Preface

The UCL Press FRINGE series presents work related to the themes of the UCL FRINGE Centre for the Study of Social and Cultural Complexity.

The FRINGE series is a platform for cross-disciplinary analysis and the development of ‘area studies without borders’. ‘FRINGE’ is an acronym standing for Fluidity, Resistance, Invisibility, Neutrality, Grey zones, and Elusiveness – categories fundamental to the themes that the Centres support. The oxymoron in the notion of a ‘FRINGE CENTRE’ expresses our interest in (1) the tensions between ‘area studies’ and more traditional academic disciplines; and (2) social, political, and cultural trajectories from ‘centres to fringes’ and inversely from ‘fringes to centres’.

The series pursues an innovative understanding of the significance of fringes: rather than taking ‘fringe areas’ to designate the world’s peripheries or non-mainstream subject matters (as in ‘fringe politics’ or ‘fringe theatre’), we are committed to exploring the patterns of social and cultural complexity characteristic of fringes and emerging from the areas we research. We aim to develop forms of analysis of those elements of complexity that are resistant to articulation, visualisation, or measurement.

The present volume addresses the challenge of how one might think through coherent alternatives to the entrenched conceptual categories of ‘capitalism’ and ‘socialism’, around which discussion of politics and society has centred for at least a century. This task remains stubbornly difficult, even while those categories become ever less suited to describe novel and unsettling political developments across the globe. Starting from analysis of the recent history and current dynamics of ‘post-socialist’ Russia and
Central and Eastern Europe, the volume confronts the global challenge we face in articulating alternatives to capitalism, socialism and threatening populist regimes.

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