Malfunctioning Affective Infrastructures

How the “Broken” Road Becomes a Site of Belonging in Postindustrial Eastern Siberia

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Abstract: Smoothly functioning infrastructures are “unnoticeable”; they attract attention upon a breakdown. When infrastructure does not function as intended, it does not stop working altogether. Rather, it functions in unprecedented ways. This article argues that in the process of malfunctioning, infrastructure not only facilitates engagement, but also produces an affect. This ethnography shows how the “broken road” (*razbitaia doroga*) in rural postindustrial Eastern Siberia becomes a site around which belonging and relating unfold. The broken road functions as infrastructure acquiring a capacity to be affective precisely as it malfunctions. The affect that people experience in connection to the malfunctioning piece of infrastructure has components of anger and annoyance, a sense of unity, sociality, and camaraderie, as well as the feelings of belonging to a certain group.

Keywords: affect, affective infrastructure, belonging, infrastructure, malfunctioning road, Siberia

“The game of rocks” is no fun to play. The “game” consists of finding a flat rock, digging it out of the mud, and placing it into a tire track in the hopes that the tire will have something to grip. Many who travel the road to the village Anosovo, Irkutsk District, play the game of rocks. This is what my cotraveler, the hunter Nikolai, called it. He said, “You can spend hours carrying stones from one tire track to another, whichever track you like best.” The difficulty of the game is predicated on the seemingly equal impassability of all the tire tracks; they are slippery, harbor never-drying puddles, and sit deep in petrified mounds.

The *lespromkhoz* (timber enterprise) of Anosovo’s road was once [upon a time] graveled. Since then, the road has deteriorated to the

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state of a winter road (*zimnik*). There are thousands of miles of winter roads in Siberia. That a *zimnik* is not “supposed” to be used other than in winter does not mean that people do not use it all year. Traveling such a road makes driving transcend its limitations and become something else entirely: sailing, sliding, climbing heaps of indurated blocks. It is as if the viscous materiality of the world resists the body going through space.

Anosovians call their road “broken” in the colloquial Russian expression (*razbitaia doroga*). In this article, I show how this broken road becomes “productive” in terms of affect. First, the broken road facilitates the sense of belonging to the community, political self-identification, and therefore forging of identities. Second, the broken road provides space for the emergence of transient and stable socialities. Third, the broken road functions as a heuristic tool for storytelling evoking fantasies, memories, and visions of the future. In short, the broken road becomes a site around which belonging and relating unfold. In this paper, I illustrate each of these three points with a set of ethnographic examples. The goal of such a demonstration is to argue that malfunctioning infrastructure possesses a particular affective power. The way the road is a center of contesting contexts is exacerbated by the absence of central electricity and mobile phone towers in the vicinity; thus, the infrastructural systems interconnect as an entanglement for villagers to navigate.

This work is part of a project I am pursuing focusing on the everyday living and quotidian mobility in Ust'-Udinskii Raion in Siberia (Orlova 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020). Specifically, I am interested in what keeps people staying in failing material, economic, and infrastructural conditions even when they have opportunities to leave and their neighbors have left.¹ It is a phenomenon especially pronounced in Anosovo where the population shrunk from two thousand people to a little over five hundred since the 1970s.

Any answer to such a question will constitute what Strathern (1981) called a “strawman” of ethnographic writing. Broz and Habeck argue that since “there is no fixed number of answers,” some “riddles” are “not to be ‘solved’” (2015, 553).² But the answer to such questions is perhaps less about finding a finite number of factors that can be arrived at and evaluated—although why not—than it is about looking from a different angle.³ Here, I propose to consider the doings of the “affective infrastructure” as influencing living and “staying” in a Siberian village. By “affective infrastructure,” I mean, the systems that are capable of facilitating, enabling, or precluding the circulation of affect. Infrastructures’ capacity to store desires has been observed theoretically (Larkin

2008, 2013; Simone 2004) and on multiple case studies (Chu 2014; Harvey and Knox 2015). For example, Larkin mentions “deep affectual commitments” and “mobilization of affect” that infrastructures generate (2013: 332, 333). Indeed, the failing or malfunctioning infrastructure seems to be able to produce this sort of affect. There is an apparent ouroboros movement that takes place between affect and infrastructure; the affects get embodied in infrastructure which, in turn, generates affect. Tug-Hui Hu (2019) suggests that “affect is made infrastructural” through circulation and containment within infrastructural forms. However, it is less often researched how it happens—how infrastructures produce affect, or people experience affect engaging with infrastructures—on ethnographic descriptions of people’s interactions with infrastructure and each other, how fantasies, dreams, and visions arise, and how such engagements facilitate people’s connection to a faltering place.

Alice Street investigated the “affective infrastructures” of a layering landscape of a “European” hospital in Papua New Guinea that was meant to replace or supplement “the old native hospital[s]” which, in the eyes of the Australian government and citizens, were “‘dilapidated,’ ‘rotting,’ and ‘crowded’” (2012: 46). Following Stoler (2008) on colonial structures’ ability to influence the present, Street is showing how hospital, while being a symbol of development and the space of improvement, over time continues reproducing racial inequalities.⁴ Feelings in a circuit from hope to disappointment play a role in this reproduction.

The construction of a prominent structure like a road is meant to be affective and inspire feelings accompanying development and connectivity. For example, a road in Peru becomes an arena of the political entanglements, enchantments of modernity, and “longing” that a grandiose infrastructural project facilitates (Harvey 2018; Harvey and Knox 2012; Knox and Harvey 2015; Knox 2017). These “enchantments” arising around “the promise (or threat) of future connectivity” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 460). Summarizing the feelings that arise in connection to the construction project from conception to fulfillment, Knox (2017) describes a full affective cycle: the dream of connection, longing for the road, the sense of isolation, abandonment, disconnectedness, stasis, and being stuck, fatigue, and frustration that nothing seems to move. Then the eagerness, enthusiasm at the big construction site, hopes, dreams, amazement, and, finally, failed hopes fueling the disenchantment related to poor quality, corruption, and unfairness of others receiving credit for the road that was not their due (Knox 2017). We can call it an affective cycle of capitalism, or perhaps of any great construction swelling into being.

There are parallels in Soviet history—the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), which was a decades-long all-Soviet construction which fueled massive enthusiasm and excitement (Rozhansky 2011), and so did the Bratsk dam construction. The cycle of production is accompanied by an affective cycle that seems to end in disappointment. This is not an occasion but rather a “structure of feeling” (that seems to require a systemic change). Investigating the (affective) “infrastructures for troubling times,” Berlant (2016) calls for creation of ties and connections beyond kinship, much as Donna Haraway does in the call for cross-species kin in the *Chthulucene* (2016), in what seems to be the opposition to “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011). The cruel optimism, in this context, essentially, is a hope that this time around the cycle will not repeat itself and will not end in disappointment.

Anosovo’s road is shown here at a low point of the affective infrastructural cycle. “Affective history” (Knox 2017) of Anosovo’s road is different in the sense that disenchantment already precedes the very prospect that is uncertain; the hope is overridden by skepticism and cynicism, and the feelings, while not impartial and apolitical are nevertheless the expression of an affect. Perhaps we may call this affect “cheerful nonchalance”: caring less or not at all, an upbeat spirit of braving the adversities or caring little of them. Malfunctioning infrastructures fail not only to connect or facilitate exchange but to produce an intended affect (for example, of national pride, patriotism, belonging to a great country), generating instead something else (an affect of belonging to a small community, reliance on one’s own effort as opposed to the state, and the sense of shared humanity and mutual help on the road).

Malfunctioning infrastructures are possibly particularly affective insofar as they do not function quite as intended. As Zuev and Habeck remark, “In some cases it is the very dearth or absence of technology that is seen as a spark for creativity, inventiveness, and pride: namely, the skill to live independently of complicated gadgets and to overcome technical difficulties” (2019: 54). The important component to it is the people’s mutual help; crossing insufficient or irregular infrastructures entails the “serendipity” of encounters and requires a simultaneous awareness of multiple actors of each other movements and position in the landscape as described by Davydov (2017). The sense of “pride,” unity, belonging, being included in scattered socialities, connectedness with others, is related to the “cheer” with which the challenges are overcome, “mission accomplished,” and destination serendipitously reached.

Many seem to have noticed—and objected to the idea—that smoothly functioning infrastructures appear to be generally “invisible” and unnoticeable to their users (Humphrey 2004, 2005: 40; Korpela 2016: 113; Larkin 2013: 336). In this view, Knox says, “the *normal* state of infrastructure is deemed to be the state when it is unremarkable” (2017: 376). By contrast, the broken/malfunctioning, ruptured infrastructures become hyper-noticeable, very visible, and require more engagement. Not only that but malfunctioning infrastructure become affective or reveal the affect; their affective powers activate at rupture. An example of such affective powers activated in disruption can be the Chernobyl disaster (Brown 2013, 2019; Petryna 1995).

This does not mean that a smoothly functioning road does not produce or reveal its affect, but it does suggest that the part of the production of the ruptured infrastructure is affect as rupture requires more engagement and paying attention to infrastructure “as such,” as opposed to navigating it with automatism. Given the definition of affect as “intensity” beyond emotions or feelings of individual subject (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164; Massumi 2002: 27), the engagement with malfunctioning infrastructures is more intense as they produce tensions and frictions between bodies and objects of the material world. According to Knox, “affect . . . provides a language to point the concatenation of forces that ebb and flow and manifest in and between bodies” (2017: 375). The term “affect” has a capacity to make us more aware of the intensities that an encounter or engagement with a disrupted infrastructure requires. Even though affect theorists state that affect is not an emotion (Rutherford 2016), emotion fester and proliferate on the surface of affect and are indicative of its presence. Thus the affective cycle beginning with the idea of the road, longing for it, excitement at a prospect of smooth ride and increased connection, as well as the road’s capacity to embody the state power, in Anosovo, is the embodiment of the presence of a “civilization” supposedly brought by the Soviet planners, and now a symbol of the failure or at least lack of the Russian Federation’s state power. But even though the Anosovo’s road can be read as a “failed promise” of the Soviet infrastructure (following the trope of “the promise of infrastructure” in its connection to the state power offered by Anand, Gupta, and Appel [2018]), its devastating state is also a condition of the present, and the attempts to improve it will define the future and ultimately perhaps the survival of the location.

Below I offer a detailed ethnographic portrayal of the everyday scenes unfolding around the “broken road” in hopes to raise awareness of the communities dealing with the infrastructural malfunctions

across Russia and beyond, as well as investigate the infrastructural-affectual relations. I am connected to the community of my study with my family roots, and I am a native speaker of Russian. I have spent considerable time in Anosovo doing work with ethnographic methods beginning in 2016, having four long stays ranging from four to seven months. The question of the road is therefore not merely a theoretical one for me but rather a pressing issue. I would ultimately want to see the community obtaining its road since it is a condition of its flourishing. Even though some of my interlocutors do not think the road is necessary, this kind of argument speaks more to the ability of people to find sides to be evaluated as positive in every situation rather than to the conviction that having no road is best for the Anosovo's future. Anosovo is by far not the only place in such a situation.

In what follows, I provide an outline of the ethnographic data that led me to the main conclusion—that the broken Siberian road becomes a manner of affective infrastructure as it malfunctions—beginning with outlining the specificity of the place. I then proceed to portray how the broken road spawns socialities and identities as it becomes an issue of a divide. Then, I analyze how the broken road features in the scenes revealing a sense of belonging by providing space for fleeting and stable socialities. Then, I talk about how people, in the process of storytelling centered around the road and its materialities—qualities and characteristics—enact their dreams and fantasies and indulge in memories. All of these “functions” of the broken road, in turn, become the ways in which people obtain the sense of unity and belonging through day-to-day engagement and struggle with it. In the ways outlined here, I show how for people, the road becomes singularly affective precisely because it is broken. This is not to suggest that people would not experience other affect centering around the smoothly functioning road, but to probe the reality of the “post-Soviet infrastructures” almost-thirty years after the official collapse of the USSR to see how the ongoing deterioration reshapes both infrastructure and the affect around it.

Place and Time: City of the Future as Imagined in the Past

The post-Soviet case presents a particularly fruitful substrate for the case studies tying infrastructure and affect because the creation of the modern infrastructure was a central political goal of the Bolshevik party in the 1920s. Enough is written on how the transformation of *byt*

(everydayness) has been understood as central for the building of the Communist society of the future, and how sometimes this infrastructure did not function quite as intended.⁵

Soviet infrastructures were constructed with the explicit goal of creating a certain type of idealized subjectivities, such as the Soviet man or woman (*chelovek*). Thus, the socialist projects of road construction were part of the effort to build communist modernity (Siegelbaum 2008). In effect, as is well known, socialist infrastructures created not communist modernity but something else. Humphrey (2005) argued that the unintended uses, although not always in disagreement with ideological meaning, produced sensibilities scattered in a “prismatic” manner, in a dispersed not a random way. For example, the staircases in *obshchezhitia* became spaces of privacy despite their intended public use (Humphrey 2005: 49). While the intended ideological meanings of the collective dwellings that *obshchezhitia* embodied were those of common, communal, and ultimately, communist living, the “unintended” uses of staircases that includes smoking, drinking, and kissing, did create a type of common living but of a different kind (Humphrey 2005: 49). Ultimately, spaces constructed as facilitating ideologies produced surpluses and excesses of socialities, subjectivities, and sensations that were not Communist but, so to speak, “haunted” by the communist visions.⁶

Anosovo emerged as one of the “cities of the future”—centrally planned settlements consolidated as a result of the dam-induced flood.⁷ “Cities of the future” is the Soviet trope replicated across time and space. It featured in works of the theorists of socialism, such as Nadezhda Krupskaya, who, in 1929, envisioned the cities where housing would provide a basis for the “Socialistically organized society of the future” (2014, 128).⁸

Although Anosovo emerged as a result of the construction of the Bratsk dam—that once was a singular most powerful world’s electricity provider—the village has never had central electricity. To this day, Anosovo is powered by diesel generators that break in Siberian winters. Such infrastructural deficiency, pushing the expectations of the never-arrived modernity beyond the horizon of possibilities, is a subject of much tension in Anosovo. “The when of infrastructural form will always imply a deferral, a further waiting, a renewed or even a crushed expectation” (Harvey 2018, 99). For Anosovians, “the when of infrastructural form” never arrived (see figure 1). The socialist future did not materialize.

The Soviet infrastructures, their unfulfillments notwithstanding, remain core at the fringes and margins. “Ruins” endure; there

Figure 1. Anosovo's main ground road in the 1970s. Private photo album, courtesy of Elena Maleeva who says, "The road reached the final stage of a ruin, which is ruin, years ago." Rephotographed by the author.

is not much you can do with them except for ruining them further.⁹ The structures coming to supplement the old ones do so partially and inadequately to the point that they can be said to be parasitizing on the infrastructures of the past. Capitalist firms that have replaced *Yegorovskii lespromkhoz* use buildings and sites constructed during the Soviet times: garages, checkpoints, and storages. Despite this continuity of "legacies," the firms eschew social obligations.¹⁰ "Well, we do not represent the state here," a timber manager grudgingly told me.

That the firm did not see social obligations as their duty did not mean that the expectations were not in place. The firm's CEO, Yevgeny Voronov, ultimately used these expectations to his advantage when he decided to run for the regional parliament. He campaigned on the promises of infrastructural improvements in Anosovo. At the village club, he was offering to the villagers to provide his helicopter but was met with an affront and yelling: "What if I am dying? We need a road—not a helicopter." After the club, at the stairs, where men smoked, and women shook their heads, Aglaia (62) once again repeated: "No, I am dying, and I am going to wait for his helicopter." She chuckled. "A kind

wizard will fly to us in a blue helicopter,” someone sang a line from a popular Soviet cartoon song.¹¹ The song no doubt helped to establish the sense of commonality against the *vlast*’ (power). It seemed to be a matter of a shared agreement that Voronov’s Bratsk-stationed helicopter cannot and indeed should not replace the road. Especially given that the road was a product of planned and concerted effort and was once maintained by the *lespromkhoz*, the society was just as much, if not more, offended as it was amused by the helicopter suggestion. It voted for Voronov though; he, at least, promised something.

But the promises remained unfulfilled, and the problem of the road persisted. Below, I show how the community of Anosovo “comes together” as a unity—only to break into fractions—around the road, which becomes an object in relation to which a feeling of belonging unfolds. Understanding how the affect of belonging emerges in disrupted infrastructures will help answer the questions of what keeps people living in the conditions of dwindling economic possibilities, what defines mobility, and how people “belong” to a place and place belongs to them.

How the Broken Road Becomes a Site of Belonging

Political Identities: Progressivists and Mrakobesy

A unity presupposes an opposition, a figure of the kinsperson, as opposed to a figure of the stranger, against whom the (dis)belonging is constructed. The broken road sparks disagreements that lead to differences in the worldview. Thus, the malfunctioning infrastructure generates intensities and contributes to identity production. In the half-joking framing of Anosovian Sergei Klyuev, “This is not a bipartisan issue. This is a harsh divide. The party of progressivists against the party of reactionaries or obscurantists (*mrakobesy*).”

“Progressivists” hope that with the advent of a smooth, good, passable, “unbroken,” mended road, life is “going to fall in order.” Skeptics object. Klyuev, whose relatives live in Moscow, observed, “People hoped that the metro station in Maryino would make it closer to the center. When the station was opened, everyone realized that it still takes two hours to get out of Maryino.” But *mrakobesy*—who are apparently also optimists—tend to see a good side in the status quo. While progressivists are strongly proroad, *mrakobesy* query whether there is anything to be lost with the acquisition of the smooth road.

Progressivists are “easy to understand,” but every *mrakobes* is a character in his or her own right. For instance, one of the road dissidents, Alexei Yakhontov (60), is a known brawler in the village. Because his opposition to the road seemed to be more of an exception than the rule, even though on occasion he was echoed by several others with whom I spoke, I want to briefly portray him here.

“My father is a Buryat, but I am Russian,” he says.¹² Alexei confirmed the way he was introduced to me: he was a lynx hunter and said he was suffocating lynxes with his “bare hands”—with his belt. “Why would I carry a rifle?” he asked. “It is too heavy. I have loops on my belt. Well, I’m not going to lie; once, when I saw two bears, I went back and took my rifle.” Several times lynxes scratched him, he said. “How?” I gasp. “How-how. Like a woman scratches the face of a man!”

Alexei gained notoriety in Anosovo as a young man riding his horse into the village club. “Caligula,” Sergei said. I had heard about Alexei before I met him—his fame preceded him, as it were. As the conversation rolled along, I asked Alexei how it happened that he drove his horse into the village club. “On a bet,” he replied, lighting a cigarette. The next day after the stunt, a militiaman walked into the Yakhontovs yard. Alexei was chopping firewood. “Put down your ax and come hither,” the militiaman sweetly beckoned. Alexei acquiesced. He put down his ax and was immediately arrested. He got fifteen days for hooliganism. “It’s okay,” he now says. “What was there to be done?” (*Chio sdelaesh’?*)

Recently, when a group of dark-skinned, skinny young men appeared in the village, Alexei was on the lookout. Anosovians called them “gypsies.” They were on a motorbike and had blankets for sale. While some villagers looked at blankets, Alexei was waving his hand, “Go away! You will not profit from here [*nichem vy ne pozhivites’ zdes’*].” Alexei was apprehensive about strangers in Anosovo. If having fewer strangers demanded having no good road, he was fine with that.¹³

Tensions continued to emerge as I embarked on a quest to establish a correlation between the *mrakobes*’s conviction that the construction of the road will bring more harm than good and flickers of racial resentment.¹⁴ But it did not seem to be possible to trace such connection with the ethnographic methods that I used. Anosovian women of both predominant ethnicities in Anosovo—Russian and Buryat—expressed strong-worded sentiments about the racially different Other. But they did not oppose the road construction, not that the construction was on the table. No matter how little they wanted strangers in the village, they still thought that the village needed the road. Some of them stated

it actively and sometimes aggressively. Some of them were among the ones who yelled at Voronov refusing his generous helicopter offering.

Time and again the road revealed itself as a site where malfunctioning becomes functioning. The impassability of the road became its faculty, “brokenness,” functionality. For many, the “brokenness” of the road precluding strangers from appearing in the village was an advantage of the road. The sense of belonging emerged against the feeling that outsiders do not belong. Resentment, entangled with anger and coupled with hope for the future—against all reason—and the plain need to have the road in a passable state, constituted a mix of charged emotions. Hostility to the racially different other, as a newcomer, an outsider, was a stinging component in the mixture.

Although Anosovians seemed to subscribe to the idea that progress needs to be made and such progress is a development from the worse to the better, some of them rejected the notion that roads comprise a necessary step on the way to the future. “Roads are bad for the animals,” a high school graduate observed, “we can use pneumatic tubes and forsake the roads on the ground.”

The attitude toward the road contributed to the formation of identity in Anosovo. Although “progressivists” disagree with *mrakobesy* on whether Anosovo needs a functioning road, the third group, “dreamers,” or, perhaps, “ecologists,” as Klyuev called them, suggest that Anosovo can skip “the road” stage of infrastructural development altogether. Just as, some of them argue, it happened with telephony. Telephony, after all, is but another infrastructural system embodying modernity and progress.¹⁵

However, in practice, the state of telephony in Anosovo, alongside with the condition of the road, contributes to the construction of the place as remote.¹⁶ During the late Soviet times, Anosovo had no wired telephony. Nowadays, it is mobile telephony that Anosovo does not have. The accrual of lacks is what the proverbial “skip” in technology amounts to. Anosovo does have satellite and internet-based telephony—in those houses that can afford it—and a card automat in the administration building, also satellite. Within the framework of “technological skips,” the mobile telephony is yet another milestone of “development” that Anosovo skips on its way to the future, which is still better technologically equipped but perpetually elusive.

The promise of telephony as a sign of progress is another—post-Socialist—version of the “coffee without milk” dilemma. “Sorry, we can’t serve you coffee without cream; we only serve coffee without milk” was supposed to be an anecdote about the socialist realities.¹⁷ But

its enduring relevance transcended the limitations of state formations, epochs, and transitions. While coffee without cream and coffee without milk are technically the same coffee, affectively, they “taste” differently when you cannot have exactly the one that you want or feel like you should have access to. Anosovo did not have wired telephony during Soviet times, so what difference does it make if it does not have mobile towers? Yet these absences, albeit producing an identical result of the lack of communicational opportunities, are not alike. Their accrual leads to the sense of being pushed back even more and adds a strike of resentment to the affect.

The “dreamers” could be proven right: the wireless network can be cast above the planet, and the transparent tubes for pneumatic cars crisscross the sky. But life unfolds today, and the potentialities of interconnectedness remain unattainable. The pneumatic transportation remains a futuristic dream from the pages of the Soviet journal *Tekhnika—Molodezhi!* (Technology to the Youth!). To me, these fantasies of the future have an unmistakable retro flavor. I am far from translating them into the universal seductive language of the “post-Soviet nostalgia,” despite the popularity of this trope,¹⁸ but it seems that the infrastructures that came into this place during the Soviet time contain the reverberations of the visions of Socialist modernity.

The broken road and the disconnectedness that it engenders, together with the scarcity of telephony, contribute to the formation of identities and builds a sense of belonging; thus malfunctioning infrastructure carries affect and becomes affective. The malfunction is lived in affect expressed through charged bodily reactions (such as yelling at the figure of authority with his helicopter offering). The anger, sadness, self-pity, and the feeling of being cast aside are components of an affect that emerges because the road is malfunctioning—or functions outside of how it “should.” Malfunctioning infrastructures are the potent producers of affect as they require an intense engagement as opposed to more or less automatic navigation.

The Fleeting Sociality of Travel

Malfunctioning infrastructure is affective in a multiplicity of ways. As the road figures as a device dividing people in relation to the strangers and contributes to the sense of local unity, traveling the road is a necessity that demands organizing and solidarity. “They complain and complain that there is no road, and they can’t go anywhere,” says

hunter Nikolai. “But all I see is *vzhik-vzhik* (swoosh-swoosh),” he is waving his hand illustrating speedy back-and-forths. Since there is a limited number of goods and services available locally, even most avid champions of sedentary lifestyles must travel to obtain basic goods. Mobility flourishes in the conditions that seemingly prevent it.

Companionships—serendipitous, as Davydov (2017) calls them—emerge when it comes to the need of traveling, and to postpone it is no longer possible. Thus affectively “infrastructured,” life in Anosovo is conditioned not as much by the “remoteness” of the place as by the difficulty of getting there. People try not to use the road, but when they do, they need an ally to defeat it. Alliances get reached and break, camaraderies spring to life and dissolve or endure, animosities spark, and friendships start and end. Between Anosovo and Muia, there are approximately sixty miles where the road is particularly bad (see figure 2). Things get left behind at relatives’ and friends’ houses and get lost or stolen. Relationships break as one needs six hours and more to surmount a relatively small distance. But other connections spring to life.

Figure 2. Affective infrastructure for the extreme exercise of mobility; Anosovo’s road in 2013. The only way of transportation by land, this road is reliable mainly in terms of the production of affect. Note the absence of electric poles.

Going from the town of Shelekhov to Anosovo, I was asked to give a ride to a young woman. A mother of three, Alyona cheerfully declared that she would like to move back to her parents in Anosovo, where “the ecological situation” is better than in the town of Shelekhov. However, her mood soon changed. It was winter, and we were stuck on a frozen mount amid the road at 2 AM. Luckily, we had a prospect of another car catching up to us in three to four hours. Such arrangements were what experienced travelers made whenever faced with the task of reaching Anosovo along the road, and I congratulated myself on my foresight. But Alyona was not as pleased. She did not share my optimism at that moment. Previously, she rationalized her desire to return to Anosovo with her childhood memories. But she forgot how hard it is to reach the village. “What if a child falls sick?” Alyona mused. I told her that during his campaign, Voronov offered the villagers his helicopter in case of emergency. “Where is his helicopter?” Alyona snapped. “In Bratsk,” I replied. “Well, do you have his cell phone number?” Alyona demanded. I did not. “Oh, man. But how *to call* him?” Like me, she also kept forgetting that there was no mobile telephony around Anosovo—nor at the road where we were stuck. “When would that helicopter arrive? From Bratsk, that alone will probably take two hours.” She virtually repeated the sentiment and considerations of the villagers during and after the meeting with Voronov in the village club of Anosovo. He prompted villagers to contact his manager rather than himself. “I like the proverb: Voronov is not the sun, and he will not warm everybody,” the manager liked to quip.

Alyona and I were diligently playing what Nikolai once called the game of rocks: wrestling pieces of broken wood that froze into stone-like clay and snowdrifts. The plan was, we would throw rocks and logs under the wheels and drive. Alyona broke a manicured nail, but the wood, hard as stone, and the stone, hard as wood, still sat in snowdrifts as the inextricable sword Excalibur. Alyona now viewed her recent project of relocation as little more than a nostalgic fantasy.

That the fleeting socialities of the travel emerge around the broken road is a way in which the road becomes a powerful element of malfunctioning infrastructure. Any “emergency” situation—and Anosovo was in the constant state of low-level emergency—spring to life the affect which is not without analogies in other places. But there was no panic in it; rather, it was nonchalant. Thus, in Appalachia, Stewart (1996: 58) described, as a forest fire was about to jump the creek, the community came together, and there emerged a certain calm and even satisfaction in the growing palpability of the threat.¹⁹

The Sense of Belonging Emerges in Language

The sense of belonging is expressed in the language. The people are talking about their road daily. It features in anecdotes and stories and partakes in the inner life. The way affect circulates is evident in language ideologies. Fantasies, some of which I already mentioned, and memories flow into a mix that arguably constitutes a fabric of everydayness.²⁰

One of the ways to make the reality of living with the unruly road more habitable is to joke about it.²¹ Anosovians jokingly call their road “BAM.” A microcosm in itself, BAM is a railroad of 4,287 kilometers (~2,664 miles) piercing the distance from Tayshet, Eastern Siberia to Sovetskaia Gavan’, Khabarovsk Krai.²²

By referring to the local road as BAM, people create the humorous effect evident in the intonation emphasis, “How are you planning to go?”—“I’ll travel *the BAM*.” (*Poedu po BAMu*). The BAM is at once an emblem of belonging and a joke. It proves to be infinitely amusing even as it is continuously repeated. As the BAM expression grew into a regular speech, the analogy on which it rests brings a swarm of associations. A tiny incarnation, an infrastructural model of “the great construction of communism,” the local road is called BAM in honor of all the labor, complicated logistics, capital, effort, heroic tales, shady histories, and downright horrors that went into the construction of the real, prototype BAM, and, even if on a different scale, in the maintaining of Anosovo’s road. It is a marker of national belonging, which is supplemented by the sense of unity on a local level of which I spoke before.

In the way Anosovians talk about the road, you would think it is alive, but this is not magical thinking, far from it. Instead, the road becomes a phenomenological, agentive being prone to switching moods. The road becomes one of those “nonhuman actants” that, according to Latour, “possess” “force, causality, efficacy, and obstinacy” (2005, 76). For example, the road can display a favorable attitude towards the traveler and then abruptly turn hostile.

As the road enters the personalized relationship with people, it is not the only side of the relationship whose agency expands. People’s agency, too, twists out of usual forms. One becomes able to “dry the road” (*sushit’ dorogu*), meaning, wait until, after the rain, the road is dry enough to pass. Even if this relationship unfolds entirely in the language, it is indicative of the emotional investment since the task of surmounting the road is central for the community. The anger and the demand-appeal to power for the road to be maintained are never too

far off. "Business will not be able to afford to maintain the road," a villager told me after that memorable heated pre-election meeting. "This is the task of the state. And the state does not care." Or, as Kruglova (2019) described it, the state simply does not stretch its Leviathan-like tentacles that far.

The road features prominently in stories and personal anecdotes. Nothing short of the "worlding" unfolds around it. Having spent a cold Siberian October night stuck in a car, two pregnant women humored each other as they recalled their ordeal. "At least I went because I had a planned screening. And why did you go?" The other answered in a low voice, as if admitting the absurdity of her motivation: "I wanted a new wallpaper for the baby bedroom." The "brokenness" of the road brings into question the validity of common desires and everyday intentions; thus, the malfunctioning infrastructure generates a sense of inadequacy in people.

One way of doing "participant observation" for me was traveling Anosovo's BAM with people. Once, I traveled with my then eight-year-old son, whom I had to bring elsewhere for the beginning of the school year. I had two cotravelers: Alexander and Nikolai. The latter had to bring bags with potatoes to his children in Angarsk—a kind of organic reverse remittance.²³ Alexander also had some business. We cooperated.

The state of the road interfered so prominently with the process of driving that our conversation revolved almost entirely around the task. The road horror stories were a separate genre and part of a narrative routine (see figure 3). "A log darted off and killed the driver," Nikolai recollected as we passed the place. "He was trying to refasten a poorly fastened load. Was found dead." Nikolai went into the mode of recollection and presented the listeners with a sequence of the violent deaths he witnessed. There were many.

As we continue to trace a safe trajectory between clay traps, I ask Alexander and Nikolai if they are not afraid to get stuck. "I love the solitude on the road!" Alexander proclaims. "Here, my car is not a part of the train of cars on a busy road. One cuts you off here, another honks the."

The "insular movement" that the car has been said to offer (Korpela 2016: 118) creates an affective feel of a "motionless voyage" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 199) within a moving entity. Moving as an individual entity, a separate item crossing the space on its own, alone as far as the eye could see, for hours, is not an opportunity that a city with its "Hobbesian anarchy of 'road wars'" (Kruglova 2019: 462) can offer. There is a certain heroism in managing these difficulties, and it is not

Figure 3. Anosovo's road. If you need to push the car out of the mud, spread a good chunk of thick fabric across the trunk. In summer, heated metal is too hot to touch with bare hands.

lost on Anosovians, even if ridiculed by them. "Party said, we must; Komsomol replied, we will!"²⁴ Alexander and Nikolai laugh. Years after the Komsomol dissipated, ridiculing the Soviet tropes still brings them joy. Hardships are a source of amusement for them.

As we continue the travel, a monotony and ennui set into place. The palpitation of the car amounts to a symphony of elements repeating their annoying repertoire of several tunes. I am thinking at what point one of those details will inevitably go out of order or, rather, Deleuzianly, flow into the order of a different kind and become a component in a grandiose disorder of the machine collapsing on the go. While each squeaking thing sings a song about its imminent destruction, Alexander confirms that "a good driver feels it in his stomach." The interlocutor of Anna Kruglova admits to being ready to fall asleep on the smooth—boring—road and says, "Think about the road with your feet" (2019, 460).²⁵ Thinking about the road with feet and feeling the palpitating car in your stomach are embodied experiences generated by malfunctioning infrastructures. Passing the "broken" road can be

exciting: it generates a sense of romanticism of solitude (Alexander), stoicism, and even heroism of overcoming difficulties. It is also nonchalant in braving adversities.

Confronted with stubborn things that refuse to work, people invent fantastic scenarios of the future. As our tiny crew goes through the mess of clay and climbs the slippery molds after a summer rain, Alexander enriched my collection of the *Technology-to-the-Youth!*-like future visions. He recalled the days he worked at a porcelain factory as a young man, "What if people leveled deep tire tracks, evened out the road, and then exposed it to fire?" In his vision, the road will acquire a smooth porcelain surface.

"You know, when you fall asleep, fantastic ideas come to mind?" Nikolai picks up. "I once dreamed of a huge machine that had two gigantic iron disks rotating. The disks cut the bulges of clay and leveled the road. Like this." Nikolai moves his hands in circular motions, one hand towards the other as if grabbing something. Done with portraying it in the air, he offers, "We invent a lot of machines. Why not this one, a clay-cutting machine?"

I ask him to tell me more, and he briskly repeats what he said, "What is not to get here? My machine would chisel the road evenly! [*Strogala by rovno dorogu!*] Like this," More circular hand movements.

I try to envision a great machine with circular disks leveling the road. Traveling the "broken road" will give you an idea or two. Throughout the duration of the travel, one cannot rest. Such a journey can take a toll on a sick body, and children do not bear it well. My son exclaims, "This road should be destroyed!" (*Etu dorogu nado unichtozhit'!*), which greatly amuses our cotravelers. Alexander says that the road is already destroyed, and any attempt to destroy it further will be of marginal effect.

While the road unfolds under struggling wheels, memories of submerged villages resurface. The recollections of the time before the flood are never too far away. Alexander and Nikolai are glad to indulge in childhood memories. In 1961, when the place of their births, the fort of Yandy, was flooded, Alexander was eight years old, and Nikolai, six.

"The city submerged by the water [*grad, ushedshiy pod vodu*]," Alexander sighs. "The city"—a village, to be precise—consisted of houses built out of the dark, "silver-black" logs. "As the surface of pine timber fluffs over time, the log acquires a fluffy finish glistening like silver," Alexander explains. The roofs were "breathing"—made out of overlapped wooden planks. The sun shed light through them, but the rain did not sift.

Dust clouds prompt Alexander to recollect that the dust on the road to the fort of Yandi was healing. The scintillating clay dust, finely grated by wheels, formed deep layers on the sides of the road. When children broke the skin on elbows and knees, they scooped the dust and dressed the wounds. “We were not afraid of contagions,” Alexander says. Scratches healed quickly, and scabs fell off revealing pink, freshly regenerated skin.

I marvel at the magical world of breathing roofs, silver logs, and healing dust while mud bursts on to the windshield. The memory and materiality, in their entanglement, provided an opportunity to escape the present. The passengers in the car were preoccupied with vistas of the bygone. The road unfolded together with a bunch of sensations that it provoked. The memories of the healing dust projected onto the clouds of actual dust were vivid like a cinematographic apparition. The dust was present both in the reality and imagination; the materiality of the form became a vehicle of recollection. One sort of this dust, the dust of the present, did not possess the amazing healing qualities, but the dust of the past did. It left behind a lingering sense of regret and loss. The “broken road” quite palpably enacted the sense of belonging. Thus, the malfunctioning infrastructure is affective, as evidenced by the “broken” road and its materialities appearing in language ideologies—ways of talking that are revealing of feelings.

Conclusion: Affective Power of Malfunctioning Infrastructures

Roads, it has been observed, are synonymous with modernity.²⁶ But what an outdated image of modernity it is (or seems to be) from amid Anosovo’s road. Anosovo’s road did not remain the same through time, and it spawned different feelings depending on its state. From a gravel road once maintained by *lespromkhoz* year-round, the road in the village of Anosovo, Eastern Siberia, has deteriorated into a seasonally usable *zimnik*. One of many across the region and beyond, such road is not supposed to be used during a significant portion of the year, yet it remains functional throughout. The functionality of the broken road goes beyond the means of mobility. As an element of the deteriorating postsocialist infrastructure, the road becomes affective in various ways.

In this article, I showed how the road to Anosovo figures in the production of identities, in the organization of socialities, fleeting but memorable serendipitous encounters (such as my encounter with

Alyona), or long-term relationships of mutual help (such as between Nikolai and Alexander). These socialities emerge around the task of traveling and may or may not have emerged otherwise. The road circulates as an imprint of the BAM in jokes, memories, fantasies, stories, and ideas—such as reminders from the past, and visions of alternative scenarios of the future. Materialities of the world—properties and qualities of “dumb matter” (Massumi 2002: 1)—have a capacity of becoming vehicles of recollections, like the clouds of dust reminding some of my interlocutors about the lost world of their childhood.

Through the portrayal of these occurrences, I demonstrated how the broken road becomes a site where belonging and relating unfold daily. I suggest that when infrastructure malfunctions, its every hiccup becomes a center of a little unfolding world, a conversation, a sociality, or an identity-formation moment as people come together or break apart into certain “fractions” in an effort to overcome it, fix, or work around it. Stayers and goers work actively in the attempt to solve the problem, producing visions of the future where technology does or does not play the role. When the concrete solutions are out of reach (business cannot afford and the state would not attend), the feelings accompanying the problem can range from anger, hope, dreams, and fantasies of the future, such as the marvelous clay-cutting machines, to nonchalance—cheerfully refusing to care too much. This way, the broken road features in the everydayness as it unfolds in a myriad of ways difficult to account for. People make numerous transactions around the road becoming, in a way, part of the infrastructure, facilitating its working while meeting their own goals.

To spell out this multifariousness, first, the road is a device of a divide between two different groups—*mrakobesy*, who do not want the presence of the strangers in the village and therefore see advantages in the status quo, and progressivists, all other villagers who believe in the goodness of the functional road.

Second, the road becomes an affective infrastructure inasmuch as it creates the socialities “of troubling times” (Berlant 2016). The “broken” road is an obstacle that needs to be surmounted time and again. Its taming becomes a center of socialities, fleeting, like a companionship experienced by Alyona and myself, or enduring, as represented by Nikolai and Alexander. In such socialities, camaraderies, and mutualities emerges a sense of shared unity, a collective life, and a belonging to the community.

Third, the road is a storytelling prompt, a heuristic tool that prompts and propagates stories of others having traveled it in different

circumstances, and unfolding in language ideologies—ways of talking about the world that are indicative of affect; not only does the road foster the sense of a local bipartite unity, but a national belonging too; that the road is called BAM evokes the shared past of the country. These ways of the road becoming affective show how the malfunctioning of the road becomes the principal way it functions.

To sum up, these functions of the malfunctioning road—a political issue, a device creating socialities, a linguistic and heuristic device permitting conversations and fostering the feeling of belonging, as well as evocations of fantasies, ideas, and memories—demonstrate that the malfunctioning infrastructures facilitate an affect of belonging which accompanies socialities emerging for the communal problem solving. The affect associated with the road is particularly strong because of the dysfunctional materiality that demands to be fixed, surmounted, or otherwise to be dealt with. The malfunctioning piece of infrastructure is an arena for the affect of dissatisfaction and satisfaction in pride that surmounting the road evokes.

The malfunctioning infrastructures are no longer “invisible” or unnoticeable like functional infrastructures often are, a conviction runs, and the malfunctioning infrastructures are hyper-visible. Hence, some of the particularly affective infrastructures are malfunctioning infrastructures. It is not that smoothly functioning infrastructures are unaffactive, but they might be less revealing of affect. Malfunction stops the process of use of the infrastructure and forces people to focus on it and engage with it more intensely. It seems reasonable to suggest, although to say so with a categorical certainty would require more research, that, when it comes to the feeling of camaraderie, relationships, and the sense of belonging, malfunctioning infrastructures seem to have a capacious potential to intensify it. While it may not be possible to hierarchize infrastructures based on their affective powers, given the multiplicity, difficulty of discernment, and idiosyncratic nature of some of the experiences and sensations that they evoke, perhaps, infrastructure tends to become particularly affective when a breakage, a slippage, or an interruption is introduced into its circuits.

Circling back to the overarching project of mobility mentioned in the beginning, mobility in difficult infrastructural, environmental, and economic conditions is entrenched in the affective infrastructures, particularly when it comes to “staying.” Enactment of movement, including relocation, depends on the affective infrastructures: ways in which people feel about material things. If, as I sought to demonstrate, the malfunctioning infrastructures are intensely affective, they

generate potent affects the exploration of which keeps people living there, in flourishing sociality, overcoming the malfunction, at times even pleased and entertained by the rifts, notches, and ruptures, “not caring” of malfunction, being angered or amused by it, or actively seeking ways to overcome it. The exploration of affects of malfunction keeps people occupied and at their social in these places. In this sense, the answer to the (im)mobility conundrum with which I began, “what keeps people living in a place as their neighbors have left?” are the explorations of the affective infrastructures, an entanglement in such an exploration, being situated within the systems that occupy one with emotions, impressions, and situatedness of being in the world. When infrastructures present us with tasks to make them work, we are “in it together,” touching the ground of our shared humanity while playing “the game of rocks.”

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Notes

1. The questions of mobility have a history connecting Siberia to “remoteness,” “isolation,” and “backwardness” (Kuklina and Holland 2018; Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019). There are assumptions cutting across disciplines and contexts that “mobility” is somehow inherently more desirable than “immobility” (see Khan 2015 and Schewel 2019 seeking to dismantle it). However, the phenomenon that the Russian state historically identified as a problem and worked against is the excesses of mobility—nomadism—of the native peoples. See Campbell (2003) on the motorized travel in the Evenki (2003), Dudeck (2012) for Khanty reindeer’s efforts of creating distance between themselves and impostors, and Vitebsky and Alexeiev (2015) for the affect of nomadism of the Eveny reindeer herders that the authors define as “pleasure and sadness” and contrast to the state’s efforts to immobilize and arrest such movement.

2. Broz and Habeck ask, “Why do these people bother to spend some 16 h[ours] of their weekend driving to Altai for ordinary drinking and barbecue?” (2015, 552).

3. For example, the economics of happiness does attempt to measure happiness with factors that can be named, calculated, and measured using qualitative methods (Frey 2008).

4. The work that is closely connected to Stoler’s (2004) pointing out the concerted effort to develop the proper feelings by the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies; the material structures were to be the means of such development along with the school curriculum.

5. Collier 2011; Oushakine 2004; Rindzevičiūtė 2019.

6. The communist “hauntedness” that began with the opening line of “The Communist Manifesto,” is now the ground for the discipline of “hauntology” offered by Etkind specifically designed to study the postsocialist spaces (2013); for roots of hauntology see Derrida (2012) and Gordon (2008).

7. The Bratsk dam flooded vast territories displacing numerous villages in 1961.

8. Researchers seem to agree that small and medium-size settlements become the battleground of socialist transformation, this is why I am calling Anosovo the “city of the future,” even though it is not a city, and neither does its future look too bright at this point of time.

9. Such “ruins,” broadly understood, possess generative potential. They are often called “legacies” in (post)socialist contexts (Boele, Noordenbos, and Robbe 2019; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017). Ann Laura Stoler (2008) rejected the scholarly romance with what she called the filigree of traces electing for framing the colonial remainders as ruins and the process of ruination. The proliferation of the “ruins” trope serves to an objectifying and exploitative consumption of spectacular postsocialist ruins. This has been critiqued as “ruin porn” (Rann 2014).

10. For the histories and dramas of the dissolution of the state-owned Socialist enterprises, see Humphrey 1998 and Verdery 2003.

11. The song from the cartoon about the Crocodile Gena and Cheburashka—pre-pokemon ugly-cute Soviet monsters—had the continuation: “And [he—the wizard] will show us a movie for free” (Composer Vladimir Shainskii, lyrics Alexander Timofeevskii, 1971).

12. Anosovo is a predominantly Russian settlement, although its ethnic profile is variegated. “Russian” in Siberia could mean something different from the European part. People may or may not embrace the *Sibiriak/Sibirichka* identity. What it means to be a “Siberian” as opposed to and in connection to being Russian, Buryat, Yakut, or another ethnicity (“Siberian” is not an ethnocultural, but rather a spatial-cultural identity), is a subject of discussions. Russian researchers suggest that “Siberian” might be a “nationality” (Remnev 2011) and reveal that in the eyes of interlocutors it could be a “unity” and even a “state of the soul” [*sostoianie dushi*]” (Anisimova and Yechevskaya 2012).

13. The sentiment of a kind is familiar to rural and urban dwellers alike. The novel *Mister Johnson* by Joyce Cary includes the tension between two points of view: the construction of the road is good versus roads are “the ruin of Africa, bringing swindlers, thieves and whores, disease, vice and corruption” (1962: 48). In New York City, the real estate prices are lower the closer the property to the light rail transit station (Hess and Almeida 2007). Another study finds that “the number of bus stops available at a distance of between 100 and 400 meters from home drives house prices down by a factor that lessens with distance” (Rosiers, Thériault, Voisin, and Dubé 2007: 322).

14. On race in Russia, see Lemon 1995, 2002.

15. Other technological and infrastructural embodiments of modernity include radio, TV, cinema, automobility, and (rail)roads (Larkin 2008: 21; Williams 2004); the absence or partial presence of those are signs of modernity that is faltering, insufficient, or lacking, and contributes to the perception of place as “remote” or falling out of the chronotope of contemporaneity, not fully contemporaneous, inhabiting the past.

16. The distance and proximity do not have to correspond directly. “Remoteness” is a product not only of distance but of the insurmountability, viscosity, and resistance of the space. The roads aim to diminish remoteness but, because of the state of their materiality, perpetuate the inaccessibility of the place (Kuklina and Holland 2018). See also “symbolic distance” built by Khanty reindeer herders as an act of indigenous resistance (Dudeck 2012: 92). In addition, remoteness is not an objective but a relative category: the place is certainly not “remote” to those who inhabit it; it is part of colonial hierarchies in which there is a metropolis, or a center, and a periphery, or locations remote (from somewhere, be it a capital or infrastructural hubs).

17. This is a rendition (not verbatim) of the scene from the American comedy *Ninotchka* (director Ernst Lubitsch, 1939), popularized by Žižek (2014: 44 and 2016: 291).

18. The literature on post-Soviet nostalgia is barely surveyable. The classics are Boym (2002) and Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004). Among the last installments, Boele, Noordenbos, and Robbe (2019) seem to be summarizing the most.

19. The term “language ideologies,” as Kroskrity (2004: 496) points out, does not have a range of accepted definitions. For the purposes of current writing, I adopt the definition that belongs to Errington (2000) and that Kroskrity calls “succinct” (2004: 496). Language ideology “refers to the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language” (Errington 2001: 110). In this work, such situated usages of language may be particular to a person or shared within the community; language usages reveal the ways of belonging and relating. It is necessary to pay attention to language ideologies because affect manifests in language. Larkin suggests that there is “soft” infrastructure such as knowledge of a language, “or a particular sort of religious learning, the performance of a cultural style” (2008: 6). Thus infrastructure becomes a “totality,” in Larkin’s usage, that encapsulates “technical and cultural” systems (2008: 6). I suggest that the “matter” transmitted in the “soft” infrastructure of language might be information (on the level of representation) and affect.

20. Nancy Ries (1997, 2009) made the case of studying daily conversations in Saint Petersburg assuming that cultural patterns emerge in them. Dale Pesmen used a similar method in her 1990s ethnography uncovering the mysteries of “the Russian soul” (2000).

21. On “habitability” of postindustrial places, see Morris (2016).

22. BAM absorbed enormous injections of labor. Truly an international endeavor and framed as such during the Soviet time, in the year of its completion, 1984, the BAM provided employment for more than one hundred thousand people of over 108 ethnicities (*natsional’nosti*) (Krylov 2019). The peoples’ friendship (*druzhba narodov*) was supposed to find material embodiments through such construction projects, which expressed and generated a certain affect that participants recollect as unparalleled (Orlova 2019a). It is apparently hard to let go of such affect.

23. For the analysis of the circulation of “remittance,” see Lopez (2015). In this case, the remittance is “reverse” because the remittance, normally, would be the income of a part of the family in the cities sent to their relatives living elsewhere, in places of less economic opportunity. However, in this case, and this was more or less common in the late Soviet years and beyond, the parents send the “reverse remittance,” in the organic form (potatoes) to their children in the city. Argounova-Low (2007: 57) describes how the kinship networks aid or preclude the integration of the villagers in the city of Yakutsk, and how village food is considered “more nutritious” and also serves as a nostalgic tie to the place of origin. In such networks, the food and other benefits often circulate both ways and sometimes unevenly. City dwellers support relatives from the village by, for example, providing a place to stay to pass entrance exams at college, and the village kin is sending food, which “becomes an identity marker”

(Argounova-Low 2007, 57) and a symbol of belonging to the village, the city, insiders or “outsiders,” or both sides.

24. “*Partiia skazala: nado! Komsomol otvetil: est’!*” A popular slogan of the Soviet times, from the placard by Irina Bolshakova and Vyacheslav Smirnov (1963). The continuation reads: “To the fields! To the construction sites!”

25. Kruglova also describes a sense of sociality a driver feels with the one who follows her on the road replete with potholes. See also Argounova-Low (2012: 77–79) section “Sensory perception of roads.”

26. This synonymity is analyzed and questioned by Dalakoglou and Harvey (2012: 459), observed by Kruglova (2019). In Russia, modernity and roads are intertwined in the sense that both are prone to “the sudden appearances and disappearances” (Kruglova 2019: 461).

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