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"The Road to Life"

Educating the New Man

Lyubov Bugaeva

> *The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.*
>
> John Dewey (1916)
>
> *They just talk and write about a new man, while we in practice try helping him to grow up.*
>
> M. Gorky (1928–9)

The 1920s in Soviet Russia was a time of daring pedagogical experiments designed to transform the *besprizorniki*, juvenile delinquents, and street children, into the "new men" of the communist future. Surprisingly, major sites of these experiments were "children's labor-education communes" created by the Joint State Political Administration (OGPU), the secret police of the young Soviet Republic. Even more surprising, the actual practices of "making new men" in these secret-police installations were to a large degree based not on the prevalent ideology but on prerevolutionary Russian experimental pedagogy, the American ideas of progressive education, and John Dewey's philosophy of education.

The experiments resonated widely through various domains of Soviet culture. Writers and educators tried to capture their essence and to convey the enthusiasm of a "new-world-in-the-making" that permeated the life of these communes in numerous literary works. Nikolai Ekk's *The Road to Life* (*Putevka v Zhizn'*) (1931), a full-length feature film commissioned by the OGPU, presented the experiments in the reeducation of the *besprizorniki* on the silver screen.

This chapter explores the OGPU's children's labor-education commune by examining the intricate interactions of life, literature, and cinema, as well as the pedagogical principles, both Russian and American, which underpinned the Soviet experiments in "creating the new man." It argues that the children's labor-education commune, created, ironically, by one of the most feared and rigid institutions of control of the Soviet state, was an "island of freedom" that for a short period embodied the most audacious aspirations and ideas of American progressive education and prerevolutionary Russian pedagogy. The labor-education communes did not create a "new man," but they certainly tried.

The Soviet School as a Pilgrimage Destination

The "new-world-in-the-making" caused genuine interest around the world, and foreign guests—teachers, scientists, philosophers, writers, physicians, and others—rushed to the Soviet Union. As Michael David-Fox noted, the "pilgrimage to Russia" was "one of the most notorious events in the political and intellectual history of the twentieth century," one that marked a period of intensive cultural and intellectual interactions between Soviet Russia and the Western world.[1] Soviet newspapers regularly reported about foreign guests coming to the USSR. Thus, the July 1928 newspapers informed their readers about an "American excursion to the USSR," the arrival in Leningrad of "a group of 31 American educators headed by the Vice-President of the American Academy of Sciences Jean Dew."[2] The "Jean Dew" mentioned in the news was the American pragmatist philosopher and education reformer John Dewey (1859–1952), who laid out his theory of education in a number of publications, for example, *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897); *The School and Society* (1900); *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902); *Democracy and Education* (1916); and *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915).[3] One year before his visit to the Soviet Union, Dewey joined the board of directors of the newly created American Society for Cultural Relations with Russia. In 1928, Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875–1933), People's Commissar of Enlightenment, invited Dewey to visit the Soviet Union to have a close look at Soviet schools.[4] For Dewey, who had traveled before to Mexico, China, and Turkey, it was one more meeting with the "revolutionary world." *Time* magazine half-mockingly reported on Dewey's trip to Russia:

> Number Six on the Boulevard Sretensky in Moscow is the People's Commissariat for Education. There excited Russians are awaiting this week the coming of a great U. S. citizen who is chiefly famed on other Continents—John Dewey. [. . .] "The two contributions of America to world culture are Professor Dewey and Negro jazz." [. . .] Now he could leave behind his duties as a professor of philosophy at Columbia University. Ahead lay Europe, then broad, fertile Russian plains, and Moscow, and Number Six Boulevard Sretensky.[5]

The infamous Bureau of Investigation, later renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation, hurried to label as communist supporters the delegation, the Society for Cultural Relations with Russia that sent the delegation, and assuredly Dewey himself because of his interest in the Soviet experiment.[6] Meanwhile, Soviet Russia had been eagerly awaiting the American philosopher whose name and works were widely known. *The School and Society*, one of Dewey's major works on education, appeared in Russian already in 1907 and was reprinted in 1922, 1923, 1924, and 1925, with a new chapter and an introduction by Stanislav Shatskii (1878–1934), an important Russian and Soviet educator and educational administrator. Other works published in Russian were "My Pedagogical Creed" (1913–14); *How We Think* (1915, 1919, 1922); *Schools of Tomorrow*, written with Evelyn Dewey[7] (1918, 1922); *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, with an introduction by Stanislav Shatskii (1921); and *The Child and the Curriculum* (1922, 1923).

The itinerary for the American delegation proposed by the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), the agency responsible for public education and culture, included visits to Leningrad and Moscow, with several side trips. It was designed to demonstrate to the American professors and educational administrators "the art of education in the USSR."[8] Anatolii Lunacharskii also had in mind the application of Dewey's ideas in Soviet schools. He was looking for authoritative conceptions and for allies to rely on for his mission of building new schools for the new society. Education was to be the education of the "new man," since the "old man," "which was raised in a chaotic and a-cultural capitalist society, was not acceptable." In order to organize the educational process accordingly, school was to be reformed. As Lunacharskii put it, "it is in the arena of the school that we will change the old world."[9] For him, creation "of the new man" required both self-training and self-education, and, therefore, the theory of education required "anthropology," that is, "human studies."[10] The Commissar was then a passionate advocate of the complex method, a concept of the educational process that replaced traditional subjects in a school program with complex themes, for example, "The USSR and the world." The goal was to develop a child's understanding of the natural and social environment and to encourage group work in the process of study. Lunacharskii believed that instruction, for example on how to cook, could simultaneously provide insights into chemistry, physics, botany, and zoology, as well as into hygiene and physiology. He found parallels between the Soviet complex method and the American project method[11] and was eager to pursue turning them into an effective Soviet educational model. Shatskii, whose thought was greatly influenced by the works of John Dewey, promoted in Russia the project method as early as 1905. The Russian publication of *The Project Method* by William Kilpatrick, Dewey's pupil and colleague, opened the door for applying American ideas in Soviet schools.[12]

Dewey was interested in the Soviet school system and in Soviet life in general; he wanted to understand Soviet society. During his visit, Dewey "slept soundly, stayed out at parties, gave dinners, visited night clubs, attended every event, and never experienced a day of dysentery [. . .] He managed to see as much art as possible, the icons, the folk art, and modern paintings in Moscow. But he also went on every obligatory excursion and found those nearly as interesting."[13] Soviet Russia really shook Dewey, who saw in Soviet people the energy and a kind of almost religious feeling, reminiscent of the enthusiasm and religious rise of the first American settlers. In the first chapter of the essay "Impressions of Soviet Russia" (1929), written in the wake of the trip, Dewey shared his understanding of the Russian Revolution. For him it was in the first place a transformation of human consciousness, not a social change; "the more basic fact of a revolution—one which may be hinted at, but not described, by calling it psychic and moral rather than merely political and economic, a revolution in the attitude of people toward the needs and possibilities of life."[14] He had an insight that "the Revolution was a great success, while Communism was a frost."[15]

Dewey discussed nurturing the aesthetic taste of Soviet people in the metaphors of agricultural engineering, as if the new consciousness, like a plant, required cultivation: "Perhaps the most significant thing in Russia, after all, is not the effort at economic transformation, but the will to use an economic change as the means of developing a popular cultivation, especially an esthetic one, such as the world has never known."[16] The American philosopher wanted to see how the new consciousness could be "cultivated" through the application of the methods of progressive education. He got the opportunity when he visited the experimental stations of Narkompros in the Moscow and Kaluga regions, and the children's labor colony near Leningrad. Dewey was enthusiastic about what he saw:

> Education affords, once more, the material for a striking illustration of the role of experiment in the future evolution of Soviet Russia. In a region something less than a hundred miles from Moscow [. . .] there is an educational colony under the direction of Schatzsky. This colony is the center of some fourteen schools scattered through a series of villages, which, taken together, constitute an extensive (and intensive) educational experiment station for working out materials and methods for the Russian rural system. There is not in my knowledge anything comparable to it elsewhere in the world.[17]

The American philosopher was particularly impressed by the labor-education commune Krasnye Zori (Red Dawns) near Leningrad, which was located in the former palace of Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov.[18] The director of the commune was a biologist and a former pilot Ignatii Ionin (1893–1939). Dewey wrote about the wayward children whom he met there:

> I have never seen anywhere in the world such a large proportion of intelligent, happy, and intelligently occupied children. They were not lined up for inspection. We walked about the grounds and found them engaged in their various summer occupations, gardening, bee-keeping, repairing buildings, growing flowers in a conservatory (built by a group of particularly tough boys who began by destroying everything in sight), and making simple tools and agricultural implements, etc. Not what they were doing, but their manner and attitude is, however, what stays with me—I cannot convey it; I lack the necessary literary skill.[19]

The Labor-Education Commune and the Joint State Political Administration

The labor-education commune that fascinated Dewey was a project born in the OGPU and implemented by the Chekists. Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877–1926), nicknamed "Iron Felix," the head of the secret police and of the Commission for the Improvement of

Children's Lives at the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR, saw *besprizorniki* as the most important and urgent problem that the secret police should deal with. He once noted that the "care for children is the best means of exterminating the counterrevolution."[20] Genrikh Iagoda (1891–1938), the head of the OGPU until 1931, followed Dzerzhinsky's priorities and actively supported the idea of *perekovka*—literally re-forging—reeducating former criminals and turning them into new Soviet people. Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), a Russian and Soviet writer and a political activist, who was a longtime friend of Iagoda since their first meeting in Nizhny Novgorod before the Revolution, once noted that the difficult task of educating young generations was the responsibility of the so-called terrible Chekists, whom "the bourgeoisie of all countries usually portrayed as being devoid of any human likeness." Only the art of the future would be able to illuminate their "amazing cultural work."[21] The Chekist idea of "re-forging" perfectly met the mood of the time. "Re-forging" meant a reeducation of the criminal, not necessarily a juvenile, through creative work and in the course of solving large-scale problems.[22]

In his efforts ~~of introducing~~ "re-forging" Iagoda followed the decisions of the government of the RSFSR that in March 1926 adopted the Regulations on the Struggle against Homelessness, and in September approved the three-year plan that included the liquidation of child homelessness. However, Cheka and Narkompros started the fight against homelessness even earlier. Labor-education communes became the main weapon in this fight. Several communes were opened under the auspice of the OGPU, that is, Krasnye Zori near Leningrad, the Gorky colony near Poltava, the Dzerzhinsky colony near Kharkov, and the Bolshevo commune near Moscow.[23] The first inhabitants of the communes were teenagers, usually from thirteen to seventeen years old, each with a criminal past and a prison term.[24]

In 1936, Ida Auerbach, the wife of Iagoda, advocated for the countrywide creation of labor camps for adult criminals for their "re-forging," claiming that "the general situation of 'being', the general scheme of the production process in the prison camps already has in itself a number of objective possibilities for solving the seemingly insoluble, as the square of a circle, the task of redesigning the consciousness of the declassed and the class-hostile elements, re-forging them into the workers of the socialist society."[25] According to Auerbach, those elements are reconstructed "in a forge of conscious productive labor connected with all forms and methods of cultural and educational influence."[26] The practice of Stalin camps in the 1930s was, of course, fundamentally different from that of the children's commune labor schools; however, the rhetoric of stories about them, especially that of transforming mentality, came from the narratives of the 1920s. The "liquidators of homelessness,"[27] Matvei Pogrebinskii, Ignatii Ionin, and Anton Makarenko, colorfully narrated their experience of reforming juvenile delinquents.[28] Gorky, in his essay "Across the Union of Soviets" (1928–9), branded the work of the "liquidators of homelessness" as "the insanity of realists."

Education in communes was based on several principles. The commune was a community of co-thinkers and a "school of action," where the residents decided all important questions collectively. The basic principles of the commune structure from the very first days were voluntariness and independence. The voluntariness differentiated a commune from a penal colony. The prospective members of the commune decided on this principle at the very first meeting, “the arrival and departure of a commune is voluntary, no ~~grates,~~ no guards. The doors are always open.”[29] Being in a commune voluntarily implied the responsibility and duties of communards. The Chekists who supervised the communes explained that everything was given as a credit. Therefore, the well-being of the commune would depend on work. The answer to the question “who to work for?” was “for your community, work for yourself.” Members were responsible for each other and for discipline; accordingly, they exercised control functions and took disciplinary action: “No one has the right to punish them. The supreme body is the general assembly. All issues will be resolved by this assembly.”[30] The recent juvenile delinquents made the selection of prospective communards from prisons, camps, and detention points: “Further on, the new members of the commune will be received by the communards themselves. They themselves will go to the prison, and they themselves will select the guys.”[31] Among other rules was compulsory work. Communes were self-sufficient economic units: they practiced agriculture, beekeeping, and various crafts. For example, the Kharkov labor colony, named after Dzerzhinsky, became the site of the production of cameras called FED (for Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky).

The set of rules and principles of commune life was impressive, especially taking into account the time period. Juvenile delinquents enjoyed a high level of independence. The Cheka, which was considered one of the most rigid controlling organizations of the Soviet state, supported their self-rule, autonomy, and initiative:

> Do you want a good life? You will have a good life! Today you have workshops but they’re pathetic: tomorrow you’ll have powerful factories. Today your only meagre nag escaped from you. Tomorrow you’ll have garages with your own cars. Today you walk to the station, to the cooperative store, right? Tomorrow you’ll drive trucks with goods to your own store. You’ll have schools, hospitals, stores, everything. But you should make it happen. You should do that with your own hands.[32]

When visiting the Dzerzhinsky OGPU Labor Commune in the Ugresha Monastery, Gorky was deeply impressed with the variety of labor activities of the communards who were making shoes, manufacturing beds, cooking and baking bread, doing carpentry and stone works. Most important, among all those activities there was a place for art and science, and the environment in the colony was set up to support and develop creative imagination:

> About fifty boys are working in a “sculptural” studio, their instructor is a young artist invited from the DOPR [House of Preliminary Detention], where he was serving his sentence apparently for embezzlement. [. . .] Some sixteen-year-old, a face amazingly similar to Fyodor Chaliapin in his young years, arranged a so-called “bio-garden” from a huge cage of wire [. . .]. In the cage there are magpie’s chicks, blind little owls, a hedgehog and a large toad, which he calls Banker. The guy is a dreamer, a romantic [. . .].[33]

By the time of Dewey's visit Krasnye Zori was a multi-sector self-sustaining farm, where the communards worked in horticulture, animal husbandry, poultry farming, beekeeping, and seed production. They even took part in film production.[34] The motto of the commune was "Let's make our educational facility a model polytechnic school laboratory."[35] Ionin was proud of the "industrial science" that he had created. Every year students moved to the next class with a different type of agricultural activity. For example, poultry farming was taught in the fourth grade, and seed and beekeeping in the seventh. Ionin was convinced that the labor community is an effective way of educating "new people," and the commune was the "forge" in which they were created.[36] Gorky voiced a similar idea: "I'm not against the epic of old fairy tales, but I'm for the new ones that could transform a drudge and indifferent master into a free creator of a new culture."[37]

Gorky linked this transformation with purification and with the hygiene of the body. Yet in Gorky's *Mother* (1906), purification was seen as preceding an inner radical transformation:

> Man ought to be renovated—that's what I think! When a man grows scabby, take him to the bath, give him a thorough cleaning, put clean clothes on him—and he will get well. Isn't it so? And if the heart grows scabby, take its skin off, even if it bleeds, wash it, and dress it up all afresh. Isn't it so? How else can you clean the inner man? There now![38]

Not surprisingly, a clean body became the first step toward the reeducation of street urchins:

> They appeared in incredible rags, with faces covered with dirt and soot; gloomy, angry, they seemed sick, tortured, trampled by the ruthless life of the city. It was even more strange to see them an hour or two later, when, washed, dressed in clean clothes, strong, as if cast in bronze, they walked freely in the workshops of the dispensary, curious and suspicious, while observing other children, already quite skilled carpenters, fitters, blacksmiths, shoemakers. Almost all the guys seem healthy on the outside, well-built, and muscular.[39]

The reeducation of young criminals into responsible builders of a bright future was an experiment, like physical, chemical, or natural science experiments. Consequently, juvenile criminals were the material for those experiments, though the first pools of prospective communards were "not especially good," as Pogrebinskii observed. Gorky used similar language, though in his view the "biomaterial" was of good quality, "All healthy, smart, well-built guys; very rarely flicker degenerate, stupid or painful faces. [. . .] you don't immediately believe what you see, but you see healthy children."[40] For him it was Darwin's theory in action, "natural selection of the toughest" over those who were "weak, poisoned by cocaine and alcohol, destroyed by a premature sex life, and already dead."[41] It seemed coherent that street urchins "with bad heredity and susceptible to the temptations of the street" died, while only strong ones who were able “to fight for life” were left.[42] No wonder that communards, who ran the selection process themselves, took recruitment of new members very seriously, weighing the “quality” of the material and bringing in the “best, healthiest and smartest.”[43] A healthy body guaranteed the “healthy spirit” and productivity that were required for successful *perekovka*: “Yet seventeen, Val’ka already had a prison sentence; a former gangster, she escaped the death penalty being a minor. Today she is a woodworker and earns 108 rubles because she is fit and healthy.”[44] Once Iagoda made a Freudian slip while describing a “happy socialist country” that did not have “the hungry, poor, and freaks.”[45]

The results of the pedagogical experiment impressed the experimenters themselves. Pogrebinskii, for instance, enthused:

> Enemies are angry, while allies look at the factory that produces new Soviet people with admiration and love. It is unbelievable, and the facts are irrefutable. Recent scoundrels of society, those who have got their education in a harsh school of life, start a new life. This is the implementation of Dzerzhinsky’s idea, this is the OGPU contributing its experience to the construction of socialism. Thanks to the enormous energy of the OGPU leaders, the commune lives and expands, not as an experiment, but as a fact proved by life itself.[46]

The newspaper *Leningradskaia Pravda* (Leningrad’s Truth) reported that in the course of the fifteen years of its existence, the labor commune Krasnye Zori had trained hundreds of qualified builders of socialism. Among the former pupils of Krasnye Zori were “six scientists, fourteen engineers, six doctors, six party workers, seven commanders of the Red Army, and 27 teachers.”[47] ~~“Liquidators~~ of homelessness” made the pedagogical experiment-in-progress possible. Gorky recognized them as “neither dreamers nor romantics” but as “a new type of teacher~~s~~,” who had an “active love for children.”[48]

From Life to Screen: *The Road to Life*

In the early 1930s, in his effort to contribute to the reeducation of juvenile criminals, Gorky wrote a movie script, titled *Criminals*, which was based primarily on his impressions of the labor communes. Striving for accuracy and credibility, the writer even discussed it with communards. However, the script never made it to the screen, because another film, *The Road to Life*, had already filled the niche.

The Road to Life (1931, Mezhrabpomfilm, directed by Nikolai Ekk, script by Alexander Stolper, Nikolai Ekk, and Regina Yanushkevich) is one of the first Soviet blockbusters and one of the first Soviet feature sound films, often referred to as “the first.” The film explores the struggle against homelessness in the 1920s that resulted in the creation of an experimental labor commune headed by the Chekist Sergeev (Nikolai Batalov). The main characters are former petty criminals in the gang of Zhigan (Mikhail Zharov) and then the first communards, Mustapha, nicknamed “Fert” (Dandy) (Ivan Kyrlia), and Kol’ka, nicknamed “Whistle” (Mikhail Dzhagofarov). The gang leader throughout the film makes serious efforts to repossess his former assistants. He tries to humiliate them by suggesting that they are "bought" by the police, and to seduce them with drinks and "girls." At the end of the film, when all attempts to get Mustapha and Kol'ka back fail, Zhigan sabotages the newly built railroad that connects the commune with the outer world and kills Mustapha.

At the time of filming *The Road to Life* Nikolai Ekk (1902–1976) was a young director, whose creative activity began in the Meyerhold Theater and in the theater abbreviated as METLA (a broom), The Moscow Unified Leninist Theatre Team. Ekk was the author of scripts and plays that were mostly about youngsters (including some coauthored with Regina Yanushkevich, his wife, and Alexander Stolper, a Russian and Soviet film director and screenwriter).[49] He was a "man of both unrestrained and logical imagination; he could flash like gunpowder, and he did not hesitate to undertake the most audacious enterprises"[50] and constantly in a search for new forms and new themes. The symbol of the theater where he worked, a broom, was rather transparent: the goal of the theater, as well as of Ekk, was to clear the space for experiments using Meyerhold's biomechanics as a new method of creating a theater performance.[51] *The Road to Life* also was an experiment in a number of ways.

The OGPU commissioned Ekk, Stolper and Yanushkevich to write a script for a *kul'turfilm* (cultural film, from German *Kulturfilm*), a propaganda or educational film about homeless children.[52] The authors decided to "immerse themselves" in the material; they "visited prisons and other places not so remote, came to several children's communes, talked to the Chekists, criminal investigation officers, and met with street children on Moscow streets." They quickly discovered the limitations of the Kulturfilm format and convinced the Chekists that "the film would be deeply human and would stir up millions of people."[53] As a result, the Kulturfilm became a full-length feature film. A dedication to Felix Dzerzhinsky, recited by the theater actor Vasilii Kachalov in the film's finale, reminds the viewer of its original assignment:

> To you, the enthusiasts of the homelessness front, and to you,
> the first chairman of the Children's Commission of the All-Russian Central
>   Executive Committee and the best friend of children,
> to you, Felix Dzerzhinsky, we dedicate this film.

The film reflects the experiences of several communes and shows the role of the OGPU in creating them. It opens with an introductory section, which gives background information, sets the stage for the story, and provides the main theme: street children and offenders, described as "skeletons in dirty tatters, looking angry, looking wild." Their fate seems predestined, "Today he is homeless, tomorrow he is the enemy of labor, a bandit!" but they get a chance to start anew in a Soviet labor-education commune:

> What will save them? Charity? Teaching? It's all funny to them and to us!
> We know more: man is created by the environment.
> The Republic of the Soviets will give them a ticket to life,
> Because it understands the power of free, universal labor.

The reeducation of urchins is presented as "remodeling," or "remelting":

> We build metallurgical giants in uninhabited taiga.
> We have found the live lever to the fate of humanity.
> We will teach the homeless to break through to the new world.
> We'll melt them into the workers at the construction sites of the world.[54]

The Cheka oversees the "remelting" of the former offenders into "the workers at the construction sites of the world." The leading Chekist Nikolai Sergeev (Nikolai Batalov)[55] sets the basic principles of commune life, which are freedom, voluntariness, trust, and independence. In the commune, there is no guard, no authoritarian leader, no permanent control of the former criminals, and no apparent control of the OGPU. Though Sergeev occasionally reports to the OGPU on the progress, he does not receive any orders. In general, there is no interference or pressure from the authorities.[56] Sergeev meets children, the future communards, at the railway station when they arrive voluntarily and without guards. The journey to the "new life" is their first decision and the first lesson of trust. Sergeev entrusts Mustapha, a skillful pickpocket in his previous life, with the money to buy food for the trip. It is risky, and Sergeev himself doubts the success of his little pedagogical experiment: "Will he escape?" Mustapha, though, does not run away but comes back with purchases, thus justifying the unexpected trust of the Chekist Sergeev.[57] Pogrebinskii, describing a similar episode in his story of the commune, imagines the thoughts and feelings of the juvenile criminals at that time: "But here starts an extraordinary thing: they, the prisoners, receive the money for their train tickets and no guards escort them, just the head of the commune. Like free people, really? Maybe to escape? No, better to wait, it is unclear what is going on. Besides, it's flattering—they trust!"[58]

Communards also had a high degree of autonomy. They organized their work activities, determined the punishment for the guilty, and made strategic decisions for the future of the commune. Not the Chekists but the communards themselves conducted the operation to neutralize the gang leader Zhigan, who tried to seduce the communards with a good life, alcohol, and "girls." Besides, Mustapha and Kol'ka arrived armed to detain Zhigan, and even used their guns, though pointed in the air.

Another important element of reeducating *besprizorniki* was compulsory handicraft-type production. A "new man" was to be a master of his craft. By organizing labor activities in the communes, the educators sought to employ the skills from the criminal past of their pupils. Thus, Mustapha, who could, right in the street, masterfully carve decent size pieces from the fur coats of fashionably dressed ladies, used his criminal skills in a communal shoe shop. Mustapha's reorientation and the application of his "talents" to production were not a product of the film director's fantasy. Rather it was an illustration within the pedagogical scheme of the assumption that "biologically unambiguous mechanisms of social behavior can be turned by intense and skillful work on re-forging in the opposite direction; the social meaning of biological mechanisms, like the current of the Volga River, can be turned [. . .]."[59]

The film supports the idea that the reeducation of juvenile criminals begins with the hygiene of the body. In one of the episodes, ~~the~~ off-screen voice asks: "Fathers and mothers, what if somebody pushes your neat child into the mud and beats him badly?" The answer is apparent; your child will be dirty. Thus, a bathhouse becomes an obvious metaphor of purification and almost an obligatory element of the narrative about the new man.[60] The bath corresponds to the liminal phase in the rite of passage, which former criminals undergo. Along with mud, water washes away the previous identity—there is a transition to a new state. In *The Road to Life*, the bathing ritual naturally takes place immediately after the arrival of the *besprizorniki* in the commune, that is, before entering a new life. The nudity of the boys in the bathhouse alludes to the initial human nudity. It marks the first stage of the pedagogical experiment. The footage of the youngsters merrily soaking in the steam room of the bathhouse alternates with the footage in which OGPU workers rejoice at Sergeev's wired message: "No one escaped. Experiment successful." The text of the message emphasizes the experimental nature of what is happening. Besides, the *besprizorniki* in the film, like those described by Pogrebinskii and Gorky, is the good quality "material" that could be used for creating a new man. Screen communards are never sick, and the film's hallmark is Mustapha's white-toothed smile along with the laughter of the Chekist Sergeev revealing his healthy strong teeth (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).[61]

When *The Road to Life* was released in the United States in 1931, Harry Alan Potamkin, a film critic of the "left," announced the new turn in Soviet cinema:

> Today the Soviet kino is [. . .] arriving at the terminal contact, which is, after all, the human experience. [. . .] Instead of the actor, there is the character, the human personality. Instead of the oratory of the "grand" films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, there is intimacy of contact. [. . .] we get a *Road to Life* and a *Golden Mountains* in which collectivism is experienced through its florescence, the human personality.[62]

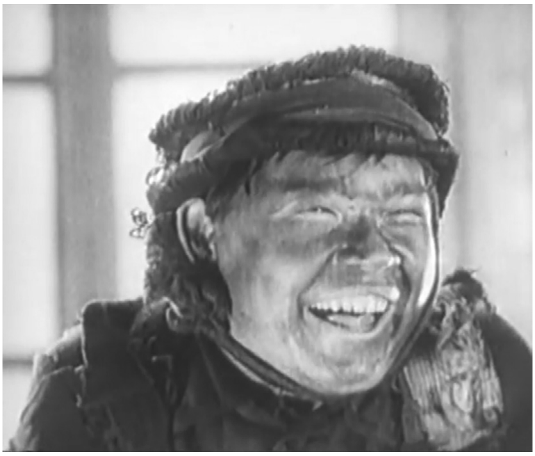

Figure 2.1 Ivan Kyrlia as *besprizornik* Mustapha, a screenshot from Nikolai Ekk's *The Road to Life* (1931) © Mezhrabpomfilm, 1931.

Figure 2.2 Nikolai Batalov as Chekist Sergeev, a screenshot from Nikolai Ekk's *The Road to Life* (1931) © Mezhrabpomfilm, 1931.

Potamkin claimed that as a result of "the ideological re-armament," "the picture becomes luminous with a new reality, that of the advance of Soviet culture."[63] Defending the film from criticism for its technical shortcomings, the critic argued, "The movie is not just technology; it is technology informed by philosophy—the latter is the more important."[64] In his view, the substance of *The Road to Life* greatly exceeded certain imperfections of its form.

Indeed, *The Road to Life* was more than relevant to American viewers during the Great Depression. American teenagers whose parents lost their jobs were leaving their homes and riding the rails in search of income that was not easy to find. *The Road to Life* influenced several American films made in the 1930s that told the stories of homeless children in the times of Great Depression, for example, *Wild Boys of the Road* (1934, directed by William A. Wellman, Warner Brothers) and *Boys Town* (1938, directed by Norman Taurog, MGM). In the latter a priest, Father Flanagan, created a "boys' town," a commune for troubled teenagers, where he reeducates them. Like Soviet communards, American boys in their "town" exercised self-governance and determined the rights and responsibilities of the community members. They were also judges, and they decided on punishment in case of guilt.

In the Soviet Union, the official reception of *The Road to Life* was cold. The General Directorate for the Theater Repertoire (Glavrepetkom) and the Children's Commission of the Central Executive Committee banned the film, and only Stalin's reaction, "I do not understand what should be banned here?"[65] saved it. But in the movie theaters the film was a success, running for months in the same movie theater. However, critics, especially from the left, found in it "the most alarming symptoms of lagging behind the practice of socialist construction."[66] According to A. Mikhailov, the critic for the "left" magazine *Proletarian Cinema*, the theme of homeless people was presented too romantically, thus creating the impression of a "robinsonade." The social roots of homelessness associated with the capitalist system, for example, unemployment and wars, were not shown; the anti-bourgeois nature and the specific features of the struggle against homelessness were not disclosed; "the growth of children, their remake" was "not felt as a process."[67] According to the newspaper *Izvestiia*, the film was "our defeat on the ideological front" and revealed the need for "some measures to eliminate the homelessness of this art."[68] Striving for the political control over film production and demanding the "communist reflection on the plot," the critic considered a mistake the film's "lyrical appeal to the hearts of the audience." He also saw as a mistake the very attempt of reeducating *besprizorniki* that was based on trust.[69] The review reflected the change of political climate. The 1930s brought fears of initiative and of independence. No wonder that for the critic "the film showing the struggle of ~~the~~ Soviet power and the Soviet public with homelessness" missed "nine tenths of ~~the~~ Soviet power and of the Soviet public."[70]

Authorities were worried by the popularity of the negative character Zhigan (Mikhail Zharov) and his thief's songs. Also puzzling was the freedom that the communards had and the fact that the OGPU backed them. The reaction to the film, both on the right and on the left, came together with the realization that the educational experiment shown in the film was not strictly controlled. It was an initiative project with unpredictable consequences and with an open end. Whatever critics perceived as amateurism and "robinsonade" was in fact the result of the introduction of the principles of voluntariness, autonomy, initiative, and responsibility. The principles that underlined the "re-forging" of juvenile criminals transgressed the boundaries of the purely "Soviet" experiment tied to a certain time. Those principles and their practical application connected the OGPU educational project with advanced pedagogical experiments in the United States and Europe, and in the first place, with Dewey's philosophy and pedagogy.

Dewey's Philosophy and Soviet Experimental Education

The OGPU project of labor-education communes found its roots in the prerevolutionary Russian experience of progressive education, in particular the ideas of Stanislav Shatskii and Alexander Zelenko. Before the Bolshevik revolution, Shatskii and Zelenko worked on a number of projects, such as the ~~"~~Settlement~~,"~~ an educational institution, modeled on Hull House~~;~~ a settlement in Chicago that was cofounded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr; ~~"The~~ Day Shelter for Children~~"~~ in Moscow; and ~~"The~~ Cheerful Life~~,"~~ a summer children's colony. Shatskii and Zelenko in turn, before and after the revolution of 1917, were inspired and guided by the American experience of progressive education and by the ideas of John Dewey. Zelenko, who was for many years in correspondence with Dewey, visited the United States several times. In 1903–4, he lived in Hull House, where Dewey was a trustee and a frequent guest. Although Shatskii met Dewey in person for the first time in 1928 in Moscow, he had known of the latter's works for a long time and was the author of prefaces to several Russian editions of Dewey's books. The two spent several days together at the experimental station of Narkompros[71] in the Kaluga region. For Dewey, meeting Shatskii was a meeting with the new; the practical application of the ideas of American pedagogy in Soviet education engaged the philosopher's imagination. For Shatskii, on the contrary, ~~it~~ was meeting the author of a theory he was very well familiar with.[72]

Several key concepts of Dewey's pragmatism resonated with the Soviet educational model, in the first place the concept of experience based on the organism-environment interaction and problem-solving in the process of inquiry. In 1896, Dewey wrote a short, but important, article, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," where he argued against the conception of the reflex arc, common in psychology at the end of the nineteenth century. The reflex arc conception treated sensory stimulus, central connections, and motor responses as separate entities (sensation-idea-movement), while for Dewey such separation was an erroneous evocation of the mind/body distinction. Assuming the continuity of body and consciousness, he argued for the wholeness of experience as "the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives."[73] As he put it, "in actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; *an* object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world—a situation" (italics in the original).[74] So, experience in the first place was "the manifestation of interactions of organism and environment";[75] interactions were necessary conditions for defining "the self" that was "a factor *within* experience and not something outside of it to which experiences were attached as the self's private property" (italics in the original).[76] Experience rested at the heart of how people think and imagine the world; new experience, which was the result of interaction with the environment, opened new possibilities and new perspectives.

Such understanding of experience is the core of the John Dewey's philosophy of education. If the body and consciousness are inseparable, and experience is the result of the interaction between the body and the environment, then the learning process requires problematic situations that are solved through the interaction of the student with the environment:

> When a pupil learns by doing he is reliving both mentally and physically some experience which has proved important to the human race; he goes through the same mental processes as those who originally did these things. Because he has done them he knows the value of the result, that is, the fact. A statement, even of facts, does not reveal the value of the fact, or the sense of its truth—of the fact that it is a fact.[77]

Education necessarily means discovery; it is the ongoing growth and richness of experience in the sequence of "discoveries," "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."[78] For Dewey, education is experimental, in the sense that is situational, based on experience and is an ongoing process of decision-making and problem-solving. Besides, the inclusion of the student into a wide social context is a critical condition for the educational process. Dewey states that the student is a social being, and the school is "simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends."[79] "The democratic man," which is the final goal of education, is created through active interaction with the community in the process of "growth," that is, realizing his potential in the process of learning. This personal growth depends not so much on the political system in the society as on way of thinking and interaction among its members. Openness, communication, and dissemination of ideas are far more important than democratic institutions.

In Soviet Russia, Dewey found to his excitement the practical application of the philosophy of pragmatism in his instrumental and experimental version. The complex method, supported by Lunacharskii, implied a contextual approach. Considering the context was akin to looking at the organism in its interaction with the environment, which was one of the key points in Dewey's instrumentalism. The laboratory-brigade method applied in Soviet schools was a variant of the Dalton plan, a secondary-education technique based on individual learning, created by Helen Parkhurst, an American educator, author, and lecturer, under the influence of Dewey. The plan presumed active and independent students, free choice of school subjects, and the individual speed of progress. It gave freedom to the student's manifestation of individuality. In Russia, the Dalton plan replaced the classroom system shortly after the publication in 1923 of *Dalton Laboratory Plan* by Evelyn Dewey, with a foreword by Nadezhda Krupskaia.[80] On the first pages, Evelyn Dewey declared, "The children are the experimenters. The instructors are observers, who stand ready to serve the community as their special talents are needed."[81]

In Soviet commune schools, Dewey liked the experiment per se. Besides, Soviet teachers, like Dewey himself, understood the importance of the educational environment. For Dewey, the ideal learning environment was life itself. The learning process was to provide access to experience and knowledge that would help a student enter the social space. After his visits to the commune Krasnye Zori and to the Shatskii's experimental station, Dewey concluded that the Soviet education system succeeded in that

> The idea of a school in which pupils, and therefore, studies and methods, are connected with social life, instead of being isolated, is one familiar in educational theory. In some form, it is the idea that underlies all attempts at thorough-going educational reform. What is characteristic of Soviet education is not, therefore, the idea of a dovetailing of school activities into out-of-school social activities, but the fact that for the first time in history there is an educational system officially organized on the basis of this principle.[82]

Moreover, the construction of life in labor communes was in line with Dewey's philosophical principles, as the learning environment there was created within and by the commune, and there were no distracting or detracting influences, of benighted and stogy parents, for example. Hence, the educational process in a commune school was easier to model. Dewey, who devoted a considerable part of his writings to developing liberal ideas and for whom democracy was the "idea of community life itself,"[83] saw a great democratic potential in the labor commune.

From his trip to the labor communes Dewey brought back an excursion diary and a drawing by a fourteen-year-old boy given to him in memory of the school that "opened eyes."[84] He also brought to the United States the belief that, as a result of the "grand psychological experiment" in Soviet Russia, a new form of human association was born, experimental, creative, alive:

> But I cannot but suppose that the Russian people will, in the end, through a series of adaptations to actual conditions as they develop, build something new in the form of human association. That these will be communistic in the sense of the leaders of the revolution, I doubt; that they will be marked by a high degree of voluntary cooperation and by a high degree of social control of the accumulation and use of capital, seems to be probable.[85]

Inspired by the application of his ideas of active interaction with the environment, learning through problematic situations, connecting school and life, community-building based on common interests, and so on, Dewey stated that "however rigid and dogmatic the Marxian symbols may be, actual practices are affected by an experimental factor that is flexible, vital, creative"; the desire and readiness to experiment "marks the Russian school leaders to an extent unknown in other countries."[86] According to the philosopher, "the simplest and most helpful way to look at what is now going on in Russia is to view it as an enormous psychological experiment in transforming the motives that inspire human conduct."[87] Upon his return to the United States, the welcome-back reception at the ~~Astoria~~ Hotel in New York became "a tribute to the vision, the courage, the freedom and spiritual integrity of a great American educator whose influence [. . .] has reached overseas to help make school a rich and joyous experience for little children in the back streets of ancient cities and the remote villages of Russia's once illiterate hinterland."[88]

However, the story that connected the United States and Soviet Russia, Dewey's philosophy of education and the Soviet pedagogical experiment, the reality of labor communes and a film about them, did not end there. After *The Road to Life* premiered at Mussolini's first Venice Film Festival (1932), where spectators recognized Ekk as the best director, the film made its way to the United States, where it ran in movie theaters for almost a year. Amkino (American Cinema), a special agency established in New York in 1926, was responsible for its distribution. Amkino was prominent in spreading Soviet cinema in the United States; during thirteen years of its existence it delivered to American viewers more than 160 Soviet films. For several months in a row, *The Road to Life* was on screen in the very heart of New York City, in Times Square at the Cameo movie theater, which could accommodate 600 spectators. At that time, the movie theater was directed by Matti Radin, who was actively promoting Soviet cinematic art. A year later, Eisenstein, speaking in the Cameo before the screening of *Golden Mountains*, a film by S. Yutkevich, praised the movie theater "for the good work that the Cameo is doing in bringing Communism to Times Square."[89] The poster for *The Road to Life* announced that "all New York is startled by the first Soviet talking picture."

In the Russian version, the film starts with an introduction performed by the actor Vasilii Kachalov. In the world distribution the introduction has different "voices," and their choice is telling.[90] In the American version, John Dewey introduces the film with the following remarks:

> Ten years ago, every traveler in Russia came back with stories of hordes of wild children who roamed the countryside and infested the streets. They were the orphans of soldiers killed in the war, of fathers and mothers who perished in the famine after the war. You will see a picture of the old road to life, a road of vagabondage, violence, thieving. You will see their new road to their new life, a road constructed by a brave band of Russian teachers. After methods of repression had failed, they gathered these children together in collective homes, they taught them cooperation, useful work, healthful recreation. Against great odds they succeeded. There are today no wild children in Russia. You will see a picture of great artistic beauty, of dramatic action and power. You will also see a record of a great historic episode. These boys are not professional actors. They were once wild children, they once lived in an actual collective. You will also see an educational lesson of the power of freedom, sympathy, work and play to redeem the juvenile delinquent; a lesson from which we too may learn.[91]

In Dewey's "Impressions of Soviet Russia", in Nikolai Ekk's movie *The Road to Life*, in the works by Maxim Gorky, and in literary narratives of the "liquidators of homelessness," Soviet Russia of the late 1920s and early 1930s is presented as an experiment-in-process, unfolding in time and space, "a new world and a new man in the making."

Conclusion

In the Soviet Russia of 1928, Dewey caught the pathos of "re-forging" a criminal into a new man. The spirit of Bolshevik educational experimentation resonated with Dewey's vision of the "school of tomorrow." He praised the transformational power of the revolution that unlocked the creative potential of man: "I can hardly do better than record the impression, as overwhelming as it was unexpected, that the outstanding fact in Russia is a revolution, involving a release of human powers on such an unprecedented scale that is of incalculable significance not only for that country, but for the world."[92] Yet educating a "new man" did not necessarily mean educating a democratic citizen. Despite his admiration for the pedagogical experiments in Soviet Russia, Dewey believed that, in order to build communism without dictatorship, "the most essential thinking" about how to achieve this goal "still remains to be done."[93] It is also important to note that one of the reasons Dewey was enthusiastic about what he found in Soviet educational experiments was that they put into practice his conception of the transactional nature of experience. This approach to experience, which is to say the mutually constructive interaction of an individual with his environment, was in turn central to Dewey's idea of democracy as a way of life. Unfortunately, contemporary commentators on Dewey's reactions to the educational experiments of the 1920s do not appreciate this point.

Dewey thought that in the end "all education is experimental, whether we call it that or not. [. . .] practically everything we do, every course we lay out, every class we meet, is in its effects an experiment for good or for bad."[94] However, the labor communes stand out compared to other attempts to educate children as democratic citizens. The commune was shaped by a number of ideas: prerevolutionary Russian, early Soviet, and Dewey's ideas of the organism-environment interaction, inquiry, and education as experience. It was a complex phenomenon based on its own rules. It produced workers as well as engineers, scientists, and artists. It never became single-personality-centered; the general idea of experimental and practice-based education was greater than the personal or institutional ambitions of its Chekist organizers. It turned out to be more successful in generating a productive atmosphere than many schools not based on commune living. The labor commune was an example of progressive education in the USSR, but it was also more than that. It was a new form of life created in Soviet Russia as a result of international pedagogical experiential thinking.

The period of pedagogical experiments in the Soviet Republic was short. On September 5, 1931, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks adopted a resolution "On Primary and Secondary Schools," which called for "a struggle against frivolous methodological fantasies and implementation of methods not previously tested in practice." The resolution singled out and stigmatized the project method that made impossible any future reference to the American ideas of progressive education: "All attempts to make the so-called 'project method', which springs from anti-Leninist theory of a dying school, the basis for schoolwork actually led to the destruction of the school."[95] Moreover, Dewey's influence, even his very name, came to be ignored in subsequent histories and commentaries during the Soviet period.[96]

The 1920s were a golden time for pedagogical experimentation, a period of the most fruitful activity of the OGPU labor communes. In the 1930s, the communes no longer fit into the new Soviet administrative and command system. They were either reorganized into factory schools or closed. In 1936, Makarenko admitted that "ten years of experience of Chekists, brilliant experience of world importance" were totally forgotten.[97] In 1937, when the NKVD began its "purging" operation, the head of the colony Krasnye Zori Ignatii Ionin was arrested, and soon after the colony was disbanded. In 1937, Pogrebinskii shot himself. As Michael David-Fox notes,

> With Pogrebinskii's suicide following the arrest of Iagoda, Bolshevo's fate was sealed. In a mere three days in 1937, more than 400 people were arrested in the commune, many of whom were shot. In the course of 1937–38, all the secret-police labor communes for children were liquidated as educational institutions; the Bolshevo Commune was turned into a "Plant for the Production of Sporting Goods Inventory."[98]

The book of Pogrebinskii was removed from the libraries, Ivan Kyrlia (Mustapha) was arrested on charges of Mari nationalism, and all direct references to the Bolshevo commune were removed from the film. *The Road to Life*, balancing between the avant-garde language of the 1920s and the aesthetics of the 1930s, between the pedagogical experiments of the 1920s and the pedagogy of the 1930s, did not fit the reality of the 1930s. A unique Soviet experiment in educating the "new man" was over.

the First Edition of the *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*," *Kritika*, 6 (2005): 55–95; Laurent Mazliak, "The beginnings of the Soviet encyclopedia: The utopia and misery of mathematics in the political turmoil of the 1920s," *Centaurus*, 60 (2018): 25–51; G. V. Iakusheva, *Otto Iul'evich Shmidt – entsiklopedist: kratkaia illiustrirovannaia entsiklopediia* (*Otto Iul'evich Shmidt – Encyclopedist: A Short Illustrated Encyclopedia*), eds. A. M. Prokhorov and B. S. Sokolov (Moscow, 1991); Iu. E. Shmushkis, *Sovetskie entsiklopedii* (cit. n. 1).

61 See *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi akademii*, 12 (1925): 363–92.

62 See, for example, the statements of Valerian Kuibyshev in RGASPI f. 79 op. 1 d. 858 ll. 1–3.

63 On these types of institutions, see David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind* (cit. n. 41).

64 Bogdanov, "Vospominanie o detstve" ("Recollections about Childhood"), in *Neizvestnyi Bogdanov*, vol. 1, 25–6.

Chapter 2

1 Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford, 2012), 1. The research leading to this chapter was supported by a grant from the Russian Science Foundation: Project No 19-18-00414 'Soviet Culture Today (Forms of Cultural Recycling in Russian Art and Aesthetics of the Everyday Life. 1990s–2010s)'.

2 "Priezd amerikanskikh uchenykh v SSSR" (The Visit of American Scholars to the USSR), *Izvestiia*, July 7, 1928.

3 However, one of his principal works on educational theory, *Experience and Education*, was still to be written.

4 According to the trip organizers, it was "a non-political mission of twenty-five American educators to study methods of public instruction in Soviet Russia." The group included "Miss Katherine Devereux Blake, Emer. Principal, N. Y. City. Dr. J. McKeen Cattell, Editor of four scientific journals. President Lotus D. Coffman, University of Minn. President Donald J. Cowling, Carleton College. Professor John Dewey, Columbia University. Professor Robert H. Gault, Northwestern Univ. Professor Mary L. Hinsdale, Grand Rapids College. Florence Holbook, Principal, Chicago, Ill. President Parke R. Kolbe, Polytechnic Institute, Brooklyn. Dr. J. Kunitz, College of the City of New York. President K. G. Matheson, Drexel Institute, Phil. Professor James K. Norris, Mass. Inst. of Tech. President Geo. D. Olds, Amherst College. K. E. Richter, College of the City of N. Y. President Walter Dill Scott, Northwestern Univ. Miss Emily A. Stein, James Monroe High School, N. Y. City. Professor Lucy Textor, Vassar College. Professor Thomas Woody, University of Penn." (1928.05.16 [06418]: Francis Ralston Welsh to State Dept. Collection: Diplomatic Branch. Document: TD. Notes: Stamped "EASTERN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS | MAY 19, 1928 | DEPARTMENT OF STATE"; "RECEIVED | MAY 21, 1928 | Dept. of State") (Special Collection Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale).

5 "Foreign News: To Moscow," *Time*, XI, no. 23 (June 4, 1928): 18.

6 The informer to the State department listed all cases of Dewey's "sympathy" to "the Soviets" concluding that "Professor John Dewey has been very consistently helping the Communist game, both in what he has done in America and what he has said in the past about the Russian Soviets." About the delegation the report said that it is "one more move in the Communist propaganda game engineered by those who have proved willing tools of the Communists in the past and with various non-

Communists drawn in to hide the Communist machinery working underneath" (1928.05.16); (06418): Francis Ralston Welsh to State Dept. (cit. n. 4).

7 The name of Evelyn, who coauthored with Dewey *Schools of Tomorrow*, was known to Soviet educators. Nadezhda Krupskaia (1869–1939), the wife of Vladimir Lenin and a Deputy Head of Narkompros (1929–39), wrote an introduction to Evelyn Dewey's book *The Dalton Laboratory Plan*, published in Moscow in 1923, and reprinted in 1924, 1925.

8 "Priezd amerikanskikh uchenykh v SSSR" (cit. n. 2). Soviet pedagogical publications were happy to report any reaction of foreign educators to the system of Soviet education. See, for example, "Iz otzyvov amerikanskikh pedagogov o russkoi shkole i programmakh GUSa" (From reviews of Russian schools by American educators), *Na putiakh k novoi shkole*, 9 (1926): 188–91; E. Guro, "Inostrantsy o nashem prosveshchenii," *Na putiakh k novoi shkole*, 12 (1929): 62–8.

9 A. V. Lunacharskii, "Vospitanie novogo cheloveka" (Education of the New Man) (1928), in idem, O *vospitanii i obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1976), 282. About American-Soviet parallels in the pre-Stalin system of education, see, for example, V. V. Iakovleva, *Reformirovanie otechestvennogo obrazovaniia v kontekste filiatsii idei v pervoi treti XX veka* (Reform of National Education in the Context of Filiation of Ideas in the First Third of the twentieth century). PhD Dissertation (Perm, 2004); *Ocherki istorii shkoly i pedagogicheskoi mysli narodov SSSR, Konets XIX—nachalo XX veka* (Essays on History of School and Pedagogical Thought of Peoples of the USSR), eds. E. D. Dneprov et al. (Moscow, 1991). On Dewey's role in developing Soviet theory of education see: A. E. Korobova, *Pedagogicheskie idei J. Dewey i ikh interpretatsiia v otechestvennoi pedagogicheskoi teorii i praktike 20–30-kh gg.* (Pedagogical Ideas of John Dewey and Their Interpretation in Russian Pedagogical Theory and Practice). PhD Dissertation (Saratov, 2000).

10 A. V. Lunacharskii, "O vospitanii cheloveka novogo obshchestva" (On Education of the New Society Man) (1925), *Nauka i zhizn'*, 3 (1976): 55.

11 Cf. A. V. Lunacharskii, "Nashi tekushchie zadachi (Kakaia shkola nuzhna proletarskomu gosudarstvu)" (Our Current Tasks [What Kind of School Does the Proletarian State Need]) (1922), in idem, *O vospitanii i obrazovanii* (Moscow, 1976), 101. The project method is a method of teaching that requires joint work of children on a project with minimum guidance of a teacher. See Russian translation of Ellsworth Collings, *Opyt raboty amerikanskoi shkoly po metodu proektov* (*An Experiment with a Project Curriculum*) (Moscow, 1926).

12 Thus, for example, Victor Shulgin (1894–1965), an educator and a historian, a member of the Narkompros collegium, advanced the project method in Soviet schools. Cf. V. N. Shulgin, "Osnovnye voprosy sotsial'nogo vospitaniia," *Na putiakh k novoi shkole*, 4–5 (1927). On application of the project method in Soviet schools see N. K. Krupskaia, "Voprosy teorii i praktiki metoda proektov" (Problems of Theory and Practice of the Project Method), *Na putiakh k novoi shkole*, 5 (1931): 17–24.

13 Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York, 2002), 354.

14 John Dewey, "Impressions of Soviet Russia," in idem, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1927–1928,* vol. 3 (Carbondale, IL, 1984), 204.

15 Ibid., 222.

16 Ibid., 213.

17 Ibid., 247. For S. Shatskii's recollections of Dewey's visit, see S. T. Shatskii, "Amerikanskie pedagogi u nas v gostiakh" (Our guests are American educators), in idem, *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia v 4 t.*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1964), 206–14.

18 In the 1920s and early 1930s, "educational" pilgrimage was one of the kinds of pilgrimage of Western intellectuals to the Soviet Union. Communes, including children's labor communes, served as one of the pilgrimage destinations. In addition to Dewey, the famous pilgrims who visited communes, though not children's labor-communes, were Niels Bohr, Bernard Shaw, and Nancy and Walldorf Astor. Thus, in 1931, Shaw and the Astors visited the Irskaia commune in the Tambov region, where descendants of Russian emigres to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia had returned to live.

19 Dewey, "Impressions of Soviet Russia," 212 (cit. n. 14).

20 Felix Dzerzhinsky, "Order of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission," No. 23, Moscow, January 27, 1921. On children's life in the USSR see: Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (Yale University Press, 2008). For literature on *besprizorniki* see Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918–1930* (Berkeley, 1994); Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies) (Bloomington, IN, 2000).

21 M. Gorky, "Ot 'vragov obshchestva'—k geroiam truda" (From "enemies of the society" to heroes of labor), (1936) in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v 30-ti tomakh* (Collected works in thirty volumes), 27 (Moscow, 1953), 509. M. David-Fox claims that Gorky played a "key role" in the history of Bolshevo (David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 158 cit. n. 1).

22 In the 1930s, when the pathos of creating a "new man" would become an empty form, *Perekovka* would be a common name for newspapers published in Stalin's camps.

23 M. David-Fox notes that, interestingly, the Bolshevo commune was not designed as a "showcase for foreigners" but was brought to light by *The Nation*, which published an article about the commune in 1925. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 160 (cit. n. 1).

24 *Kommuna v Nikolo-Ugreshe* (Commune in Ugresha Monastery) (Dzerzhinskii, 2012), 23–39.

25 I. L. Auerbach, *Ot prestupleniia k trudu* (From crime to labor), ed. A. Ya. Vyshinskii (Moscow, 1936), 24.

26 Ibid., 5.

27 "The liquidator of homelessness" is a term coined by Gorky. In his essay "Across the Union of Soviets" the writer applies this term to the teachers who worked in the labor communes, that is, Makarenko, Melekhov, Pogrebinskii, and others. Gorky and Pogrebinskii got acquainted in 1928; it was Pogrebinskii who brought to Gorky in Italy a letter from Stalin, proposing him to return to the USSR.

28 See M. S. Pogrebinskii, *Trudovaia kommuna OGPU* (Labor commune of OGPU). Edited by M. Gorky (Moscow, 1928); M. S. Pogrebinskii, *Fabrika liudei* (Making People), (Moscow, 1929); I. Ionin, *Shkola-koloniia Krasnye Zori* (Leningrad, 1933); A. Makarenko, *Pedagogichesksaia poema* (Road to Life) (Moscow, 1935); *Bolshevtsy. Ocherki po istorii Bolshevskoi im. G. G. Iagody trudkommuny NKVD* (The Bolshevs. Essays on history of a labor commune named after G. G. Iagoda), eds. M. Gorky, K. Gorbunov, and M. Luzgin (Moscow, 1936).

29 Pogrebinskii, *Fabrika liudei*, 8–9 (cit. n. 28).

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Makarenko, *Bolshevtsy*, 195 (cit. n. 28). See also: A. Makarenko, "Bolshevtsy" (The Bolshevs), *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 27, 1936.

33 M. Gorky, "Po Soiuzu Sovetov" (Across the Union of Soviets), in idem, *Sobranie sochinenii v 30-ti tomakh* (Collected works in thirty volumes), 17 (Moscow, 1952), 157–8.

34 In 1924, Ionin together with his wife wrote a script of an educational film, *Golden Honey*, about the beekeeping activity of the communards. The script was later used for the documentary *Krasnye Zori* (Red Dawns) about the life and the work in the commune.

35 On the organization of labor in the commune Krasnye Zori see I. V. Ionin, *Shkola-koloniia (kommuna)* (School colony [commune]), ed. N. A. Kuznetsov (Leningrad, 1924); I. Ionin, *Shkola-koloniia Krasnye Zori* (Leningrad, 1933); I. V. Ionin, *K organizatsii opytno-agronomicheskoi raboty v ShKM* (To organization of experimental agriculture in a school colony) (Leningrad, 1932). Under the penname "I. O. Nin" Ionin published a children's story about the pioneers who at the end of the story were awarded an honorary diploma for their "work in developing animal breeding, in particular for the contribution to protection of feed"; see I. O. Nin, *Pochetnyi diplom* (Honorary Diploma) (Moscow, 1931), 38.

36 "The Forge of New People" was the name of the article in the newspaper *Lenin's Sparks* dedicated to the fifteenth anniversary of the commune Krasnye Zori; see "Kuznitsa novykh liudei," *Leninskie iskry*, November 27, 1934. In the late 1920s and the 1930s, "The Forge of New People" became a cliché in examples of *perekovka*. See, for example, A. Otvodnyi, *V kuznitse novogo cheloveka* (In the Forge of the New Man) (Moscow, 1932).

37 Gorky, "Po Soiuzu Sovetov," 181 (cit. n. 33).

38 M. Gorky, *Mother* (New York, 1906), 63.

39 Gorky, "Po Soiuzu Sovetov," 155 (cit. n. 33).

40 M. Gorky, *Publitsisticheskie stat'i* (Publicistic Essays) (Moscow, 1933), 22–3.

41 Ibid.

42 Gorky, "Po Soiuzu Sovetov," 165 (cit. n. 33).

43 Pogrebinskii, *Fabrika liudei*, 10 (cit. n. 28).

44 Ibid., 32.

45 Makarenko, *Bolshevtsy*, 194 (cit. n. 28).

46 Pogrebinskii, *Fabrika liudei*, 34–5 (cit. n. 28).

47 *Leningradskaia Pravda*, November 23, 1934.

48 Gorky, "Po Soiuzu Sovetov," 177 (cit. n. 33).

49 "Krasnye orliata" (Red Little Eagles) (1925), "Ky-Sy-Me" (Komsomol, Young Communist League) (1925), "P. S. R." (Party of free guys) (1928), "Fugas zalozhen" (Explosive bomb is laid) (1928), "Put' sovetskogo khleba" (The Way of Soviet bread) (1929), and so on.

50 Radii Fish, *Nazim Hikmet* (Moscow, 1968), 95.

51 *Vecherniaia Moskva*, September 6, 1926.

52 Well-known film directors, including A. Medvedkin, A. Room, L. Kuleshov, V. Pudovkin, N. Ekk, G. Vasiliev, and others, were often involved in the creation of such films.

53 R. Yanushkevich, "Velikii nemoi zagovoril. Fragmenty vospominanii" (The silent era has spoken. Fragments of memories), *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 98 (2011): 59. http://www.kinozapiski.ru/data/home/articles/attache/52-65.pdf. In the 1920s, the OGPU sought to use the creative activity of filmmakers for propaganda purposes; thus, by order of the OGPU a propagandistic film, *Solovki* (1928, directed by A. Cherkasov), was filmed, as well as a number of documentaries about the White Sea channel.

In 1925, the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema (later Society of Friends of Soviet Cinematography and Photography) was established; the short-term chairman of the board was Dzerzhinsky.

54 In the 1957 restored and edited version of the film approved by N. Ekk, these lines are absent. The industrial vocabulary of "reforging," "remodeling," and "remelting," which was typical for the first postrevolutionary years, disappears from the narrative about the education of the Soviet man making the period of the 1920s to the early 1930s unique in this respect.

55 Sergeev is modeled on several historic "liquidators of homelessness," including Matvei Pogrebinskii, Fiodor Melekhov, a former colleague of Pogrebinskii and the first director of the Liuberetskaia commune, and Mikhail Tipograf, a member of the commission for the elimination of homelessness. Tipograf helped Batalov to find the right approach to his part, to the "grain" of the role. He several times took Batalov to "operations" and even gave him a *kubanka* hat and a leather overcoat that was a popular attire in the Cheka. See M. Zharov, *Zhizn', teatr, kino* (Life, Theatre, Cinema) (Moscow, 1967), 292.

56 In fact, the lack of control from the Cheka authorities and the non-authoritarian behavior of the Chekist Sergeev aroused criticism of some scholars who saw the film as the "glorification of the Chekist experiment." Cf. Cristina Vatulescu, "Secret Police Shots at Filmmaking: The Gulag and Cinema," in idem, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford, 2010), 123–60.

57 A similar episode is described by A. S. Makarenko in his book *Road to Life* (1935): Makarenko trusts a revolver and the commune money to a former criminal Semion Karabanov (Semion Kalabalin). A. S. Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaia Poema* (*Road to Life*, 1935), vol. 1 (Moscow, 2018), 163. There is rather extensive literature on Makarenko's pedagogical experiments that often foreshadows the educational activity of other labor-communes' organizers. See, for example, J. Bowen, *Soviet Education: Anton Makarenko and the Years of Experiment* (Madison, 1965).

58 Pogrebinskii, *Trudovaia kommuna OGPU* (cit. n. 27), 7–8.

59 Auerbach, *Ot prestupleniia k trudu*, 32 (cit. n. 25).

60 See, for example, Auerbach's story about "reeducation" in a Stalin camp of the poorly working brigade that starts with washing hands before lunch, followed by morning neck washing; see Auerbach, *Ot prestupleniia k trudu*, 48 (cit. n. 25), or the struggle for cleanliness that requires for each communard to have his own toothbrush and toothpowder in Makarenko, *Bolshevtsy*, 215 (cit. n. 28).

61 Reportedly, according to Meyerhold, the success of *The Road to Life* was based on two smiles: Batalov's and Ivan Kyrlia's. See: E. Margolit, "Svoi! V nature!" "Putevka v zhizn" kak obrazets "obshchestvennogo zakaza" ("Ours! In fact!" *The Road to Life* as an example of "social request"), *Séance*, September 13, 2015. https://seance.ru/articles/svoj-v-nature/.

62 Harry Alan Potamkin, "Tendencies in the Soviet Films," *New Masses*, VII (12) (1932): 18.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Yanushkevich, "Velikii nemoi zagovoril. Fragmenty vospominanii," 63 (cit. n. 53).

66 A. Mikhailov, "Putevka v zhizn'" (Road to Life), *Proletarskoe kino*, 5–6 (1931): 25.

67 Ibid., 26, 28.

68 K. R. "Film o besprizornikakh ili besprizornyi film" (Film About Homeless Children or Homeless Film), *Izvestiia*, May 10, 1931.

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 The First Experimental Station (1919–36), a network of institutions, was, probably, the most radical experimental educational institution in the world.
72 See: N. S. Kirichko, "Shatskii i zarubezhnaia pedagogika," in *S. T. Shatskii (1878–1934)*, ed. M. S. Epstein (Moscow, 1934), 100–8; V. I. Malinin, "Russkie pedagogi o shkole SShA" (Russian Educators about American School), *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, 4 (1987): 116–24.
73 John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1935, Vol. 10, Art as Experience* (Carbondale, IL, 1989), 50.
74 John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1938, Vol. 12, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (Carbondale, IL, 1986), 72.
75 John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1939–1941, Vol. 14, Essays, Reviews, and Miscellany* (Carbondale, IL, 1988), 16.
76 Ibid., 17.
77 John Dewey, *The Middle Works*, *Vol. 8, 1899–1924: Essays and Miscellany in the 1915 Period; German Philosophy and Politics; Schools of Tomorrow* (Carbondale, IL, 1979), 391.
78 John Dewey, *The Middle Works, Vol. 9, 1899–1924: Democracy and Education, 1916* (Carbondale, IL, 1980), 82.
79 John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," *School Journal*, 54 (January 1897): 77–80.
80 Later Krupskaia criticized the uncritical application of the Dalton plan in the Soviet system of education. The Resolution of the Central Committee of the party in 1932 (August 25) condemned the laboratory-brigade method of learning.
81 Evelyn Dewey, *The Dalton Laboratory Plan* (New York, 1922), 1.
82 Dewey, "Impressions of Soviet Russia," 233 (cit. n. 14).
83 John Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," in idem, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1925–1927,* vol. 2 (Carbondale, IL, 1984), 328.
84 Dewey, "Impressions of Soviet Russia," 236 (cit. n. 14).
85 Ibid., 246–7.
86 Ibid., 248. N. S. Iulina believes that Dewey was "cheated in his expectations," not because he was not far-sighted, but because he was too rational. The chances that the Soviet state had were not used because of irrational reasons, voluntarist decisions of the authorities, ideological dogmas, an atmosphere of fear, and so on; that is, because there was just "an exceptional turn in the natural course of events," N. S. Iulina, "Ob ocherke Dzhona D'iui 'Vpechatleniia o Sovetskoi Rossii'" (On John Dewey's essay "Impressions of Soviet Russia"), *Istoriia filosofii*, 5 (2000): 272.
87 Dewey, "Impressions of Soviet Russia," 243 (cit. n. 14).
88 *Survey* 61 (1928): 348–9. For a sampling of English-language commentary on Dewey's relation to Soviet educational experiments, see, for example, William W. Brickman, "John Dewey in Russia," *Educational Theory*, 10 (1960): 83–6, and "Soviet Attitudes toward John Dewey as an Educator," in *John Dewey and the World View*, eds. Douglas E. Lawson and Arthur E. Lean (Carbondale, 1964), 64–149; "Dr. Dewey Praises Russia's School," *New York Times*, December 6, 1928, 3; Elena Rogacheva, "Russian Education in Search of Democracy: The Relevance of John Dewey's Model of the School," *East/West Education*, 15 (1994): 49–61.
89 *Film Daily*, April 15, 1932, 4.
90 In the version shown in Germany, the opening speech was given by Egon Erwin Kisch, a Czech-German journalist and writer, communist, and one of the founders of

the Communist Party of Austria. Kisch, who saw *The Road to Life* in 1931 in Moscow, defended the film from criticism: “Three years ago, *Putievka* would have been a reportage, but now when homelessness has been liquidated, the film is a serious social and political document.” Cited in Margolit, “Svoi! V nature!” (cit. n. 61).

91 John Dewey cited in Bowen, *Soviet Education*, 4 (cit. n. 57).

92 Dewey, “Impressions of Soviet Russia,” 207 (cit. n. 14).

93 John Dewey, “Making Soviet Citizens,” in idem, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1925–1927,* vol. 6 (Carbondale, IL, 1985), 293–4.

94 John Dewey, “Statement to the Conference on Curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts,” in idem, *The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1925–1927,* vol. 6 (Carbondale, IL, 1985), 423.

95 “O nachal’noi i srednei shkole” (On primary and secondary school), *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s”ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK: 1929–1932* (Moscow, 1983), 356.

96 See Judy Kutulas, *The Long War: The Intellectual People’s Front and Anti-Stalinism, 1930–1940* (Durham, NC, 1995), 116–18. For an account of Soviet-era commentary on Dewey’s philosophy see John Ryder, *Interpreting America: Russian and Soviet Studies of the History of American ~~thought~~* (Nashville, 1999), especially Chapter 4.

97 Makarenko, “Bolshevtsy” (cit. n. 32).

98 David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 173 (cit. n. 1).

Chapter 3

1 See Mikhail Heller, *Mashina i vintiki. Istoriia formirovaniia sovetskogo cheloveka* (A cog and the wheel. The development of Homo Sovieticus) (London, 1994), 28; Maja Soboleva, “The Concept of the ‘New Soviet Man’ and Its Short History,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 51 (2017): 64–85; and the “introduction” to the present volume.

2 This metaphor was used by the Head of the People’s Enlightenment Department at the Petrograd Executive Committee Z. I. Lilina (Zinov’eva) in 1918.

3 A. V. Lunacharskii and N. A. Skrypnik, *Narodnoe obrazovanie v SSSR v sviazi s rekonstruktsiei narodnogo khoziaistva. Doklady na VII s”ezde Soiuza rabotnikov prosveshcheniia* (People’s education in the USSR in relation to the reconstruction of people’s economy. Presentations at the Seventh Congress of the Union of Enlightenment Workers), (Moscow, 1929), 131–2. Here Lunacharskii uses the Russian folk saying “*gorbatogo mogila ispravit*” that is roughly equivalent to “a leopard can’t change its spots.”

4 On the notion of “re-forging” (*perekovka*), see Lyubov Bugaeva’s contribution to the present volume.

5 About Eugenii Radin, see Nikolai Krementsov, *With and Without Galton: Vasilii Florinskii and the Fate of Eugenics in Russia* (Cambridge, 2018), 279–80.

6 M. A. Radina-Kornil’eva and E. P. Radin, *Novym detiam novye igry: Podvizhnye igry shkol’nogo i vneshkol’nogo vozrastov ot 7 do 18 let v refleksologicheskom i pedologicheskom osveschenii* (New games for new children: Physical games for in-school and out-of-school age, from seven to eighteen, from the reflexology and pedology perspectives), 4th ed. (Moscow, 1927), 4.

7 Yu. M. Lotman, “Kukly v sisteme kultury” (Dolls in the system of culture), in idem., *Izbrannye stat’i*, vol. 1 (Tallinn, 1992), 380.