Introduction

Transnationalizing Russian Studies

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Framing Russian Studies

What does it mean to embark on a degree in Russian?[1] At one level, the answer is obvious: Russianists should aspire to proficiency in the Russian language as well as a deep understanding of Russian culture and society. On further inspection, though, this answer throws up a whole new set of questions. The term 'Russian' is not as self-explanatory as it may first seem. The Russian Federation – like the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire before it – is a multi-ethnic country with over 100 minority languages and cultures, dozens of which have official status in specific republics within Russia. Russian communities and cultural producers are to be found across the world, in locales as diverse as Riga, Tel Aviv, and Brighton Beach. That which we call Russian culture is co-produced and reproduced, consumed and reinvented across the globe, in different languages of the world and by agents with or without connections to Russia itself.

[1] As befits a volume on the transnational, we recognize that there is some significant variation of academic cultures and structures across different countries, including those that would form part of the Anglophone world. While Russianists in, say, the UK, the USA, and Australia will largely acquire the same set of knowledge and skills on a degree, they will not necessarily do so within the same kind of institutional framework. We cannot in the discussion that follows do justice to all the different institutional configurations in our field. Our analysis often starts from the British context, as all three editors, as well as the press, are UK-based. However, we try to acknowledge the differences with other contexts where appropriate, particularly the USA, which is the largest centre for Russian studies outside Russia.

Russians themselves have two different words for 'Russian' – *russkii* and *rossiiskii*. *Russkii* is the term used to refer to the Russian language [russkii iazyk].[2] It refers also to the East Slavic ethnocultural group associated with that language. It is similarly the term used to designate literature in that language [russkaia literatura]. *Rossiiskii*, by contrast, means, roughly, 'pertaining to the Russian Federation'. It is the word found in the names of federal institutions and documents; citizens talk of carrying a *rossiiskii*, not a *russkii* passport. The associated term *rossiiane*, used to refer to citizens of the Russian Federation, is a more inclusive, civic designation that encompasses the full diversity of ethnic groups within the world's largest country, all of whom have their own languages, from the Chechens in the Caucasus to the Buryats in southern Siberia and the Yakuts in the far north, to name but a few.[3] Also worthy of mention is a third term, *russkoiazychnyi*, 'Russophone'. This label unites speakers of the Russian language, irrespective of citizenship and nationality, whether they reside in the former Soviet republics (many of which – such as Kazakhstan or Latvia – maintain substantial Russian-speaking communities) or further afield, in all the corners of the globe that the Russian (or indeed Russian-speaking) diaspora has reached. Finally, much of the culture that was produced in the Russian language during the Soviet era (1917–91) tends to be labelled 'Soviet' rather than 'Russian'. This is especially true for certain domains of cultural production, such as, for example, cinema.

Clearly, therefore, students of Russian cannot afford a static and unitary conception of Russia as a discrete nation with a singular language, culture, and history. As we shall argue in this introduction, it is vital for anyone who identifies with Russian studies, whether as scholar or student, to engage in a systematic and critical reflection of the various ways in which 'Russia' and 'Russian culture' have been historically framed and defined. What we see as particularly important here is the avoidance of potential methodological

[2] The first published Russian grammar, produced by the eighteenth-century polymath Mikhail Lomonosov, was, however, titled *Rossiiskaia gramatika* (1755), the term *rossiiskii* signalling that this was a grammar of the language of the Russian imperium, which was not ethno-dialectically uniform.

[3] In the sixteenth century, though, when the term *rossiane* first appeared, it referred to a both ethnically and territorially blurred larger body of Eastern Slavic peoples, in the context of the incorporation into Muscovy of lands on its western fringes which used to be part of Kievan Rus. It was only in the 1990s, under Boris El'tsin, that the term *rossiane* acquired its current meaning of citizens of a multi-ethnic Russian Federation, although related usage had arisen earlier, in the Russian post-1917 emigration, when it was used to imagine a new, still multi-ethnic, Russian state that would replace the Soviet Union (see Grishchenko 2012).

blind spots associated with so-called 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002, 2003). To counter such pitfalls, we propose a transnational approach to Russian studies. This, crucially, does not mean applying some general theory of the transnational to all things 'Russian'. Rather, what we are seeking to stimulate in the remaining sections of this introduction is an interrogation of how the distinctive history of nation-making, empire-building, and diasporization that has shaped our field's object of study also shapes how Russian studies is 'done'. The key consequence of this is that Russian studies must forge *its own* path out of such methodological impasses. This, we argue at the end of this introduction, also includes using the unique resources and expertise developed within Russian studies itself to account for what 'the transnational' might look like from a 'Russian' vantage point. It means taking seriously the fact that the 'object' that Russian studies engages with is also always, inevitably, a subject in its own right.

Russian studies has never been blindly 'nationalist', and certainly not simplistically so. The history of the Russian state and society makes it difficult to conceptualize things 'Russian' in conventionally national terms. Programmes in Russian have, in fact, historically been more inclined than programmes in some other languages to extend beyond the national paradigm otherwise typical of modern languages and to instead conceive of Russian studies as closer to a form of area studies, a discipline rooted in a broadly imperial paradigm.[4] This has led not only to greater readiness among Russianists to teach culture that is not strictly speaking 'Russian' (e.g. cinema produced in non-Russian parts of the former Soviet Union) but also to go beyond the study of cultural production per se and incorporate into Russian studies programmes approaches that are less typical of modern languages. Indeed, Russian programmes have not only followed other modern languages in moving away from an exclusive focus on language and literature to one that embraces the study of film, theatre, visual culture, and the media but they are also often more open to incorporating elements from history, politics, sociology, international relations, or anthropology.[5]

[4] This, of course, is the case also with some other languages, such as Arabic or Spanish.

[5] In France, programmes in 'la civilization russe' offer a not dissimilar framework that is open to a wide variety of disciplinary approaches to the study of Russian culture and society. Whatever the country, different institutions will offer differently inflected programmes, depending on the research specialization of the faculty (although staff will, of course, invariably teach topics outside their research interests). While disciplinary versatility is often to the field's advantage, the diversity of methodologies and approaches can also at times make it challenging for both researchers and students to maintain a common sense of purpose and a shared disciplinary language.

Historically, the study of Russian has in fact been embedded in a variety of frameworks and these have often coexisted, intermixed, and overlapped. The oldest framework, dating back to the nineteenth century, positions the study of Russian language and culture in the context of the study of the wider group of Slavonic languages, alongside the parallel Romance and Germanic groups. This framework, rooted in Indo-European philology, has during the twentieth century and especially in the context of the Cold War been juxtaposed with an alternative, geopolitical, one, where the study of Russian is envisaged as part of the study of the Soviet-dominated, and for the most part Slavic, eastern Europe on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In other words, the study of Russian came thereby to be positioned comfortably and conveniently across both a philological and an area studies framework, insofar as these happened to broadly coincide. This framework has thrived under the 'Russian and Slavonic studies' or 'Russian and East European studies' labels. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, this framework often also includes the term 'Eurasian' as a way of incorporating research on non-Slavic, 'Asian' parts of the former Soviet area. Needless to say, these terms remain politically problematic in that in different ways they perpetuate and naturalize notions of Russian hegemony in eastern Europe and former Soviet Eurasia. On the other hand, they also show that 'Russian studies' has always been embedded in a transnational, and this often means tacitly imperial, dimension. Within these larger frameworks, the study of specifically Russian language and culture has existed both as a programme in its own right and as a contributor to a more interdisciplinary (but generally social and political science-dominated) study of said geopolitical area.

At the same time, however, over the course of the twentieth century, the Indo-European framework, which embeds languages, as well as their study, within larger language families, gave way to a very different, broadly 'national', principle of organizing the study of modern languages. According to this principle, which rose to prominence from the First World War onwards, each language acquires a *nation-like* autonomous status within an overarching 'international' of modern languages. This new framework, however, has led to the gradual marginalization of 'smaller' languages, with some, such as Czech, Polish, or Serbo-Croat, increasingly taught only as subsidiary subjects, often withering away as 'non-viable'. By contrast, this framework rewarded a set of 'larger' languages with relatively stable institutional (i.e. departmental) autonomy. Within this framework, which came to dominate modern languages during the twentieth century and survives to the present day, the study of Russian language and culture came to be modelled as essentially equivalent in form and status to the

study of French, German, Spanish, and Italian language and culture, which are seen as representing the 'core' modern languages. Within this select group, Russian is, in terms of student and staff numbers, invariably one of the smaller units. However, it also tends to position itself as a rather more unusual and exotic member, often looking to punch above its weight, and is bolstered in this by Russia's enduring geopolitical and cultural significance on the world stage.

Most recently, though, the normally separate, parallel programmes of study in the respective 'core' languages are being steadily driven closer together and urged to integrate at a deeper level. Efforts to maximize administrative efficiency have at most UK universities led to the disappearance of autonomous language departments as such, prompting harmonization across different language programmes and their ever-greater integration within an overarching modern languages structure.[6] Such a shift is also being promoted and justified on pedagogical grounds, with a push from some quarters for modern languages to 'move with the times' and break out of the mould that structures the study of each language and culture as a separate programme. Academics in modern languages are now increasingly encouraged to create courses that enable students to study languages, cultures, and societies not in isolation but as part of a dynamic, multilingual, and transcultural, global whole. The latter approach remains, however, in tension with the continuing need for modern languages to build, maintain, and strengthen expertise in a *specific* language, culture, community, and geopolitical area. This tension can emerge especially at the level of implementation, since courses that cut across different languages and promote a global vision of culture can sometimes be introduced not as supplements to but at the expense of courses that offer a more detailed and in-depth – indeed 'thick', as developed by Geertz (1973) – understanding of one particular language, culture, and society.

So how does one go about trying to reconcile these seemingly opposing demands? The Transnational Modern Languages (TML) series, of which this volume is a part, intends to resolve precisely some of the above dilemmas (see Burns & Duncan forthcoming). The TML project posits that language, society, and culture are not isomorphic – that is, they do not neatly coincide – but form complex constellations in which it is not straightforward to predict where the boundaries defining a given language or culture might lie, who

[6] In the USA, individual languages have tended to retain their departmental identity and autonomy, although smaller departments are sometimes fused into a joint unit, as has notably happened to German and Russian at some institutions.

might be laying these boundaries, how, and why.[7] What the transnational approach to the study of languages and cultures emphasizes instead is that language and culture must be conceptualized as flows of signification across boundaries. However, what one must continue to bear in mind is that, in the modern era, the boundaries of language and culture (not least as objects studied by modern languages), are still dominantly constructed in broadly 'national' terms, meaning that it remains essential to take into account the dynamics of nation construction and deconstruction, historically and politically contingent as they might be, when studying the life of languages and cultures, as well as the life of communities that are defined as bearers of particular languages and cultures.

Thus, on the one hand, the transnational approach resists eliding, sidelining, or ignoring ongoing 'boundary-work' (see Gieryn 1983) on which the existence of languages and cultures depends, but instead historicizes and deconstructs the social construction of languages and cultures. On the other, it shows that the *study* of languages and cultures should not itself reproduce these boundaries and merely repeat this same boundary-work; rather, as modes of signification, as means of encoding and decoding meaning, languages and cultures are never to be studied as matching the socially constructed boundaries hardwiring languages and cultures to communities that are being identified with them precisely through said boundary-work. In other words, the transnational approach seeks to account, simultaneously, for two equally important parallel processes on which language and culture as phenomena depend – the ongoing complex and diverse construction of 'the national' through particular forms of boundary-making that goes on around languages and cultures, and the continuous parallel processes of crossing or transgressing, relativizing or reconfiguring, breaching or transcending the boundaries thus constructed.

The transnational thereby helps us to navigate between the Scylla of essentialism (e.g. in the case of Russian studies, the fetishization of Russianness as

[7] Our own understanding of the transnational more generally draws on scholarship in a number of fields, including the social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz's influential *Transnational Connections* (1996), Steven Vertovec's *Transnationalism* (2009), and Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt's edited volume *Transnational Studies Reader* (2008). An ongoing 'transnational turn' has been under way in historical studies since the 1990s. See, *inter alia*, Tyrrell (2007), Iriye (2013), Saunier (2013). Thus far, the term 'transnational' has been embraced more eagerly in the social sciences and in history than in, say, literary studies, where the concept of 'world literature' has taken root, for example in the work of Casanova (2004) and Damrosch (2003). However, Paul Jay's *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010) makes the case specifically for the 'transnational', as does John Burt Foster Jr.'s *Transnational Tolstoy* (2013), the latter specifically in a Russian context.

a fixed identity) and the Charybdis of globalism (such as postulates that the linguistic and cultural specificity of things 'Russian' are sheer ephemera in a highly globalized world). Thus, it is critical to the transnational approach not only to aim to avert tacit essentializations of nationally circumscribed cultures, but also to avoid falling victim to the complementary risk of turning all cultural flows into a single all-subsuming global process. In this the TML project follows Ulf Hannerz's understanding of the term 'transnational' as 'more humble' than the term 'global', as an often 'more adequate label for phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share the characteristic of not being contained within a state' (1996: 6). In fact, as Ian Tyrrell has argued, the 'transnational' is paradoxically 'broader' (as well as, in Hannerz's terms, 'humbler') than the 'deterministic and unidirectional juggernaut of globalisation' (2007).

While the 'transnational' must be contrasted with the 'global', it must also be distinguished from the 'international'. While the term 'international' emphasizes the role of *states* as corporate actors, 'In the transnational arena, the actors may […] be individuals, groups, movements, business enterprises', and so forth (Hannerz 1996: 6). As John Burt Foster puts it: 'If "inter" assumed orderly, almost diplomatic processes of give-and-take among well-defined units, "trans" poses a less regulated, even unpredictably creative surge of forces across borders that no longer seem as firmly established' (2013: 2). Yet, as Hannerz himself points out, 'there is a certain irony in the tendency of the term transnational to draw attention to what it negates – that is, to the continued significance of the national' (1996: 6). This is inherent in the ambiguities of the Latin prefix *trans-* itself, which designates not just a movement across, but also a gesturing beyond.

When applied specifically to the study of modern languages, the transnational approach is to be seen as a response to a major reproach addressed at modern languages as a field – namely, the criticism that the way we approach our subject area almost inevitably leads to the pitfalls of what has been described as 'methodological nationalism' – an epistemological stance which *naturalizes* the division of humanity in broadly 'national' terms (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002, 2003). Crucially, this critique must be understood as fundamentally epistemological in kind – a critique of the *underlying assumptions of scholarship*, not an empirical claim about the relevance or irrelevance of nations in the contemporary globalized world.[8]

[8] Of course, 'methodological nationalism' is hardly a problem only for modern languages. It is endemic in much of the humanities and social sciences. For this reason, a search for alternative models, global and transnational, has been sweeping across the various disciplines in recent years, not least in history, where Werner and

This is not, of course, to say that scholars should not respond to major, transformative historical developments and align their paradigms and approaches accordingly. However, the vicissitudes of history are not automatically the best guides to the organization of knowledge production. For example, even as the neoliberal triumphalism of the 1990s–2000s prompted scholars to start foregrounding the significance of global interactions over and above national dynamics, the rise of right-wing populism during the 2010s is forcing the pendulum to swing the other way. Of course, the global dynamics of twenty-first-century forms of neonationalism, which directly interconnect Donald Trump's populism in the USA, Vladimir Putin's 'traditional values' agenda, Viktor Orbán's premiership in Hungary, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in Australia, and the 'Brexiteers' in the UK, are prompting the development of new frameworks of analysis and interpretation which seek to explain and interpret precisely the transnational dimensions of the phenomenon in question (de Cleen & Galanopoulos 2016; Zúquete 2015). New frames of analysis, not least those rooted in the concept of the transnational, are also needed to understand Russia's contemporary political and cultural positioning in the wider world, including its strategies of nation-building both at home and among Russophone communities beyond its borders.

When it comes to the more specific question of what needs to be done for Russian studies, in particular, to avoid the epistemological error of 'methodological nationalism', the matter is not simply one of countering some supposed insulation of the study of Russian language, culture, and society from explorations of wider, transnational, political, and cultural dynamics.[9] Rather more

Zimmerman's (2006) concept of *histoire croisée* has been an influential tool for transnationalizing, and deconstructing, claims to national specificity. At the same time, one must also be wary of a rather different, implicit methodological nationalism that tends to affect the social sciences in particular, and notably the field of international relations, in which theories of 'soft power', for instance, were until recently based almost exclusively on the US model.

[9] Indeed, Russian studies as a field has, in fact, always been open to a transnational perspective and a number of recent works have made this quite explicit. As studies that have influenced us, we would highlight Edith W. Clowes's *Russia on the Edge* (2011), which analyses how Russian identity is constructed at the periphery, in contact with other cultures, as well as John Burt Foster Jr.'s *Transnational Tolstoy* (2013), which shows how a canonical Russian writer is himself a product of transnational forces and how his work has travelled to and influenced writers and societies across the globe. More recently still, Kevin M. F. Platt's *Global Russian Cultures* (2018) has drawn attention to the multiple meanings of Russian identity and culture in a globalized world, where 'Russianness' is made not only in the Russian Federation, but by Russophone communities around the globe. *Russian Culture in the Era of Globalisation* (2018), edited by Sarah Hudspith and Vlad Strukov, decouples

problematic in Russian studies, in fact, has been a distinctive kind of Russian (or Soviet) *exceptionalism*, which can be found even in some of the best scholarship on Russia. Exceptionalism informs a great deal of Russia's intellectual and political history, from the messianism found in Dostoevskii's late work to Vladimir Putin's view of Russia's unique national destiny on the world stage. Needless to say, these kinds of essentialized notions of Russianness have long fallen out of favour in academia, but an implicit, quieter, exceptionalism continues to exist in Russian studies, in teaching as well as research. Resorting to it often helps specialists in the subject brand Russian studies as distinctive in the increasingly competitive marketplace of higher education, but whether this is always warranted intellectually is less certain. This is not, of course, to deny either specificity or uniqueness to things 'Russian' (or, say, 'Soviet'). It is certainly not to say that identifying some historically or culturally distinctive structure, pattern, or empirical manifestation as specifically 'Russian' (or 'Soviet') is to automatically fall foul of the sin of 'exceptionalism'. Rather, the issue is one of avoiding making this exceptionalism *methodological*; in other words, of studying things 'Russian' (or 'Soviet') as exceptional by default. It is a question of recognizing that the identity of things labelled 'Russian', specifically as that which Russian studies studies, is an ever-shifting construct with multiple, competing meanings, in flux across space and time, produced by variously positioned agents with a myriad different claims and agendas.

'Russia' as Epistemic Frame

Indeed, in this context, 'Russia' and 'Russian culture' need to be considered not just objects of study but also *epistemic frames*[10] which are of critical importance to scholars who situate their work in the domain of knowledge production dubbed Russian studies. To speak of Russia and Russian culture as 'frames' refers to their function as tacit, taken for granted, axiomatic constructs (whether academic, political, or merely commonsensical); as,

globalization from Westernization, arguing that Russia in the twenty-first century has developed its own vision of globality that increasingly comes into conflict with Western notions of globalization. Hudspith and Strukov highlight how producers of Russian culture – from 'high' culture like opera and ballet to popular culture such as television and YouTube videos – are enmeshed in a global system of cultural exchange and a global game of politics and power.

[10] Epistemic frames have been understood as that which governs ways of knowing, deciding what is worth knowing, and adding to the collective body of knowledge and understanding of a given community of practice (Shaffer 2006). Piaget and Garcia (1983) introduced the term *cadre épistemique* as deriving from a particular social and historical context in which knowledge develops.

in Bourdieu's terms, 'structures of vision and division' (1998: 53–56) that delimit, shape, underpin, and then remain embedded in the architecture of whatever meanings are attributed to culture understood as pertaining to Russia. As frames, they carry the imaginaries (i.e. internalized social representations) (e.g. see Taylor 2003) that position Russian culture in, and tie it to, a particular geo-historical time-space, an embodied community or network of subcommunities, a society marked by certain assumed patterns of self-reproduction; a specific set of symbolic codes (especially language); and an evolving canon of cultural artefacts and producers. As knowledge-producing professionals, Russian studies scholars are responsible for constructing Russia and Russian culture as frames both for their own professional community and for those outside it. At the same time, they are continuously confronted with the construction of these frames by others – academics in their own or other fields, other kinds of intellectuals and specialists, and lay individuals, including both those who might be claiming Russian culture as 'theirs' and those who might be particularly keen to Other it (positively or negatively).

If Russia and Russian culture are to be understood as epistemic constructs, then transnationalizing Russia and Russian culture is itself an epistemic project – an interrogation and deconstruction of epistemic boundary-work involved in constructions of 'Russia' and 'Russian culture'. This is why what we are ultimately claiming to be doing in this collected volume is transnationalizing *Russian studies*, a domain of knowledge production. And if this is so, then what we mean by 'transnationalizing' cannot be dependent on and tied to some narrow definition of the nation, for 'nation' itself is a framing concept, directing the framing of Russia and Russian culture down particular lines. This also applies to other, competing, framing concepts of relevance, such as 'empire'; indeed, the latter too must, in the context of the project of transnationalizing, be understood as an epistemic frame that in a very specific way governs how 'Russia' is to be studied and known.

There is, of course, a reason why the term 'transnationalizing', which contains the term 'nation' at its morphological and semantic core, is an appropriate one to use here. The TML project targets a very particular *politics of framing* – a politics that has a certain vector – namely, the demarcation and construction of *a* culture along broadly national lines. The 'nationalization' of culture is both a political and an epistemic vector which has dominated the entirety of the humanities since the end of the eighteenth century. However, this nationalizing vector does not, in fact, in any way predetermine the exact ways in which a specific 'nation' is imagined or demarcated; in other words, the ways in which Russia and Russian culture (as opposed to some other, say French or German, culture) might actually be framed. As we shall see in the brief discussion that follows, the framing of Russian culture by scholars and

non-scholars is complex and multiple – made up of many different kinds of frames, which are often juxtaposed and intertwined even when seemingly contradictory.

The framing of Russian culture as a national culture usually assumes that this culture should be rooted in a particular, historic, and above all linguistically demarcated ethnic group, construed as a biologically existing people, extending genealogically through time, occupying a certain space, and, over time, developing statehood, thereby evolving from a mere tribe into a fully fledged nation. And, indeed, the origins of Russian culture are conventionally traced to a branch of East Slavic tribes who are said to have inhabited territories in the east of the European continent and eventually formed the core population of two premodern state formations, Kievan Rus (from the ninth to the thirteenth century) and, after the latter's demise, Muscovy or the Grand Duchy of Moscow (from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century). Significantly, however, such framings of the ethnic, territorial, and statehood origins of Russian culture have hardly required either ethnocultural purity or territorial integrity and coherence. Rather, the framing of Russia and Russian culture here usually emphasizes the vagueness, expansiveness, and in-betweenness of people, territory, and culture. Even the Russians' Slavic origins are readily accepted as culturally indeterminate – traversed and shaped by a multitude of other cultural influences (Iranian, Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Nordic) during the centuries-long great migrations from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages.[11]

This indeterminacy of origins is there also in the imaginary of the formation of the first Russian state itself, with the legendary establishment of Kievan Rus in the ninth century by Scandinavian invaders from the north and then its extensive politico-cultural shaping by the neighbouring Greek-dominated Byzantine Empire in the south, not to speak of continuous military, political, and economic engagements with numerous surrounding culturally varied ethnic groups to both east and west along highly porous and shifting boundaries. Similarly, the eventual transfer of the centre of Russian statehood to Moscow during the Mongol Yoke (thirteenth to fifteenth century) is invariably accepted as arising just as strongly from Muscovy's comfortable embeddedness in the political culture of the Asian empire of the Khans as from its self-promotion as an emerging new centre of eastern Christendom.

Certainly, ideologies of Russian 'nationhood' assume that such indeterminacy of cultural and political roots does not necessarily prevent the 'Russian people' from remaining self-identical despite or, paradoxically,

[11] A useful general introduction to Russian history underpinning the discussion that follows can be found in Riasanovsky and Steinberg (2016).

precisely because of the whirlwind of extrinsic influences in which they have been historically caught up. What has been arguably less important here is the self-identity of 'Russians' as a biological mass. Indeed, Russia's late-nineteenth-century physical anthropologists posited a 'mixed racial type' as the prevailing one in the empire, although they were methodologically committed to dissociating the concept of race from either ethnic culture or nationhood (Mogilner 2013). Moreover, some have defined Russia precisely as a synthesizer of cultures: Andrew Wachtel points to one current of Russian national identity that emphasizes the country's supposed 'spongelike ability to absorb the best that other peoples had to offer as the basis for a universal, inclusive national culture' (1999: 52). Dostoevskii's Pushkin Speech of 1880 is a case in point: the novelist lauds the poet as a distinctively 'Russian spirit' *precisely because* he could 'exemplify […] the genius of another people' (Dostoevsky 1994: 1292).[12] Such cultural syncretism, Wachtel suggests, gives translation a privileged role in Russia, not only in the establishment of a national and imperial culture in the nineteenth century, but also in the maintenance of a Soviet identity and culture in the twentieth. The Soviet Union had a vibrant culture of translation between Russia and its smaller national and regional languages, underpinned by a schizophrenic nationalities policy that supported smaller languages and cultures so long as they did not challenge the state's political ideology or threaten the hegemonic status of Russian. Wachtel concludes that 'the entire Soviet cultural project represents merely an extension of the universalizing translation project that had already been felt intuitively as Russia's mission in the nineteenth century' (1999: 72).

The commitment to a supposedly syncretic notion of Russianness could be coupled not only with political utopianism, but also with religious messianism. Dostoevskii concluded his Pushkin Speech by prophesizing that Russia's ultimate destiny was 'to utter the ultimate word of great, general harmony, ultimate brotherly accord of all tribes through the law of Christ's Gospel!' (Dostoevsky 1994: 1294).[13] These words echo a more general positing of 'Russianness' as something fundamentally spiritual; something that, to paraphrase Tiutchev,

[12] The speech was delivered on 5 June 1880 at the unveiling of a new Pushkin monument. Dostoevskii praised Pushkin as the epitome of the synthesizing impulse that he saw in Russian culture, lauding his 'capacity to respond to the whole world' and suggesting that this very breadth made him peculiarly Russian. For Dostoevskii, Pushkin epitomized Russia's national destiny more broadly. An English translation of the full speech is available in Dostoevsky (1994: 1281–95).

[13] Russia is not unique in universalizing its national idea. France's claim to be the world's standard-bearer for liberty in its specifically Western interpretation is another example. Arguably, national identity and the universalizing impulse are inextricably tied.

exists principally as an article of faith.[14] The core of this spiritual self-identity tends, moreover, to be rooted in a fantasy of Russia's and the Russian people's 'chosen-ness', which is imagined, of course, in a broadly religious key, as chosenness essentially by God, and this first for great suffering but ultimately for salvation. That said, even the narratives that construct the distinctiveness of the Russian people's spiritual identity still thrive, in fact, on the latter's indeterminacy – on motifs of dualism and schism, on the problematization of vertical structures and central religious institutions, and the constant harking back to horizontal, anarchic, alternative, hidden, secretive forms of spirituality.

The identification of Russia with Orthodoxy has been mythologized as resulting from an historic choice – the famous ninth-century 'baptism of Rus'. This then led both to an *appropriation* of Orthodoxy by Russia (the development of specifically 'Russian Orthodoxy') and to an *assimilation* of Russians into it, notably through the coupling of ethnic and religious identity, so that the 'Russian people' [russkie] became an 'Orthodox people' [pravoslavnye]. Yet Orthodox culture was never an ethnic culture, but the culture of an imperial *civilization*. Initially, this was the imaginary of an eastern Christian civilization that it was Moscow's ambition to embody in the guise of the 'Third Rome' (as famously proclaimed by monk Filofei in the sixteenth century), with Russia being construed as the de facto imperial successor to fallen Byzantium. This ideology served as the basis for the self-construction of Russian statehood in the shape of an imperial tsardom during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The idea of the uniqueness of Russia's historical path as a social, cultural, and political formation acquired in this context a civilizational rather than ethnic form.[15] Moreover, both faith and ethnicity were ultimately subordinated to a distinctive form of state power that was assumed to lie at the centre of Russia's historic identity. In the nineteenth century, this was turned into an official ideology of Russian autocracy in the motto 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality'.[16]

[14] The metaphysical poet Fedor Tiutchev (1803–73) penned an influential epigram in 1866 depicting Russia as a mysterious force only understood by faith: 'Умом Россию не понять, / Аршином общим не измерить: / У ней особенная стать – / В Россию можно только верить' [Russia cannot be understood with the mind, / No common yardstick can measure her. / Russia stands along, unique: / One can only have faith in Russia] (Tiutchev 2003: 165).

[15] The notion of a 'Third Rome' has persisted in underpinning the uniqueness of things Russian in later, Soviet, but also more recent ideological formations. See Poe (2001).

[16] The motto Pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost' was invented by Count Sergei Uvarov and embraced by Tsar Nicholas I during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Much of the work of transnationalizing Russia to date has been directed precisely towards breaking down this entrenched epistemic frame of Russia as civilizationally unique and exceptional, usually by placing it in a comparative framework and by challenging narratives of Russia's or the USSR's inherent difference or supposed insulation from the rest of the world (e.g. Clark 2011). Dominating this discussion has been the question of Russia's ambivalent participation in *modernity*, here understood as a set of sociocultural norms and attitudes, practices and imaginaries that arose in post-Renaissance Europe in the context of the industrial, scientific, philosophical, and political revolutions that have shaped the modern world between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries (e.g. Hoffmann 2011; David-Fox 2015). Critical to placing Russia in the context of modernity, however, has been the framing of Russian culture not so much as the culture of some chosen historic people, but as the culture of a *successful empire* (the longest-lasting land empire, in fact) – an entity forged through territorial expansion and the conquest of *other* peoples (the *inorodtsy*). When framed as a culture of imperial civilization, Russian culture becomes ethnically plural and fuzzy – it is the culture '*of* Russia' [rossiiskaia] rather than 'Russian' [russkaia]. This *modern* version of Russian culture as the culture of an imperial civilization refers, of course, not to the theocratic roots of the Third Rome, but to Peter the Great's early-eighteenth-century reforging of Russia into a military empire on the European model – a form in which the Russian state persisted until the collapse of autocracy in 1917. This is an empire oriented, at least in principle, not towards the past (tracing imperial Christendom backwards) but the future – explicitly identifying with the form of European modernity that asserted itself through the might of the state, especially in militarily led great power expansion, and then (inevitably) conflict with equivalent imperial rivals on the international stage. Peter's European vision has, indeed, been historically victorious, but it has also reproduced the pattern of framing Russian culture as fundamentally split – here in terms of its ambivalent relationship to modernity; a split symbolized by yet another move of the state's capital from Moscow to St Petersburg in the early eighteenth century.

The development of Russia as a powerful imperial state is understood, however, to have occurred largely at the expense of another key development of modernity – namely, the appearance of the nation state as modernity's normative polity. This is usually presented as the historic failure of the Russians to develop a cohesive identity as 'one nation', growing instead, during the eighteenth century in particular, into an imperfectly formed, fractured nation, split in a fundamental way between a tiny, but powerful, Europeanized elite and an enslaved, illiterate, brutally exploited,

and effectively 'colonized' peasant mass (Etkind 2011). To counter this, certain segments of the elite, namely the Slavophiles, who in the middle of the nineteenth century blamed this split in the nation primarily on Westernization, constructed an alternative, romantic ideal of a homogenous 'one nation', defined by a mystical, premodern, and thus nominally ethnic (broadly Slavic), but in reality highly nationalist form of utopian communitarianism that was explicitly dissociated from modern (Western) state forms – in effect, a nationalism without the nation state.

At the same time, though, the modern, or rather Petrine, framing of Russian culture as a culture of an imperial civilization, over the course of the nineteenth century, allowed its shape and form to emphasize neither ethnic purity nor national homogeneity. Instead, it came to develop a far more complex dynamic of civilization-building and colonial negotiation as critical to the identity of Russia and Russian culture as the dominant culture of an empire. This dynamic has, as a result, entailed pendulum-like shifts between policies of imperialist Russification, on the one hand, and the pragmatic tolerance of or even support and admiration for the 'lesser' cultures of the various imperial subjects. Crucially, though, 'Russification' usually implied the imposition on others of an *imperial*, rather than strictly ethnic, culture. The ethnic culture of the Russian people themselves became, in turn, 'folklore'. At the same time, in the context of what was a diffuse and imprecise system of both ethnic and territorial differentiation under the tsars, the denominational label 'Orthodox' [pravoslavnyi], rather than the ethnic 'Russian', became a particularly common form of self-identification among the empire's ethnic Russian subjects, namely the peasantry (many of whom would have been serfs until 1861), and this specifically as this group's way of distinguishing itself from others within the empire.

The downfall of the tsarist empire and the formation of the Soviet Union introduced a radically new political inflection to the meanings of Russian culture as dominant culture of what was now constructed as an unprecedented entity – a supposedly highly progressive kind of 'free union of free nations'. The USSR was developed as something of a 'post-empire' – a radically new type of state, expressly built to overcome both bourgeois nationalism and capitalist imperialism, yet in which, paradoxically, both neo-colonial approaches and active nation-building reached new levels (Slezkine 1994; Hirsch 2005). Crucially, the Bolshevik regime invested far more attention and effort than its predecessor in politically, administratively, and culturally constructing, systematizing, and controlling the Union's multinational structure (in both ethnic and territorial terms) under the umbrella of a larger, ideologically framed, supranational 'Soviet' cultural

identity. Within it, 'Russian culture' blurred with 'Soviet culture', in part as a purportedly neutral interconnector and pragmatic medium, but also as the presumed most advanced culture within the Union – the locomotive of the multinational Union's speedy progress towards communism (see, for example, Tyulenev & Nuriev in this volume).

What arose as a new, Soviet, civilization came, in fact, to be construed, in line with Marxist theory, as the only true spearhead of history – a civilization ready to take the mantle of modernity over from old Europe by diverging from and overtaking the (bourgeois and fascist) West. This was therefore a modern, future-oriented version of the Third Rome, with the USSR at the helm of a Communist, rather than Christian, International. For sure, within the Soviet Union a rich variety of specifically Russian nationalisms proliferated (see Brudny 1998) which reframed the meanings of Russian identity and culture rather differently from what its role was officially meant to be (as merely the 'form' in which a *Soviet* culture would manifest itself). However, the shapes taken by the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century Russian nationalisms both before and since the collapse of the USSR have generally continued to construct Russia in both ethnically and territorially indeterminate ways, ranging from the narrowly folkloric 'village Russia' to an expansive Russia as de facto 'Eurasia', with a range of different imaginaries of Russian statehood, usually of a quasi-imperial kind, somewhere in-between (compare also with Tolz, Maiorova, and Filimonova in this volume).

Irrespective of the historic indeterminacy of where Russia actually lies, of where it begins and ends, of where its centre and where its periphery might be, of who counts as its people(s) and how they should be identified, of what this state is called and where its capital might be – all of the frames sketched above imply a (topological) 'inside' within which Russian culture develops or is developed and to which it therefore properly belongs. At the same time, however, there is also a highly important set of frames constructing Russian culture as something that flourishes *beyond or outside* Russia itself. Firstly, Russian culture has in significant ways been situated in *exilic or diasporic cultural production*, which boomed especially in the the post-1917 émigré culture of the so-called 'Russia Abroad' (Raeff 1990), and then continued in new forms in the late-Soviet and post-Soviet migration waves, right up to the present day. Included in this frame one might at times even find writings by emigrants or their descendants which, while strongly thematizing a 'Russian' predicament (within or beyond Russian borders), are not necessarily written in Russian, but in English, French, German, or Hebrew, or else deliberately work with a linguistic hybrid of one kind or another. Secondly, and this principally from the Second World War to the late 1980s, Russian culture was also

recognized internationally as the *culture of a world superpower*, responsible for leading the spread of communism in competition with the increasingly global English-language culture of the USSR's superpower rival – the USA. And thirdly, Russian culture has also been prominently framed as a *branded cultural export or import* with universalist pretentions and the status of one of the great world cultures. Here Russian culture became a major contributor to the canons of *world* literature, cinema, theatre, ballet, music, and art, and thus a confident participant in all manner of cosmopolitan cultural mixes, even while retaining and foregrounding its own distinctive 'brand' features.

Finally, from the early twenty-first century, partly through the consequences of the break-up of the former Soviet 'empire' and partly through the exceptional degree of mobility and intercultural interaction and hybridization that characterizes today's globalized world, Russian culture has been developed not simply as a culture beyond Russia itself or as part of a universalist 'world culture', but also as a 'global culture' in the sense of transcending the above-described inside-outside binary, not least by explicitly relativizing the relevance of nation state borders in determining the boundaries of both Russia and Russian culture.

The projections of Russian culture as 'global culture' are themselves diverse, however. At one end of the spectrum is the Russian state's own construct of the 'Russian World' [Russkii Mir; RM]. Though global, RM is imagined as 'anchored' in the Russian Federation itself, as a powerful player on the international stage but also as what Rogers Brubaker (2011) calls a 'nationalizing state'. Indeed, the concept of RM is not only being promoted globally, outside Russia (e.g. through the operations of the Russian World Foundation, the Russian government's soft power organization), but also inside it through the development of an explicitly ethnically inflected (*russkii* rather than *rossiiskii*) nation-building frame which has since the mid-2010s been imposed across an otherwise multi-ethnic territory through new laws and policies introduced to gradually erode Russia's existing, federally organized, multiculturalism. Secondly, RM is imagined as being held together across the globe by a network of so-called 'compatriots' [sootechestvenniki] – a concept that is distinct from that of expatriates since it does not entail citizenship of the Russian Federation. Compatriots are understood to exist in all parts of the world and include both the so-called 'beached diaspora' (Laitin 1998) of Russians who after the dissolution of the USSR ended up citizens of a non-Russian former Soviet republic and Russophone migrants from any migrant wave. A compatriot is, in principle, anyone who openly identifies with and actively supports the maintenance of Russian language and culture abroad. Compatriotism is, however, at least tacitly, also expected to translate into a form of loyalty to the Russian Federation itself, which is

why compatriots are supported through a network of official organizations and included in this way in Russia's global soft power projects. And, finally, RM is also often understood to be rooted in a distinct set of civilizational values (sometimes dubbed 'Eurasian'), which imply competition with rival civilizations (Western, Islamic, Chinese). Russia itself is here imaged as one of the major 'poles' of a so-called 'multipolar world' – the successor to the hegemonic US-dominated 'unipolar world' that followed immediately after the fall of communism.

There is, however, an alternative conception of the 'Russian World' that similarly understands Russian culture as anchored in a specific national language, history, and traditions, which then disperses across and exists in the global world in a variety of ways, but does not imply the idea of a 'Russian civilization' in competition or conflict with other world civilizations. This other construction of the 'Russian World' is still fundamentally patriotic, but its patriotism is that typical of a Russian intelligentsia traditionally wary of state power.[17] It is, in fact, an expression of cultural patriotism that explicitly avoids direct association with the state and envisages Russian culture going global not as a cultural projection of Russian statehood but, quite the contrary, as this culture actively *freeing itself* from the state. Ultimately, as a construct of 'global Russianness', this understanding of the 'Russian World' assembles not 'compatriots', but those whom Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997) has called 'cosmopolitan patriots'.[18]

Finally, at the other end of the spectrum is a radically constructivist framing of 'Russian culture' as a 'global culture'. Here, Russian culture is posited as something that lacks any kind of secure core, that is not guaranteed by a singular people, state, language, history, or civilization, that is not unitary, let alone exceptional, but fundamentally *diffracted* into a multiplicity of competing projects and claims, articulations and imaginaries, whatever inflection (romantic, patriotic, ludic, ironic, cosmopolitan) is attributed within these diffractions to a 'Russian' identity (see especially Platt 2018). In this liberal frame, which permits, for instance, the possibility of 'Russian literature' being written by 'non-Russians', the 'Russian World' can take forms,

[17] Svetlana Aleksievich, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature, referred to 'Russia's great culture' in this way in her Nobel Lecture, titled 'On the Battle Lost' (2015).

[18] This alternative conception of the 'Russian World' as expressive of a 'global Russianness' that needs to be contrasted with the 'Russian World' as an ideological project of the Russian state was discussed by Lara Ryazanova-Clarke in the paper 'Znai nashikh: The Russophone World in the UK', which she presented at the 'Transnational Russian Studies' symposium in Durham on 14–16 September 2017.

exist in places, belong to people, and be articulated in languages that would normally have been constructed as external to this 'world', or even be labelled its Other (as in the burgeoning of 'Russian-American' writing, for example). This frame of 'global Russian cultures' (emphatically in the plural) is first and foremost an intellectual project – a reflection of a particular scholarly perspective of our time, and one that emanates from outside Russia itself. However, this does not mean that this is a purely academic frame. Insofar as the 'Russian World' is by definition an ideological construct, the idea of 'global Russian cultures' cannot avoid being ideological itself. For this frame does not posit the 'Russian World' simply as an object of study; it also represents an explicit polemical challenge both to the neo-nationalist ideology of the current Russian state and to essentializations of Russianness that are inherent in alternative non- or anti-state conceptions of the 'Russian World'. What 'global Russian culture' offers instead is a radical alternative, based on the total opening up of the question of the ownership of and belonging to that which we are to label 'Russian culture'.

The Transnational in Reverse Perspective

The above is, of course, just a provisional sketch of the broad range of divergent frames within which Russian language, culture, and society can be and have been placed, in the past as well as the present. As this brief outline suggests, Russian studies cannot afford to be reduced to the study of phenomena circumscribed by some predetermined set of historic borders, confined to a single overarching linguistic code, or referred to some homogenous cultural community, however broadly and flexibly any of these are defined. More importantly, though, our purpose here has been to reinforce the point that it is fundamental for Russian studies to actively engage in the deconstruction of the boundary-work involved in the delimitation of things 'Russian' and also to show that transnationalizing Russia and Russian culture is itself, as an epistemological project, not a simple and narrow task.

However, what still remains to be done, we believe, is to invert the terms of the analysis and to ask what it might mean epistemologically to view the transnational from a *Russian* vantage point. Indeed, as specialists in Russian studies, all the contributors to this volume lay claim, at least implicitly, not only to knowledge *about* Russia but also to knowledge that enables one to see and reconceptualize the world from distinctively Russian perspectives (bearing in mind, of course, everything said above about the plurality and contingency of what 'Russian' means here). Indeed, part of the responsibility of Russian studies as a field of expertise is to re-present, analyse, and interpret *views 'from within'*. Taking examples from this very volume, Russianists will

seek to account for Russia's own imperializing version of nationhood (Tolz; Maiorova); or Russians' literary articulations of homosexuality (Doak); or the disruptions, restrictions, and innovations of competing Russian-language media operations (Gorham; Strukov; Hutchings). This, moreover, entails not just presenting the 'Russian perspective' but at the same time adding something new to conceptualizations of empire, nation, sexuality, or media politics more generally. Indeed, incorporating this view 'from within' with a view 'from without' is critical to completing the epistemological turn that we are advocating under the banner of transnationalizing the study of Russia and Russian culture.[19]

The paradox entailed in the double movement that we are proposing here is captured in the notion of 'reverse perspective' [obratnaia perspektiva], which was developed by the early-twentieth-century Russian religious thinker Pavel Florenskii to account for the 'distorted' imagery of Russian religious icons, which appear to flout the laws of linear perspective. Rather than lines converging and objects diminishing in size as they recede from a predetermined imagined viewer, the lines of iconic objects become convergent the closer they are to the actual viewer placed before the icon, while background figures may be larger than those in the foreground. Far from being naively ignorant of linear perspective, icon painters saw perspective as artificially generating a mere illusion, constructed from the fixed vantage point of a notional, constructed observer. They strove, by contrast, to thrust the actual observer into the heart of a reality in which objects and figures have *their own* presence: 'Forms should be apprehended according to their own life; they should be represented through themselves, according to the way they have been apprehended, and not in the foreshortenings of a perspective laid out beforehand' (Florensky 2006: 218). Crucially, what reverse perspective does is to turn the viewer of the icon, paradoxically, into both scrutinizer and scrutinized. Moreover, reverse perspective is conceptualized as a means of immersing the viewer in a reality that is explicitly distinguished from a merely illusory image, a deliberate construct of a reality, ultimately an abstraction of life.

The paradox of reverse perspective may also be re-expressed in the terms that the young Mikhail Bakhtin used to conceptualize aesthetic creation. In his early writings, Bakhtin (1990) rejected what he called 'theoreticism', which he condemned for its tendency to create abstractions from unique human

[19] This, of course, applies to modern languages more generally. As expressed by French studies scholar Neil Kenny, modern languages as a discipline involves 'the study of languages and of their associated cultures and societies from simultaneously the inside and the outside' (cit. Wells 2017).

experiences. In its place he proposed what he described as an 'ethical' understanding of aesthetic creation. He equated aesthetic creativity to an act of love in which 'the author' starts off by entering the life of 'the hero', apprehending it from within and taking care to preserve intact its irreducible particularity. 'The author', however, then had to exit that life and apprehend it lovingly from without in order to 'complete' [zavershit'] it and give it meaning.[20] In aesthetic creation, the other's life is thereby, according to Bakhtin, lovingly co-experienced from within, but in order to turn it into a meaningful whole, the authorial self must eventually return to its position of 'outsidedness' [vnenakhodimost']. Thus, in Bakhtin's account, the fundamental difference of 'the other' must be neither fetishized nor reduced to an instance of an abstract generality. Instead, it is to be 'completed from without', whilst retaining a singularity experienced in its totality 'from within'.

We are here extending the 'ethical' reframing that Bakhtin develops with reference to aesthetic creation, in which an author gives meaning to that which s/he creates, to the epistemological task that lies before specialists in Russian studies. Our task requires us not only to apprehend, understand, and give meaning to things 'Russian', but also to communicate that meaning, as specialists, to others. This 'ethical' move is certainly not to re-introduce, by the back door, a form of Russian exceptionalism that we have argued against and are determined to avoid. Rather, it is to recognize that, just as the 'Russian' in 'Russian studies' is not restricted to the Russian 'nation' but covers a plurality of meanings and contexts, so we need to build from our Russian studies work a multi-layered, multi-dimensional, multi-perspectival picture *of the transnational itself.*

Translated into practical terms, we are bound, therefore, to adopt multiple methodological variants on the transnational paradigm. Thus, some of our contributors work comparatively, juxtaposing the Russian with the non-Russian

[20] Confusingly, though not uncharacteristically for Bakhtin, the same ethical privileging of the non-reductive act of communication between one free, uniquely embodied consciousness and another is, in his later work, associated with the opposite notion of 'unfinalizability' or 'unfinalizedness' [nezavershennost']. He sees the great novels of Dostoevskii as the ultimate expression of this phenomenon. It is possible that the latter formulation, which is the one that Connor Doak applies in his chapter in the present volume, reflects Bakhtin's tacit, coded battle against the constraints on freedom imposed by Stalinism in its most repressive phase. Whatever the explanation, Bakhtin is consistent in pursuing a lifelong resistance to schematic abstraction, in his belief in the power of the aesthetics of verbal creativity to confront it, and in the ethical importance of incarnating the realm of truth in the concrete event of being with and for the other. For a fuller discussion of Bakhtin's intellectual development, see Morson and Emerson (1989).

(Jackson; Bozovic). Others operate cross-culturally, tracing movement across Russian and non-Russian space-time configurations, both within a broadly defined post/imperial space (Glaser; Tyulenev & Nuriev; Radunović) and beyond it (Bullock; McAteer; Norris). Others still apply what might be termed a transcultural approach, testing universal theories out on Russian cases (Tihanov; Rutten). This process can be represented as a spectrum that extends from an emphasis on the particular to a privileging of the general, with most chapters in this volume shuttling to and fro along it.

It is no coincidence that we have chosen two theorists deeply immersed in the Russian philosophical tradition to illuminate our approach to a transnational framework for which we claim general applicability; this is a case of our 'object of study' acquiring subjectivity and 'speaking back' to us, even as we frame it from without. Nor is it coincidental that both Bakhtin and Florenskii abhorred abstraction and struggled within their different idioms to formulate ways of thinking about universal meaning which managed to conserve the particularity of the embodied individual. Both Florenskii and Bakhtin (in his early phase) linked embodiment in this sense to the mystery of Christ: the Son of God, whose divinity remained undiminished by the acquisition of an irreducibly particular, suffering human form. Seen through this prism, but shorn of its theological baggage, the term 'transnational' also designates our search to derive 'universal' yet 'embodied' meaning from our object of study – an 'object', though, that is simultaneously a speaking 'subject'.

Structure of the Book

In presenting the results of this search, we have divided our book into four parts. The first, 'Nation, Empire, and Beyond', presents some of the ways in which the multi-ethnic space once claimed by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union can be explored as a geopolitical or geocultural frame within which a variety of national, imperial, and postcolonial entanglements are enacted as part of the region's ongoing cultural politics. Vera Tolz opens this section with a critique of discourses past and present which have used Russia's multinationality as a way of exceptionalizing Russian policies and practices *vis-à-vis* colonial subjects. She connects this to Russia's ongoing negotiations of its ambivalent relationship with the West. The latter has persistently served as a mirror, but one in which Russia, paradoxically, keeps seeking the image of the Other. Amelia Glaser's chapter follows this by examining the intersection of nineteenth-century Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish literary imaginations, focusing, through the figure of the 'marketplace', on the nefarious intercultural 'horse-trading' that went on in the Russian Empire's multilingual western borderlands. Olga Maiorova in turn explores the engagement of

a group of Russian Tolstoians with local communities in early-twentieth-century Central Asia (Turkestan). She uses this case to demonstrate the reciprocal nature of cross-cultural transfer in the area, calling for a re-evaluation of our understanding of 'Russification' in the area through the prism of rather more complex forms of cultural exchange that went on in the empire's eastern peripheries.

Dušan Radunović then shifts our attention onto the importance of symbolic appropriations of *space* as a key part of empire- and nation-building, both during the Soviet era and since then. His chapter looks at the deconstruction of the crucial political bond between territory and nation, specifically in cinematic works produced during the 2000s in Georgia and Kazakhstan. Radunović argues that the films he analyses (by Mikheil Kalatozishvili and Giorgi Ovashvili) deploy the visual symbolism of space as a metaphor for the distinctive experience of the transnational in which the people of post-Soviet Eurasia are caught up – an experience that runs counter to the obsessive nation-building preoccupations of the post-Soviet states themselves, and that needs to be located primarily in the domain of personal affect. This first section of the book concludes with Tatiana Filimonova's analysis of Vladimir Sorokin's 2013 novel *Telluria*, a satirical reworking of Eurasian geopolitics in a dystopian post-post-national world, which is as whimsical as it is unmistakably rooted in Russo-Soviet history, or rather, the ideological phantasms that stem from it.

The second part, titled 'Beyond and Between Languages' foregrounds the crucial role that *language* plays in circumscribing culture, and especially literature, in national terms, while simultaneously serving, paradoxically, as both the means of and the obstacle to transnational, interlingual, and cross-cultural communication. Galin Tihanov opens this section by examining the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovskii's interest in 'world literature'. Shklovskii understood the term not as a canon of foreign classics to be incorporated into a universalist treasure trove of 'Soviet culture' (as Maksim Gor'kii, for example, had conceived it), but as a framework that confirms the concept of 'literariness' as something above and beyond language; and hence something 'portable' beyond the work's original language. Marijeta Bozovic's chapter brings this crucial question into the present by reminding us of the influence that Vladimir Nabokov, 'Russian émigré' turned model 'world writer', has had on contemporary figurations of 'world literature'. For Nabokov, too, 'world literature' ceases to be a canon, and is instead reconceptualized as a form of *reading* – namely, the reading of great works of literature as a means of imbibing the greatness of literature as such. However, as Bozovic argues, both Nabokov and the 'world writers' who echo his work (namely, the South African J. M. Coetzee and the Iranian Azar Nafisi) appear to suggest, perhaps

pessimistically, that this kind of reading of world literature – reading figured in the novels of all three writers as a form of pedagogical seduction – commonly ends in communicative failure. Cathy McAteer switches our attention to the focus of *producing* – rather than reading – 'world literature' in her study of how Russian literary greats were transposed onto British soil, specifically in the context of the mid-twentieth-century Penguin Classics series. McAteer delves into the archives of the publisher Penguin Books to reveal the editorial conceptions and translation practices underpinning this series as it relates specifically to the publication of Russian classics. She shows how the various personal, institutional, and commercial factors that lay behind the commissioning of translations shaped the way in which Russian works reached the British public at the height of the Cold War.

The crucial role that translation plays not only in channelling cultural flows across state borders but also in controlling such flows within a single country is explored by Sergey Tyulenev and Vitaly Nuriev in a chapter that charts the development of a distinctive translation system within the multinational and multilingual USSR. Their analysis demonstrates how important it was for the Soviet regime to use translation as a means of politically integrating cultural production within the Union while at the same time fostering the policy of supporting the many languages and literatures of the Union's officially recognized nationalities. Tyulenev and Nuriev stress the pivotal yet ambiguous position in this system of the Russian language, from and into which the bulk of Soviet translation was carried out. The exploration of the vital, yet also problematic, role of Russian as lingua franca of this region, even after the collapse of the USSR, continues in Julie Curtis's examination of New Drama – a transnational avant-garde theatre movement which arose in the late 1990s in the triangle between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Based on documentary techniques and focused on controversial sociopolitical topics of the day shared across all three countries, New Drama embraced Russian as its unquestioned linguistic medium during the 2000s. However, since the flaring up of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2015, the transnational character of the movement has come under severe strain, as has its Russophonism. Since then, the choice of national language and the way it is deployed now tops the list of concerns for many of the playwrights involved. Such a choice has come to serve as a key means of expressing not just a political but also a moral stance, something critical to New Drama as an aesthetic form.

Part three, titled 'Cultures Crossing Borders', focuses on the life and cultural transpositions of things 'Russian' in the global arena. Philip Bullock examines the complex transnational histories of performances of Russian operas based on major literary classics across the tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. He

challenges naive framings of 'Russian opera', 'Russian music', and 'Russian literature' as reflections of either a national consciousness or mythic otherness. Generalizing his findings concerning opera, Bullock argues that an analysis of how Russian culture is *performed* (in a wider, figurative sense as well) on the global stage (where 'the globe' would also encompass Russia or the USSR), enables one to see that much of what goes by 'Russian' needs to be understood as, in fact, inherently transnational. Stephen Norris's analysis of responses to Fedor Bondarchuk's 2013 film *Stalingrad* from both Russian and international audiences and film critics follows Bullock's lead, but adds a further point – namely, that 'the nation', as both abstract concept and concrete reality, is itself a fundamentally transnational phenomenon; or, more specifically, that what a given nation *means* is necessarily forged in a transnational arena. Indeed, Norris's analysis of the trials and tribulations of Bondarchuk's blockbuster shows how the transnational nature of twenty-first-century film production and consumption is directly shaping contemporary Russian patriotic culture. Norris highlights Russian patriotism's intimate entanglement with American patriotism, showing how Russian patriotic cinema can simultaneously shadow and copy Hollywood, dialogue with, and outdo it, while at the same time declaring itself, and in some respects genuinely being, against it.

While the Great Patriotic War has been a particularly important locus of Russia's patriotic self-construction under Putin, the same can be said of Russia's positioning in relation to a very different topic – that of gender and sexuality, especially as it relates to representations of queerness. As Connor Doak argues in his chapter, both Russia's and the West's narratives of gender and sexuality are invariably forged in transnational encounters with the Other. In order to de-reify the grand narrative that pits a traditionalist/homophobic Russia against the gay-friendly/decadent West as two civilizations with values diametrically at odds with one another, Doak offers a reading of two pieces of post-Soviet fiction (by Viktoria Tokareva and Margarita Meklina) whose plots revolve precisely around transnational encounters on the physical and symbolic border between Russia and the West, heterosexuality and homosexuality. As his analysis shows, when the question of the relationship between gender/sexuality and nation/civilization is examined through a literary lens, the answers become rather more ambiguous, with these narratives' authors, protagonists, and readers ending up rightly disoriented as to what is 'queer' and what is not.

The way in which 'Russia' encounters the wider world is of course never simply a matter of Russian-branded culture being projected onto the global stage. The transnational flow of things Russian implies that these are then not only appropriated and reinterpreted, but also, crucially, *re-performed in another's voice*, sometimes in seemingly unexpected ways and places.

Jeanne-Marie Jackson analyses how the 'Russian novel of ideas', exemplified by the works of Tolstoi and Dostoevskii, has informed the way certain novelists from southern Africa – namely, the Cape Town-based Imraan Coovadia and the Edinburgh-based émigré Zimbabwean Tendai Huchu – frame their own authorial, as well as their protagonists', searches for particular forms of 'salvation'. As emerges from Jackson's analysis, the great Russian writers' nineteenth-century confrontations with the problem of God and individual freedom, at a time when capitalist modernity came knocking hard on Russia's doors, resonate with some of the metaphysical dilemmas faced by contemporary transnational individuals ensnared by the global interconnectedness of everything in a universe in which truth seems to have become redundant. Jackson's discussion thereby inevitably opens up the question of how universal and how culturally and historically specific is humanity's search for greater meaning. Ellen Rutten's chapter asks a similar question, but in the context of aesthetics: can seemingly universal aesthetic concepts, such as, for instance, 'imperfection', be culturally appropriated (i.e. 'nationalized') – for example, by trying to develop an aesthetics of 'Russian imperfections'? Through an analysis of aesthetic claims about 'imperfection' made on such culturally diverse platforms as Russian online dating sites and scholarly interpretations of late-Soviet avant-garde art, Rutten shows that something like the 'aesthetics of imperfection' cannot be understood as either universal or culturally specific (say 'Russian'). While all aesthetics of imperfection are situated in specific 'thickenings' of social beliefs, cultural practices, and linguistic forms (meaning that there is nothing universal about the notion), these 'thickenings' will invariably be both translocal and transcultural (i.e. dependent for their meanings on the material and symbolic links that they form with other such 'cultural thickenings' even when the latter are situated in seemingly completely different sociocultural contexts).

The final section of the book, 'Russia Going Global', discusses Russia's positioning in the contemporary globalized world, examining both the ways in which this world has transformed Russia and the ways in which it is transformed by it. The period under consideration is the era of Vladimir Putin, whose positioning of Russia in the global community is premised on the idea that the latter must be transformed into a 'multipolar world', by which Putin means breaking the Western or, more specifically, American domination of some of the key instruments of globalization, including, especially, the internet. Michael Gorham's chapter focuses on this very issue, discussing the Kremlin's rhetoric around the idea of the so-called 'sovereign internet', which has so far served as a way to legitimize the imposition of state security controls over the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on Russian soil, even while cynically exploiting the laxity of such controls

elsewhere in the world. Gorham exposes the hybrid and seemingly contradictory nature of Russian state rhetoric on ICTs, but he interprets it as stemming from pragmatic opportunism and the need to target a variety of audiences, both in Russia and in the larger global community. The coexistence of multiple, mixed messages is not unique to contemporary Russian state rhetoric, and is revealed as an inherent characteristic of the global mediascape more generally. A closely related finding emerges out of Stephen Hutchings's analysis of the multipronged operations of Russia's main international broadcaster, RT. Hutchings shows how in the global media environment, in which RT is reputedly promulgating 'Russia's position', there is, in fact, no discernible 'anchor' for such a position. Indeed, one should not look for it either in the ideologies, strategies, and policies of the Kremlin or in RT's own institutional structures and professional agendas. As a result, 'Russia's position', if it can be called this, becomes, in RT's articulation, exceedingly difficult to pin down. Yet, as Hutchings argues, the protean character of RT programming and online output is not the outcome of some overarching Machiavellian strategy, but the effect of rather random and reactive tactics of survival in the unpredictable ecosystem of the twenty-first-century globalized media.

The peculiar nature of this environment is further explored in Vlad Strukov's discussion of Meduza – a quality online media outlet with offices in Latvia, but whose commentary and news (both original and aggregated) are directed at Russian audiences concerned primarily with Russia-related politics. Crucially, though, as Strukov argues, Meduza avoids a clear identification with any given geographical location, nation state, language, financial base, diasporic community, political group, or ideological position. Instead it generates a distinctive cultural environment through a dynamic of interactive engagement with online material by an audience whose online activity is in its totality 'Russia-oriented', but geographically, ideologically, politically, and economically 'unanchored'. While Strukov's findings are based on an analysis of larger patterns of online media activity of a particular kind of 'Russo-centric' but ultimately deterritorialized form of 'global Russianness', Lara Ryazanova-Clarke is interested in how the latter is produced in the discourse of individuals who self-identify as Russian but reside outside Russia. Her chapter provides a sociolinguistic analysis of how Russians living in the UK negotiate their conflicting allegiances to homeland, host country, and diasporic community. By dissecting the discourse of her subjects' interview self-presentations, Ryazanova-Clarke reveals that each individual construction of 'global Russianness' is, in a Bakhtinian sense, multi-voiced: each interview acts as a stage on which a variety of ideological positions, from the patriotic to the cosmopolitan, come together to interweave dialogically each interviewee's distinctive narrative of transnational belonging or, indeed, non-belonging.

The Transnational as Transgressional

Ryazanova-Clarke's finding is a fitting conclusion for a volume which calls for an embodied, dialogic approach to the study of humanity. This approach is central to the way we understand and deploy the concept of 'the transnational'. In the latter, the prefix *trans-* combines the senses of 'between' and 'beyond' – of both 'crossing' and 'surpassing' the constructed boundaries that divide humanity in broadly 'national' terms. However, what is also entailed in the notion of 'the transnational', in both of the above senses, is an act of *transgression* – a 'violation' of the normative order of things which takes place at the point of 'stepping across' boundaries. A 'transgression' implies, crucially, that the boundary that is being crossed is neither accepted nor done away with. Thus, the transnational as transgressional implies neither simply the study of cultural flows across 'national' boundaries nor some utopian transcendence, even disappearance, of these boundaries as such. Instead, the transnational implies *working through* such boundaries, remembering at every step of the way both the perils and the potentials that they harbour.

Indeed, here we must caution against the hubristic notion of a linear teleology running from the tyranny of empires, through the flawed, nativist democracy of nations to the global harmony of the post-national. As Rana Dasgupta implies, in its readiness to denigrate and negate the past, such a narrative risks compromising the future:

> Empires were not democratic, but were built to be inclusive of all those who came under their rule. It is not the same with nations, which are founded on the fundamental distinction between who is in and who is out – and therefore harbour a tendency toward ethnic purification. This makes them much more unstable than empires, for that tendency can always be stoked by nativist demagogues […] In the previous century it was decided with amazing alacrity that empires belonged to the past, and the future to nation states. (2018)

As should be clear from the above summary of the volume's structure, a number of the chapters that follow (Tolz; Maiorova; Radunović, Filimonova; Curtis; Tyulenev & Nuriev) demonstrate how the Russian experience, imperial and post-imperial, offers both corroborations of, and challenges to, Dasgupta's position. But what of language? Again, several chapters in our volume demonstrate the instructive potential of the Russian experience. For example, the transnational Meduza news portal (Strukov), the London-based Russian-speaking diaspora (Ryazanova-Clark), and 'New Drama' in the former Soviet area (Curtis) illustrate contexts in which language can work through and

beyond its associations with nation and empire in order to detach itself from them and reassert a post-imperial unifying function.

Indeed, the transnational reframing of our Russian cases directly questions the axiom 'monolingualism = bad / multilingualism = good' that seems to be a present article of faith among self-respecting modern linguists. Just as the multilingual is often the monolingual multiplied, so the monolingual (single-languaged) does not equate to the univocal (single-voiced), but can, under certain conditions, be capacious and inclusive (Denman 2017). This subversive conviction is shared by Bernard Avishai in relation to the role that the linguistic sensibility shared by Hebrew speakers in Tel Aviv could play in creating a truly inclusive Israeli state:

> The latter Hebrew is self-ironising, playfully anglicised – erotic, brassy, metaphorical, mischievous. This is the Hebrew every with-it Israeli knows and every democratic Israeli unknowingly counts on […] The Hebrew of Tel Aviv is spacious enough for Arabs to absorb its nuances and yet remain Arabs, at least in the hybridised way minorities everywhere adapt to a majority's language and the culture it subtends. (2018)

Avishai's understanding of what it means to 'know' a language is broader than the mastery of vast lexical inventories, grammatical paradigms, rules of syntax, and oral/aural communication skills to which learners aspire in modern languages classes. It includes the multiple idiolects, attitudinal tones, speech genres, and stylistic registers through which ideas, thoughts, ideologies, and entire world views acquire flesh. As Valentin Voloshinov put it, language is not a function of the fixed, abstract systems we associate with the 'French', 'Russian', and 'Spanish' of language textbooks. Rather:

> The speaker's focus of attention is brought about in line with the particular, concrete utterance he is making […] For him the center of gravity lies […] in that new and concrete meaning it acquires in the particular context […] What is important for the speaker about a linguistic form is not that it is a stable and self-equivalent signal but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign. (Voloshinov 1973: 67–68)

There are lessons here for the way modern languages are taught, suggesting that (a) the separation of 'language acquisition and skills' from the study of literary, cultural, and historical 'content' is both suspect and false, and (b) that the teaching of modern languages, sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, and

critical discourse analysis should go hand in hand, pointing towards new interdisciplinary allegiances. The discussion of the inseparability of language from the thoughts and ideas that it notionally 'encases' brings us full circle to the principle of Russian culture as an embodied community or linguistically defined network of subcommunities in a particular geo-historical chronotope – the concept, another of Bakhtin's (1981) richly productive neologisms, of time in-corporated (i.e. em-bodied) into space, and of space lived through time. This principle defines not just Russian studies, or even modern languages, but all of the humanities.

Moreover, if the humanities involves the study of shifting configurations of the relationship between language, chronotope, and intersubjectivity, the corollary is that each component of that trio is dependent upon the other two. We assert our humanity *as* intersubjectively connected communities, *in* language, *through* time-space. Such a formulation does not reduce all meaning to the function of the abstract, thinking subject. The notion of embodiment relates not just to that subject's corporeality. It also describes his/her situated-ness within a particular chronotope lived in communion with others through language. Moreover, even in the solipsistic form of individual consciousness, language is by definition intersubjective since, as 'inner speech' (to give it Voloshinov's formulation), consciousness is inherently social. The humanities we are describing have at their heart language in its widest definition, one whose understanding requires the specialist knowledge of modern linguists working in close collaboration with, and providing concrete, spatiotemporal context to, sociolinguists and discourse analysts drawn from multiple disciplinary arenas – literary, political, anthropological, and other. Indeed, as Mary Louise Pratt explains, epistemologically, reality can only be known *through* language and each actual language will generate its own distinctive version of that reality; hence the importance of 'knowing languages and of knowing the world through languages' (2003: 112).

Our intervention comes at a point when both the humanities and the social sciences are increasingly in thrall to methodologies designed to process ever larger quantities of 'big data'. However, the very idea of installing 'data' at the centre of the humanities is inimical to its mission. Bakhtin differentiates the exact and the human sciences by distinguishing the former's focus on lifeless 'things' (for which we can read 'data') from the latter's interest in speaking 'subjects':

> In opposition to the subject there is [for the exact sciences] only a voiceless thing. Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and cognized as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be

> perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be dialogic. (1986: 160–61)

A not dissimilar emphasis is to be found in Patricia Clavin's definition of the transnational itself. For Clavin, transnationalism is 'first and foremost about people: the social spaces they inhabit, the networks they form and the ideas they exchange' (2005: 422). Missing from Clavin's account is language: for without language, these ideas cannot be expressed nor exchanged, nor these spaces made social. It is the latter perspective that modern languages as a domain of study provides, giving, through the study of language and culture, access to human beings in the fullness of their spatiotemporally lived, intersubjective existence. With this key omission made good, we come close to identifying an intellectual agenda in which the transnational is something to be embraced even as it is transcended and transformed into something else: the transnational as *trans-national*. Here we draw on debates around the emerging concept of 'translocality', characterized by Greiner and Sakdapolrap as 'a "transgressing" of locally bounded, fixed understandings of place [which] at the same time emphasises the importance of places as nodes where flows that transcend spatial scales converge' (2013: 377). Wherever such a 'transgressing' ends up, it will bear the heavy responsibility of serving as a staging post for an as yet inchoate, but radical, rethinking of the humanities, and of the still precarious place of modern languages within it, including more specific areas of research, teaching, and expertise, such as Russian studies.

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