

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Post-Soviet, Post-Social?

So we cannot say that liberalism is an always unrealized utopia—unless one takes the kernel of liberalism to be the projections it has been led to formulate by its analyses and criticisms. It is not a dream that comes up against a reality and fails to insert itself within it. It constitutes—and this is the reason for both its polymorphism and its recurrences—a tool for the criticism of reality: criticism of a previous governmentality from which one is trying to get free; of a present governmentality that one is trying to reform and rationalize by scaling it down; or of a governmentality to which one is opposed and whose abuses one wants to limit.

—Michel Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*¹

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP between neoliberalism and social modernity? How have neoliberal reforms critiqued and reworked projects of state planning and social welfare found in so many countries in the twentieth century? A generation of scholars has answered these questions in virtually one voice. Neoliberal doctrine, they argue, is opposed to social welfare and to the public ends of government; it is “congenitally blind,” as Peter Evans has written, “to the need for social protection” (2008: 277). Neoliberal reforms, meanwhile, deconstitute institutions of social protection and economic regulation, either through a general retrenchment of government in favor of the market, or through programs that move the locus of governing outside the state. Most broadly, if the twentieth century was characterized by the rise of “social” government, then as Nikolas Rose has argued, neoliberal thinkers have “challenge[d] the rationale of any social state” (1999: 135).

The argument of this book begins from a dissatisfaction with this conventional wisdom about neoliberalism. Scholars have taken too much for granted about neoliberalism and social modernity, and taken too little care in examining the thought of actual neoliberals, the technical details of neoliberal reforms, or the prior institutions of planning and social welfare that these reforms critiqued and sought to reprogram. My aim is to redress some of these shortcomings through a study of urbanism, social welfare planning, and neoliberal reform in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

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During the 1990s, the Russian case and the battles over “transition,” the Washington Consensus, shock therapy, and structural adjustment, stood as emblems of the neoliberal project’s grandiose transformative ambition—and catastrophic failure. But the dynamics of this period proved to be both contingent and temporally circumscribed, bracketed roughly by Soviet breakup in 1991 and the devaluation of 1998. My gambit is that ten years beyond the collapse of the Washington Consensus—and with the luxury of a broadened and perhaps historically deepened perspective—the Russian case provides a good site for revisiting the legacy of an important and distinctive form of social government, and for asking how neoliberal reforms propose to reshape it.

The first half of this book examines the Soviet urbanist paradigm of city-building or *gradostroitel'stvo*. City-building grew out of the thoroughly researched experiments of the urbanist and architectural avant-garde in the late 1920s. But here I am interested in city-building as a key element of the Soviet Union’s more enduring project to constitute its population’s health, welfare, and conditions of daily existence as objects of knowledge and targets of governmental intervention—that is, I examine city-building as a key figure of the Soviet project of social modernity. I show how planners of the 1920s and 1930s invented city-building as an alternative to a liberal framework for understanding and governing life in industrial cities. Then, shifting focus to the late Soviet period, I examine city-building as a window on the mundane elements such as pipes, wires, apartment blocks, bureaucratic routines, and social norms, through which a new form of collective life was assembled.

The book’s second part examines how, after Soviet breakup, these elements have become targets of neoliberal reform. In this analysis I do not identify neoliberalism with a set of abstract principles, a rigid ideological project, or specific governmental techniques (of calculative choice, privatized risk, and so on). Rather, following Michel Foucault’s methodological orientations, I examine neoliberalism as a form of critical reflection on governmental practice distinguished by an attempt to reanimate the principles of classical liberalism in light of new circumstances—most centrally, for my purposes, the rise of the social state. This investigation takes us far from the Russian scene, to key figures in the American neoliberal tradition who criticized and sought to reform the regulatory regimes, technical infrastructures, and welfare mechanisms that comprised the social state. By tracing the influence of these figures through “minor traditions” of neoliberal thought such as the new economics of regulation and fiscal federal theory, I will show how neoliberal reforms took hold of mundane instruments of the *Soviet* social state as key targets of intervention. Thus, surprisingly, pipes and valves, budgeting formulas

and bureaucratic norms, emerge as privileged sites where the relationship between neoliberalism and social modernity can be reexamined.

The conclusions that emerge from this analysis suggest a critical revision of accepted understandings of neoliberalism. I did not find that neoliberal thinkers were blind to the need for social protection. I did not find in neoliberal reforms a total program of marketization or government through calculative choice that wiped away the existing forms of Soviet social welfare. In the domains I studied, neoliberal reforms propose to selectively reconfigure inherited material structures, demographic patterns, and social norms. They suggest new ways of programming government *through* the state that retain the social welfare norms established by Soviet socialism. An important implication of this analysis is that, following the recent comment of Jacques Donzelot, although neoliberal programming calls for “a completely different compromise with the idea of social justice than the one represented by the Welfare State” (2008: 117), we have to understand how it may involve, in some cases, a compromise nonetheless. In this sense, neoliberalism should be analyzed not *beyond* but *within* the history of what Foucault called biopolitics: the attempt to govern a population’s health, welfare, and conditions of existence in the framework of political sovereignty.

ORIENTATION: THE CITY OF THE FUTURE, TODAY

These questions about social modernity, neoliberalism, and biopolitics took me over a broad empirical field, one that encompassed crucial dimensions of the genealogy of Soviet government—reaching back to Peter the Great—and selected thinkers in the development of post–World War II neoliberalism in the United States. I will say something in a moment about how these various sites came into focus, and about the difficulties of organizing inquiry into such a far-flung field. But my starting point—the scene that provided an initial orientation to these diverse sites—was for an anthropologist rather traditional: a small industrial city in the southern Russian province of Rostov, called Belaya Kalitva. Following Anna Tsing (1993), small industrial cities are “out of the way” places—neither the administrative capitals (sites of political dramas) nor the major industrial centers (those privileged loci of early socialist construction) that have been the focus of much work on cities and urbanism in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.² Given my concerns, the reasons for starting in such places were straightforward. Small industrial cities were identified as ideals of the socialist urban future by the architects, urbanists, and social planners who invented the norms and forms of Soviet social modernity.

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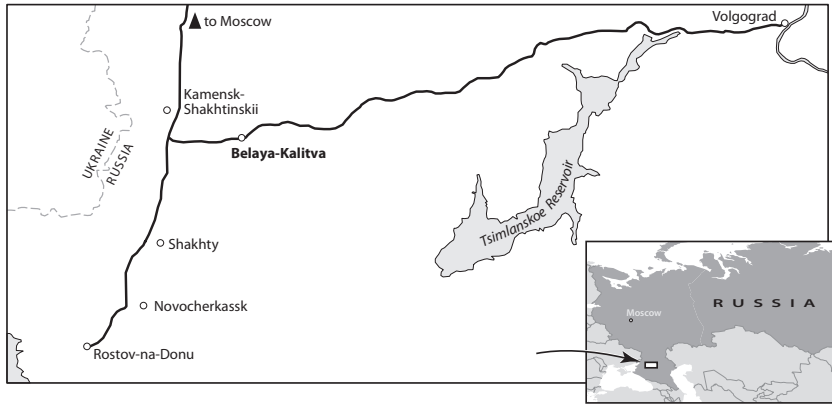


Figure 1.1. Belaya Kalitva, Rostov *oblast'*

Such cities seemed, therefore, like good places to study both the emergence of this project and its proposed reformation after Soviet breakup.

In the nineteenth century, Belaya Kalitva was a small *stanitsa*, the administrative center of an agricultural district. Industry in the area was restricted to mines that lay on the northeast extent of the Donbass, the coal basin that spans what is now the Ukrainian-Russian border. It was only in the mid-twentieth century that substantial industrial and thus urban development took place in Belaya Kalitva proper, triggered by the construction of what is still called, in one of those peculiar and telling Soviet terms, the city's "city-forming" (*gradoobrazuiushchee*) enterprise, an aluminum plant connected with defense aviation. Through the 1950s, a growing industrial workforce drove a modest expansion of the local population, as well as the construction of new schools, a hospital, a stadium, a "House of Culture," and some communal housing. But at the end of the decade the city was little more than a rural-industrial settlement, in which most locals lived in small huts.

Urban transformation quickened in the 1960s following an event that was to have great significance in my research: the approval in 1964 of Belaya Kalitva's first general plan. The plan was produced by the Leningrad State Institute for the Design of Cities (*Lengiprogor*), one important center of the distinctive Soviet urbanist practice of city-building (*gradostroitel'stvo*). In contrast to familiar forms of urbanism, city-building was not limited to questions of zoning, transport, or the use of public space. Rather, employing planning methodologies developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, city-builders produced detailed blueprints for every possible element of a future city. They began from plans for "settle-

ment” (*rasselenie*) that projected the correlative development of the local population and industrial production. On this basis, city-building plans proceeded to lay out a new substantive economy or, to borrow another key term from the vocabulary of Soviet urban modernity, a new city *kho-ziaistvo*—apartment blocks, schools, and clinics; doctors, teachers, and communal service workers; parks, clubs, and other recreational facilities; pipes, wires, roads, heating systems, electric substations, and other elements of urban infrastructure. The result was a vision of the future that totalized the field of collective life. Belaya Kalitva’s future was simply the sum of those elements described in the general plan. And the path between the present and the future was, simply, planning.

Belaya Kalitva’s development over the last twenty-five years of the Soviet period did not precisely follow the lines laid out in the general plan. City-builders complained constantly about the lack of planning control. There were perpetual imbalances in urban development—for example, industrial production was favored at the expense of housing, schools, and urban infrastructure. And Belaya Kalitva, like many small Soviet cities, grew less than city-builders had hoped (the Soviet Union’s large cities, meanwhile, grew much more). Nonetheless, a visitor to Belaya Kalitva in the late 1970s or early 1980s would have found a city that closely resembled the one envisioned in 1964: central avenues lined with apartment blocks; parks; centralized urban infrastructures; nearly universal social and urban services; and increasingly balanced adjustments between the local population and available local industrial employment. Even works that were not completed—a second “city-forming enterprise” or a new residential settlement—pointed to the modest but stable future of city-building.

Belaya Kalitva was hardly atypical. The preponderance of small and medium industrial cities dispersed over Russia’s vast and frigid territory was one key characteristic of an urban pattern that is, as a 2005 World Bank report put it, unique to Russia. By the end of the Soviet period just under sixty million people, or nearly 60 percent of the Russian urban population lived in cities of under 500,000 people; almost half that number—nearly 30 percent of the urban population—lived in cities under 100,000 (Goskomstat 1999). And as residents in these cities were linked to systems of urban need fulfillment that became nearly universal over the Soviet Union’s last decades, the cities were themselves plugged in to national mechanisms of economic coordination and circuits of resource flow, embedding the substantive economy of cities in the staid certainties of Soviet planning.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, these certainties were thrown into disarray in all Soviet cities. But the collapse of national planning and the introduction of markets for most industrial goods were particularly

devastating in small industrial cities like Belaya Kalitva. By the late 1990s, Belaya Kalitva's aluminum enterprise, stripped of guaranteed orders, was running at a tiny fraction of its capacity. Industrial employment, correspondingly, dropped to a fraction of its former levels. Economic collapse affected every facet of local life. Belaya Kalitva had literally lived on its city-forming aluminum factory, both directly through industrial wages and services and, indirectly, through taxes that were the primary source of revenue for the city government. Thus, as a direct consequence of industrial collapse, wages for teachers and doctors fell into arrears, apartments were chilly, parks were dilapidated, and buildings in what once had been a tidy city center were in a state of increasing disrepair.

This, perhaps, was neoliberalism in the sense it is conventionally understood: as a totalizing and utopic project of deregulation, state retrenchment, and marketization that wreaked havoc on the existing organization of collective life. In cities like Belaya Kalitva the devastation was as much existential as material. The mundane elements that comprised urban life and that formed the stable horizon of a certain future were viewed by many, particularly of older generations, as the fruit of decades-long struggle and mind-numbing sacrifice. Belaya Kalitva literally arose from the rubble of World War II, from the ashes of burned buildings, from a dismantled prison camp that was constructed by Nazi occupiers on the foundation of the city's aluminum enterprise, started just before the onset of hostilities. The collapse of this urban reality offended everything that had given meaning to the lives of many Soviet citizens. Literally, the future was at stake, and not only in the obvious sense that it was bleak or uncertain. After Soviet breakup the landscape of half-built enterprises, crumbling apartments, and deteriorating parks stood as stark reminders of a vision of the future—a mode of relating the present to a possible future—that was now past. An entire way of life in hundreds of cities like Belaya Kalitva, spread across the vast territory of post-Soviet Russia, was thrust into question: Would people simply move away? If they stayed, how would they survive? What new forms for governing this peculiar human collectivity—for relating its grim present to a better future—would emerge?

POST-SOVIET SOCIAL?

These questions provided a starting point for my research—the beginnings of an orientation. The answers I found surprised me, and pushed me in unexpected directions. A first surprise was that despite obvious signs of decline during the difficult years of the 1990s, local life in Belaya Kalitva held together. Teachers and doctors were not paid regularly, but clinics and schools still functioned. Radiators were tepid, but in most cases they

kept apartments livably warm as hot water continued to flow through central heating systems (something that was not true in all post-Soviet countries³). Pension payments were intermittent, but frequent enough that older residents could support younger members of their families—at least some of the time. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the 1990s did not witness a dramatic outflow of people from the city.⁴ Many Belokalitveans began to travel to Rostov (the regional capital), Moscow, or other cities for work. But these were often temporary migrations, and people generally returned. In sum, things were bad but, following the economic geographer Ann Markusen (1996), they were also “sticky.” The substantive economy created by Soviet city-building proved stubbornly intransigent. The pipes, apartments blocks, radiators, and boilers; the flows of gas, hot water, heating oil, and rubles; and the existing routines of bureaucrats who had little to do but nowhere to go—all seemed to hold things together. The industrial heart of Belaya Kalitva was torn out. But the mundane systems built to support daily life—the elements of the substantive economy, the city *khoziaistvo*—somehow survived.

Here was a second surprising observation: the vital importance of these material structures, bureaucratic routines, and resource flows that had, during the Soviet period, plugged people into centralized systems of urban provisioning, and plugged cities into national mechanisms of economic coordination. Such sociotechnical infrastructures, which make modern life possible, generally escape our notice. But as Paul Edwards (2002) has observed, they become visible when they break down, or seem threatened with breakdown. In post-Soviet Belaya Kalitva they were the objects of urgent concern, perpetually discussed in local papers and among friends and acquaintances. They were also the constant preoccupation of the city government, which, paralyzed by fiscal crisis, could only “govern” local life through frantic attempts to squeeze transfers out of the regional government so that teachers’ wages could be paid, or through in-kind transactions with local enterprises to exchange heat for tax debt so that the city government could keep apartments warm. Thus, following Oleg Kharkhordin (2010), in some improbable way these mundane sociotechnical systems were among those “common things” that made Belaya Kalitva a unit of collective fate.⁵

When I was in the field these common things were also coming to the attention of reformers, both foreign and domestic, in Moscow and in regional capitals, who were thinking about problems of government in post-Soviet Russia. For most of the 1990s, reforms focused on privatization, liberalization, and stabilization, those explosive themes of macroeconomic policy and enterprise governance that dominated the rancorous debates around “transition” and the Washington Consensus. But attention shifted by the early 2000s to “second-generation” reforms (Naim

1994). International consultants, development organizations, Moscow think tanks, federal functionaries, and regional policymakers turned a critical eye to those sociotechnical systems that in the difficult years of the 1990s had been crucial to the preservation of cities like Belaya Kalitva. By the early 2000s, they were among the most important targets of federal and regional reforms. All of this attention caught my attention. And the more time I spent in Russia, the more I became convinced that budgets, spending norms, pipes, and wires were key sites where the relationship between Soviet social modernity and neoliberal reform could be examined.

The character of these reforms was a third surprise, one that is central to the claims of this book. These reforms had many of the features that are often associated with neoliberalism. They proposed to transfer previously centralized powers of decision-making to citizens and local governments, and to replace, in some cases, state economic coordination with mechanisms of market allocation. They aimed to “responsibilize” citizens not just as subjects of need but as sovereign consumers making calculative choices based on individual preferences. But in other respects, these reforms did not map easily onto our conventional understandings of neoliberalism.

Take, for example, reforms of urban heating systems, centralized behemoths that could provision an entire small city. During the Soviet period, heating systems “bundled” Soviet social modernity, linking households to urban utilities and utilities to national circuits of resource flow in a system that was driven by a substantive rationality of need fulfillment. Reform programs formulated by both the Russian government and international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations proposed to “un-bundle” these systems through marketization (of gas provision and maintenance), commercialization (of heat production), and “responsibilization” (of “users”). But this un-bundling was blocked in significant ways. The material setup of heating systems—the absence of meters or control valves, the technical integration of the distribution network—meant that the flow of heat could not follow “effective demand.” Consequently, reforms took shape as a selective intervention to reprogram key nodes in the system while leaving much of its structure—its hardware, if you will—intact. What is more, reforms did not abandon existing norms of social welfare. Thus, the Russian government’s 2001 framework for sectoral reform affirmed that heat was a basic need whose provision should, at the end of the day, be guaranteed by the state.⁶ Were these reforms simply not “neoliberal”? Were they examples of a neoliberalism that had been accommodated to the exigencies of local circumstances? Or was it necessary to revisit accepted understandings of what neoliberalism is?

Another example is found in reforms of the budgetary system. Like centralized heating systems, budgets were crucial to the articulation of Soviet social modernity. Through them, norms for social provisioning were translated into resource flows that made a range of social and urban services (from education to health care to gas, heat, electricity, and water) available to the Soviet urban population. Post-Soviet reforms proposed to “budgetize” the behaviors of local governments, in Nikolas Rose’s (1999) sense, giving them the freedom to determine which public values should be pursued through state spending but simultaneously imposing hard constraints. But reforms *also* proposed new formulas for redistribution—transferring resources from rich to poor regions, and from rich to poor cities—that drew precisely on existing socialist norms for social provisioning. In this sense, these reforms re-inscribed the substantive *ends* of Soviet social welfare.

Once more, these observations suggested puzzlement about neoliberalism as a technical, political, and ethical project. This puzzlement, in turn, posed a methodological question about where to direct inquiry. Having begun my research with fieldwork in small industrial cities, the instinctive anthropological response might have been to analyze a distinctively Russian variant of neoliberalism, through which a marketizing project was reshaped, both through creative adjustments by policymakers and through resistances and blockages that constrained the utopian aspirations of neoliberal ideology when it “hit the ground.” Material infrastructures like heating systems might, in this view, be analyzed as intransigent elements that made post-Soviet change path-dependent.⁷ Concessions to existing norms of social welfare might be understood, following Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002), as “ameliorative” measures that address contradictions in the neoliberal hegemonic project. The problem with such an approach, in my view, was that it would take for granted the “neoliberalism” that is supposedly at stake in post-Soviet developments. I was thus led to ask: How could “neoliberalism”—rather than its effects—be brought into the field of inquiry?

THE CRITICAL CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

If there is a particular difficulty in posing this question today it is due in part to the dominance of a “critical conventional wisdom” about neoliberalism, whose main effect, I contend, has been to obscure neoliberalism rather than make it visible as an object of inquiry.⁸ To justify this claim, and to clarify its meaning, it may be helpful to briefly consider two recent studies that have played a significant role in shaping critical discourse: David Harvey’s *Neoliberalism* (2005) and Naomi Klein’s *Shock Doctrine*

(2007). Harvey and Klein cannot, of course, stand in for all critical scholarship on neoliberalism. Certainly there are strains of critical discourse—notably work by Nikolas Rose and others (Rose 1999; Rose et al. 2006) in the framework of “governmentality,” and the work of Dieter Plehwe and others (Plehwe et al. 2006; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009) on the neoliberal “thought collective”—that have made neoliberalism a much more meaningful and effective object of inquiry than these authors have. But Harvey and Klein provide a useful orientation if only because they state explicitly what is often taken for granted in discussions of neoliberalism.

Harvey, working in a Marxian framework, understands neoliberalism as a “system of justification and legitimation” for a project to “re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites,” following the economic crises of the 1970s. He argues that

In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as “an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs” it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market.

Neoliberalism thus abandons the solidaristic and equalizing norms of the social state. Regressive “redistributive effects and increasing social inequality,” Harvey concludes, have “been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project” (Harvey 2005: 3, 16, 19). Klein meanwhile, argues that:

The movement that Milton Friedman launched in the 1950s is best understood as an attempt by multinational capital to recapture the highly profitable, lawless frontier that Adam Smith, the intellectual forefather of today’s neoliberals, so admired—but with a twist. Rather than journeying through Smith’s “savage and barbarous nations” . . . this movement set out to systematically dismantle existing laws and regulations to re-create that earlier lawlessness. And where Smith’s colonists earned their record profits by seizing what he described as “waste lands” for “but a trifle,” today’s multinationals see government programs, public assets and everything that is not for sale as terrain to be conquered and seized—the post-office, national parks, schools, social security, disaster relief, and anything else that is publicly administered (2007: 241–42).

Many scholars would, no doubt, object to the epochal and totalizing terms in which these authors present neoliberalism as a ubiquitous force

in post-World War II history. But few would question the basic claims Klein and Harvey advance concerning neoliberalism and the social state: neoliberalism is for the market and opposed to government provision of services; for an ethic of individual responsibility and opposed to “all previously held ethical beliefs”; for a private definition of value and against value created by government—except, in Klein’s account, when public value can be plundered by corporate interests.

One major task of this book will be to ask whether, and in what sense, any of these claims about neoliberalism can be supported. To do so, it is necessary to address another question that is not *substantive*, concerning the “content” of neoliberalism, but *methodological*: What *kind of thing* is neoliberalism? And how should it be studied? Is neoliberalism the *kind of thing* to which one can attribute a coherent position on such diverse issues as redistribution, schools, security, disaster relief, and the post office? How is it connected to the vast range of historical experiences in which contemporary scholars purport to discover its workings?

Here, too, Harvey and Klein lay out a story that is implicit in most, though certainly not all, critical work. This story begins by identifying neoliberalism as an intellectual movement that is associated with a number of prominent economists, political philosophers, and motley fellow travelers, many of whom were associated with the Mt. Pelerin Society or the University of Chicago’s department of economics. This intellectual movement took shape in the wake of a vast expansion in the role of governments in managing social and economic life. In response, “neoliberals” revived but modified the tenets of classical liberal thought, both as a critique of these developments and as a source of proposals for reform.

There is nothing wrong with this starting point. Indeed, in the discussion that follows I will insist on employing an “emic” definition of neoliberalism that refers to those figures Dieter Plehwe (2009a) has called the “self-conscious” neoliberals, who sought to revive the tradition of classical liberalism and modify it in response to new problems.⁹ Troubles arise, however, when these thinkers are connected to all those other things—reform programs, techniques of governing, broad processes of transformation or, most generally, a sweeping hegemonic project—that are often analyzed under the rubric of neoliberalism. The standard narrative unfolds roughly as follows: First, a handful of thinkers (certainly Milton Friedman; perhaps Fredrik von Hayek) are taken to be the paradigmatic neoliberals while other self-consciously neoliberal thinkers are ignored. Second, a simplified account of their thought, generally based on selective reading of popular writings and neglect of the “serious speech acts” found in their scholarly work, is offered in some general formulae about support for the market, opposition to social welfare, and emphasis on individual choice and autonomy.¹⁰ Third, links are then established

between these individuals and a range of experiences—from Ludwig Erhardt to Boris Yeltsin; from Augusto Pinochet to Bill Clinton; from Deng Xiaoping’s “Four Modernizations” to the Washington Consensus to the post-Soviet project of “transition”—either by discovering some purportedly decisive interpersonal or institutional connections or, more crudely but unfortunately more commonly, by simply registering every instance of marketization, opposition to social welfare, and “government through calculative choice” as a case of neoliberalism.¹¹ Thus, after beginning on solid ground, we observe what Bruno Latour calls an “acceleration” in the analysis, in which neoliberalism is understood as a dark and pervasive force that can explain “vast arrays of life and history” (2005: 22).

My objection to such accounts is not that they attempt to link neoliberalism to programs of reform and processes of transformation that are quite distant from the thinkers we would want to call “neoliberal.” Quite the contrary: the significance of neoliberalism must be sought, at least in part, in the disparate experiences in which neoliberal styles of reasoning, mechanisms of intervention, and techniques have played a significant role in shaping the forms of government. The problem, rather, is that such analyses fail, as Foucault once wrote, to “pay the full price” of making the connections that they wish to establish (2008: 187).

Toward Reconstruction

The way forward, it seems to me, is a conceptual and methodological reconstruction of the field of inquiry. Reconstruction begins with unlearning much of what we think we know about neoliberalism. It then requires reconstituting the field of investigation in a way that makes neoliberalism appear as a topic and *problem* of inquiry rather than its premise.

To explain what I have in mind it will be helpful to return to the Russian case. In what sense can Russia’s post-Soviet experience be linked to neoliberalism? The answer to this question may seem self-evident; it has certainly been taken for granted by observers of post-socialist transformation. As Bruce Kogut and Andrew Spicer have shown in a comprehensive review of relevant literature, post-Soviet transformation has overwhelmingly been understood as the product of a “‘Neo-liberal Economic Ideology’ that. . . framed foreign aid strategy in post-communist countries” (2004: 3).¹² And the Russian experience during the 1990s—particularly policies of structural adjustment and shock therapy, unleashed in a final triumphant dismantling of Soviet socialism—marks the neoliberal apotheosis.

But there are problems with this story. First, as Venelin Ganey points out, the actual process of reform in all post-socialist countries was “incoherent, tentative, and contradictory.” Thus, to portray post-socialist

developments as “emanations of an ideology that is both comprehensive and radical would amount to committing a grand simplification” (Ganev 2005: 350). Second, the claim that structural adjustment and shock therapy are distinctly and specifically “neoliberal” at least requires qualification. When it was initially proposed by pragmatists at the World Bank as a program of massive *intervention* in response to economic crisis, structural adjustment was an anathema for many self-consciously neoliberal thinkers. In any case, as I argue in chapter 6, structural adjustment was the product of contingent historical factors, not the distilled essence of the neoliberal project.

But even if we grant that, in some qualified way, policies like structural adjustment and shock therapy can be associated with neoliberalism and that they have had enormous implications for post-socialist change—and in some qualified way, both claims are indeed true—we encounter a third and for my purposes decisive problem. Namely, such an account limits the reference domain of neoliberalism in Russia to a specific set of problems—relating to macroeconomic reform and privatization—and to the specific historical conjuncture of the 1990s, whose dynamics were more temporally circumscribed than many observers assumed they would be at the time. We are thus left to ask whether there is continued meaning in speaking of neoliberalism “beyond” the Washington Consensus, whether the reforms that moved to the center of attention in the 2000s can, indeed, be called “neoliberal” in some meaningful sense. I want to insist that as my research turned to mundane systems like planning norms, budgets, and heating systems, these were, in fact, questions: Could the reforms of such systems be linked to something that could be called “neoliberalism”?

Ultimately, my answer was “yes”—although there was, indeed, a high price to be paid for arriving at it. After some digging through reform documents and technical studies and, from there, through relatively obscure traditions of economic and technocratic thought, I found that these reforms could be traced to key exponents of American neoliberalism. Of most immediate relevance was the work of George Stigler and James Buchanan, two thinkers who have been largely ignored in relevant scholarship, but who were major figures of post-World War II neoliberalism in the United States.¹³ Buchanan and Stigler were explicitly concerned with how the precepts of classical liberalism could be accommodated to the norms of what they called the “social state.” They made original contributions to a new liberal understanding of basic concepts such as the social contract, public interest, and equity. And they deployed this reworked conceptual toolkit to critique the budgetary mechanisms, infrastructures, and regulatory regimes through which the social state had been articulated, first of all in the United States. Their work was then

taken up in traditions of technocratic practice. Buchanan, thus, made key contributions to fiscal federal theory, which, among other things, has become a central framework for a neoliberal programming of redistribution. Stigler, meanwhile, catalyzed a new economics of regulation that addressed, among other things, the government of infrastructures and utilities. By the 1970s the schemas of analysis and programs of reform they and others proposed had become central to a new liberal programming of the social state in rich countries; by the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s their proposals were circulating around the world. In post-Soviet Russia, international consultants, aid agencies, federal, regional, and local officials, and Russian experts deployed these forms of critique and programming to reform institutions inherited from the Soviet social state.

Through these long detours, a set of disparate objects came into focus as essential to investigating the puzzles about neoliberalism and social modernity that had initially been framed by small cities like Belaya Kalitva: city-building and Soviet planning; Stigler, Buchanan, and a neoliberal critique of the social state; fiscal federal theory and the new economics of regulation; and the mundane sociotechnical systems—pipes and wires, bureaucracies and budgets—that tied the other elements together, both materially and conceptually (see figure 1.2). These elements comprise, certainly, a complex and unwieldy field of study. The questions that emerged were: How to shape the disparate elements of this field—and the genealogical lines that run through them—into some kind of coherent narrative form?; How to craft general claims about neoliberalism as an intellectual project with broad and diverse effects without losing hold of its specificity in the thought of actual neoliberals?; and How, finally, to place post-Soviet neoliberal reform in a broader history of governmental forms in tsarist and Soviet Russia?

REORIENTATION: NEOLIBERALISM, SOCIAL MODERNITY, BIOPOLITICS

My answers to these questions, which I outline in the remainder of this introduction, have been shaped by Foucault's reflections on liberalism and biopolitics. Substantial literatures have drawn on Foucault's work to analyze contemporary neoliberalism, and have debated the applicability of key concepts such as discipline to the Soviet Union and Russia.¹⁴ Since I am pushing Foucault's analysis in a somewhat different direction, it bears outlining what I find distinctive in his reflections before explaining how they animated my own inquiry. This will require a brief comment on the historical and conceptual problems that Foucault tried to analyze in the frame of biopolitics. But this discussion will soon lead us back to the central themes of my argument.

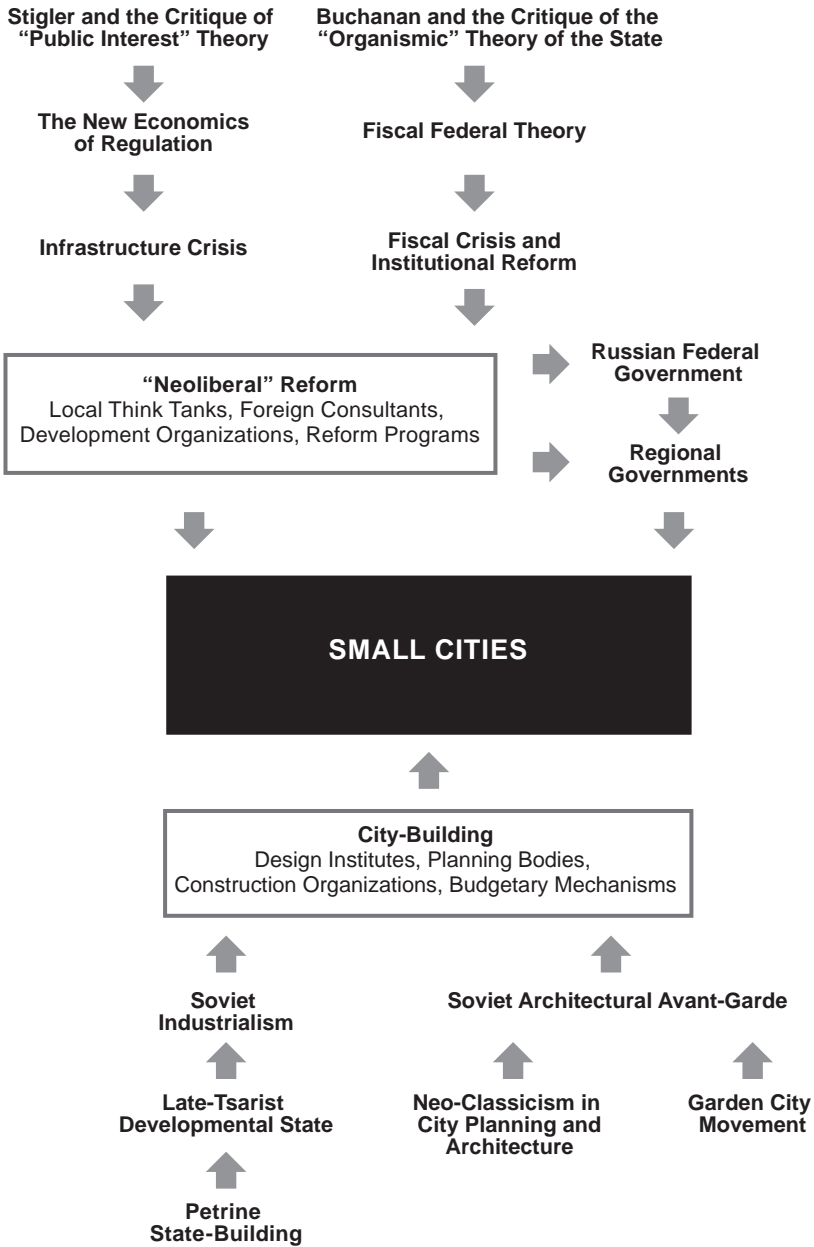


Figure 1.2. A Complex Field of Problematizations

The analysis that follows is rooted in Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. In these lectures Foucault initially set out to develop a genealogy of biopolitics. Many commentators have concluded that this initial plan was dropped, and that he turned instead to an analysis of liberalism and neoliberalism in the frame of "governmentality." But as I have argued elsewhere (Collier 2009b), this reading is not quite satisfactory. Foucault observed that liberalism could be studied as the "general framework of biopolitics" (Sellenart 2007: 383), and remarked that "only when we know what . . . liberalism was will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is" (Foucault 2008: 22). Indeed, I would like to show—if only in the most general terms—that Foucault's examination of liberalism and neoliberalism suggests a template for the study of biopolitics; and that the frame of biopolitics, in turn, provides an orientation for the study of liberalism and neoliberalism that diverges substantially from the one suggested by conventional understandings.

Foucault found in liberalism the initial articulation of a new kind of governmental reason that understood individuals and collectivities not as legal subjects (of sovereignty) or docile bodies (of disciplinary power) but as living beings. At the most general level, it is this feature of modern government that Foucault designates with the term "biopolitics." I cannot address here the important historical question of whether and in what precise sense the "government of living beings" is distinctive of modern government, although it bears noting that on this point Foucault's analysis converges with that of other authors, such as Karl Polanyi and, in a different fashion, Marc Raeff.¹⁵ But some clarification about the reference of "living beings"—and, therefore, about what is designated by the "bio" in biopolitics—is in order.

In its initial articulation—that is to say, in the thought of the French Physiocrats and the British liberals, who are at the center of Foucault's story—biopolitics was shaped around the naturalistic conceptions that were characteristic of early liberal thought. Foucault argued that the key figure of liberal political reflection was *population*, understood as a "multiplicity of individuals who are and fundamentally and essentially only exist biologically bound to the materiality within which they live."¹⁶ Following Polanyi's piquant observation, liberalism learned to understand human beings "from the animal side"; in liberal thought "the biological nature of man appeared as the . . . foundation of a society that was not of a political order" (2001: 119).

Though this connection has not been made by many of Foucault's readers, it seems uncontroversial to conclude that the "bio" in biopolitics refers precisely to this early liberal naturalism—the proposition that government had to be thought of as a relationship between the juridico-legal domain of the state and the quasi-natural order of "population,"

which was radically heterogeneous to the order of sovereignty. That said, it should be underlined that biopolitics, at least in these lectures, did not refer to the political management of questions that we would today call biological. Liberal and protoliberal thought could not have been concerned with the biological in the contemporary sense since it simply did not exist at the time¹⁷; and in current usage the problems with which Physiocracy and British liberalism *were* concerned, and that were the focus of Foucault's analysis in these lectures, such as trade, patterns of habitation, urban conditions, means of subsistence, and so on, would be called "economic" or "social." It is most accurate to say—and, in so many words, Foucault *did* say—that if a new figuration of "Man" or "anthropos," defined at the "finitudes" of life (biology), labor (economic activity), and language (sociocultural existence), emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the object of the human sciences, then biopolitics designates the entry of this figure into the workings of political sovereignty.¹⁸ In this sense, the term "biopolitics" may serve (and has indeed served) as a source of confusion. Foucault might just as well have referred to an "econopolitics" or a "sociopolitics," or invented a more general term. But since he did not, since the obvious alternatives do not exactly roll off the tongue (*anthropos*-politics?), and since biopolitics is an accepted term of art, I will stick with it.

At one level, then, biopolitics refers to a taken-for-granted (though not necessarily very well conceptualized) fact: that all modern governments are concerned with managing the biological, social, and economic life of their subjects. But we should be careful. Like other diacritics of modernity (Max Weber's analysis of rationalization, for example), this is best seen not as the diagnosis of an age but as an analytical orientation. There is no underlying "logic" of biopolitics but different ways in which the government of living beings is made a problem of reflection and intervention. What is most interesting in Foucault's work—and what I try to develop for the Soviet and post-Soviet cases—is an analysis of the successive *formations* of biopolitical government, and of the different ways that biopolitics has been *problematized*.

Here it will be helpful to briefly consider Foucault's treatment of these topics in the first lectures of 1978, which focus on the "protoliberal" French Physiocrats.¹⁹ His analysis revolves around a number of individuals who formulated proposals for understanding and managing nascent processes of urbanization and industrialization in the eighteenth century: Vigne de Vigny's plan for the city of Nantes that sought to manage the pressures of population growth and expanded trade; Emmanuel Etienne Duvillard's study that employed statistics to establish the distribution of smallpox risk over a population; and Louis-Paul Abeille's proposals for regulating the grain trade. Foucault found in these thinkers fundamen-

tally novel propositions about the realities with which government had to grapple. The Physiocrats argued that to understand phenomena such as urbanization, famine, and pandemic disease, governmental knowledge and intervention had to concern itself with living beings in their patterns of habitation, production, and trade. They began, thus, to “carve out” new realities that would later be called “society” and “economy” as sites of veridiction—fields of objects about which truth claims could be advanced—and as the grounds for a new “political ontology”—that is, propositions about what government is, about the objects on which government works, and about the ends toward which it is directed (Gordon 1991).

We should not pass too quickly over this point. In contrast to most “Foucaultian” work on liberalism and neoliberalism, Foucault’s analysis of the Physiocrats—like his subsequent analyses of the British liberals and of the German and American neoliberals—insistently focuses on *thinkers* and *thinking*. In his lectures of the late 1970s Foucault did not understand thinking as a static or closed system of reasoning—an *episteme*—or as an abstract practice of theorizing. Instead, as Paul Rabinow has argued, he analyzed thinking as a “temporally unfolding situated practice” (2003: 17) that constitutes new ways of understanding and intervening, new kinds of veridiction, and new political ontologies.²⁰ Here, then, is a first methodological orientation that we can draw from Foucault: to study liberalism and neoliberalism not as ideologies, hegemonic projects, or governmental rationalities but as forms of “critical reflection on governmental practice” (Foucault 2008: 321). In a nominalist spirit, and following the suggestion of Stephen Holmes (1995), we could identify some orientations that are shared by all or at least many liberal and neoliberal thinkers. But the real interest of Foucault’s approach lies in its analysis of how these thinkers took up particular historical situations and recast them as problems of *thought*: the Physiocratic response to the economic difficulties of Absolute monarchy; the German *ordo-liberal* response to the legitimacy crisis of the post-Nazi state; and, most relevant for my purposes, the American neoliberal response to the rise of the social state.

Our next question is how Foucault links such analysis of governmental reflection to an analysis of the instituted forms of biopolitical government. Here, too, the Physiocratic example is instructive. Foucault argues that in their analyses of disease, urban conditions, and trade the Physiocrats provided the grounds for a practical assessment and critique of an existing governmentality. They showed that the disciplinary and juridico-legal mechanisms of classical power were too invasive, too disruptive of the self-regulating mechanisms of the social and economic milieu. The Physiocrats also invented new forms of intervention that worked within and sought to modulate the autonomous laws of the market, the dynamics of disease, and the vicissitudes of population. Foucault thus found

in Physiocracy a new form of *critique* and a new kind of *programming*. This couplet of critique/programming or analysis/programming, which is repeated many times in these lectures, is crucial to understanding Foucault's project. Liberal and neoliberal thinkers are not understood to have presented a "system" of government that displaced prior forms. "There is not," Foucault argues, "a series of successive elements, the appearance of the new causing the earlier ones to disappear." Rather, Foucault is interested in political reasoning as a situated practice through which existing governmental forms are reflected upon, reworked, and redeployed. Foucault thus shows how liberal critique and programming shapes "complex edifices" of government in which disciplinary mechanisms, elements of sovereignty, and new liberal techniques of government are combined.²¹ The Physiocrats inscribed the "liberal" doctrine of *laissez faire* within the aims of sovereignty; their purpose was not to overturn but to preserve sovereign power (Foucault 2008: 285). In a subsequent analysis Foucault shows how British liberals took up and redeployed existing governmental forms, as in the integration of disciplinary techniques in Bentham's workhouse, or the adaptation of the juridico-legal edifice of rights to the new questions of biopolitical government.

Ultimately, Foucault is telling a nuanced and very dynamic story about the relationship between critical reflection and successive forms of government, documenting their intimate relationship but also insisting that they be held apart analytically so that their actual interconnections can be studied. And this is the kind of analysis I pursue in what follows. I am not treating biopolitics as a theory that could be somehow "applied" to Russia, or a "logic" that could also be found in Soviet government. Nor is the story I want to tell about how an existing (Soviet) biopolitics is "neoliberalized," as though an abstract blueprint was imposed on a prior reality. Instead, I understand Soviet government as a distinctive formation of biopolitics, the result of a specific and original response to the most basic problems of modern government: How should the state govern living beings? How should it manage adjustments between population, production, and social welfare provisioning? And I examine neoliberalism—in its initial formulation and in the Russian reforms it made thinkable—as a form of reflection that arose precisely in response to the problems of the social state, and a source of proposals for criticizing and reprogramming the social state.

BIOPOLITICS AND SOCIAL MODERNITY—LIBERAL AND SOCIALIST

The first half of this book examines the emergence of Soviet biopolitics, focusing in particular on the project of Soviet social modernity: not the modernization of society, as though "society" was a pre-existing entity

waiting to be modernized, but the forms of veridiction, the kinds of programming, and the apparatuses through which figures like society and economy were “carved out,” as Foucault has put it (2007: 79), as objects of knowledge and targets of intervention in Soviet Russia.²² My analysis centers on city-building, the distinctive Soviet form of urban planning. Conceptually, it revolves around a distinction between the liberal and Soviet variants of social modernity.

We have seen that the problem of social modernity was inaugurated in liberal (or protoliberal) reflection as a response to processes of urbanization and industrialization—and the problems to which they gave rise—first, as a *critique* of excessively rigid and invasive frameworks of sovereignty and discipline and, second, as a form of *programming* that worked within the autonomous laws of the economic and social milieu. But the forms of social modernity have not always been “liberal”—far from it. One can point to innumerable projects—from programs of social welfare, to frameworks of international development, to twentieth-century socialism—that, as Mariana Valverde (2008) has recently reminded us, rested on a rejection of liberalism’s core tenets. Among these latter traditions the Soviet case is of fundamental importance, looming over the twentieth century as the great alternative and challenge, to which liberal thought—or, more precisely, *neoliberal* thought—had to provide answers. But surprisingly little attention has been paid to the distinct formation of socialist biopolitics. Analyses of totalitarianism in a Foucaultian frame have focused on “limit” experiences (the camps, for example), which are often treated—rather mysteriously—as a hidden *nomos* of liberalism rather than as distinctly illiberal formations of government that have to be analyzed on their own terms.²³ And although a number of excellent studies have drawn on Foucault’s concepts to study tsarist and Soviet Russia, most focus on questions of subjectivity and power, or on problems of “cultural modernity.”²⁴ No study, at any rate, has tried to construct for the case of Soviet biopolitics and social modernity what Foucault (and a massive subsequent scholarship) provided for the liberal cases: an account of the political ontology on which it rested and of the kind of critique and programming through which it reflected upon and reshaped existing governmental forms.²⁵

An analysis of Soviet biopolitics and social modernity must begin from the fact that the problems confronted by Soviet planners were entirely different from those faced by the French Physiocrats or British liberals. The most important feature of the tsarist inheritance was understood as the *absence* of urbanization and industrialization; the key challenge was to create through state initiative what had arisen “spontaneously” (because these processes were thought to take place “outside” the state) in the liberal cases.²⁶ In response to these challenges, key figures in early

debates about Soviet government explicitly rejected liberal political ontology. They cast aside its concern with the autonomous realities of economy and society and its strictures on governmental intervention, and they reconceptualized collective life as a space of total planning. Soviet city-building extended this biopolitical gambit into the domain of urban modernity and social welfare. Economic planners called for the state to reorganize populations around new sites of industrial production; city-building was a framework for building cities and mechanisms of need fulfillment around these new collections of people. If, in liberal thought, “economy” and “society” were discovered as autonomous realities not subject to the laws of the state, then for key theorists of Soviet city-building, such as Nikolai Miliutin and Mikhail Okhitovich, the problem of settlement (*rasselenie*) concerned the *planned* adjustments between populations and production. If, in liberal thought, the laws of the social milieu had to be respected, the Soviet city (*gorodskoe khoziaistvo*)—the key problem domain of city-building—was a substantive economy planned and programmed to its minutest detail.

These basic orientations of city-building and social modernity were established by the early 1930s, as the attention of architects and urbanists turned from a “revolution in daily life” to the problem of building cities around the new industrial works foreseen in the first five-year plan. But it was only after World War II that city-building consolidated as an apparatus of transformation. In the postwar decades the planning institutes expanded; resources were increasingly channeled to housing construction and social welfare provisioning; and the population, violently reorganized over national space in the first several decades of the Soviet period, slowly settled into a stable pattern. It is during this period that sociotechnical systems like urban utilities and budgetary systems emerged as key mechanisms through which a new pattern of substantive provisioning was established. And it is during this period that small industrial cities—the longstanding ideal for city-builders—emerged as the exemplars of a particular form of modern life comprising:

- *Forms of expertise* in domains such as architecture, urbanism, demography, geography, and social welfare planning;
- *Values and normative orientations* to equality and to universal social provisioning;
- *Institutional and material apparatuses* such as infrastructures and budgetary bureaucracies through which cities, people, and resource flows were stitched together;
- A *project of transformation* that oriented these different elements toward the *telos* of a planned future;

- *Patterns of adjustment* between populations, production, and social welfare provisioning defining the size structure of settlements and the relationship between social provisioning and industrial production.

These elements make up what I will call the “Soviet social”: not Soviet “society,” whose existence was such a contentious question of late Sovietological debate, and not the analytical field that provides the explanatory background for the social sciences, but instead a particular configuration of collective life in whose assembly city-building played a central role.

NEOLIBERALISM: REPROGRAMMING THE SOCIAL STATE

If the first half of this book is concerned with the project of Soviet social modernity and the assembly of the Soviet social, then the second half asks: How do neoliberal reforms critique and program the systems of social welfare and the urban forms created by socialism?; Can these reforms be considered “post-social”? If, on the one hand, we understand Soviet social modernity as a *project of transformation*, with corresponding knowledge forms and apparatuses, we would have to conclude that post-Soviet Russia *is* post-social in a rather straightforward sense. The mechanisms of Soviet industrial coordination and the framework of city-building were rapidly disarticulated with the collapse of Soviet socialism. On the other hand, years of scholarship on post-Soviet Russia has demonstrated the often surprising persistence of the material structures, demographic patterns, spatial forms, bureaucratic routines, and underlying values produced by Soviet socialism. My aim is not to sort out precisely what has been preserved and what transformed. Instead, following Foucault’s emphases, I am interested in how the elements of the Soviet social are being reproblemated in new approaches to thinking about government in Russia.

For reasons I have already rehearsed, this orientation took me far from Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, to the post–World War II United States where James Buchanan and George Stigler enter our story as crucial figures in neoliberal reflection about the social state. Buchanan and Stigler were both “neo” and “liberal” in a specific and, it seems to me, meaningful sense. Writing after World War II, both understood that they lived in a different world from that of the classical liberals. They recognized that the existence of a large government whose expenditures were directed overwhelmingly to health, social security, and welfare posed a challenge to classical liberalism. They hoped, certainly, to limit the growth of the state, and both, at times, denounced government in strikingly categorical terms. But they had no illusions about returning to the *status quo ante*. A

“social state” of some size was a reality. The question was how liberalism could be adapted to the problems of the social state, and how, in turn, the social state might be modified to conform to the political and economic principles of liberalism. Thus, most basically, Buchanan and Stigler’s *neo-liberalism* was defined by their attempt to modify liberal critique and programming *in light of* the social state.²⁷

Central to this effort was what might be called a critique of public value—a critical approach to analyzing the value produced by government for its constituents. Buchanan and Stigler argued that since the Progressive Era and the New Deal in the United States, economic critique focused on “market failure”—that is, the failure of unregulated markets to ensure competition or maximize welfare. On this basis, economists (and other experts and policymakers) justified a substantial expansion of state intervention across many areas of social and economic life. For Buchanan and Stigler (and many other neoliberals), the problem with the dominant forms of economic reasoning about the state began from the fact that “government” was treated as a benevolent actor, and the “public” as a homogeneous mass whose needs and values could be known. In response, they raised fundamental questions about the production of “public value” (a term of which both were suspicious) in a complex modern society. For whom, they asked, are public values valuable—a broad swath of the citizenry or powerful private groups such as corporations? Through what mechanisms are these values defined? How can public values such as health and welfare—values that, as Foucault once remarked, have no “internal principle of limitation” (2000: 373)—be reconciled with the reality of scarcity and the diverse desires of constituents?

The answers that Stigler and Buchanan formulated struck directly at the regulatory institutions, redistributive mechanisms, and infrastructures through which the American social state expanded; their effect, as one not particularly sympathetic commentator observed, was like a “shotgun blast” that challenged the assumptions and institutions of “the Progressive era, the New Deal, and the Great Society” (McCraw 1976: 297). On one level, their critique drew attention to the failure of many government interventions to produce the outcomes that policymakers and technocrats explicitly sought to achieve. But this new critical reflection was not only an economic “test” of government activity (Do policies achieve their goals?). It was, also, a “criticism of reality”—an intervention at the level of political ontology. Stigler and Buchanan articulated what I will call a “microeconomic” critique of government that comprised, following Foucault, an entirely new “method of analysis and . . . type of programming” (2008: 219) of the social state. In referring to a microeconomics of government, I do not mean to suggest that they worked on the microeconomy as a *pre-existing* field. Rather, I refer to a

form of reflection and intervention that served to *constitute* the incentives of individuals as a register of reality that could be known and governed.²⁸ Buchanan and Stigler (and many other neoliberal thinkers) decomposed what they saw as unwieldy aggregate concepts like “the state,” the “public interest,” and “society” into calculating actors, whether firms, interest groups, or individual citizens. They defined a new *critical visibility* of government activity, uncovering previously ignored behavioral questions about how regulatory officials, corporations, policymakers, the beneficiaries of public programs, and citizens responded to the incentives that were created, often unwittingly, by government intervention. At the same time, this microeconomic perspective provided the conceptual grounds for a new *programming* that identified these actors’ incentives as a key target of reform.

It is central to my story that the form of critique and programming that Stigler and Buchanan formulated did not arrive in Russia because the agents of “neoliberal hegemony” transported it there; there are no hidden connections between major neoliberal thinkers and the experts and policymakers who formulated heating or budgetary reform in Russia, and these latter individuals, no doubt, would never think of themselves as neoliberals. Instead, we will see that a crucial intermediary role was played by two “minor traditions” of neoliberal thought: fiscal federal theory and the new economics of regulation. Borrowing loosely from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (1986) discussion of minor literature, I have in mind a tradition defined not by an overriding ideological or political agenda, or by great thinkers, but by a style of reasoning and an accumulation of exemplary experiences that contributes to shared understandings. Akin to Michel Callon’s “hybrid knowledges” (1998a), these minor traditions were constituted between academic disciplines, domains of technical expertise, and policymaking, and produced an entire body of knowledge, and a toolkit of highly original practices. As Nikolas Rose (1999) has shown in his work on “advanced liberalism,” these new governmental mechanisms that work through individual choice and calculation—we might call them “microeconomic devices”²⁹—introduced a vast range of new possibilities into the programming of government: markets in social “bads” such as pollution; voucher programs for schools; the monetization of social welfare payments; decentralizing reforms of government; incentive pricing for regulated industries; formulas for budgetary redistribution; mechanisms of quasi-competition in contexts where competitive markets cannot function, and so on. These minor traditions, though not exclusively associated with neoliberalism, can be called “neoliberal” in, again, a specific and meaningful sense, and it is through them that neoliberalism can be meaningfully associated with the areas of reform that I studied in Russia.

POST-SOVIET SOCIAL

The question I want to pose explicitly—precisely because it is so often taken for granted—is how this microeconomic programming relates to the norms and forms of the social state. At first glance it might seem that the multifarious realms of *substantive* organization of economic and social life are reengineered through mechanisms of *formal* rationalization and calculative choice. Following Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde, to the extent that they are “autonomizing and responsabilizing” of individual citizens, these “advanced liberal” techniques of government enable the state to “divest itself of many of its obligations” for the population’s health and welfare, and to devolve these to “quasi-autonomous entities” (2006: 91). To recall Harvey, the market ethic replaces all previous ethical systems. “Advanced liberal” government, on this account, would also seem to be “post-social” government.

But we should not move too quickly from the identification of neoliberalism with a microeconomic critique and programming to any assumptions about the formations of government that neoliberal reform shapes. What Buchanan proposed, what the theorists and practitioners of fiscal federalism elaborated, and what a collection of international consultants, local experts in fiscal reform, policymakers, and government officials articulated through proposals for budgetary reform in Russia, was not the abandonment of the social welfare goals of the Soviet state. Instead, by programming systems of transfers, reforms aimed to accommodate the reality of scarcity and a preference for decentralized government to the quite stringent redistributive standard of “fiscal equity.” In doing so, neoliberal reforms did not reject Soviet social norms. Quite the contrary: we will see that the technical definition of “fiscal equity” requires meticulous calculation of citizens’ norm-defined “needs” in order to determine appropriate budgetary distributions. This orientation to fiscal equity was not an exception to a neoliberal project that was *really*, in its dark and hidden moments, devoted to evacuating the public purposes of the state. Nor was this simply an “ameliorative” accommodation, meant to overcome contradictions in the “neoliberal hegemonic project.”³⁰ Rather, fiscal equity was the central theme of Buchanan’s classic essays of the late 1940s and early 1950s, which articulated a new liberal reflection on growing inequality in industrial societies and suggested a practical approach to organizing distributions of wealth that would be, as he put it, more “ethically acceptable” (1950: 590). If Buchanan took from classical liberalism a concern with limiting the state and fiercely defending individual autonomy, he also took from it a concern with justice.

What Stigler began to conceptualize, what was elaborated through a new economics of regulation, and what was articulated in federal re-

forms of heat provision formulated in the 2000s in Russia, was not the abandonment of the principle that the state should guarantee delivery of essential infrastructure services, or of the proposition that in certain sectors of a modern economy markets fail and government must intervene. Instead, it was a new critique and programming of heat provisioning that deployed microeconomic devices—meters, targeted (rather than blanket) subsidies, incentive pricing—to *partially* reprogram the delivery of heat while preserving a prior orientation to universal provisioning, and managing the natural monopoly characteristics of heat production imposed by the stubborn material structures and spatial forms of Soviet socialism. This, again, was not an “exception” to a neoliberal project bent on marketizing public services. Rather, it was *precisely* an application of a tradition of neoliberal thought that acknowledged the failure of markets to produce desired efficiency or welfare outcomes in some sectors or sub-sectors, and that sought, in these cases, to deploy microeconomic devices in a way that could be accommodated to the *substantive* orientations of universal need fulfillment. This was less a “marketization” or “privatization” of a public service—the universal slogan of neoliberalism’s critics—and more a new patterning of social welfare mechanisms with techniques of commercialization and calculative choice.

These observations suggest no definitive answers to the question of whether post-Soviet government is post-social government. If there is a global argument it is negative: the antinomies that have long been accepted as defining neoliberalism—public versus private value; social versus post-social; the state versus the market; solidarity versus individualism—do not perform the conceptual labor we require of them. My point is not precisely that existing formulations about neoliberalism are wrong; they are in some cases but not in others. Rather, it is that they are of the wrong *kind*. They are seeking in neoliberalism explanations for “vast arrays of life and history,” to repeat Bruno Latour’s phrase, when we should be trying to establish better tools for studying this significant form through which population, society, and economy are being reshaped as objects of governmental reflection and intervention.

OBJECTS AND METHOD

In concluding this chapter, a few comments about the objects of analysis that appear, and the methods of inquiry employed in this book are in order. A central strategy, motivated by the methodological concerns already discussed, is to cast a suspicious eye on terms like “Soviet society,” “marketization,” or “neoliberalism” and to identify objects of analysis—and terms for describing them—that get closer to the actuality of how the

social was assembled in the Soviet period, and how it is being reshaped today. Thus, I spend a good deal of time on detailed analyses of pipes and budgetary routines, norms and standards, calculative tools such as socialist “tabulations” of social welfare needs, and neoliberal redistribution formulas. I also devote considerable attention to the analysis of technical documents and the “styles of reasoning”³¹ that can be discerned in them: articles written by neoliberal economists and Soviet planners; strategy statements issued by technocratic institutions such as the World Bank; and reform proposals propagated by the Russian government or Russian think tanks. This may make for rough (or dry) going at times. But I am convinced that only in this way can we make headway in addressing questions whose answers have too often been taken for granted.

In some respects this approach bears an affinity to the style of inquiry associated with Actor-Network Theory (ANT). It places great value on detailed and careful technical description. And my broader methodological orientations echo ANT’s antisociological arguments: its insistence on taking figures such as “the market” or “society” or the “calculative actor” not as *pre-given categories* of social scientific analysis but as *assemblages*. Their construction has to be accounted for by making “the social” traceable, as in Latour’s recent formulation (2005: 164), or, following Michel Callon, by showing how markets are made through the “framing” of calculative agencies (1998a).³² Thus, my inquiry was very much concerned with understanding how, through “humble” infrastructures, the Soviet social was assembled, and with the way that calculative agencies were (or were not, thanks in part to the intransigence of the same infrastructures) framed through neoliberal reforms.

That said, as my fieldwork progressed, this mode of inquiry was complicated by a simple fact: other observers in the historical and contemporary fields I was studying were asking precisely the same questions. Tsarist ministers, planning theorists, and Soviet city-builders were all concerned with understanding how “the social” had been assembled in liberal countries, and with inventing alternative ways that, through infrastructures, standards and norms, and budgetary mechanisms, it could be assembled differently. Neoliberal reformers, from Buchanan and Stigler to the often anonymous authors of innumerable Russian and foreign technical reports, asked not whether it would be possible to “marketize” these assemblies—as though markets and calculative agencies would magically emerge when the state was withdrawn. Instead, they asked how calculative agencies could be constituted by disentangling actors and framing their choices through the details of material apparatuses and administrative arrangements. From this perspective, the questions of ANT did not have to be *introduced* into these fields as the special contribution of a detached observer. They were already there, posed through diverse forms

of critical questioning that were historically shaped through an entire accumulation of arguments, now obscure technical debates, and historical experiences. The challenge, thus, was to analyze these actors as *thinkers*, and to analyze *thinking* neither as abstract reflection nor as a fixed “system” or *episteme* but as a practico-critical activity through which, following Paul Rabinow, “historical conjunctures [are] turned into conceptual and practical problems” (2003: 47).³³

In this light, my approach diverges from ANT—and converges with alternatives such as Foucault’s history of the present and Rabinow’s anthropology of the contemporary—in its explicit concern with what might be called the historicity of the assemblages or “actor-networks” that ANT has made its privileged object of analysis. By “historicity” I do not mean just that the formation of these assemblages can be temporally traced—that they can be situated historically (arising at a certain time, animated by certain actors or actor networks). Instead, I refer to their relationship to broader fields of significance and historical conditions of intelligibility that are themselves temporally circumscribed, and whose identification is a critical moment of inquiry.³⁴ Consequently, if a first step in the analysis is “deconstructive” in the sense that Latour (2005) uses the term—a process of breaking down the vague abstractions of the social sciences and of beginning to trace how collectivities are actually constituted—then a second step might be called the conceptual reconstruction of historical conditions of intelligibility or what Ian Hacking (2002) calls historical ontology.³⁵ It is to this end that the technical analyses in this book are directed.

Thus, though city-building plans were never implemented in full, they tell us something essential about the project of Soviet social modernity. Their analysis suggests a set of terms—*khoziaistvo*, settlement, and so on—that are not meaningless abstractions but valuable tools for grasping how the health, welfare, and conditions of existence of the Soviet population was constituted as an object of knowledge and a field of intervention. And although the reforms I examine may not have worked out as anticipated in plans—and indeed have not, in some cases, even been implemented—they provide us with ways to think about the relationship between neoliberalism and social modernity that are better in the sense that they are closer to the actuality of neoliberalism as a form of critique and programming in particular domains. Buchanan’s concept of fiscal equity tells us something about contemporary reformations of the state that is entirely missed by the usual boilerplate about austerity and state retrenchment. Stigler’s economics of regulation allows us to understand neoliberalism not as a “privatization” of social services that simply abandons central commitments of the social state but as a microeconomic programming of social welfare that reworks but in some cases retains the ends of social government. In this sense, conceptual reconstruction does

not mean abandoning middle range concepts like neoliberalism. Instead, it means investing in them by clarifying their meaning and significance.

Since I am an anthropologist, it bears closing these brief notes on method by commenting on what is usually taken to be the defining feature of anthropological work—ethnography. This book is not an ethnography, and it does not have the typical traits of an ethnography. I do not draw on extensive quotation from conversations in the field; I do not investigate “difference” or structures of experience; and I do not try to portray my fieldwork in Russia as an existential journey in which the experience of the ethnographer is foregrounded. In fact, my fieldwork did offer opportunities to pursue ethnography in these familiar forms: classic rites of ethnographic passage such as fluency and immersion, unhappiness and existential quandary; and candidates for thick description, such as the *nostal’giia* of those who built small cities after World War II and lived to see their collapse, or the struggle of younger residents to gain their ethical bearings in small cities whose horizons closed down with the “opening” that attended Soviet breakup. But I did not pursue these “ethnographic” concerns for the simple reason that ethnography, thus conceived, did not offer answers to the questions I cared about.

And why should it? As various commentators have observed, ethnography was invented in relation to a specific theory of anthropology’s object—the culture or ethnos (Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Rabinow et al. 2008). Given the proliferation of other kinds of objects in contemporary anthropology, it seems reasonable to ask not whether a certain study is “an ethnography” but how certain practices associated with ethnography can fit into a toolkit for contemporary anthropological inquiry. For ultimately I did use a practice that is derived from traditions of ethnography in a fashion that seems to me typical of much anthropological work today: a technique of inquiry that begins from the specificity of a certain place, is oriented by the weight of its problems, by the density and polyvalence of the experiences that one finds in it, and that leads to other sites, where other techniques of inquiry must be used. This, at any rate, is what fieldwork in Belaya Kalitva and Rodniki—a second city in which I worked—provided: insight into critical nodes where fields of power come into contact and are made visible; into singular realities whose intelligibility has to be found in diverse experiences that lie beyond them. The detailed engagement of ethnography provided, thus, an orientation to a grouping of sites and a set of problems that I simply could not have stumbled upon otherwise. These cities also provided an ethical orientation to the fate of a curious and preponderant kind of human collectivity, to the apartment blocs, heating pipes, budgets, and people whose lives depend on these mundane systems—and whose modernity has been shattered.

A Note on Organization

The two parts of this book share a common structure. After a brief introduction, each begins by asking how the broad adjustments between population, production, and social welfare were made targets of expert reflection and intervention in the early Soviet period (chapter 2) and at the onset of the post-Soviet period (chapter 6). Subsequent chapters trace these biopolitical frameworks to the elements through which a form of social modernity is assembled, digging in to pipes, wires, and norms. My argument about neoliberalism comes late in the book—in chapter 7 (on the fisc) and chapter 8 (on heat systems). For this reason, although these chapters draw extensively on prior material, I have written them in a way that should allow them to be read on their own.