

CRAIG CAMPBELL

AGITATING IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPHY AGAINST HISTORY
IN INDIGENOUS SIBERIA



Agitating Images

This page intentionally left blank

Agitating Images

PHOTOGRAPHY AGAINST HISTORY
IN INDIGENOUS SIBERIA

Craig Campbell



University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis • London



FIRST PEOPLES
New Directions in Indigenous Studies

The University of Minnesota Press gratefully acknowledges financial assistance provided for the publication of this book from the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Texas at Austin.

Publication of this book was made possible, in part, with a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Spot illustrations appear courtesy of Krasnoïarsk Krai Regional Museum.

Portions of the book were previously published as "History's Ornament: Photography and Cultural Engineering in Early Soviet Siberia," *Journal of Historical Sociology* (2013).

Copyright 2014 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by the University of Minnesota Press
111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290
Minneapolis, MN 55401-2520
<http://www.upress.umn.edu>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Campbell, Craig.

Agitating images : photography against history in indigenous Siberia / Craig Campbell.
(First peoples : new directions in indigenous studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8166-8106-8 (pb : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8166-8105-1 (hc : alk. paper)

1. Evenki (Asian people)—Cultural assimilation—Russia (Federation)—Siberia, Northwestern—History—20th century. 2. Evenki (Asian people)—Government relations—History—20th century. 3. Evenki (Asian people)—Government policy—Soviet Union. 4. Historiography and photography. I. Title.

DK759.E83C36 2014

323.11941—dc23

2013050882

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgments | vii |
| Prologue | ix |
| Introduction: In the Archives of the Cultural Base | 1 |
| The Years Are Like Centuries | 9 |
| Dangerous Communications | 153 |
| Conclusion: Ethics of Presence and the (De)generative Image | 211 |
| Notes | 229 |
| Bibliography | 247 |
| Index | 261 |

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This book, from start to finish, is a minor career; the research has gone in many directions and has been whittled down to its core articulations through countless conversations. To all those who listened to me and offered advice, I am deeply grateful. Unfortunately I've lost track of some who helped me in the earliest stages. So I begin with an apology as well as a declaration of general gratitude for myriad gifts of knowledge, friendship, forgiveness, understanding, tolerance, money, and love.

My children grew up while I researched this book—their acceptance of the strange pace of life for a scholar (being around too much, being away too much, and sometimes just half-being) has been essential to sustaining my project. Their mother, too, cared enough for these words and this work to lend her generous support, time, and editorial gaze in earlier stages. Thank you.

Agitating Images grew out of graduate work undertaken at the University of Alberta, where there are many people who deserve acknowledgment. Derek Sayer and Elena Siemens were my invaluable mentors and supporters: they trusted in me, and in turn I learned to trust myself. An important Wild Rose cohort of fellow travelers includes Yoke Sum Wong, Karen Engle, Mark Jackson, Kim Mair, Erin Stepney, Amy Swiffen, Dan Webb, and others.

David Anderson has been an important partner in much of my Siberian research. He has also been a steadfast role model for committed ethnography as well as an important friend and mentor.

My friend from Novosibirsk, Anatolii Ablazhey, helped in many ways and has been a steadfast supporter of my research. I must also thank A. Sirina, M. Batashev, N. Makarov, and N. Martynovich. Of course many more need to be acknowledged, and I apologize for not naming all of them here. Archivists and librarians, sociologists, archaeologists, and ethnographers from Tura,

Krasnoiarsk, Irkutsk, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg all helped this project at various stages.

Many friends in Tura need to be thanked, and already too many years have passed since I have seen them. Most especially I thank the Khutukogir family for extending their support and their homes to me on my visits.

In Austin, Texas, I have found an uncommon community to whom I am deeply indebted. Katie Stewart and John Hartigan have done so much to make space for me here. Writing sessions with Sofian Merabet, Ann Cvetkovich, Randy Lewis, Heather Hindman, and others associated with Public Feelings were tremendous.

Many institutions play a role in one's research, and they should not be left out, least of all because they make this practice possible. The Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council has been very generous toward me and has given me a great deal of financial support over the years. Others include the Canadian Circumpolar Institute and the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta.

Prologue

What stands out most to us when we look at this hundred-year-old image? Is it the gaze of these men, women, and children staring at an ancient camera's lens? Although the look is arresting, I don't think this is the first thing the viewer will notice. I suggest our first level of engagement is to wonder what is going on, on the surface of the image. Not only are three people painted out (or in, depending on your opinion), but the effect of the touch-up produces an uncanny confusion of territory. While it promises to excerpt a photographic element from the plane of the image, it also threatens to decouple the indexicality secured by photography.



Figure 1. A falsified image? Neither the photographer nor the manipulator is noted. Courtesy Tura Regional Museum. I. M. Suslov collection.

“*Maiskie Tungusy*” was written in Cyrillic on the verso of a photographic print from which this image is reproduced. Aside from three other alphanumerical classificatory markings connecting this photograph to specific institutional histories and archival ecologies, I’ve found nothing else written about the image. “Tungusy” is a pluralized ethnonym. It was used most commonly into the early twentieth century to describe a variety of indigenous peoples widely dispersed across North and Central Asia; this includes the Siberian Evenkis who are at the center of this study. The term *Maiskie* probably locates this group of Tungus in the Maia River basin, an area in central Siberia east of the Enisei and Lena Rivers.

The thickly painted white border draws three bodies out of the group of “Maiskie Tungus.” It seems to float them on a separate plane. On first inspection one might imagine that the white border obscures the artificial insertion of three people into an already existing group. The erasure of certain elements (such as the baby’s cradle to the right of the alteration) reveals on close inspection that underneath the white paint the picture is a cohesive whole. This is no composite image; rather it is a deliberate attempt to slice through one “real” to present another. This photograph draws attention to itself. The overt distortion and obfuscation of this image present rare evidence for techniques of visible manipulation—the trace of the *act* of falsification rather than its after-effect. While all photographs function as perversion to the empirical event, most are presented in their relationship to that-which-once-was as transparent reflection: unmodified replication, if not unmodulated reproduction.

The danger of the falsified photograph is not the real it hides or masks but the unmarked real it produces. Regardless, my interests in this photograph’s modifications as well as other conspicuous adjustments—minor marks and modifications—are intended less as cyphers for a discourse on the nature of the real and more as enticement to dwell a little longer on the surface of the image. The title of this book—*Agitating Images*—gives away little beyond a promise to engage with the visual and the implication of some sort of trouble. But perhaps “trouble” is too negative a term; after all, *agitation* is a word that also implies a potentially more benign mixture of elements. In many ways *Agitating Images* is a project defined both by trouble and mixture:

a hopeful commingling of disparate parts or claims. The “trouble” I invoke is analyzed and historicized, but it is also a critical trouble that is expected and invited; in this latter sense I present agitation in the form of a montage of photographic images accompanied by histories, observations, and critiques. This trouble is coaxed and encouraged to settle, however awkwardly, like that gloomy space between night and day in the arctic winter where our certainty of the shape of things is least secure—where form is a little less sharply defined. Photographs and histories find themselves in a space half-formed, half-unformed. Their specific roles seeping out into the other, their interplay complicating a “coming into” something: shaping up or sedimenting and hardening.

“Agitation” [*agitatsiia*, in Russian] was the name given to a project of Communist activists who were working in the first decades of the twentieth century. They took their struggles to peasants in the fields just as they did to proletarian workers in factories. They also traveled to remote regions of the former Tsarist Empire to meet indigenous Siberian peoples. The agitators were community workers attempting to bring about class warfare in a place where there was little sense of conventional class differentiation and where Marxist class analysis could only be applied through highly selective and acrobatic rhetorical acts. Inevitably the models used by labor agitators came up short against the organic and ill-understood character of work in the reindeer camp, the trapper’s tent, and annual clan gatherings. As was so often the case elsewhere, policy and methods designed for Europe were poorly suited to the everyday realities of colonial outposts. Reindeer herders in Siberia, after all, bore little resemblance to peasant farmers and even less to the urban proletariat. Revolutionary methodology, at least in the earliest days, was a relatively blunt tool of urgent politics and action.

Agitation itself has a history as a word describing the effort to raise a shared sense of discontent among a group—the agitator thus being a kind of agent of incipient change. Karl Marx often used the term to describe a broad range of activists committed to political transformation. As the pragmatics of revolution required a division of labor and clarification of jobs and their attendant responsibilities, the role of the agitator came to be codified in the context of Soviet revolutionary politics. Eugene Debs, an American union organizer,

wrote on the definition of an agitator in an 1890 English-language labor pamphlet: “The employer wants quiet, stagnation; wants to be let severely alone. The agitator won’t have it so. At the bottom of the labor question there exists a wrong of incalculable enormity. The labor agitator seeks to unearth it—to lay it bare, *to expose it to the gaze of the world* and exterminate it.”¹ What Debs described was an aesthetics of injustice; a regime of looking that would make visible the overlooked and unmarked in everyday life. The conditions of postrevolutionary Communism in Russia imagined a role even more bold and expansive for the agitator. The form of Communism developed under V. I. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party necessitated not only a revolution in rights and labor practices but also a revolution in everyday life. The reconstruction of economies and social relations was quite simply not enough: agitation needed to disturb established orders of being with a program that was more profoundly encompassing. The aesthetic regime of change was designed to reconstruct the palpable sense of ordinary life and possibility. In 1902, Lenin described in detail the agitator’s grave assignment:

[The agitator] will take as an illustration a fact that is most glaring and most widely known to his audience, say, the death of an unemployed worker’s family from starvation, the growing impoverishment, etc., and, utilising this fact, known to all, will direct his efforts to presenting a *single idea* to the “masses”, e.g., the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase of wealth and the increase of poverty; he will strive *to rouse* discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of this contradiction to the propagandist.²

Without naming it thus, Lenin’s focus was on the *everyday*, on the form of ordinary life as it was lived out by countless people struggling to make sense of the twentieth century’s ebullient and terrifying upheavals. Agitation’s necessary attention to the facts of everyday life, to the lived feeling of injustice, is possible by a hyper-attunement to ordinary experience and expression. In a visual register it was also just the look of it all and later a learned way of looking at the surface of the ordinary. The object of attention was the manner in

which ideology obscured the possibility of radical (revolutionary!) change. The division of labor between the agitator and the propagandist is critical in my own appropriation of the term. Agitation is an act of cultural critique, whereas propaganda—foreclosing on the possibility of discussion, disagreement, or negotiation—is dogma. Agitation cries out that something is not right, while propaganda proscribes the path to change. Agitation in the years following the 1917 October Revolution was marked by a militarization of culture and language in a rigid march of “progress.”³ Soviet society was at war with illiteracy. It was at war with “stagnation” and “backwardness.” In central Siberia it was also at war with shamanism and other particularities of indigenous life deemed incompatible with Soviet modernity. Debs dramatically claimed: “Agitation is the order of nature. Nature abhors quiet as it does a vacuum.”⁴ Agitation in the context of early Soviet cultural interventions was an essential component in an obligatory process of cultural reconstruction, a process wherein ideas and practices were evaluated according to Communist principles. Those principles that failed to meet the ideal were disrupted, denigrated, and, where possible, liquidated or destroyed. There could be no vacuum for the state’s sociology, for its totalizing interventions into everyday life.

Innokentii Mikhailovich Suslov, the man standing to the right in figure 2 with his arm raised in the air, was one of the primary agents of cultural change in the central Siberian territory of Evenkiia. He was born in Siberia but trained as an anthropologist and geographer in St. Petersburg. After the 1917 revolution (that toppled tsarist rule) and the subsequent civil war (that sorted out national power), Suslov traveled the Russian countryside on specially outfitted agitational trains. The goal of these caravans was to convince peasants and other rural peoples to support the revolutionary enterprise. Later he returned to central Siberia to supervise Communist “enlightenment” work among indigenous peoples. One of his most significant and enduring projects was orchestrating the construction and implementation of a system of remote outposts, called Culture Bases.

The agitation I have deployed in this work engages more than the specific historical connotation of the Communist Revolution. In an expanded sense it functions as a kind of historiographical ethos. Agitation serendipitously describes what I’ve come to see as a troubled (and troubling) relationship



Figure 2. Obvious traces of modification are visible in this image. Courtesy Tura Regional Museum. I. M. Suslov collection.

between photography and historiography. In this book I will argue that all photographs are actually agitating; even the most mundane and seemingly transparent images will be shown to have the capacity to agitate against or undo our meaning-making endeavors. Photographs are qualitatively different things than are words, sentences, essays, and monographs. They communicate in unique ways, and their appearance in proximity to exposition and argument is deeply problematic. The effect of photographs is also overlooked in scholarly writing with surprising frequency. To extend the militaristic tone from revolutionary Communism: photographs are *agents provocateurs*. They pose (or are posed) as media amenable to interpretation and the ascription of meaning, whereas in actuality they undermine meaning and interpretation by indexing the irreducible meaninglessness of the everyday.

Agitation as an ethos—as an orientation toward the writing of history—shares in the spirit of innervation invoked by the famous cultural critic Walter Benjamin in his exploration of aesthetics. There was ballistic tactility

in some of the emerging forms of art and visual exhibition described and critiqued by cultural critics in the 1920s and '30s. As Walter Benjamin saw it, the spectator did not *see* this art, “it *happened* to him.”⁵ The registers of shock or “shock effects” transcended and troubled the contemplative (and complacent) world of tradition and mind, binding it up with body effects and social reverberations. Benjamin’s aesthetics of innervation—described through emerging theories of the psyche and motivated by revolutionary artists and thinkers—was a site or perhaps a utopian sociospatial reorganization. Innervation for Benjamin was a metaphorical suture used to demarcate mind–body transference: a two-way street, as Miriam Bratu Hansen describes it, which is “not only a conversion of mental, affective energy into somatic, motoric form, but also the possibility of reconverting, and recovering, split-off psychic energy through motoric stimulation.”⁶ This two-way street of innervation or agitation troubles the boundary between the mind and the body. Susan Buck-Morss wrote that “‘innervation’ is Benjamin’s term for a mimetic reception of the external world, one that is empowering, in contrast to a defensive mimetic adaptation that protects at the price of paralyzing the organism, robbing it of its capacity of imagination, and therefore of active response.”⁷ Benjamin’s mimetic faculty, which blows apart conventions of verisimilitude, looks to semblance, interplay, and affinity through touch and tactility . . . through bodily engagements with the world: “Revolutions are innervations of the collective” wrote Benjamin.⁸ The photo-fragments in my book are a little army of agitators, set to radically challenge archives of “nonsensuous correspondences.”⁹ The tactility of seeing is thus tied to the revolutionary potential of the images vis-à-vis the historical claims set beside them.

Another resonance for this project of agitation is the trouble invoked by Judith Butler in her work on gender and performance. In a widely quoted passage from the preface to the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes on the inevitability of trouble and the necessity of making it as well as being in it.¹⁰ Making trouble and being in trouble for Butler torments the “subtle ruse of power” that would deny ground for difference. This “subtle ruse of power” concerning behavior and gender is reproduced through historical writing, not concerning gender alone but concerning the *everyday* as well. The irreducible fact of a life lived—an affective order (and ordering) of the

world—refuses the undifferentiated otherness of the past generated by so much historical writing. Agitating photography, like troubling gender, turns on a recognition of indeterminacy. This “subtle ruse of power” is closure or stagnation. It is the denial of a space from which to speak opposition, what Jacques Rancière calls for in his work on dissensus and emancipation.¹¹

In a fashion I see Butler’s notion of trouble resonant also with Walter Benjamin’s writing on history as an effort “to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up a moment of danger.”¹² This is a danger that, according to Benjamin, “affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers.”¹³ While deciding on which histories matter may be the task of articulating the past historically—producing a consensual framing of reality—I’ll show how photographs “flash up” dangerously as they position themselves not against historical claims but against everyday consensus. Accepting the inevitability of trouble enriches history; engineering agitation empowers the spectator-reader to more boldly push against the thousand little closures native to writing about the past.

Figure 3 is a manipulated image presented as an obscured photographic trace designed to mark an absence. It occupies a space of provisional externality in this book by pointing to a Web page I have called the archival degenerator. The degenerator is an archival game that can exist only as a digital supplement to a print publication. The manipulated and obscured photograph, a collage of sorts, is placed to amplify and complicate the absence of the intervention. It points outward from the book to the game, which in turn indexes archives and histories through its chaotic mechanism. My archival degenerator is an experiment in surrealist archival science. It is a degenerate’s catalogue that presents an engaged randomization of the entire collection of photographs from the Endangered Archives Programme originating in the Krasnoiarsk Krai Regional Museum. The point of the archival degenerator is to bring multiple images together, to allow them to rub up against one another, to produce unexpected encounters and to engineer serendipity. What will become of this? Who knows? The point of this exercise is that the categories of the archive are arbitrary, just as the categories I generate are arbitrary. But the poetry of degenerated archival orders suggests different readings and possibilities. The degenerate’s catalogue throws together two random images each time you activate the engine.

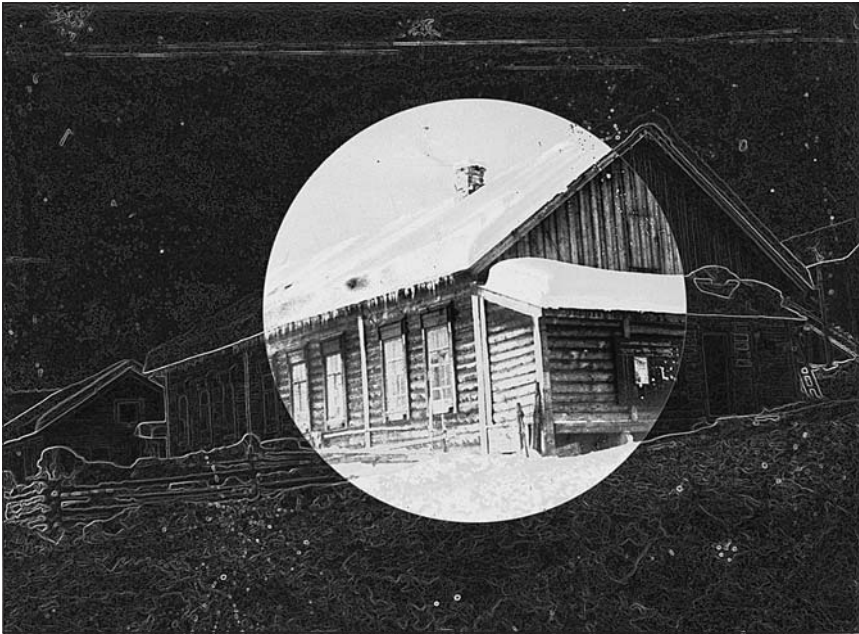


Figure 3. A manipulated image. Original image courtesy Krasnoyarsk Krai Regional Museum.

Like anything corrupt, the archival degenerator upsets rules and codes. It undermines the fictions of closure and comprehensibility. It refuses the archive and its logics of order and practice. It agitates history and power and draws attention to the implicit and unspoken rules governing access and expression. The juxtapositions created in the degenerate's catalogue are ephemeral and in some ways dilettantish. They are not easily instrumentalized and are best seen as a tool to generate novel associations. As Ted Bishop writes in *Riding with Rilke*, the heart of archival work is "the discovery of surprising connections between disparate artifacts."¹⁴ Most of the surprising connections I've made while playing with the degenerate's catalogue are actually disconnections and incredulities: "Where are the signs of trauma after the brutal small pox epidemic?" "What does this pile of reindeer carcasses have to do with Bolshevik party politics?" or even more mundane observations:

"What kind of tea are they brewing?"

“Did that man ever travel to Moscow?”

“What a beautiful coat!”

“They look cold.”

“I’m hungry for fish.”

Being in the archive presents a situated encounter with the structuration of history itself. While doing research for this book, I often found myself in the dull repositories of state institutions and regional museums. I felt like a disciplinary interloper, an ethnographer lost in foreign parts—immersed in a vast ocean of documents all connected to one another in myriad and incalculable ways. Such scope and intricacy seem to make a project of relational historiography laughably parochial. The incalculable immensity of the ephemeral haunts historical representation. What was left behind disturbs me to this day: unread documents, partially read documents, hot trails grown cold, unmapped networks, and most significantly the immensity of it all; all potentially meaningful, all superficially useless. Each document points to intimate labors, inscriptions, and extensive bureaucratic systems; each one moves through ages of revolutionary excitement, repressions, banal organizations, reorganizations, and re-reorganizations. Each document conveys the class marks and carefully inscribed histories of its movements from one place to another. From their fragmentations through re-formations and re-fragmentations they bear the indexical marks back to the ledgers of previous researchers. These are archival threads that have no place in this work, but that I am loath to cut out; their collective absence is too obvious and too frequently unspoken. Perhaps we are in a moment whereby grand schematizations and constructions of historical events are looked upon with a modicum of suspicion: now more than ever there is a desire to know the past as a collection of sensuous instances. Or perhaps not. The discursive realities of an archive structure our interpretation of it. But the affective orders of the archival researchers’ *observation of*—and more importantly *contact with*—history must not be written away under the pragmatic efficiencies of reductive categories. Certainly, it is discourse. But it is more, too.

A photograph, in any event, cuts across historical narratives referring to a single moment but anticipating an indeterminate possibility. Remember the archive is not just about the past; it is about the future, or rather, it anticipates

a future audience. The photograph (like the archive . . . as an archive) is a future-oriented object, for it is always establishing connections beyond itself and being reinterpreted in each photo-encounter. It is remarkable how easily a photograph can eviscerate historical narrative. Like a coroner's scalpel, it cuts into these partial pasts with its precision and sensuous particularity; it makes me think of Brion Gysin and William Burroughs with their cut-ups. Those two sought to find hidden pulses and forgotten rhythms through their poetry, prose, and art. Their cutups also point back further to the Romanian Dadaist Tristan Tzara, whose nihilism lit up generations of artists. His lusty inchoate protest rang out against "greasy objectivity, and harmony, the science that finds everything in order." It was, as others would call it, an innervation with a profound ballistic tactility.

"To Expose It to the Gaze of the World"

While *Agitating Images* is an experiment in form and a serious yet playful engagement with design, it is also a commitment to critical cultural history. I've written this book in two parts. The first part, "The Years Are Like Centuries," is a historical examination of the encounter between indigenous peoples in central Siberia, especially Evenkis, and the newly minted Bolshevik-led Communist government. The second part of this book, "Dangerous Communications," positions this history in conversation with ideas about photography and archives. As a whole the work ranges across the murky territorial boundaries between indigenous studies, cultural anthropology, cultural theory, history, and sociology.

The 1920s and '30s marked a colossal and explosive shift of everyday life across all of Russia, including its subordinate lands in northern Asia. Through the examination of an event—the production and performance of Communism in central Siberia, one of the frontiers for Russia's mass utopia—I show how the ruling Bolshevik party, faced with an enormous inland territory and what was perceived as a culturally anterior population, developed a unique technology to facilitate the shaping and manipulation of the indigenous cultural everyday. This technology was called the *Kul'tbaza*, or Culture Base. In particular this book focuses on the Tungus Culture Base, a prototype that

functioned as a model for Soviet intervention across the Siberian North. The Tungus Culture Base also laid the foundations for an Evenki “city in the forest”: Tura, the capital of an autonomous ethnic homeland for a fledgling Evenki nation.

Rather than illustrate my history of Soviet programs of culture change with archival photographs, I present archival photographs as an anti-illustration, an intrusion into the historiographical calm of the text. In the first part of this book, untitled and uncaptioned photographic images actively agitate against the written history. They undermine it by offering paths of critique and challenge that might otherwise be marginalized and ignored. Following Lenin’s rhetoric, these image agitators strive to rouse discontent, even indignation. It is perversely a struggle with the history I am writing—an invited and necessary perversion. Through states of agitation and historical apprehension, I stake a claim for a modality of publishing that delivers authoritative and expository claims alongside the means to engage with the limits of authorship and expertise—something that works to undo the sedimentation of historical reality.

The second part of this work, “Dangerous Communications,” is embellished in a more or less conventional manner with archival photographs that I have collected while doing research in Siberia. This part actually reconfigures its subject through an engagement with expeditionary photographs from Siberian archives. These photographs are meant to accompany and extend the textual arguments, but they are not, for the most part, discussed in the text as examples. Unlike the photographs presented in the prologue, they are not illustrations with captions but are instead historically complicit and collusive. They offer new possibilities and openings rather than simple affirmations and closures. The images in this section are thus agitating in a passive sense and in the way that they redistribute the production of historical knowledge across an ambivalent register of ordinary life.

In the Archives of the Cultural Base

The idea that culture is something to be produced, invented, constructed, or reconstructed underlined so much of the USSR's social vision . . . its stunning reach was perhaps nowhere more strikingly seen than in the ways it transformed the lives of the peoples living along its furthest borders.

—Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture*

In his book *In the Soviet House of Culture*, anthropologist Bruce Grant presents one of the key narratives that initially piqued my interest in exploring Siberia and studying the histories of indigenous Siberians—histories which have offered up both similarities and disjunctures to my earlier readings into aboriginal-state relations and twentieth-century colonialism in the Canadian North. His reference to something called the “House of Culture” offered a deliciously unfamiliar and enticing analogy for what appeared to be a qualitatively different form of colonial relationship. Whereas Grant wrote about the Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island, my introduction to Siberian history and ethnography began in 1995 with an Evenki family in the far northern village of Oleneok, Republic of Sakha (Yakutiia). Since that time I have pursued studies in the culture and history of Evenki-speaking peoples of central Siberia with a particular focus on those living in a territory known as Evenkiia. Most recently I have undertaken research into the striking cultural transformations that took place in the Soviet Union after the 1917 Communist Revolution.

The convolutions of power, articulated through centers and peripheries, are at the heart of nearly every study of Siberia. As Bruce Grant notes, the engineered cultural transformations happened to people living on the *furthest borders* of the Soviet Union. From Moscow to the outermost settlements along the Pacific Ocean is a distance of over six thousand kilometers. My own paths, traced through the Russian Federation beginning in the mid-1990s, were

primarily located in the Evenki Autonomous District (Evenkiia, EAO), a region that is at the geographical center of Russia. Ironically this geographical center also represents a cultural and political “fringe.” Thousands of kilometers from the rail and highway systems to the south, Evenkiia is connected to the rest of the country by shipping routes that rely on frozen winter ice roads, limited seasonal river travel, and air transport; even with present-day transportation technology, getting in and out of that area from urban centers in the South takes significant time and effort. At the beginning of the twentieth century Evenkiia was known as the Turukhansk North, and it was very much the edge of the empire, although located in the very center of it. Empire’s edge in this case refers not to distance from the center as it is measured in kilometers or versts, but rather to a metric of access and to a fertility of imagination born of ignorance. Siberia, for most Russians, was also very much on the periphery of the imagination. It was (and continues to be for many) alternately a site of struggle and privation as well as a site of purity, proximity to nature, and authenticity. It is in this center-on-the-edge that I developed my own secular pilgrimage to houses of culture and historical epicenters in central Siberia.

Whereas Bruce Grant takes the House of Culture [*dom kultura*] as his central metaphor for Soviet cultural transformation, my project is an attempt to look through the genealogy of the House of Culture to its predecessor, the Culture Base [*kul’tbaza*].¹ For me, the Culture Base carries the same hint of estrangement and “otherness” as did the House of Culture when I first encountered it. It is a nomenclature that begins with a defamiliarization; an untranslatable word that signals difference and refuses easy containment and understanding. There is no parallel to either the Culture Base or the House of Culture in the Canadian aboriginal experience of colonialism, though missions, forts, trading posts, mission schools, and residential schools were all (similarly) locations of cultural encounter, subjugation, and (often) forced assimilation. The Soviet Culture Base, however, was built on a very different paradigm. While it was indeed built to drive the process of cultural transformation, it was designed *not* to obliterate cultural difference; it was designed to discipline it. As a technology of discipline, the Culture Base was the first concrete effort on the part of the soviets to bring socialist enlightenment to the farthest reaches of the taiga.

In my writings here, I use the first Culture Base, located in the Turukhansk North and constructed at the end of the 1920s, to anchor the historical and theoretically peripatetic explorations of historiography and photography. This Culture Base became known as the administrative town of Tura, and it is to this place that I traveled with my family in 1998, and where I encountered photographic archives housed in a small regional museum. From Tura I made many other trips and investigations: walking through the taiga, exploring rivers by motorboat, trekking on reindeer saddle and sleigh, driving winter roads on great Soviet trucks, and flying by helicopter to locations around the Ilimpii taiga in Evenkiia. *Agitating Images*, however, is built principally on archival research in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, and Krasnoiarsk. A great deal of it emerged out of my involvement with the Endangered Archives Programme 016, an initiative funded by the British Library to digitize and preserve glass-plate negatives from provincial archives in Siberia.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the word *Siberia* continues to conjure up images of a distant, brutal, and cold land. A hundred years ago, Marie Antoinette Czaplicka (a Polish anthropologist and a lecturer at Oxford University around 1916) wrote that when she was a child *Siberia* meant one thing: “dire peril to the bodies, sore torture for the souls, of the bravest, cleverest, and most independently minded of our people.”² This was a place on the margins of “civilization,” where the light of European science and reason rarely fell; it was replete with places of dark shamanic rituals where “Stone Age” nomads wandered the icy tundra ceaselessly along paths as old as time. This was a land for the destitute exiles, for criminal intellectuals and other deviants: a prison with no walls. Evenki historian V. N. Uvachan wrote that before “the October Revolution, the Turukhansk territory was a forlorn land of white silence and great sorrow. It was called ‘the wretched Turukhansk’ and the ‘the prison without bars.’”³ It is this vast mythologized land that Communist agitators, instructors, and administrators set out to permanently transform in 1917.

Siberia continues to be a mythologized and exoticized land, defined largely by its remoteness, a seemingly indelible history of challenge, and a brutally cold environment. While it is no longer so associated with political exile (though the infamous gulags continue to feature prominently in histories and

sample content of Agitating Images: Photography against History in Indigenous Siberia (First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies)

- [download J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [The Natural Golf Swing here](#)
- [The Law of Agency and Partnership \(3rd Edition\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [click The Russian Revolution](#)

- <http://academialanguagebar.com/?ebooks/J-R-R--Tolkien--Author-of-the-Century.pdf>
- <http://junkrobots.com/ebooks/Working-with-Disney--Interviews-with-Animators--Producers--and-Artists.pdf>
- <http://nexson.arzamashev.com/library/Weather-Eye-Open--New-California-Poetry--Volume-13-.pdf>
- <http://www.netc-bd.com/ebooks/Tales-of-the-Jazz-Age.pdf>