In conclusion, the essays included in the book are diverse as to their themes and critical approaches. All in all, the volume *Conrad in Germany* is a valuable contribution to the study of Conrad.

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Why make art? Why—even when we are not extensively schooled, or brilliantly mentored, or deeply immersed in a specific artistic community with its set conceptions of what art is and how it is shaped—do we make art anyway? This question lingers in the background of Mari Ristolainen’s *Preferred Realities: Soviet and Post-Soviet Amateur Art in Novorzhev.* Far from the cultural centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, often one single generation away from plowing fields, often remembering with emotion and imagination the Soviet world that formed them as children, the artists that Ristolainen writes about make art avidly and inventively (and sometimes urgently and awkwardly) in the forms of plays and performances, photographs, and poems. It is a subject ripe with possibilities: What happens when the state intervenes proactively in the making of art by non-professionals? What is the content of that art? Its form? What relationship does it have to state experiments in the shaping and re-shaping of social beings? Perhaps most interestingly, what does this set of artistic voices sound like? What is its aesthetic offering?

Ristolainen spent years studying the kinds of art that regular people have been, for decades, making in Novorzhev, Russia (a town of 4000 in Pskovskai Oblast). It is a rich feast of expression and in *Preferred Realities* she dwells on its examples lovingly: there are plays, poems, and photographs analyzed for theme and form and in terms of ideological content. The Soviet and post-Soviet contexts in which this art was made were special in the assertive role that the state played in first getting regular Soviet citizens to make art at all, and then to get them to make art that resonated with quite particular social messages. Ristolainen argues the importance of this first dramatic wave of control over the narrative in setting in motion future artistic production. She traces a process that she calls the “circular production of community narratives” that begins with artistic experts setting a model of what art is and should look like for amateurs (“modeling”); then continues with locals roughly repeating what they have seen the experts do (“narrating”); and then with amateurs gaining some mastery of that narrative and recreating it in their own voices (“re-narrating”). Important in this process are the roles of different kinds of actors: the narrators (i.e., artists) themselves; the intercessors (those who control the flow of art into the community, like culture workers, librarians, journal editors, etc.); and the receivers, that is, those in the community who take in that art, with all its images and messages. In this process, there is a form of conservative social memory at work: images, ideas, and ideologies are introduced only to be reproduced in a circular fashion. In this sense, to Ristolainen, the state manages quite a lot of dominance and control: i.e., whether or not people who write odes to, say, lingonberries or birch trees know that their poem is a part of a Soviet way of thinking about the glory of the *rodina*, the lingonberry odes are heartily produced and reproduced.

This is an impressive work of research on a fascinating topic. Time in the Russian countryside reveals, over and over again, humbling examples of how people who have been offered so little can create lives of great depth. Novorzhevians make art. Ristolainen lets us hear and see these people at the tender moments of their artistic offerings. At one point in the book, Ristolainen asks a very fine local artist, Elena Rodchenkova, why Novorzhevians write. “Perhaps,” she says, “because ... there is no other way to express oneself ... the soul just hurts ... it is anxious ... and so ... the protest goes on ... because everything around is perishing [...]” (277). There
is something universal in this urge for expression when there is pain or loss (or joy or flight). The soul just hurts: writing happens.

The research in Preferred Realities is framed around a cluster of social constructivist theories that are appropriate to the kind of analysis that privileges perception at a social level. It also gives a lot of power to the state and its programs for ideological framing and control. If anything, the research might be strengthened by considering what this art is all about without assuming that the state has ultimate control of its framing. That is to say, perhaps poems about nature are about states and state nationalisms (either in central or local forms); and perhaps rodinas are tropes that are ripe for usage by the state; but perhaps that is not all that they are. Great poems about nature have been written by formidable country poets (like Robert Burns, with his “westlin winds and slaughtering guns” or his “red, red rose”) for centuries. Those poems can mix and merge with the aims of state nationalism, but no one would say that the ravishing inventiveness of Burns is an instrument of state nationalism alone. Nor would it be unreasonable to say that the rodina existed as a powerful trope before, during, and after the Soviet apparatuses used it to their ends. Maybe the focus on the rodina is a “preferred reality” anyway, with or without complicated measures for narrative control by the state?

Nevertheless, the rich detail and profound questions that animate this book make it a good and important read. The work still retains some of the feel of a dissertation; there is a long theory section at the beginning that might have been more effective had it been more condensed.

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Elizabeth Papazian’s study sheds new light on the origins of Socialist Realism, an artistic method theorized in 1932 and prescribed to Soviet artists after the first meeting of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934. Papazian argues that the paramount interest of artists and politicians in documenting reality throughout the 1920s and during the years of the first Five-Year Plan played a crucial part in the evolution of Socialist Realism and thus in establishing a new relationship between the Soviet artist (viewed by Stalin as an “engineer of the human soul”) and society. By documentary approach in the arts Papazian means “the use of or reference to methods of conveying and transmitting information in a maximally transparent way, with minimal apparent interference from an authoring presence” (5). Promising objectivity and instrumentality in recording a changing reality, the documentary methods also revealed their potential to affect reality and thus served as a forerunner of the Socialist Realist concern with representing “the path to the future and the ideological transformation of the reader” (210).

The book is based on scrupulous research and is well structured. It consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The Introduction explains in what way the Bolshevik Revolution changed the relationship between art and politics in Russia and what comprises the documentary moment in Soviet culture. The crisis of representational art of the early twentieth century inspired Russian artists to apply documentary methods in their work in order to make their art relevant to the project of building a new world. While developing different aesthetic modes within the documentary approach, filmmakers and writers of various political convictions and aesthetic preferences (such as avant-garde artists, proletarian artists, or fellow travelers) produced a similar artistic response to the political and social upheavals of the time. According to Papazian, the documentary moment linked together “the three major responses to the crisis of representation posed by the Bolshevik Revolution—namely, the utopian, critical, and