

On the “subjective reality” of Teodor Shanin’s peasant projects: Field studies, ‘long table’ method, and Peredelkino (an oral history approach)¹

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Abstract. The article reconstructs the researchers’ “subjective reality” in Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies projects. While there has been extensive research on methodological, epistemological and empirical dimensions of these projects, little attention has been paid to personal experiences, emotions and transformations of the researchers. This study aims at filling this gap by reconstructing their subjective perceptions through oral histories, memories and published sources and also at ‘localizing’ such a subjective reality by examining its connection with the Peredelkino House of Creativity, where Shanin’s research team used to meet periodically. The article consists of the following parts: first, it outlines the broader conditions of Shanin’s peasant studies expeditions; then it focuses on “subjective reality of the first encounters” with Shanin and his ideas; the fieldwork is examined through the researchers’ observation of rural communities, their efforts to gain peasants’ trust and methodological challenges they faced; further, the study considers the long table discussions at Peredelkino, emphasizing their dual function as spaces for methodological and personal support; finally, the author explains institutionalization of the projects’ subjective reality through their lasting impact on research and educational initiatives of its participants. The findings show that the scholars’ subjective reality was deeply intertwined with the broader intellectual and social-political transformations of the 1990s, which resulted in the specific research culture of Shanin’s peasant studies projects — a combination of reflections on ethnographic experiences, analytical and methodological frameworks with personal experiences, friendship, and intellectual partnership.

Key words: Teodor Shanin, peasant studies, subjective reality, oral history, long table method, Peredelkino, Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences

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Interdisciplinary studies of the peasantry and rural life, initiated in the late 1980s by Teodor Shanin — a historian and sociologist of peasantry, professor at the University of Manchester and founder of the Russian-British university, Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences — have undergone a detailed scientific (self-)

1. The author expresses gratitude to the Peredelkino House of Creativity in which a significant part of the article was written.

analysis. First, their philosophical and epistemological foundations, conceptual and analytical frameworks have been examined (Shanin, 1998, 2002). Second, their topics, concepts and findings have been documented (Fadeeva, 1997; Fadeeva, Nikulin, 2002) together with the stages, chronology and content of the collected data (Yastrebinskaya, 2002). Third, the principles of the so-called “long tables” as a methodological feature of these projects have been clarified and adapted to the contemporary conditions (Shteinberg, 2021). However, one perspective of Shanin’s peasant projects has remained insufficiently explored.

The scholars dealt with “voices and perspectives from below”, describing the village through the peasant “eyes and voices”; however, their voices and perspectives often remain unheard and unseen, which certainly does not mean that they were silent. On the contrary, they have spoken about themselves in articles and monographs, but as rational scholars, describing themselves in a rather formal academic way. For instance, one text identifies the qualities of project participants as primarily significant in the research perspective: interdisciplinarity, collectivism, internationalism, good (self-)learning abilities, and reflexivity (Fadeeva, Nikulin, 2002: 111). What did the peasant projects’ scholars feel and experience as ordinary people? How did their personal and professional self-perception evolve during the research and after returning from the field? What acquaintances, discussions and moments of work and rest determined their most vivid memories? What impressions, emotions and feelings accompanied their collective discussions at ‘long tables’? How do they assess their research experience today? The article aims at reconstructing the “subjective reality” of the participants of Shanin’s peasant studies projects through their oral histories and memories.

Some preliminary remarks on the subjective reality in oral history

The term “subjective reality” refers to an ontology *sui generis* constituted in communication, fluid and dynamic. The oral historian does not reconstruct “objective past” out of “objective” social-historical process, acting as a “loudspeaker” or “mirror” for historical facts. Rather, he functions as a mediator of individual testimonies, who uncovers subjective reality and translates it into research factuality.

In the article that became program for the oral history approach, Louise Passerini emphasizes that subjective reality is “sufficiently elastic to include both the aspects of spontaneous subjective being contained and represented by attitudes, behavior and language, as well as other forms of awareness, such as the sense of identity, consciousness of oneself, and more considered forms of intellectual activity” (Passerini, 1998: 54). Subjective reality is expressed through

informants' conveyable judgments and self-assessments, emotions and impressions, sensations and perceptions, most vivid memories, (self-)descriptions, and opinions which will be further considered in Shanin's peasant research.

Another goal of the article is to "localize" subjective reality through its connection to a specific space — the Peredelkino House of Creativity in the Moscow Region, where Shanin's scholars periodically came for collective meetings. Certainly, they did not meet only in Peredelkino only, there were also Berezki and Dubki resorts. However, Peredelkino is most frequently recalled as a place for collective intellectual work and shared daily life. How were discussions and daily routines organized at Peredelkino? What role did such meetings play in the projects? How were these meetings experienced and reflected on the personal level? In other words, what was the subjective reality of Shanin's peasant studies projects at the meetings in Peredelkino?

After a brief methodological review, I will trace the emergence and dynamics of the scholars' subjective reality through a sequential description of the projects' stages: from the launch to the encounter with Teodor Shanin and his ideas, through field expeditions and analytical work during "long tables" and finally to the institutionalization of the research results. I will focus on certain elements of the peasant studies' epistemological (conceptual) framework — methodology of double reflexivity, hoping to proof its research potential for contemporary oral history.

First, I prioritize the subjectivity of the object, referring to "how it defines and explains it's actions and the choices made" (Shanin, 1998: 85). Therefore, I will focus less on the content and results of Shanin's expeditions and "long tables" and more on the meaning and significance of these studies and meetings for their participants. Second, I conduct an analysis without a pre-established system of hypotheses and explanations, in accordance with the "grounded theory" approach, which Shanin's scholars "accepted as a self-evident methodological stance" (Ibid.: 81), based on the collected data. Third, I aim at focusing on three elements of double reflexivity proposed by Shanin: subjectivity of the object, realities in which it exists, and interpretative actions of the researcher. Accordingly, I will consider subjective aspects of the peasant studies projects in broader context — intellectual, social-economic and other. Fourth, the scholars successfully combined oral sources (interviews) with pre-existing resources of local and regional archives in the studied areas. Similarly, in addition to interviews I conducted, I will rely on the already published materials which are mostly communicative in nature (recollections, interviews, collective discussions, roundtables, video recordings, and documentaries). Despite their predetermined and finalized form, they remain highly relevant to the oral history approach.

In this section, I will briefly outline circumstances that made Shanin’s peasant expeditions feasible, emphasizing social and intellectual conditions of the projects originated. *First*, in the Soviet Union at that time, rural research was the domain of a few, albeit notable, groups. The revival of rural studies was ensured by the Novosibirsk school of economic sociology led by Tatyana Zaslavskaya and Rozalina Ryvkina (Zaslavskaya, Ryvkina, 1980; Zaslavskaya, Kupriyanova, 1987). In addition, rural journalism played a significant role, for example, the TV program *Selsky Chas* (Rural Hour) by writer and journalist Yuri Chernichenko was dedicated to the peasant question². In 1986, the film *Arkhangelsky Muzhik* (The Arkhangelsk Man), directed by Anatoly Strelyany, presented the story of Nikolai Sivkov, the first Soviet farmer³. Finally, the village prose (Vasily Belov, Valentin Rasputin, Viktor Astafyev, and others) remains an essential source of knowledge about rural life⁴.

However, the *zemstvo* statistical tradition had been interrupted, and comprehensive surveys of rural life and agriculture had not been conducted for a long time. This was paradoxical, given that in the early 20th century Russian agrarian scholars — Alexander Chayanov, Alexander Chelintsev, Alexander Rybnikov and other members of the organization-production school — had been at the forefront of peasant studies as a field of empirical and theoretical research (Brisch, 2014; Nikulin, 2017). This development was halted in the early 1930s, when many economists, historians and sociologists associated with this school were repressed. As Shanin later noted, since the mid-1960s, while writing his doctoral thesis on the political consciousness of the Russian peasantry, he often thought “*how much I would like to resume this work, to return to those roots of peasant studies that had flourished so brilliantly in Russia*”⁵. The rehabilitation of agrarian scholars in the late 1980s and the newly granted access to archived allowed a return to these forgotten foundations.

Second, the peasant way of life was in decline. Labor productivity in collective farms remained low, and young people were leaving villages. Yet, there were those who remembered pre-collectivization traditions, fests, household practices, crafts, and family history.

Third, conditions necessary for serious peasant studies were

2. See, e.g.: URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKEHT1X96S>.

3. Strelyany A. (1986) The Arkhangelsk Man. URL: <https://youtu.be/naW8q7o5Kos?si=EK3Dh-p6V7dYj5Fv>.

4. According to some memories, Shanin criticized the Soviet village writers for their “idealization” of the Russian peasantry, although acknowledged that they described rural life and the peasant mindset with considerable accuracy (Doktorov, Nikulin, 2020: 167).

5. Vinogradsky V. (2013) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project: “Two looks back”. URL: https://youtu.be/W6AjtFaHZZ4?si=Th_IJm3qMGk72Mmn.

Presnyakov I.
On the “subjective reality” of Teodor Shanin’s peasant projects: Field studies, ‘long table’ method, and Peredelkino (an oral history approach)

developing. The Soviet Union had opened to the West in research and academic exchange in addition to the intensified research cooperation within the country. For example, in 1986, the first scientific-practical conference *Worldview and Agricultural Practice* was held in Poltava and led to the publication in 1988 of the monograph *Man and Land: Worldview, Economy, and Social Policy* (Nikolsky, 1988). Shanin followed the Poltava discussions, considering them an example of “a serious critical analysis of problems of Soviet agriculture and social structure of the village” (Shanin, 1989: 7). In 1989, the second All-Union scientific-practical conference of economists, historians, philosophers, agrarian scholars and writers, *Agricultural Production and Environmental Management* was held. In June 1990, Shanin together with the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNIL), Institutes of History and of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences organized the first international conference of agrarian scholars, which led to the establishment of the International Association of Agrarian Scholars with the academician Alexander Nikonov elected as its president, Teodor Shanin and Sergei Nikolsky as vice presidents⁶.

This renaissance of peasant studies in the USSR reflected not just a scientific interdisciplinary approach but also a diversity of perspectives, including non-academic ones. It is therefore unsurprising that Shanin’s team later consisted not only of agrarian scholars, historians, economists, sociologists and geographers but also of philosophers, philologists, architects and journalists.

“I am not your subject and will decide whom to meet myself...”

To create a team, Shanin used “social networks” — to find and attract a diverse group of specialists through recommendations, announcements, phone calls and even by chance. What was the projects’ participants’ “subjective reality of first encounters” with Shanin and his idea?

Shanin met the historian Viktor Danilov long before the projects. By the time of expeditions, Danilov stood out from the group of researchers because of his age (over 60), life and academic experience: he was a DSc, a professor, and a war veteran⁷. The story of his first meeting with Shanin deserves mention, if only for its unique circumstances. In 1977, while working on his book *Russia as a Developing Society* (Shanin, 1985), Shanin traveled to the USSR. Being already familiar with Danilov’s work, he sought to meet with the Soviet his-

6. For more details see: URL: <https://iphras.ru/page29360777.htm>.

7. The shared experience of military service played a significant role in Shanin’s relationship with Danilov. Shanin regarded Danilov not only as a recognized Russian expert on the peasantry but also as a close friend.

torian. At the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, Nikolai Bugai, the academic secretary for international affairs, suggested a list of researchers suitable for meeting with the British professor. Shanin, as he recalls, responded: “*You seem to forget, Mr. Bugai, I am not your subject and will decide whom to meet myself*”. The secretary politely agreed. “*In that case*”, Shanin said, “*I would like to start with Professor Viktor Danilov. I’ve read his works, and they interest me greatly*”. “*Unfortunately, Professor Danilov is unwell*”, Bugai replied. Shanin was disappointed, left the office, walked down the corridor until the door marked “Department of Agrarian History” and knocked. Inside, he found a man, sitting alone and typing with one finger. “*I am looking for Professor Danilov*”, Shanin said. “*I am Danilov*”, the man replied.

Shanin thought that he was unknown to vis-à-vis and began introducing himself, only to hear: “*What are you talking about! Awkward Class, isn’t it?*”⁸. It turned out that Danilov had read Shanin’s works, including *The Awkward Class. Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia, 1910–1925* (Shanin, 1972), and was aware of his other works. Danilov became a leader of the historical part of the peasant studies projects. From 1990 to 1994, historians (both recognized professors and graduate students) worked under his guidance.

The historian Viktor Kondrashin after defending his thesis in February 1992 faced significant problems (unemployed, without Moscow registration, living illegally in a dormitory, he supported his family by playing the *bayan* (chromatic accordion) in the subway and working as a loader). As Kondrashin recalls, once Danilov “*stopped, looked at me, and walked on...*” However, later Danilov offered him a position in the project “*to write a history of the Lokh village for 26\$ a month*” (Kondrashin, Nikulin, 2021: 140, 150). During his graduate studies, Kondrashin collected evidence about the 1930s famine in the Volga villages due to a temporary lack of written sources, and this experience proved invaluable for field research.

The projects’ historians visited local and regional archives, producing so-called “settlement sketches” that captured key historical periods — from the Emancipation reform of 1861, through the Revolution, *dekulakization*, collectivization and Great Patriotic War to Khrushchev’s reforms. Their sources included diaries, letters, memoirs, *zemstvo* surveys, budget records, household cards, tax rolls, and demographic censuses. Information gaps were filled with data from sociological studies conducted simultaneously. Thus, expeditions had both ethnographic and historical-sociological character (Danilov, 2002).

The Saratov philosopher and sociolinguist Valery Vinogradsky joined the team by chance. He calls himself a “veteran” as he was

8. This acquaintance is reconstructed from Shanin’s narratives in: Arkhangelsky, 2022: 146–147; Babashkin, Kuznetsov, 2016: 69–70.

the oldest fieldworker when expeditions began (about 40 years old). In the summer of 1990, while on vacation in the sunny city, Vinogradsky passed by the Institute of Socio-Economic Problems of Agro-Industrial Complex Development of the Academy of Sciences, where he worked. It was a hot day, so he decided to enter to freshen up. On the second floor, he met the institute's director, who told him about "an English professor gathering a team to live in villages for an extended period and study the history of old peasant families — their histories, rural spaces, and living environments"⁹. Without hesitation, Vinogradsky asked how to participate. By July, he attended the first meeting of future project participants at the VASKhNIL headquarters in Moscow.

The Englishman was late. When he finally arrived, he entered with a confident stride, dropped a large leather bag on the red velvet-covered table, and with a slight accent uttered three phrases that Vinogradsky vividly remembered: "Sorry late (no preposition). Ten minutes. Moscow — heavy city". Thus, the meeting began. On Shanin's face Vinogradsky observed two emotions: confidence and readiness to take risks. "These emotions were evident in his eyes and tone; they were striking. I had never seen anything like it before" (Alekseev et al., 2020: 61).

The psychologist and sociologist Ilya Shteinberg came from the city of Engels. Before meeting Shanin, he worked as an engineer-psychologist, then as the executive secretary of the public opinion research council under the local Communist Party committee and finally at the Academy of Sciences, settling into the steady scholar routine in his early thirties. His meeting with Shanin disrupted this linear trajectory: "It was a collision with another culture" leading to "astonishment and bewilderment"¹⁰. At a meeting in 1898, Shanin spoke in detail to Soviet researchers about Russia's tradition of studying peasantry, the need to re-explore Alexander Chayanov's program, the value of ethnographic observation of rural life, and the importance of research participation in rural life. Suddenly Shanin asked: "Colleagues, I don't understand. Why aren't you asking me why we are doing this?". Shteinberg and his colleagues, having acquired such an habit during years of work, shrugged and replied that the reason seemed obvious: to develop recommendations for improving agriculture and productivity for the Central Committee, relevant ministries, and key agrarian enterprises. Shanin disagreed: "Colleagues, no. We are doing this to seek the truth, to understand how everything works, how it's structured". For Shteinberg, this was "a revelation, because the purpose of research had always been to provide recommendations

9. Vinogradsky V. (2024) Interview with the author on June 27 in Google Meets.

10. Shteinberg I. (2024) Interview with the author on September 19 in Google Meets.

for ‘boosting the national economy’, while the tasks involved studying ‘social-economic problems’. But for Shanin, it was the opposite: the goal was truth, while recommendations were the task and not the primary one” (Shteinberg, 2021: 25). Many of Shteinberg’s colleagues, although agrarian scholars, declined to participate in the expedition, unwilling to spend extended periods in villages. He, inspired by Shanin’s ideas and demeanor, agreed to join the project.

Alexander Nikulin first heard about Shanin in 1989 and saw him in 1990 at the first international conference of agrarian scholars. However, they did not meet until early 1993, when the first stage of the project was coming to an end. At that time, Nikulin was a 31-year-old research fellow at the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences and heard about Shanin’s expeditions. They first met at the EPICenter, an analytical center founded by the economist and politician Grigory Yavlinsky. Nikulin made a presentation combining Alexander Chayanov’s theories with Shanin’s ideas about informal economies and structures. After the presentation, Shanin was the first to introduce himself and invited Nikulin to join the peasant studies project. “*It was great for both of us that we already had a common professional foundation*”, Nikulin recalls. “*I accepted without hesitation, and that’s how I found myself participating in “long tables” in Peredelkino*”¹¹.

Olga Fadeeva, an economist, sociologist and one of the youngest project participants (barely in her 20s), met Shanin in 1988 at the Novosibirsk Akademgorodok. Rozalina Ryvkina, a co-founder of the Novosibirsk economic-sociological school, organized the meeting, which Tatyana Zaslavskaya, another prominent figure in the Russian economic sociology and rural studies, also attended. As Fadeeva recalls, “*Shanin was already reflecting on the idea of the peasant studies projects*”¹². Fadeeva was invited to join expeditions during an off-site sociology summer school for young Soviet humanities scholars at the University of Manchester, which was organized by Shanin in 1989¹³. He told that he wanted “*to act differently compared to what we were used to*”. Fadeeva found the idea “*quite strange, unusual, and unlikely to be feasible*” (Alekseev et al., 2020: 62).

However, by October 1990 the Soviet-British project “Social Structure of the Soviet Village” had begun and resulted in three expeditions: one focused on history, spatial organization, power and budgetary relations in Soviet villages; another examined changes in the economic structure of rural life under the collapse of the Soviet Union and further reform of the Russian agrarian sector; and the third studied peasants’ informal economic practices. Three expeditions covered

Presnyakov I.
On the “subjective reality” of Teodor Shanin’s peasant projects: Field studies, ‘long table’ method, and Peredelkino (an oral history approach)

11. Nikulin A. (2024) Interview with the author on September 28 in Google Meets.

12. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

13. For more details about summer school see: Yampolskaya, Salovskaya, 1990.

a vast geographic area — from Belarus, Armenia and the Central Asian republics to the Volga region, Urals and Siberia — and a period from 1990 to 2001.

How can the subjective reality of these encounters be described? Mutual professional interests and the moderate sense of novelty were clearly secondary to the astonishment, wonder and even revelation when meeting a purposeful, confident and risk-taking British man with a new research culture. The sense of encountering something unfamiliar caused some confusion and uncertainty about the scale of tasks, making the projects look utopian and impractical. However, this was counterbalanced by the active determination, energy, inspiration and willingness of young researchers to be involved: “*People were genuinely interested; they wanted to work on a project of this kind*”¹⁴.

Here, it is worth making a brief methodological remark: when choosing the main figures for my narrative, I recognized that it would be presumptuous to aim at a comprehensive analysis of memories of all project participants. Moreover, this was never my objective. I deliberately sidestepped the milestones of “battles” over the representativeness of oral history, arguing that subjective reality cannot be quantified or evaluated statistically. Therefore, I focus on individual experiences, personal emotions and memories as inherently valuable and methodologically justified data.

“He taught us to embrace this De Docta Ignorantia...”

In groups of two or three (sometimes as family pairs), scholars were to live in and study pre-selected villages across the Soviet Union for periods from 6 to 13 months. I will not delve into details and outcomes of their fieldwork so that to focus on the researchers’ perceptions of Shanin’s methodological style and on the subjective aspects of their field experiences as reflected in their memories.

“*He had a completely different idea*”, Olga Fadeeva highlights¹⁵. In the Soviet Union, sociological studies of villages typically consisted of representative surveys of rural populations with formalized questionnaires: the collected data was coded, processed on a computer and analyzed. While admitting the value of quantitative methods, Shanin called for full participation in peasant life. How did this requirement transform the research routine? To hear and see “voices and perspectives from below”, researchers chopped wood, carried water, heated stoves, sat on benches, celebrated and mourned — living in sync with the rhythm of peasant life. The “zone of silence”, which

14. Nikulin A. (2024) Interview with the author on September 28 in Google Meets.

15. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

villages had been for decades, was to become a space for open dialogue. According to Valery Vinogradsky, this made Shanin “a principled phenomenologist”, as he emphasized “attention to things and density of events, offering a fresh perspective”¹⁶. Shanin, as Vinogradsky recalls, “taught to embrace ignorance — not as an empty void but as a science of ‘not-knowing’, *De Docta Ignorantia that dates back to Socrates*” (Aleksseev et al, 2020: 61). In practice, this meant that researchers were forbidden to conduct surveys or present any documents for the first three months. Without much deliberation, Vinogradsky used his project salary to buy a small house with a plot of land, plowed the garden, raised chickens, brought his wife and children to the village, and began working as an assistant in the local bakery, stacking freshly baked bread on shelves each day, which introduced him to the entire village. “People would come for bread and ask ‘Who’s that guy? What’s he doing here?’ — ‘Oh, he’s a historian, studies our life’ — ‘Well, ok then’”¹⁷. Following Shanin’s principle, this “domestication” provided Vinogradsky with a place in the social space of the Volga village of *Lokh*.

At first, locals mistook the researchers for journalists, inspectors or even spies. Alexander Nikulin recalls taking Shanin to the *Privolnaya stanitsa* in the Krasnodar Region: to organize this visit, he informed the chief agronomist that a “famous English professor” was coming. The reply was “got it — a spy”¹⁸. Although it was said in jest, the mistrust was palpable. However, for Shanin, peasants’ trust was a key to his projects. At a meeting in Peredelkino, he once remarked: “Peasants believe that we treat them as friends not because we convinced them, but because it’s true. And for that, they need to look at us first. In this sense, we have a unique resource”¹⁹. It is true participation in rural life that generated trust and proved that “outsiders” had peaceful intentions and sought to earn friendship.

Historians had their own way of research: while working at a municipal archive, Viktor Kondrashin lived in a dormitory on “two boiled potatoes and one cucumber a day”. Later, when he headed a district archive, he decided to live in a tent, cooking meals over a campfire. Soon he realized that was impossible. Fortunately, he met the director of the local history museum: “He let me stay in the museum, there was a stuffed bear with a club among the exhibits and a few other curiosities, with no amenities whatsoever. But I could manage” (Kondrashin, Nikulin, 2021: 150–151).

16. Vinogradsky V. (2024) Interview with the author on June 27 in Google Meets.

17. Ibid.

18. Nikulin A. (2024) Interview with the author on September 28 in Google Meets.

19. Vinogradsky V. (2014) Teodor Shanin and his team. URL: <https://youtu.be/qhYYvVtd6VY?si=RojeLuVM7r4EOPoA>.

Some field situations were risky. One winter morning, Galina Yastrebinskaya, after a long night conversation with a local, had to cross the Pinega River in northern Russia. The cold weather had just set in, forming the thinnest layer of ice on water. The local woman, as Yastrebinskaya recalls, was completely confident: “*Go straight across, and you’ll make it*”. The researcher couldn’t back out — her informant’s trust and respect were at stake. Miraculously, she ran across the river: “*My God, if the ice had cracked, no one would’ve saved me!*” (Babashkin, Kuznetsov, 2016: 72).

There was also room for comic situations. For example, having learned about Shanin coming to the village of Lokh, Ilya Shteinberg took charge of preparations. The local administration decided to greet the guest in the village canteen, at least to offer him a meal “*although we didn’t have much. It was the 1990s, there was basically nothing. We managed to cook some cabbage soup, fry some potatoes, and find some vodka*”. However, there were no glasses; they were either stolen or broken. Shteinberg had to improvise — instead of glasses, he used small mayonnaise jars of about 250 ml. “*Shanin took one of mayonnaise jars and said: ‘What strange glasses!’ I had to respond somehow, so I said, ‘Teodor, it’s a local custom!’*”²⁰.

Fieldwork as a process of self-discovery

After the first of the project, Vinogradsky admitted: “*It wasn’t my understanding of the village that changed — I changed. I mastered almost every rural task: I learned to mow, weed, slaughter chickens, dig wells, many things. I plunged into a new-old life. It’s old but for me it’s new*” (Vinogradsky, 2013b). The roles of the scholar and the rural resident intertwined: “*During the day, I have a hoe or spade in hand, helping to dig potatoes, chop wood or weed, and a tape recorder hanging around my neck to record conversations. In the evening, I process the material, because you can’t record too many conversations. Thus, you have to transcribe everything regularly*” (Ibid.).

The peasant way of life and interactions with locals influenced the course of research. For instance, focus groups could be conducted near a village shop or at a family table, and the data collected served for both scientific conclusions and common sense insights. Alexander Nikulin applied the method of household budgets to study 16 families of different professions and income: “*For a whole year, I had been visiting them at least twice a month, spending several hours to talk about their incomes, expenses and strategies. It was almost like being a family doctor*”. As trust grew, these conversations shifted towards daily life and relationships between spouses, parents and children and

20. Shteinberg I. (2024) Interview with the author on September 19 in Google Meets.

relatives. “You think you come only to collect statistical data, but in fact their phenomenology and dramas unfold before you. You become a sort of social worker or social psychologist, someone they confess family secrets, anxieties and plans to”. This inevitably affected the researchers’ worldview: “We were aware of sorrows, fears, anxieties, pains, joys, weddings, drinking bouts and funerals of this community and came to an existential understanding of how complicated life was. It makes you wiser, regardless of your career, your thesis or where you’ve presented your work”²¹.

For Nikulin, field trips also served as a basis for developing the professional identity of an agrarian scholar. Previously, he had focused primarily on historical-archival work, and his occasional regional trips usually involved conversations with archive directors and collective farm heads. “For me, it was very important because, before meeting Shanin, I felt somewhat inadequate compared to those *zemstvo* statisticians and agronomists who worked extensively with rural populations, while I was always sitting in archives and libraries”, he admits. Due to comprehensive anthropological research — first with Valery Vinogradsky in the Saratov Region and then independently in the Nizhny Novgorod Region — his personal horizons expanded: “It was incredibly beneficial. It turned out I’m not a bad field researcher”²².

Ilya Shteinberg recalls an incident that made him rethink the significance of audio records and transcripts in fieldwork. Once he interviewed a farmer whose statements angered him: “He said he’d plant forest on the land he was given and sell abroad the equipment he was provided with. I started being nervous and explained to him what the farmer was... In short, he ended up making his arguments physically”. All this time the “debates” were recorded, and, when listening the tape later, Shteinberg was shocked. He realized that for some inexplicable reason he misheard his informant: the farmer wanted to plant forest because the land was bad, and specialized seedlings could restore soil fertility. He already had equipment, so he intended to sell what he had been given to buy other necessary tools. “I listened to the tape and thought, ‘What an idiot I am!’ Later I went back to apologize”. Shteinberg attributes this “blind spot” to uncontrolled subjectivity, explaining that the only thing one can do is to be aware of it. In this regard, records are the most helpful: “Recording is the best teacher if you want to work with interviews. You have to listen and make transcription yourself. That was a lesson for me. I started transcribing everything in detail”²³.

The subjective reality of researchers kept developing. Following

21. Nikulin A. (2024) Interview with the author on September 28 in Google Meets.

22. Ibid.

23. Shteinberg I. (2024) Interview with the author on September 19 in Google Meets.

Shanin's principles, they tried to gain peasants' trust and respect as a research resource by taking risks and exploring daily life as both researchers and ordinary people with their concerns, fears and hopes. The development of communication and fieldwork skills was accompanied by the discovery of new aspects of their professional and personal identities and limits of their subjectivity. Through the study of peasant stories, daily life and family challenges, researchers also reflected on their sense of self and worldview.

"The idea of coming to Peredelkino was a powerful one"

As Alexander Nikulin recalls, at the fieldwork progressed, anxiety inevitably grew: "*You keep collecting data but what do you do with it? How do you process it? How do you understand it?*"²⁴. Valery Vinogradsky describes similar feelings: "*So many images of the past and present rural life have passed before me that I can't contain this experience anymore. I need to unload somehow*"²⁵. Researchers needed a safe space to discuss their fieldwork, take a break and address both academic and practical issues. "*Peredelkino like no other place provided this*"²⁶. By focusing on this location as an example, I will describe how the subjective reality of Shanin's scholars developed, while they spent at the House of Creativity at least three days every three to four months during and after their fieldwork.

Vinogradsky made a video record of the meeting on January 15–17, 1996²⁷. Sometimes researchers stayed at the hotel with balconies offering excellent views, sometimes they had to sleep in small, narrow rooms in the old building. In the second-floor foyer with the library, scholars discussed the latest news, chatted and laughed. However, discussions took place in the space between the library and the reading room, which locals called the "secret room" and in which researchers sat at a long table made of several smaller ones. As a rule, on the first evening, Shanin talked about current matters or gave a brief methodological lecture. For him, it was essential to study not only the peasantry but also the methods of such study: "*We need future generations to continue this work. And for that, we need methodology; our techniques are far from being fully developed*"²⁸.

24. Nikulin A. (2024) Interview with the author on September 28 in Google Meets.

25. Vinogradsky V. (2013) Teodor Shanin's peasant studies project: "Two looks back". URL: https://youtu.be/W6AjtFaHZZ4?si=Th_IJm3qMGk72Mmn.

26. Shteinberg I. (2024) Interview with the author on September 19 in Google Meets.

27. Vinogradsky V. (2014) Teodor Shanin and his team. URL: <https://youtu.be/qhYYvVtd6VY?si=RojcLuVM7r4EOPoA>.

28. Vinogradsky V. (2013) Teodor Shanin's peasant studies project: "Two looks back". URL: https://youtu.be/W6AjtFaHZZ4?si=Th_IJm3qMGk72Mmn.

The next day, after breakfast, Shanin organized discussions as a moderator. Most of the time researchers focused on filed reports and subsequent clarifications. As Nikulin recalls, Shanin taught that researchers were to “bring reality” from the field, which was reconstructed through detailed oral reports. These reports functioned as “thick descriptions” (according to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz) formed from a multitude of sometimes disordered and not always clearly expressed impressions, facts, memories and other subjective experiences but always rich in meaning and requiring interpretations (Geertz, 1973). Olga Fadeeva recalls that during the second stage of expeditions (1995–1996) much attention was paid to the problems of the studied territories, “because events were starting to develop very quickly”²⁹ (she meant the political situation in the country at that time). As video records show, the researchers discussed the rural population’s voting patterns in the 1995 State Duma elections.

In these meetings, specialists invited by Shanin participated: geographer Alexander Alekseev, economist Evgenia Serova, philosopher Sergei Nikolsky, journalist Otto Latsis, famous Soviet sociologists (Yuri Levada, Vladimir Yadov and Alexei Levinson), and others. “At that time, in the 1990s, they were disconnected from the field, especially from the kind of fieldwork we were doing. But they listened attentively, made unexpected conclusions and framed theoretical concepts we hadn’t even considered. It was an incredible school”, Shteinberg recalls³⁰. He often asked Tatyana Zaslavskaya for advice, however, instead of answers, he invariably received another batch of questions: “She would get information from me, listening attentively and taking notes. Then she’d ask me even more questions. At first, I was frustrated that I couldn’t get my questions answered. But eventually I realized that my questions were naïve, and my analysis couldn’t compare to hers. This woman had fearless thinking. Being with her was like standing next to a powerful transformer humming with energy. She helped me a lot and even edited my texts. That’s the kind of people we had around us”³¹. Shanin called such guest consultants “friends of the project” or, more formally, “the advisory institute”.

“Long table” as a methodological and psychological anchor

In the methodological perspective, “long tables” in Peredelkino helped to “synchronize” research practices and results as participants had specific backgrounds and professional trajectories, some were not scholars, and some had not been previously engaged in academic re-

29. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

30. Shteinberg I. (2024) Interview with the author on September 19 in Google Meets.

31. Ibid.

search (ethnographic work, scientific observation, interviews, collecting oral histories or analyzing household budgets), which determined different understanding of standards and approaches to research. Discussions at the long table aimed at addressing these differences, making methodologies more flexible, balancing subjectivity with analytical rationality and retaining the unique features of the studied regions under generalization.

According to Nikulin, one of the key goals was *“to identify a paradox — even if we couldn’t resolve it, we could clearly articulate the problem”*³². At Peredelkino, the researchers — still gaining experience — learned, made mistakes, argued, thus, becoming professionals. *“Practically every long table ended with Shanin saying, ‘We’ve learned something from each other, colleagues’”*³³.

The 1990s were marked by uncertainty. As Shteinberg notes, the researchers were *“facing complete uncertainty — not just about the future but about the present and even the past”* (Shteinberg, 2021: 26). Meetings at Peredelkino helped them navigate in this ambiguity based on diverse research solutions, models of thinking and understanding of reality. Shanin consistently emphasized two key principles for the long table discussion: *“no one has a monopoly on truth”* and *“there is always an alternative”* (Ibid: 27). The more unstable the external environment, the more interpretations were needed to make sense of it. This approach contributed to the new scientific ethic for Russian researchers — the one, as Shteinberg put it, they *“were not particularly accustomed to”*³⁴.

The “long tables” also addressed practical and logistical challenges. As Shanin joked, *“our main methodological problem at that time was where to find rubber boots”* (Babashkin, Kuznetsov, 2016: 71). Other challenges included providing enough tape recorders and flashlights, modems and laptops. Alexander Artamonov, responsible for the project technical equipment, recalls: *“The quality of telephone communication in villages was so poor that we couldn’t ensure regular electronic correspondence”*³⁵. However, even logistical difficulties had a silver lining: if telephone and postal services had been reliable, the researchers might not have needed regular meetings in Peredelkino.

The “long tables” also served psychological purposes. For example, Olga Fadeeva recalls struggling to get along with her American partner, Sarah, during fieldwork, and such interpersonal conflicts were common, especially in a turbulent era: *“The 1990s were incredibly*

32. Nikulin A. (2024) Interview with the author on September 28 in Google Meets.

33. Ibid.

34. Shteinberg I. (2024) Interview with the author on September 19 in Google Meets.

35. Artamonov A. (2024) Interview with the author on July 12 in Google Meets.

challenging; the country was in chaos. And here we were, strangers in villages, living among locals, interacting with them... Who were we? What did we want? It wasn’t always safe”. According to Fadeeva, the long table discussions provided an opportunity to address these tensions calmly: “Teodor always emphasized how important it was for people to rest and communicate with each other every three months”³⁶.

Partnership, support and unexpected joys

Meetings in Peredelkino were also joyful occasions, sometimes quite unexpectedly. Sociologists Oksana and Mikhail from Belarus began their expeditions as colleagues but married two years later. Shortly after, Oksana discovered she was pregnant but did not tell anyone about pregnancy and the birth of her son fearing exclusion from the project: “I was ready to present my work and cooperate with colleagues, so I returned to Peredelkino, but now I also had to find time to express milk periodically” (Babashkin et al, 2020: 187). However, it was impossible to keep such a secret in Peredelkino: colleagues quickly figured it out, and what began as a surprise turned into a celebration. “By midnight, an amazing feast was set up in our room. With fruits from sunny Armenia, it was simply luxurious! Everyone came to congratulate us. It felt as if the child had been born to all of us. A project baby! That’s exactly what Teodor told me the next morning”, Oksana recalls. In 2002, after the end of expeditions, Shanin hosted a banquet in Peredelkino and shook the hand of Oksana and Mikhail’s son, saying with a smile: “the project’s child” (Ibid.).

The concluding part of “long tables” was Shanin’s individual conversations with project participants, for instance, on Valery Vinogradsky’s video we see Shanin speaking with Olga Fadeeva. In 1991, after the birth of her son, Fadeeva could no longer fully participate in fieldwork. “Teodor showed empathy”, she recalls. “He didn’t want to lose me and appointed me as the so-called ‘head of headquarters’”³⁷. She began to compile a “chronicle of the project”, taking notes on lectures and reports, transcribing records, systematizing documents and summarizing findings: “My university years were still fresh in my memory, and I hadn’t lost the habit of notetaking. Although we

36. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

37. Shanin, as both a witness and a participant of several military conflicts, including Israel’s War of Independence (1947–1949), often used military metaphors. For instance, if Olga Fadeeva was the “head of headquarters”, then young Soviet sociologists who under Shanin’s guidance went to study at British universities were called “Russian landing force”. Similarly, the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (“Shaninka”) which he founded later was initially a “training ground” for integrating Russian and British methods of university education and teaching.

already had tape recorders, I wrote everything by hand and later transcribed it myself”³⁸.

Thus, the “long tables” addressed multifaceted tasks ranging from methodological peer review to mutual support. In this subjective reality, professional and personal realms intertwined. However, this did not result in collective escapism — on the contrary, discussions in Peredelkino contributed to social connections, epistemological models and self-perceptions that allowed researchers to perform deliberate and well-thought-out research actions in the field. In addition, the subjective reality formed within the Peredelkino locality enabled scholars to navigate in the uncertain and unstable reality of the 1990s. Shanin, a trained social worker by first education, compared “long tables” with supervision in social work: *“Intellectual support is needed, continuous exchange of opinions is needed, emotional support is needed... The exchange between the supervisor and the social worker is an essential element in addressing a range of issues, including psychological aspects of social work”* (Shteinberg, 2021: 282–283). In Soviet and Russian villages of the 1990s, researchers encountered many things that could shock them, thus, accumulated both observations and stress. In Peredelkino, researchers were receiving the necessary support. Informal activities were an integral part of such meetings: excursions in the writers’ village, birthday parties and poetry readings. Meetings at the House of Creativity created the right atmosphere: *“The idea of coming to Peredelkino was the right one... It was very important; I understand that now”*³⁹.

The peasant question

In Peredelkino, scholars frequently interacted with well-known residents and guests of the writers’ village — poets and translators David Samoilov and Semyon Lipkin, writer and literary critic Evgenia Taratuta, actor Igor Kostolevsky. However, one of the most memorable companions was Vladimir Voroshilov, the creator and host of the Russian TV intellectual game show “What? Where? When?”. Once Valery Vinogradsky was recording a conversation with the shepherd Leonid Kazankin. They discussed farming, history, weather and raising children. *“How did my father teach me?”*, Leonid summed up. *“Always eat bread with honey, always be polite to people, but never greet anyone first”*. That evening Vinogradsky realized he had no idea what the shepherd’s phrase meant. The next morning, he asked Kazankin to explain it. The shepherd, taking on a serious look, replied: *“Not without half a liter of vodka”*. Vinogradsky reluctantly compiled, and

38. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

39. Ibid.

true to his word, the shepherd provided an explanation⁴⁰. Two years later, the scholars met again in Peredelkino. “*Voroshilov, after learning that I was a rural sociologist, asked me, ‘Do you have any village tales that could be useful for our game? We take everything from encyclopedias, but your tales would come from real life’*”, Vinogradsky recalls⁴¹. Vinogradsky remembered Leonid’s phrase, which left Voroshilov fascinated. Soon, there was a question on his show for experts: “What does the peasant phrase ‘Always be polite to people, but never greet anyone first’ mean?” 15 million rubles — a good sum in the mid-1990s — were at stake. The team led by Andrei Kozlov answered that the phrase might mean that a person should become so respected that others greet them first, not the other way around, but they lost⁴². The phrase reflected the core values of peasant morality. Honey symbolized satisfaction from hard work: for those who worked on land, even a simple crust of bread could taste sweet as honey. Similarly, the practice of “not greeting anyone first” meant a deep-rooted social rule: in the village, everyone knows one another and greetings are customary; however, if a person is busy with work, it is the responsibility of the other to greet him first. This was the peasant ethic: those who worked hard were respected.

With the prize money, Vinogradsky bought a Sony video camera and began recording a sociological video diary, including meetings in Peredelkino. The shepherd Leonid was not left without a reward: on a frosty January day, Vinogradsky brought him three boxes of vodka on a sleigh. “*The whole village celebrated: ‘Georgich, we’ll tell you so many more of these stories! You just bring them there and then do the same thing again!’*”⁴³.

Meetings in Peredelkino could not ignore issues of the Russian culture and literature. The philosopher and historian Sergey Nikolsky, who specialized in issues of the Russian peasant self-awareness and worldview, sought to add the artistic dimension to discussions. “*It was just at that time*”, Nikolsky recalls, “*that works of Platonov, Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov were published again. Those people felt the pulse of public consciousness. Without understanding that consciousness and the artistic material, meaningful conversations*

40. Vinogradsky V. (2014) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project. Days and works: Documentaries. URL: <https://youtu.be/dapOrzvxDFQ?si=QxmOWIMRhYFnZiUn>.

41. Ibid.

42. What? Where? When? (2014) What? Where? When? Winter Series 1994, 3rd Game from December 10, 1994. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOIYSPNHLYo>

43. Vinogradsky V. (2014) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project. Days and works: Documentaries. URL: <https://youtu.be/dapOrzvxDFQ?si=QxmOWIMRhYFnZiUn>.

*with peasants would have been impossible*⁴⁴. The researchers also paid considerable attention to the works of the *derevenshchiki* (Soviet village prose) — Vasily Belov, Valentin Rasputin, Viktor Astafyev, and others. Artistic interpretations were considered a methodological necessity for the study of peasant worldview: “So, researchers were to carry out fieldwork in the Northwest, in the Vologda Region... I asked them, ‘Have you read Fyodor Abramov? Have you watched Konchalovsky?’ Awareness of artistic consciousness makes the researcher more sensitive, attentive, prepared and perceptive”⁴⁵. Thus, meetings in Peredelkino were scientific, educational and research at the same time — the first of their kind in the post-Soviet history of the Peredelkino House of Creativity, preceding the revival of the residency tradition in 2021. Interaction with writers and translators influenced the researchers’ perspectives, while artistic creativity became part of their analytical framework.

Peasant Studies and the long table method after field expeditions and Peredelkino

What happened to the subjective reality of Shanin’s peasant studies projects after they ended? Was it institutionalized in professional trajectories of the expedition participants⁴⁶. The combination of research and social-cultural practices at the meetings of scholars, including in Peredelkino, has become known as the “long table method”. The term was coined by the journalist Otto Latsis, a friend and consultant of expeditions, in his 1993 article “Knights of the long table” (Latsis, 1993). Ilya Shteinberg wrote a book on this method (Shteinberg, 2021). While it would be an exaggeration to claim that Peredelkino was the only birthplace of the long table method, it is reasonable to say that many its procedures and practices were developed, refined, and polished in the House of Creativity — in its “secret room”, hotel rooms, dining hall and along forest paths. The local subjective reality transformed into an intellectual product.

The ambition and scope of the projects further fueled the research-

44. Nikolsky S. (2024) Interview with the author on September 14 in Google Meets.

45. Ibid.

46. Through the methodology of reflexive peasant studies, Shanin tried to combine the Russian *zemstvo* tradition, achievements of Soviet historians and sociologists and Western methods of rural sociology and anthropology, and this synthesis resulted in a variety of fieldwork outcomes, a detailed description of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, some topics and narratives crucial for understanding Shanin’s approach are not analyzed in detail, for instance, gender and family aspects of rural women’s lives (See, e.g.: Vinogradsky, Vinogradskaya, Nikulin, Fadeeva, 2002a, 2002b).

ers’ aspirations. Expeditions and discussions were an excellent training ground, but many participants were eager to create independent scientific organizations or launch even larger-scale projects. However, the circumstances were far from favorable. After the death of Alexander Nikonov, president of the VASKhNIL, in 1995, the plans to establish the Chayanov Institute to revive the traditions of Russian agrarian scholars did not come true. Moreover, for political reasons, the idea of a national monitoring of agricultural reforms based on Shanin’s team methodology was abandoned. Ilya Shteinberg recalls feeling strongly frustrated at the time, like “*what astronauts feel after preparing for a mission but never being allowed to launch*” (Bashkin et al, 2020: 192).

Nevertheless, the ideas of collective meetings continued to affect the subsequent work of the researchers. For instance, Valery Vinogradsky still works with materials collected during expeditions to reconstruct peasant discourses, peasant family and life strategies, everyday informal practices (Vinogradsky, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). His hobby of videography and scriptwriting, supported by the Saratov television, led to the production of several documentaries about Shanin’s expeditions⁴⁷. As Vinogradsky remarked, “*Teodor and I became close friends very quickly. I helped him a lot, and I worked a lot myself. Those were the happiest years of my life. Truly the happiest*”⁴⁸.

Olga Fadeeva focused on the analysis of about 150 rural household budgets from various regions of Russia. This continuation of the *zemstvo* budget studies allowed to reconstruct the real economic practices of rural families, emphasizing the role of informal economies in household budgets (Fadeeva, 2002). In 1998, Fadeeva returned to her research department in Novosibirsk to continue the traditions of Tatiana Zaslavskaya and Rozalina Ryvkina, further developing the concept of regional, multi-structured rural Russia (Fadeeva, 2015; Fadeeva et al, 2021). She switched from standardized surveys to qualitative, in-depth interviews: “*Today, I use mainly qualitative methods — interviews — to establish rapport. My work with Teodor taught me to quickly understand whether someone is ready to talk to you, how much time they are ready to spend, or if they do not want to talk at all. You need to find a way to quickly start a conversation,*

47. Vinogradsky V. (2013) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project: “Rural Atlantises”. URL: https://youtu.be/VY4NV3dEuKo?si=UwybjqFRUog8l_Yh; Vinogradsky V. (2013) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project: “Two looks back”. URL: https://youtu.be/W6AjtFaHZZ4?si=Th_IJm3qMGk72Mmn; Vinogradsky V. (2014) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project. Days and works: Documentaries. URL: <https://youtu.be/dapOrzvxDFQ?si=QxmOWIMRhYFnZiUn>; Vinogradsky V. (2014) Teodor Shanin’s peasant studies project. “It was Monday of the Holy Spirit”. URL: <https://youtu.be/f6XXakSkVMw?si=luosqv6XZhAroCOj>.

48. Vinogradsky V. (2024) Interview with the author on June 27 in Google Meets.

*figure out what to talk about, and interpret what people say. And — above all — not to fear starting a conversation*⁴⁹.

Alexander Nikulin continued systematic studies of the peasantry and rural life in the economic perspective. Shortly after the projects, he received a postdoctoral fellowship at the Yale University and later headed the Center for Agrarian Studies at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA). Since 2016, he is the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Russian Peasant Studies*; he published numerous articles and books, focusing primarily on contradictions and paradoxes in the interaction between large- and small-scale agricultural production, especially collective farms (*kolkhozes*) and private household plots, and also on the model of transformation of the Soviet/post-Soviet *kolkhoz* into a “large-scale farm” (*krupkhoz*) (Nikulin, 2002, 2011). As one of his most significant works he considers the one based on Shanin’s expeditions and long table discussions (Nikulin, 2003).

In 1999, the experience of reflexive peasant studies and qualitative methodology was summarized in the book by Ilya Shteinberg and another project participant Evgeny Kovalev (Kovalev, Shteinberg, 1999), which was later developed into a university course. However, as Shteinberg recalls, “*The results of teaching left me disappointed. It felt like teaching someone to swim without knowing the outcome. When they started swimming independently, out of ten students who climbed back onto the shore, only one or two managed to show something resembling what I had taught them*” (Shteinberg, 2021: 13). Training needs to go beyond textbooks and focus on practical experience. Since the mid-2000s, Shteinberg has taught courses in universities, research companies and commercial organizations, which allowed him to refine and adapt the “long table method” to the new conditions of social life. Today elements of reflexive peasant studies, Shanin’s qualitative methodology and ethnographic style are used by many Russian scholars⁵⁰.

Peasant Studies and a new institution

Through expeditions and discussions, Shanin was “testing the waters” to see whether large-scale projects — both research and educational — could be successfully implemented in Russia. Moreover, Shanin used the long table discussions to establish relationships with those researchers who, during or after the projects, would study or work at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, the Russian-British university he founded. Shanin had already discussed the idea of establishing a new university by the middle of the peasant studies projects. “*I believe he got an idea of the Moscow School when he began the project in Russia, when*

49. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

50. See, e.g.: Voronkov, Chikadze, 2009.

he arrived and realized that, on the one hand, everything was collapsing rapidly because old institutions were dying out, and, on the other hand, something new was being created”, Olga Fadeeva recalls⁵¹.

Shanin considered the establishment of such a university based on the British educational model in Moscow as a way to ensure the internationally competitive standards of the training of young Russian researchers. According to Valery Vinogradsky: “*Shanin said that methodology required a scientific and educational institution. He dreamed of establishing a British-style university in Moscow to train political scientists, social workers and sociologists. This was a dream he spoke about often, especially during long table meetings, saying that methodology needed a solid foundation*”⁵². Moreover, an institutional base allowed Shanin to reunite his group, bringing people together under one roof and institutionalizing the “peasant studies team”. As Vinogradsky notes, “*Shanin realized that people were drawn to him, that they could work, and that they needed to be educated. At the end of the project, after we had written so much and collected a huge amount of material, he said, ‘I want all of you who participated in the projects to study at the Moscow School for free — with scholarships and housing’. This is how he created an educational infrastructure for us. Both my wife, who had joined the project at a certain stage, and I graduated from the Moscow School*”⁵³. Vinogradsky, a DSC then, became a student of the new university and wrote his Master’s thesis on the basis of his interviews during the peasant studies expeditions.

Before the Moscow School was established, in 1993 Shanin together with Tatiana Zaslavskaya and Viktor Danilov had founded the interdisciplinary academic center for social sciences Intercenter. The Moscow School opened in 1995 on the basis of the Intercenter. One of its divisions was the Center for Peasant Studies and Agrarian Reforms headed by Victor Danilov⁵⁴. He managed to organize a group of historians of rural Russia from various regions. Under the editorial leadership of Danilov and Shanin, the *Peasant Studies* yearbook had been published since 1996, and eleven “settlement” essays written by the historians during Shanin’s expeditions were included in these yearbooks⁵⁵. Danilov and Shanin organized the seminar “Contemporary Concepts of Agrarian Development”, the materials of which were later published as a book (Babashkin, 2015). The seminar supported the concept of a Russian-British university and aimed at connecting “political cultures” and combining Western and Russian approaches

51. Fadeeva O. (2024) Interview with the author on June 5 in Google Meets.

52. Vinogradsky V. (2024) Interview with the author on June 27 in Google Meets.

53. Ibid.

54. For more details, see: Danilov, Myakinkov, Nikulin, 2002.

55. See, e.g.: Kondrashin, 1997.

to peasant studies⁵⁶. Western graduate students, who participated in the seminar, later developed its ideas and methodologies of Shanin's projects in their theses, articles and books⁵⁷.

Viktor Kondrashin, who became a researcher at Danilov's center, admits that he initially worked in Shanin's and Danilov's projects and as a loader at the Luzhniki Stadium. However, under Danilov's mentorship, he focused on the seminar: "*It was incredibly nerve-racking and serious academic training for me and my peers — S. Dominkov, I. Slepnev, V. Babashkin, A. Nikulin... It was essential for us not to give up*" (Babashkin, Kuznetsov, 2016: 77). These efforts bore fruits: Kondrashin later defended his DSc thesis and headed the Center for Economic History at the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Danilov worked as a professor at the Shaninka until his death in 2004⁵⁸.

In 2006, Ilya Shteinberg, a graduate of the Moscow School, was invited by Shanin to integrate the "long table method" into the university's curriculum as a special practicum on qualitative sociological methods. In 1997, Alexander Nikulin also graduated from Shaninka. During the 1990s, he worked at the Intercenter and became its executive director in 2003. Later, in 2019, he established the Chayanov Research Center at the Moscow School to study and promote the scientific legacy of Alexander Chayanov.

Thus, the subjective reality of Shanin's peasant studies projects, which at a certain stage was localized at the Peredelkino House of

56. According to Vladimir Babashkin, a colleague of Danilov, the seminar was established after he had made a Russian summary of the anthropologist James Scott's book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976, Yale University Press). Shanin was satisfied with the summary, and Danilov proposed to organize a special session of the Agrarian History Department to discuss the text. Shanin supported the idea and "suggested to make at least 30 copies on a mimeograph and distribute them not only among agrarian historians but also among other representatives of Russian (former Soviet) social sciences. In addition, he proposed to invite two stenographers to transcribe the discussion" (Babashkin et al, 2020: 184).

57. See, e.g.: Allina-Pisano, 2005; Linder, 2007; Visser, 2009; Vorbugg, 2019.

58. Since the late 1960s, Viktor Danilov faced significant political pressure due to his book on the history of Stalinist collectivization. Once the head of a group of historians at the Academy of Sciences, Danilov was demoted to the position of senior researcher. The ideological control during this period was so severe that when a colleague brought him news about a favorable review of his book in the *American Historical Review*, Danilov said: "Keep it to yourself. I have a defense soon. God forbid they find out about this positive review" (Babashkin, Kuznetsov, 2016: 74). Danilov's collaboration with Shanin (Shanin, Danilov, Gordon, 1992), his role as a consultant in the peasant studies expeditions, their joint project *The Peasant Revolution, 1902–1922* (Danilov, Shanin, 2002, 2003) and other subsequent studies marked Danilov's return to the large-scale historical research of the peasantry. Moreover, this work was crucial for Danilov not only academically but also financially, helping him to survive in the challenging 1990s (Doktorov, Nikulin, 2020: 157).

Creativity, had developed gradually — from first meetings of Soviet scholars with Teodor Shanin to a collection of emotions and impressions inspired by the British professor and his ideas how to study the Russian peasantry. Wonder and a sense of novelty were combined with confusion and the perceived utopian nature of the planned expeditions; however, there also was inspiration and readiness to act.

During fieldwork, the key goals of researchers were to gain peasant trust, which would guarantee a meaningful dialogue and a full integration into rural life, a discovery of new facets of researchers’ personalities and boundaries of their subjectivities. Due to being localized in Peredelkino, the researchers’ subjective reality developed in two ways: on the one hand, their meetings aimed at methodological synchronization and collective analysis of fieldwork results; on the other hand, such meetings contributed to professional partnership and mutual personal support. When at the long table, researchers reflected on their ethnographic experiences, developed analytical and methodological skills, had a rest, made friends and supported each other in the challenging 1990s.

Finally, after the end of the projects, this subjective reality was institutionalized — in methodologies, books, academic courses, research and other organizations, including the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. Today, there is still the core of “Shanin’s team” — a group of project participants and friends united by research and personal experience. The peasant studies expeditions — their content and outcomes, both objective and subjective — became for many participants the framework for subsequent ideas, studies and achievements. Moreover, at the turn of the century, Peredelkino unexpectedly turned into a significant locus of intellectual life and of the history of social sciences in post-Soviet Russia. For Peredelkino traditionally associated with literature and arts, this represents a new dimension of activities rooted in social sciences, field studies, long table discussions and peasant studies.

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Presnyakov I.
On the “subjective reality” of Teodor Shanin’s peasant projects: Field studies, ‘long table’ method, and Peredelkino (an oral history approach)

О «субъективной реальности» крестьяноведческих проектов Теодора Шанина: экспедиции, длинные столы и Переделкино (устно-исторический подход)

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию «субъективной реальности» участников крестьяноведческих проектов Теодора Шанина. Несмотря на значительное внимание к методологическим, эпистемологическим и эмпирическим аспектам ис-

следований, личный опыт, эмоции и трансформации исследователей остаются недостаточно изучены. Статья восполняет этот пробел, реконструируя субъективные восприятия, впечатления и воспоминания участников проектов на основе устных историй и уже опубликованных источников. Еще одна задача статьи — локализовать субъективную реальность посредством ее связи с Домом творчества «Переделкино», где регулярно собиралась исследовательская команда Шанина. Структурно статья состоит из нескольких частей. Вначале автор кратко описывает констелляцию обстоятельств, позволивших осуществить крестьяноведческие экспедиции. Далее анализируется «субъективная реальность знакомства» участников проектов с Шаниным и его замыслом. Полевой этап проектов рассмотрен через призму погружения исследователей в сельскую среду, их попытки заручиться доверие крестьян и те методологические вызовы, с которыми они столкнулись. Затем автор изучает структуру и функции дискуссий за «длинным столом» в Переделкине и обосновывает их двойную функцию: методологической синхронизации и взаимной психологической поддержки. В завершение показана институционализация субъективной реальности проектов и их влияние на последующие академические и образовательные инициативы участников команды Шанина. По мнению автора, эта субъективная реальность была связана с интеллектуальными и социально-политическими трансформациями 1990-х годов, благодаря чему и сформировалась особая исследовательская культура крестьяноведческих проектов Шанина, в которой осмысление этнографического опыта и методологических подходов сочеталось с личными переживаниями, дружбой и интеллектуальным партнерством.

Ключевые слова: Теодор Шанин, крестьяноведение, субъективная реальность, устная история, метод «длинного стола», Переделкино, Московская высшая школа социальных и экономических наук