

tion, but particularly to those with some knowledge of product and process innovation in planned and post-planned economies. As well as descriptions of the changes in policy and organization, the book also contains useful analyses of the areas and content of Soviet patents, both within the main body of the text and in the appendixes. The book is extremely informative but a concluding chapter would have been useful to summarize the main findings and suggest possible future research: this might include, for example, studies of the relative technological levels (both historical and contemporary) of Soviet and post-Soviet patents.

MALCOLM R. HILL

Loughborough University, United Kingdom

Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self. By Igal Halfin. Donald W. Treadgold Studies on Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia. Seattle: Herbert J. Ellison Center for Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies, University of Washington, 2011. Dist. University of Washington Press. v, 197 pp. Appendix. Notes. Tables. \$30.00, paper.

Red Autobiographies provides detailed insight into a corner of Soviet life that not long ago, for reasons of access as well as disciplinary focus, would have fallen below the radar of scholarly attention: records at the “grassroots level” (17) of applications to the party, interrogations within, and purges from it at such institutions as the Smolensk Technological Institute, the Tomsk Technological Institute, and Leningrad State University during the 1920s. By focusing on the autobiographical statements submitted during these procedures, this book joins the growing ranks of archival research dedicated to assessing the formation of Soviet “identity” and in particular of the “new theoretical approaches to the self [that] became available just as the Party archives were opened to serious research” (3). What Igal Halfin looks for are moments in the autobiographical statements submitted by various supplicants to the party in which we can see the manifestations of a genuinely Bolshevik self, distinct from the liberal notions of selfhood to which most outsiders to the Soviet world presumably subscribe.

Halfin’s insistence—at least on the level of theory—that we set aside our preconceptions in order to understand the radically peculiar “Bolshevik identity” (158) revealed in these documents essentially positions his study as a poststructuralist inquiry into textualité, into the “Bolshevik poetics” (28) whose rhetorical strategies and tropes are taken as meaningful in and of themselves—though this is poststructuralism of a relatively soft variety that does not so much insist that there is nothing *dehors-texte*, as Jacques Derrida would have it, as it warns us against bringing to the analysis what we thought we knew about Soviet lives and experiences.

Halfin has trawled through a wealth of material and opens a fascinating window onto lives captured at the intersection of the personal (the various pasts profoundly affected by the revolution and civil war and now cast into autobiographical form) and the institutional (the need to petition the local party organization to gain admission or avoid expulsion). The entity of the “Bolshevik self,” however, remains curiously elusive, and most of the data Halfin presents point toward a very different phenomenon: not the construction of a radically new form of “identity” but an opportunistic repackaging of their past by the petitioners in order to satisfy what they perceive to be the current disposition of the party in their matter. Commenting on the vagaries of class identity in applications to the party, for example, Halfin observes that “putting their wager on peasant identity, students wanted at all costs to remain in the proletarian cohort” (75); or again, discussing one applicant to the party at Leningrad State University who had to defuse the threat of a letter accusing his family of disloyalty to the Soviet government, “skilled in the art of Bolshevik self-fashioning, Ivanov did not think of submitting readily” (79); and so on through many of the examples.

But this is not the language of identity construction, it is the language of coerced or cynical adaptation. It is one thing to instruct us that we cannot pass judgment about the subjective experience behind the autobiography, about the degree to which the charac-

terizations were internalized and sincerely believed (one curious effect of studies that appeal to textualité is a certain absolutization of what is found in the text, which must be taken at face value, without any appeal to implicit subtexts or rifts in its rhetorical strategies that might expose them as insincere). To say (or imply) that we can tell that the given author is being disingenuous—as Halfin often does (cf. his claim in the cited examples to know what the students and Ivanov were really thinking)—is, however, something quite different.

In the end there is not really any empirically evident “illiberal self” (165) here at all, nor, for that matter, any strong evidence that individualistic, liberal selfhood vigorously survived. There is simply no warrant for speculating broadly about the aims and presuppositions of documents written for such a narrowly circumscribed purpose. The documents Halfin has examined show us what they show: how petitioners rewrote their pasts in order to attain or avert a very particular pragmatic end. Of that practice *Red Autobiographies* is an engaging study; but it offers no particularly new perspective on selfhood in the Soviet era.

THOMAS SEIFRID
University of Southern California

Wege zum Pik Stalin: Sowjetische Alpinisten, 1928–1953. By Eva Maurer. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2010. 496 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. €57.00, hard bound.

Alpinists are always looking to reach new heights. In the 1930s, Soviet alpinists were literally looking for “routes to Pik Stalin” and to other peaks in the Soviet Union. But *Wege zum Pik Stalin* is a metaphor, too, because alpinists were also attempting to attain a high standing in the symbolic orders of Stalinist culture and society. Eva Maurer analyzes the difficult paths of a mostly academic elite, its formal organizations and informal networks, whose originally bourgeois and quintessentially “individual” leisure practices “in the broad field of social relations” between “private and public” (333) found various ways into the Stalinist order, though none of them were easy. Based on a broad range of sources such as alpinist literature, archival accounts, press reports, and, in part, movies, Maurer provides an outstanding, informed, analytically ambitious, and multifaceted survey of Soviet alpinism during the Stalin years.

Some books spring their main ideas on the reader on the first page, with all subsequent pages being variations on the first. *Wege zum Pik Stalin* does not belong to this category. Chapter 1 begins far from the Stalinist scene, summarizing the history of Alpine alpinism and its first Russian branches in the late tsarist empire. Some readers may find this inconvenient, but Maurer’s characterization of the prerevolutionary alpinism of a “liberal, educated, urban” (71–72) elite, who, unlike their western counterparts, were interested in science, but not so much in the military or in sporting competition, provides an important basis for the following breathtaking analysis of alpinism’s fight for status and position in Stalinist society.

It first helps to understand the complexities of “proletarian alpinism” and early Soviet leisure culture examined in chapter 2. Power struggles between old networks, patronage, and new agents such as the Komsomol added to this complexity, as did the composition of alpinist groups and discourses between old ideas and “proletarian” concepts. For instance, while proletarian tourists ought to have served as cultural workers at the underdeveloped periphery, “old Bolsheviks” on a Pamir expedition in 1928 presented themselves as being beyond the “norms of urban civilization” (118) and clearly enjoyed mountaineering in a similarly open way as their bourgeois predecessors had done. In various sources, Maurer finds the complex signature of a transformational time, with old elites rubbing elbows with newer ones within newly developed Soviet structures and organizations.

This prehistory also helps to explain the tremendous shift in official discourses in the 1930s, when subjective descriptions of travel were no longer published—although