career as an enrichment specialist, working at the institute Mekhanobr.[94] At this stage, her material interactions again concentrated on work with chemicals in laboratories.

90. "Boi za nikel´," *Monchegorskii rabochii*, September 18, 1986, 4.

91. Alexis Peri, *The War Within: Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017), 42.

92. Anna Müller, *If the Walls Could Speak: Inside a Women's Prison in Communist Poland* (Oxford, 2018), 5.

93. Shishkina, "Pamiat´o nem khranitsia zdes´," *Khibinskii Vestnik*, September 16, 2004, 6.

94. "Zhertvy politicheskogo terror SSSR," Memorial, at http://lists.memo.ru/d32/f109.htm (last accessed August 20, 2018); A. G. Kozlov, *Teatr na severnoi zemle: Ocherki po istorii Magdanskogo muzykal´no-dramaticheskogo teatra im. M. Gor´kogo (1933–1953 gg.)* (Magadan, 1992), 93–94; A. G. Kozlov, *Ogni lagernoi rampy: Iz istorii Magadanskogo teatra 30–50-kh godov* (Moscow, 1992), 133–34; Arkadii Arsh, "Ia liubliu tebia, Magadan!" at http://neisri.narod.ru/academnet/1school/15–1951/arsh/index.htm (last accessed August, 2018).

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In the early 1960s she visited the Khibiny region for the first time since 1937 and described being taken with the "huge, powerful, and beautiful enterprise" there and heartened by a new generation of workers who had heard tales about Kondrikov. "It was very pleasant for me to realize that the youth remember the people who devoted their strength, energy, and the fervor of their hearts to the pursuit of assimilating the north."[95] These words reflect a subjectivity tied to industrializing the nature of the Kola Peninsula—a personal commitment that revived after years of repression and suffering. Memories of engagement with the Khibiny environment remained strong from her retirement in the 1970s to her death in 1990. Tartakovskaia evoked these deep attachments to place while requesting a watercolor painting of the northern landscape: "For me and for my son this region is very dear . . . after all since youth my life has been happily and unhappily bound to the Khibiny."[96]

Women like Tartakovskaia experienced some of the most dramatic and cruelest episodes of Soviet history and emerged changed because of them. Her life shows the prevalence of the material environment in the formation of subjectivities for individuals who did not seek out ecological relations, but instead were forced into potent entanglements with the natural world by Soviet authorities. For the millions of Soviets who faced state oppression, willingly or unwillingly migrated to unfamiliar peripheries, or simply made a life for themselves at some remove from environmental debates, this case of a dancer who lost her legs demonstrates the existence of subjectivities influenced by the broad array of physical engagements with the natural world. It suggests that diverse forms of environmental subjectivities affected many people in the USSR.

Environmental Subjectivity and Soviet Subjectivity

Putting environmental subjectivity and Soviet subjectivity in dialogue with each other advances scholarly discussions about both concepts. For one thing, it helps us see the changing and international character of the Soviet Union. Even Potemkin, who took Marxist ideology more seriously than most, recalibrated himself in light of the global rise of environmentalism during the Cold War and the environmental consequences of industrialization. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii shifted from a conservationist in the mold of Sierra Club-founder John Muir to an environmentalist akin to anti-DDT activist Rachel Carson. Training in mining and chemical processing influenced Tartakovskaia's relationship with nature, as it did for many educated at technical schools worldwide. These broadly-shared influences on Soviet subjectivity point to the need for comparisons with regimes elsewhere in the world.

Yet distinctive features of environmental subjectivity appeared in the Soviet Union. Perhaps most notably, forced engagement with severe

95. Tartakovskaia, "Nachalo," in Rakov, ed., *Khibinskie Klady*, 61, 66.

96. Iu. L. Voitekhovskii, "Neizvestnoe pis´mo I. L. Kondrikovoi I. V. Bel´kovu," *Tietta*, no. 5 (2008): 48–49.

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environments served the state's efforts to punish people and cultivate socialist individuals, altering subjectivities in the process. Furthermore, the attempts of some people in the USSR to smooth over the contradictions between industrial expansion and nature protection demonstrate that alternative avenues to environmental consciousness developed under Soviet socialism. The insistence that humanity can balance economic and environmental needs appears in several guises of mainstream environmentalism and sustainable development. Yet some Soviet citizens, such as Potemkin and Tartakovskaia, arrived at this conclusion through alternative patterns of thinking about the trajectory of world history that was rooted in both ideology and their specific material experiences. Potemkin's denial of contradictions between industrial activity and environmental protection came from a genuine effort to make sense of nature under Soviet socialism. More oppositional figures like Semenov-Tian-Shanskii had to rely on powerful state institutions to pursue their agendas, governing organizations that were often unavailable outside of the communist bloc.

This look at the Soviet case, moreover, suggests a revision to the original idea of environmental subjectivity. Bringing material influences into the study of environmental subjectivity appears a promising route for giving the notion even greater explanatory power. Subjectivity is certainly shaped by discourse, but not exclusively so. As the hunting experiences of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, the invigorating walks of Potemkin, and the inspirational boat trip of Tartakovskaia have shown, interactions with nature also affected subjectivity. Indeed, material engagement fostered quite different views about environmental protection, as seen in the distinctions between Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Potemkin. One could bracket off "environmentalist" subjectivity from "environmental" subjectivity to maintain the initial concept's restricted focus on changing approaches toward conservation. But there is much to be gained in terms of understanding the varieties and shadings of environmental subjectivities by expanding the notion beyond an exclusive concentration on overt environmental politics and toward the totality of interactions with the natural environment.

Attention to individuals' relationship to the natural world also compels rethinking of some aspects of Soviet subjectivity. In line with scholars who have started to look at the influence of corporal and material factors, my emphasis on the physical environment shows the wide array of subjectivities that existed in the Soviet Union and the varied means of constituting them. This analytic move does not abandon Stalinist and socialist ideology as a medium that shaped the self but embeds it an elaborate network of connections that extend outside of the mind of a person.

Lastly, this analysis of Soviet environmental subjectivity has shown the strength and salience of neo-materialism as an approach to history. Scholars should think through the vast array of animate and inanimate things that can nudge the past in certain directions and incorporate them into their historical interpretations of seemingly non-material and non-environmental developments. One need not accept the most strident implications of network theorists like Bruno Latour—such as there being no difference between the actions of objects and the agency of people, or that the categories of nature and society

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must be completely collapsed—to see varied and evolving influences of environmental engagement on particular historical contexts.[97] As a heuristic for revealing the effects of an ever-changing and active material world where one might not expect them, neo-materialism enables revisiting phenomena beyond subjectivity.

97. A recent critique by Andreas Malm raises many objections to the maximalist strands in Latour's oeuvre, but it does little to challenge neo-materialism's potency as a tool for analyzing the underappreciated influence of the material world in specific settings. Andreas Malm, *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London, 2018).

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