

Christine Elaine Evans. *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 360 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-300-20848-1.

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Christine E. Evans's monograph *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television* is an engaging and superbly researched book with a main focus on the history of Central Television from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, otherwise known as the "stagnation" era. While there is no shortage of scholarly output on stagnation, a period that justifiably continues to fascinate scholars from a variety of disciplines, Evans's work is both focused in its scope and engaged with a diverse range of scholarship on the period, and works effectively with a variety of prominent interdisciplinary sources (Alexei Yurchak's 2005 *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* comes to mind, among many other examples). One of the book's main strengths lies in its expansive archival research that reconstructs the history of Central Television based on notes and memoranda from various corners of television's enormous bureaucracy, production and pre-production discussions, statistics, professional publications, memoirs, and personal notes. From the archival evidence, Evans constructs a complicated and detailed history of the evolution of the television medium, sketching out for her readers the multiple ways in which it reflected and embodied the political and social contradictions of stagnation. The other strength of the book, which appealed to me as a non-historian, was its rigorous focus on televi-

sion's role in reconfiguring the Soviet political subject.

The book is divided into seven chapters, all of which, while maintaining a clear relationship to the chronological development of the medium, are focused thematically, highlighting the author's main line of inquiry. The argument that Evans advances postulates not only the central importance placed on television as a medium of political persuasion and education, but also that Central Television served *both* as a site of political repression and censorship, and as a site of experimentation and innovation. Television both served the state's mobilization project of building socialism, and imagined new creative representations of social unity and post-Stalinist Soviet identity. Following this line of inquiry, the book also presents another interesting argument in scholarly debates surrounding the term "stagnation." *Between Truth and Time* represents another scholarly work that dismantles the binary conceptualization of stagnation, instead offering a nuanced and complicated vision of the period through the history of television as its prime political medium. Evans looks at stagnation through its "affective dimension" (p. 6), namely the role television played in addressing the melancholy and disaffected mood of the era. As Evans writes about the iconic 1973 mini-series, *Seventeen Moments of Spring* [*Semnadtsat'*

mgnovenii vesny], directed by Tatiana Lioznova, "slowness, boredom, nostalgia, irony, and the aging of the regime.... It was precisely these features ... that facilitated and brought into being the other side of stagnation culture: experimentation, open-endedness, lively debate (dressed up in various disguises ...), and the desire for inclusion and social unity" (p. 182). The negotiations around the role of television as a medium and its ability to both attract and influence its viewers while remaining within the parameters of censorship inform various thematic explorations that constitute the chapters of the book.

In early chapters Evans sets the stage by exploring the early history of Soviet television and its connection to both the reformist spirit of the "Thaw" and the Russian avant-garde. Evans draws our attention to the original conceptualization of Soviet television as "festive," linking it to the dynamic vision of the early documentary filmmaking of "life caught unawares" (Dziga Vertov) and the early Soviet ideas of television mass action, "*deistvo*" (p. 29). These ideas prioritized spontaneity and festive disruption of routine and valued direct audience input and live broadcasting, envisioning the cultural prominence of the television experts, the journalists. This early Thaw vision, however, came into conflict with the tight control and censorship of the stagnation era, and the growth of television as a medium became oriented towards dominating routines with its predictable scheduling, targeting different audiences.

In the following chapters, Evans focuses on specific television programs, showcasing case studies that illustrate how Soviet television evolved and adapted in the political climate of stagnation: from reformulating the original Soviet television legacy with its focus on viewer interaction and television's festive role, to issues of social unity and mobilization, to political education and competition with foreign broadcasts. In addition to internal factors, Evans argues, Soviet television was tuned into developments in the television cul-

tures of Western countries and those of the socialist bloc. For example, the chapter on the news program *Time* [*Vremia*] (1968-present) highlights the contrast between the "dynamic" Western news cycle and the "static" Soviet news and "the problem of [viewer] boredom" (p. 115) as one of the challenges Central Television faced. The case studies chapters provide an insightful and detailed history of popular Soviet television shows including the news program *Time*, game shows such as *Club of the Merry and Resourceful* [*Klub veselykh i nakhodchivyykh*, or *KVN*] (1961-present) and *What? Where? When?* [*Chto? Gde? Kogda?*] (1975-present), New Year's variety shows, and the miniseries *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. Evans's focus lies with game shows and holiday programming as the primary site of negotiations between the political and the personal, and as a site for the entertainment and education of the Soviet subject. As such these popular entertainment programs engage in experimentation and innovation in relation to viewer interaction, social politics of class and identity, and competition with Western forms of popular entertainment.

Evans concludes the book with a brief analysis of how the groundbreaking television of the *perestroika* era is an obvious heir to the television experimentation of the "stagnation" era. She briefly talks about the significance of this history for Russian television of today, stating in the epilogue, "Russian television under Putin continues to perform a function not unlike that of Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev era: negotiating authority in a context where political activity outside the playful world of mass media is significantly constrained" (p. 253). While it is clearly beyond the scope of Evans's study, I found myself wanting more information on how *perestroika* and early post-Soviet television informs contemporary Russian state media. The author makes interesting and significant claims about the importance of the history of Soviet Central Television to the contemporary Russian media landscape, and I hope she will undertake this research in the fu-

ture. I highly recommend this book to academic readers in Russian and East European history, media studies, and cultural studies.

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