

From the Editors

Post-Post Historiography, or the Trends of the "Naughts" (p. 645)

With this number of *Kritika* we complete our fifth volume of the journal and stand at the midpoint of the first decade of the 21st century. Although such landmarks often provide grounds for stocktaking, some of it useful, we have always been a bit skeptical of jubilees, anniversaries, institutional histories, and the other celebratory accessories of the historians' craft. In these columns we have also tilted against the "fetishization of the decade as the default chronological unit of analysis" and historians' congenital reluctance to transcend conventional chronological boundaries.^[1] It is possible, however, that our skepticism has been less than rigorous when it comes to historiography. Like many others, we have often thought in terms of the literature of "the 1970s and the 1980s," the post-Soviet historiography of the "1990s," and so on, even though it is clear that many subtle and not-so-subtle continuities often underlie the much-ballyhooed paradigm shifts in the field. Now we would like to take the occasion to raise another question, one that, for a change, is framed by scholarly silence rather than prescriptive proclamations. Why, halfway through the new decade, has no one begun to discuss the historiographical characteristics of the 2000s?

Is it simply because, as much remarked in the popular press, no accepted name for the new decade has taken hold? Some refer to the "double-ohs," the "naughts," and even more contrived appellations, but the more formal "first decade of the 21st century" and the "two-thousands" seem a bit too clunky to generate pithy prognostications. We suspect that this nameless decade's anomalous status that is, the societywide pattern of talking less about the cultural styles of the 2000s than about those of the decades that preceded it has something to do with the lack of discussion in our area about how it is distinguishing itself from the 1990s. In addition, two years or so of the new decade were effectively lost to the pundits with the flurry of scholarly anniversaries of the first ten years of post-Soviet historiography, which took place in 2001 and 2002.^[2] While changes in history-writing in the Russian and Eurasian fields between 2000 and 2005 have clearly been less dramatic than those that occurred between 1990 and 1995, a number of questions remain. Are we participating in a mere continuation of the changes ushered in by "1991," a sort of "long 1990s" of historiography? Or is a series of small and subtle shifts an evolution rather than a break slowly but surely distinguishing the current phase from the post-Soviet era that immediately preceded it?

On the one hand, there is a case to be made that the 1990s and 2000s will in the future be viewed as a single period in the history of the field. In the broadest perspective, the founding generations in Russian studies were each marked by specific approaches and understandings of the past (to use the conventional *Stichwörter*, totalitarianism in the era of high politics and revisionism in the era of social history) that were considered to lie close to the field's center of gravity and attention. Despite a good deal of internal heterogeneity and coexistence with many other trends, specific scholarly movements and well developed historical schema defined the scholarship of the field's founding generations. In explaining in turn the course of imperial, revolutionary, and Soviet history through their prisms, these schools also tended toward grand explanations and interpretive monism. By contrast, post Soviet historiography has been characterized by

methodological eclecticism, a decisive lack of single dominant "paradigms" and methodologies in short, what one commentator has dubbed "creative disorder."^[3] Neither the approaches of the postwar generation of the "fathers" nor that of the post 1968 generation of the "sons" could be squeezed into the confines of a single decade. It makes sense that the post-Soviet generation of "grandchildren" can be seen to have outlasted the 1990s.^[4]

The case for continuity is bolstered by the continued flourishing of topical directions in the historiography that took off in the late 1980s /early 1990s and continue through to the present. For example, the history of religion (not reduced to a part of worldview or national ideology in early Russia, or relegated into the background in later periods) is an area that has continued to come into its own on both sides of the new millennium.

^[5] Similarly, the study of empire, non Russians, nations, and nationalism is perhaps the most rapidly developing area in the historiography today; and it, of course, was transformed from peripheral backwater to the center of many debates only with the collapse of the USSR. This increasingly sophisticated literature currently achieves its greatest depth in the late imperial period, but it reaches back well into the Muscovite period and boasts a strong outpost in the burgeoning literature on the Soviet multinational state.

^[6] The list could, of course, be extended. But the main point is that the 2000s have been marked by a deepening of trends that came into their own in the previous decade.

There is another consideration along these lines: much of the discussion of the 1990s centered around the "archival revolution," with a range of positions taken on the relationship between the "empirics" (as our social-science colleagues say) and the conceptual frameworks dominating the field.

^[7] On a basic level, however, one can say that most historical works now make the presentation of new archival evidence a priority and that this continues to affect in fundamental ways the texture of the resulting historical work. If rising authoritarianism and nationalism in Putin's Russia or the Russian state's catastrophic under funding of the repositories of its own history hurt archival access substantially in the future, the current period will appear even more as a single unit.

On the other hand, there are cases for discontinuity to be made that are in their own ways quite persuasive. While we are talking of archives, for example, we could consider placing the break in 1995 instead of 1990. The period from around 1987 through 1994 or so represented the exhilarating height of the "archival revolution" and its negative by product, the "gold rush" mentality that led to superficial hunts for sensations and skewed the balance between evidence and interpretation.

^[8] By contrast, the period circa 1995Ð 2005 might be seen as a time when a postrevolutionary balance between the two was restored and the fruits of many years' immersion into sources and topics were finally harvested in the form of major monographs.

It is already apparent that in Russia itself the 2000s are no mere continuation of the 1990s. All major trends in "foreign" scholarship on Russia, such as totalitarianism and revisionism, were formulated against the backdrop of a particular international context; and it remains to be seen how the current conjuncture will play itself out. Over the last five years *Kritika* has cultivated a great interest in the convergences, disjunctures, and intellectual cross fertilizations of post Soviet Western and Russian historiography, and we will be monitoring this issue with great attention.[\[9\]](#)

The 1990s, moreover, was a time when the Russian field experienced the "linguistic turn" and the methodologies of the "new cultural history." The advent of postmodernism is often dated to the early 1970s, but clearly in our scholarly outpost of the intellectual world it arrived much later. Although the imported theoretical literature was received in quite varied ways, with some rejecting it entirely and others scrambling to adjust, the subversive shocks of postmodernism remained at the center of attention. Now, as 2005 approaches, the idiosyncratic adaptation of (largely) French postmodern philosophy in the American academy, primarily via literature departments, has been historicized in a critical sociology of American intellectual life; titles advertising the need to go "beyond" the cultural turn are already growing old; and many scholars have realized that "theory" is not merely a code word for a specific canon.[\[10\]](#) Of course, the debates over postmodernism continue, and after some hiatus even in this issue of *Kritika*: literary scholar Evgenii Dobrenko lampoons historians' simplistic positivism while historian Matthew Lenoe dismisses the "masters of postmodern semiotics" on whom Dobrenko relies. But, all in all, it can be said that the postmodern moment has gradually waned. In this, as in other areas, no doubt, our entire field forms but a sliver of a much broader, centuries-old cyclical intellectual fluctuation that created the oppositions between Enlightenment and Romanticism, positivism and post positivism, modernism and postmodernism, and whatever comes next.

Finally, the 2000s have seen the advent of certain new features and approaches in the literature that, taken together, may well create the awareness of a new era in the field. Russian history has become far more comparative, and situating Russian topics comparatively in many ways is on its way to becoming a more standard feature of recently published scholarship. To be sure, this is not an entirely new or "even" development: individual scholars and work in certain thematic areas boast long standing traditions of looking beyond borders; and some chronological areas, such as 18th-century studies, have generally been far more comparatively minded than the Soviet historiography, with its preoccupation with the internal development of the system and its isolated subfield of foreign policy. Even so, one can readily detect a new cosmopolitanism in much of the literature, which is concentrated in the modern period. While this ultimately can be traced back in part in institutional terms to the end of the discipline's unique status (both isolated and well-funded) during the Cold War and the concomitant if implicit imperative after 1991 to reach out to scholars in other fields, it appears that it took some time for the comparative dimension to become more deeply embedded in scholarly practices. This has revived but hardly resolved age-old questions of how to evaluate Russia's difference or uniqueness, which despite the novel content of recent comparative discussions (e.g., those centering on modernity, empire, and Orientalism) are likely never to be resolved. But the fact that broader comparative horizons are becoming *de rigeur* has altered the reach, interpretive frameworks, and implications of the literature in several areas. In a related development, the 2000s have seen the rise of a much more weighty body of work in "transnational" history. While comparative history can be understood as the joint analysis of national histories or elements thereof, and international history can be

understood to focus on international relations in a separately constituted international sphere, transnational history can be defined in our area to focus on features and aspects of Russian / Soviet history that transcend internal or domestic phenomena and to explore specific links or connections with other countries, regions, and realms.^[11] The greatest promise of this approach is that it has the potential to use previously ignored transnational dimensions to challenge and reinterpret older domestic, national, and internalist narratives. If the new archival evidence of the 1990s endowed historical work in the Eurasian field with a new depth and a new texture, the combination of the new comparativism with a significant new body of transnational history promises to put Russian and Eurasian history into much broader contexts.

What, then, can we conclude about the unfinished historiography of the "naughts"? First, given the difficulties in determining its shifts and its evolutionary pace of change, it is hardly surprising that few observers have advanced strong claims about the new decade, or indeed any claims at all. Second, this discussion might be seen as further evidence that the decade itself is not necessarily the best marker of scholarly transformation. About the only thing we can say with certainty is, in the words of a songwriter, "you don't know what you've got till it's gone": the issues we have raised now will undoubtedly gather momentum toward the end of this decade and the beginning of the next.

Footnotes

[1] "1930s Studies," *Kritika* 4, 1 (2003): 1Ð4; and "On the Narrowness of 'Periods,' or 1699 Is Not 1700," *Kritika* 3, 2 (2002): 241Ð42.

[2] "Post-Soviet Historiography of Prerevolutionary Russia," *Russian Review* 60, 4 (2001); "Historiography of the Soviet Period in Post-Soviet Perspective," *Russian Review* 61, 1 (2002); and "The State of the Field: Russian History Ten Years after the Fall," special issue of *Kritika* 2, 2 (2001), repr., with updates and new material, as *After the Fall: Essays in Russian and Soviet Historiography* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2004).

[3] David Shearer, "From Divided Consensus to Creative Disorder: Soviet History in Britain and North America," *Cahiers du monde russe* 39, 4 (1998): 559Ð91.

[4] For more on this generational interpretation of the historiography, see Maikl David-Foks [Michael David-Fox], "Otsy, deti i vnuki v amerikanskoj istoriografii tsarskoj Rossii," *Amerikanskaia rusistika: Vekhi istoriografii poslednikh let. Imperatorskii period*, ed. David-Fox (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskii universitet, 2002): 5Ð47.

[5] Recent studies include Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827Ð1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming fall 2004).

[6] On the implications, see most recently Mark von Hagen, "Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era," *American Historical Review* 109, 2 (2004): 445-68.

[7] Stephen Kotkin surveys these discussions in "The State Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists," *Russian Review* 61, 1 (2002): 35-51, advancing the bracing conclusion that "Obviously, it is perspective, not archives, that is determinative" of scholarship, by which he means "the very analytical categories used, the particular subjects chosen for investigation, the questions posed (or not posed), the sets of assumptions consciously or unconsciously espoused, and the political and personal aims pursued, within the conventions of the profession and the rhythms of generational turnover" (37-38).

[8] Mark von Hagen, "The Archival Gold Rush and Historical Agendas in the Post-Soviet Era," *Slavic Review* 52, 2 (1993): 96-100.

[9] See, for example, Richard S. Wortman, review of Sergei Iur'evich Nekliudov, ed., *Moskovsko-tartuskaia semioticheskaia shkola: Istoriia, vospominaniia, razmyshleniia* (Moscow: Shkola "Iazyki russkoi kul'tury," 1998), in *Kritika* 1, 4 (2000): 82-29; Laura Engelstein, *Culture, Culture Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia, across the 1991 Divide*, *Kritika* 2, 2 (2001), esp. 386-92; and Boris Mironov, "Has Post-Modernism Come to Russia? Comments on the Anthology 'American Russian Studies,'" *Kritika* 4, 1 (2003): 201-25.

[10] Françoise Cusset, *France, l'Europe et le monde* (Paris: Découverte, 2003), the interesting discussion by Frédéric Keck, "Que sont nos philosophes devenus?" *Critique* 60 (May 2004): 347-61; and Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[11] Among the spate of recent transnational histories and publications, see "Across and beyond the East-West Divide," two forthcoming special theme issues of *Slavonica* 10, 2 (2004) and 11, 1 (2005), the first due out in November 2004; Scott Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550-1900* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002); and Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika* 2, 1 (2001): 111-64.