many discussions since 1991, but Hough's combination of sociological and institutional approaches is unique in its detail and sophistication.

The greatest strength of the work, however, lies in its analysis of the personal and decisional matrix of these years. Nikolai Ryzhkov, the prime minister until he resigned in December 1990, is presented as a more consistent economic reformer than most existing accounts suggest, whereas Gorbachev, who lacks any economic training himself, is depicted as being ineluctably drawn against his better judgment towards "shock therapy" economic reform. According to Hough, by the end, much of the Soviet leadership had come to accept the need to pursue radical economic policies, provoking the revolution that brought their nemesis, the Yeltsinite "democrats," to power. The economic views of the two groups were remarkably similar, hence Egor Gaidar could, with equal ease, be economics editor of *Pravda* under Gorbachev and the architect of shock therapy under Yeltsin. Hough stresses the common roots of Marxism and neoclassical economic theory in the precorporate world of the early nineteenth century, with neither successfully adapting to the complexities and institutional requirements of modern corporate society, markets, and democracy. The corollary for Hough is that America, when supporting democratization and marketization abroad, should take into account the very different views on the role of the state in these processes held by leaders in China and elsewhere (and by academics like Douglass North), compared to those advanced by the late Soviet and Russian leaders. It was Ryzhkov, from this perspective, who had a more solid grasp of economic realities and a more realistic strategy for economic reform than the proponents of the "500 days" plan, but Gorbachev sacrificed Ryzhkov on the pyre of expediency and antistate dogma.

Hough attempts to unravel what Egor Ligachev in his memoirs called "the Gorbachev enigma": why did Gorbachev in effect commit the system to suicide? Part of the answer lies in the "Khrushchev syndrome," the fear of being dismissed by the party as Nikita Khrushchev was in October 1964. This together with reacting too slowly to events, was the most characteristic feature of Gorbachev's policies according to Ligachev. Hough in part endorses this, only hinting at his earlier view that Gorbachev had a well-kept secret strategy in 1990–91 to outwit his opponents. Gorbachev's strategy (if he had one) remains an enigma for Hough, and an increasingly unflattering picture emerges. Many elements are marginalized in Hough's grand account, above all the role of mass pressure from below (taking the form of strikes, electoral defeats for officialdom, demonstrations, and social movements) and the objective problems of the Soviet institutional system (the Olsonite change in the beliefs of those at the top of the system, it might be argued, only precipitated what had already been latent). Hough's representation of the politics of the last years of the USSR is not altogether convincing, yet this is undoubtedly a stimulating and fundamental work that will form the cornerstone of evaluations of the Gorbachev period for the foreseeable future.

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Popular lore enjoins us to look beyond rhetoric, value substance over style, see through appearances, and never lose sight of the real thing. Against this common wisdom runs a theory according to which rhetoric is at the heart of reality—social reality, that is. Nancy Ries makes an uncommonly lucid case for this latter view, arguing that perestroika talk is anything but cheap. She takes her inspiration from Mikhail Bakhtin, Clifford Geertz, Anthony Giddens, Joel Scherzer, and other social scientists who have taken verbal behavior seriously and shown us how everyday talk generates the realities it purports to describe.

Ries's immediate focus is on perestroika talk or "perestroika from the perspective of
the kitchen table” (163), as she puts it. But her discussion ranges far beyond the stated subject, encompassing a wide range of rhetorical props, generic forms, and discursive practices endemic to Russian culture as a whole. The book’s main thesis can be summed up thus: Russian discourse about perestroika subverted perestroika in Russian discourse and helped perpetuate the very realities it sought to uproot. The thesis may not be altogether new, but the ingenious way in which the author blends Russian fairy tales, literature, and urban lore is.

Russian Talk is based on a series of interviews with Russian citizens conducted between 1989 and 1995. The most striking thing about the perestroika tales collected in the book is their narrative style, which appears to follow “a fairy tale pattern” (52) with its familiar characters—fools and courtiers, helpless victims and omnipotent villains, the virtuous poor and ruthless moneybags, good fairies and the evil powers. Perestroika tales preach the same inexorability of suffering, the immorality of profiteering, and the futility of personal efforts that have marred Russian popular and high-brow discourse for generations. This “many-layered, fantastically embroidered, epic tale that is Russia” (27) comes to the fore in the favorite narrative genres of perestroika.

Thus, we find here razrukha tales lamenting the utter disarray into which things have fallen of late and the exquisite absurdities stalking the Russians in their everyday life. Heroic shopping tales narrate the valiant feats—podvigi—Russian consumers undertake to keep their families in food and clothes. Tales of violence conjure up the images of evil forces invading the land and terrifying its peace-loving inhabitants. Envy tales regale the unimaginable length to which neighbors, often residing in communal apartments, would go to spite each other. My favorite are mischief tales by and about Russian males who tell everyone willing to listen how valiant lads like themselves prove their mettle by defying the authorities and common sense. Then there are tales of mystic poverty, saints’ lives, ritual laments, and litanies—tales of woe that bestow on claimants a special grace, the moral right to public sympathy stemming from the exceptionally bad fortunes befalling the victim. It is such tales, according to Ries, that fostered the spirit of hopelessness and ultimately thwarted the reformers’ efforts at social reconstruction: “To put it bluntly, this national story of victims, villains, and saviors, performed through litanies, has been a discursive mechanism that facilitated authoritarian social relations” (120).

The elegant ease with which Nancy Ries spans the distance between discourse theory abstractions and conversational fragments steeped in raw emotions is remarkable. There is so much in her account that rings true. Still, this line of inquiry is bound to raise methodological and substantive questions.

Postcommunist tales, Perestroika tales, Soviet tales, Bolshevik tales, tsarist tales—all these historical narratives seamlessly blend here into the all-embracing Russian tale. Each one is a variation on the same grand theme, each one follows the same fairy-tale pattern. While this is a legitimate narrative strategy, it tends to overstate continuity and downplay discontinuity in history. The book’s argument would actually gain in strength if major historical twists in the Russian tale were framed, not only as variations on the same old theme, but also as themes in their own right.

Folklore helps tease out the sense of present-day realities, but as an analytical tool, it has a limited utility. For every fairy tale about getting even with the nosy neighbor there will be another one praising mutual aid. Proverbs celebrating friendship live side by side with those warning us to stay away from unwanted buddies. All lore contains such inconsistent, mutually exclusive discursive frames. Native speakers routinely invoke them in situ to rationalize their conduct, showing in the process that agency belongs to them and not to their language. The author is well aware of this fact, as her strategically placed disclaimers indicate, but the discourse, or theoretical significance, of the Russian folkloric polyphony is not fully explored in the book.

Also not fully explored is the relationship between word and deed, another problematic aspect of discourse theory. For all their talk about the futility of personal efforts and the pleasures of tomfoolery, the respondents sampled in the book did not always practice what they preached. Indeed, most showed “sincere commitment to their work, their families, and their own sobriety” (70), suggesting that the Russian fable may function as a cautionary tale, or as a negative reference frame, rather than as a guide to (in)action.
Finally, one cannot help wondering if the meta-narrative deployed in the book has not been touched by the excessive schematization that it attributes to the prototypical Russian narrative. The Russian universe of discourse is vast. It includes speech acts that do not squarely fall within the "Russian tale." Even a trained ear may grow deaf to speech events outside the chosen schema. To be sure, some discursive frames can grow dominant in any given period, but they never completely suppress the recession symbolic forms that feed off the alternative narrative strategies encoded in culture. And since Russia is now desperately searching for a usable past, it would seem important to explore not only its narrative resources that are susceptible to abuse but also those that offer hope for the future.

Whatever its limitations, Russian Talk is a first-rate piece of scholarship. Nancy Ries has done a great service by showing how contemporary discourse analysis can fashion fieldwork in a discipline that has often lagged behind in theoretical advances. I highly recommend her study to all Russianists with an ear for language and a knack for lore.

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A sequel to Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution (1989), this volume carries forward R. W. Davies's meticulously researched examination of history in Russia as both intellectual endeavor and political phenomenon in its own right. Neither aspect lacked general attention in Russia or the west between 1985 and the collapse of the USSR. Since 1991, however, more immediate political and economic concerns have preoccupied the Russian public, and the majority of western scholars who studied the effects of perestroika on history during the late 1980s have since left the topic largely to specialists on Soviet/Russian education, who are continuing the serious work they had undertaken long before glasnost significantly increased the short-term popularity of history and history education. Davies's study, which concludes in 1996, makes a compelling case for sustaining our attention to the topic. At a time when the lay public and even younger scholars "find it almost impossible to envisage the working life [in archives] of Soviet and Western historians in the bad days before perestroika" (85), this work synthesizes a broad range of debate in a form accessible to a wide audience.

Davies organizes his material under three rubrics: the politics of Soviet history; the battle for the archives; and the new Soviet history. His analysis of the politics of Soviet history places special emphasis on the selective use of the past as a tool to undermine the legitimacy of communism during 1988–1992. Closely scrutinizing the periodical press in particular, the author traces the progression of the attempt among reformers to use Leninism as a reformist ideal worthy of recapturing; a stage of questioning Lenin and, by extension, the October Revolution (1989–1990); and the shifting of positions, abandonment of any attempt to salvage the ideals of 1917, and the ultimate mental merging of Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism in the rhetoric of even former reformists immediately before and following the attempted coup of August 1991. Simultaneously, foes of communism also projected their own agendas onto history, including but not limited to the nostalgic idealization of the tsarist past that penetrated journalistic accounts of history and historical fiction. The author extensively catalogues these exchanges, as well as those that continued when history returned to a less public audience in 1993–1996.

The section on the archives will be of special interest for a lay audience. Davies is able to draw on extensive personal experience as he outlines the transformation of archival administration and access from the Soviet period to the recent past. He is able to describe in clear detail the structure of the former organization, administration, and control of information and the problems of access to materials experienced even by reliable Soviet historians. Against this backdrop, he then addresses many popular misconceptions