

INTRODUCTION

Anna Paretskaya

Anna Paretskaya, the issue's lead editor. Address for correspondence: Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 8128 William H. Sewell Social Sciences Building, 1180 Observatory Drive, Madison, WI 53706, USA. aparetskaya@wisc.edu.

The bulk of this issue of *Laboratorium* consists of the articles that were originally submitted to the journal's second competition for young scholars. (The first such contest took place in 2012, and the articles by some of the winners and finalists were published in issue no. 2, 2012.) During the current competition, which was open from August through November 2015, we received about 60 submissions by authors from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Ukraine, Estonia, Hungary, India, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. The manuscripts represented a variety of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities—including political sociology and the sociology of organizations, gender and migration studies, research in ethnicity and nationalism, history, death studies, and cultural anthropology—and, as a result, covered a wide range of topics and methodological approaches. This diversity of submissions was impressive and encouraging. It once again confirmed that the journal is recognized as a multidisciplinary platform for qualitative scholarship in the social sciences broadly conceived. The geography of submissions—internationally as well as within Russia—also testifies to a certain success of *Laboratorium's* other objective: to facilitate scholarly dialogue among scholars from different parts of the world and to internationalize scholarship by showcasing social research that is conducted by scholars across the world.

The winners and finalists, several of whom are publishing their work in this issue of the journal, represent this disciplinary, methodological, geographic, and linguistic diversity. The four authors of articles in this issue are working toward their doctoral degrees at universities in Budapest, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Florence. Anna Varfolomeeva, the first-prize winner for her article “The Soul of Stone: Indigenous Peoples and Mining in Karelia,” specializes in environmental sciences and policy at the Central European University. Her ethnographic study investigates the symbolic meanings of nature and of industrial development for the Vepses, an indigenous people in Karelia. She finds that in neither the cultural identity of the Vepses nor in what they consider the public good of their local community are nature and industry perceived as antagonistic, as either/or—rather they are closely intertwined and embodied in the rare decorative stones mined locally, gabbro-diorite and raspberry quartzite. By extension, along with her informants Varfolomeeva questions the dichotomy between “traditional” nature and “modern” industry.

The fuzzy boundary between traditionalism and modernity is invoked in the piece by the death studies researcher Sergei Mokhov, who is a graduate student at the National Research University–Higher School of Economics in Moscow. His “Taking the Spell Off of Death: Media as Mourning Ritual in Russia’s *Psychic Challenge*” argues that Russia is a transitional society that increasingly has been moving away from traditional beliefs and rituals, including mourning rituals, but has not quite established a fully modern infrastructure of social and psychological support to deal with affective turmoil, such as the grief of the bereaved. Mokhov’s analysis suggests that a reality TV show like *Psychic Challenge* can take the place of a traditional commemorative ritual. Perhaps, the show’s popularity—among the bereaved, the faithful, and the rest—is related, in part, to its attempt to bring together clairvoyant mediums and mystics, on the one hand, and a modern mass medium.

Unlike Mokhov, Anastasiia Novkunskaia, a sociologist at the European University at St. Petersburg, seems to treat Russia as a late-modern society, one feature of which is a heightened attention to the care for one’s health—in other words, increased discipline and control over the body. However, the findings of her study “Distribution of Responsibility in the Field of Reproductive Health: The Perspectives of Obstetrician-Gynecologists” show that responsibility for such care, including women’s reproductive healthcare, is “dispersed” or even diffused. Even though obstetrician-gynecologists, whom Novkunskaia interviewed and observed for her study, accept a certain responsibility for their patients’ health and well-being, they hold patients, the state, and a host of other social actors responsible for women’s reproductive health. Ironically, in the situation when everyone is expected to be “responsible,” the discourse of irresponsibility prevails—suggesting a failed, or at least flawed, (late) modern panopticon.

Lastly, “Soviet Architecture and the West: The Discovery and Assimilation of Western Narratives and Practices in Soviet Architecture in the 1950s–1960s” by Olga Yakushenko discusses “modernization” of Soviet architecture in the postwar era. Placing changes in professional discourses and practices in architecture and construction in a broader context of post-Stalinist reforms, Yakushenko, a PhD student in history at the European University Institute in Florence, uncovers channels—Western professional literature, trips abroad, contacts with foreign colleagues—that brought international postwar modernism to the Soviet Union and made it a principal architectural style. But the author comes to a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: by accepting modernism—or at least despite it—Soviet architecture remained on the periphery of the architectural community and, possibly, on the periphery of modernity itself, at least “Western” modernity.

These early-career scholars are not hesitant to undertake ambitious projects that involve the study of under-researched groups (like the Vepses), rigorous fieldwork and archival research, or inventive and innovative disciplinary subfields (such as death studies). And despite having Russia as the site of research, all of these projects engage in implicitly comparative studies and pose not so implicitly critical questions about modernity.

Results of the 2015 Young Scholars Contest

1st place: **Anna Varfolomeeva** (Central European University, Budapest), “The Soul of Stone: Indigenous Peoples and Mining in Karelia”

2nd place: **Olga Yakushenko** (European University Institute, Florence), “Soviet Architecture and the West: The Discovery and Assimilation of the Western Experience in Soviet Architecture at the End of the 1950s–1960s”

3rd place: **Maureen Pritchard** (University of London), “Social Suffering and Ethnic-Based Marginalization in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan,” and **Sergei Mokhov** (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), “Disenchanted Death: Grief, Mourning, and Symbolic Immortality in *Psychic Challenge*”

Other finalists:

Ramina Abilova, Kazan’ Federal University

Evgeniya Golman, Higher School of Economics, Moscow

Gabriela Gonzalez-Vaillant and **Gianmarco Savio**, State University of New York at Stony Brook

Rebecca Gould, University of Bristol

Eline Helmer, University of Oxford

Anastasiia Novkunskaja, European University at St. Petersburg

Anna Riabchikova, Higher School of Economics, Moscow