

The Implications of Transnationalism

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When *Kritika* published a special issue in 2001 on the state of the field ten years after the end of communism, it was logical to include a reassessment of the October Revolution and two pieces on the rapidly developing investigation of the Stalin period.¹ Transnational history went unmentioned, along with international and comparative approaches, for they did not yet appear crucial to the state of the field. If “culture” was “everywhere” in the Russian history of the 1990s, talk of the transnational became ubiquitous in the 2000s.² In retrospect, however, the first post-Soviet decade laid the groundwork for the proliferation of cross-border and cross-cultural approaches by furthering a closely related phenomenon: intensive investigation of comparative dimensions to Russian and Soviet history.³

This essay argues that the interpretive implications of the transnational trend that crystallized in the second post-Soviet decade are most profound for the study of the revolutionary and communist period. This is for two reasons. First, the grand narratives of Soviet history have been focused internally from the field’s outset, heightening the impact of cross-border research. Second, communism’s intense ideological engagement with the outside world, combined with the effects of isolation from it, has the potential to generate a certain kind of transnational history centering on the interacting effects of models, contacts, and ideas—including rejections and misunderstandings. At the same time, from the perspective of 20 years after, transnational history in the Russian and Soviet field is still very much an unfinished scholarly revolution.

¹ “The State of the Field: Russian History Ten Years After the Fall,” special issue of *Kritika* 2, 2 (2001).

² Laura Engelstein, “Culture, Culture Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia, across the 1991 Divide,” *Kritika* 2, 1 (2001): 363–94; David L. Ransel, “Reflections on Transnational and World History in the USA and Its Applications,” *Historisk Tidskrift*, no. 4 (2007): 625–42.

³ On the synergy between comparative and transnational history, see Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor, eds., *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

The Western scholarship on Russia of the 1990s raised the question of Russian and Soviet modernity as a conceptual frame. The problem of modernity is still very much with us, but its initial posing centered on state violence, practices of state intervention, and the agendas of intelligentsia experts.⁴ Institutionally, it was virtually inevitable after the end of the Cold War that Russia would be studied in ways that made its history more relevant to scholars in other fields. In post-1991 Russian-language scholarship there were equally compelling reasons to investigate Russia's international connections, first and foremost with European countries: the combination of interest in previously restricted areas, Yeltsin-era "Westernization," and the controversy over Russia's *osobyi put'* (special path) produced a wave of books under the title of "Russia and the West" and a research boom on cultural relations with individual European countries.⁵ Another major impulse to comparative history has been the "imperial turn," which stimulated comparative studies of empire.⁶

But what, in fact, does the term "transnational" mean? In 2006, the *American Historical Review* ran a discussion entitled "On Transnational History." The resulting forum appeared to fit the Russian field, to paraphrase Stalin, like a saddle on a cow: featuring fine-tuned distinctions among transnational, global, and world history, it centered on the meaning of transcending something Russia never was, the nation-state. Of course, insofar as transnational (or any other) approaches are disciplinary-wide trends and methodologies, Russianists need not necessarily define them differently. Understanding the focus of transnational history as the movement of "goods, technology, or people" across national borders, although it is perhaps most geared toward opening up the boundaries of fields such as U.S. history, is certainly relevant to any area.⁷

⁴ Peter Holquist, "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Perspective," *Journal of Modern History* 69, 3 (1997): 415–50; Laura Engelstein, "Combined Underdevelopment: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia," *American Historical Review* 98, 2 (1993): 338–53; Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjunction," *Kritika* 2, 1 (2001): 111–64.

⁵ See, for example, S. V. Chugrov, ed., *Rossii i Zapad: Metamorfozy vzaimovospriiatii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993); A. V. Golubev et al., *Rossii i Zapad: Formirovanie vneshepoliticheskikh stereotipov v soznanii rossiiskogo obshchestva pervoi poloviny XX veka* (Moscow: Institut istorii RAN, 1998); five volumes of *Rossii i Italiia* published between 1993 and 2003; four volumes of *Rossii i Germaniia* published between 1998 and 2007; nine volumes of *Rossii i Frantsiia XVIII–XX vek* published between 1995 and 2009; and many similar publications.

⁶ Most recently, see the work of Aleksei Miller, including *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006); and Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁷ "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006): 1140–65, quotations 1140. Of the six historians taking part in this forum, two were

However, this formulation notably omits explicit mention of the exchange of culture and ideas, not to mention models, practices, and images. These assume heightened significance for the history of both “Westernization” and a Soviet order that severely restricted borders and movement.

I would like to argue that Russian Westernization in the imperial period and the Soviet Union’s place at the center of the communist “second world” impart a particular valence to cross-border research that can make a distinct contribution to transnational history as it is being developed more generally. This was a country defined by rapid yet selective Europeanization in the imperial period and competition with capitalism in the Soviet era. Intensive scrutiny of the mechanisms by which foreign models were domesticated and international practices, knowledge, and culture circulated across often formidable quarantines can bring particular dividends. In the study of Soviet communism, the received boundaries that need to be transcended are those of not the nation-state but the Iron Curtain and are thus not merely transnational but transsystemic.⁸ In this sense, the most salient aspect of border-crossing is not the movement of goods and technologies, although that is important, but the profound domestic impact of imported models and practices as well as perceptions and ideas about the outside world—and, by the same token, the ways the image and mythologies of Russia and the USSR profoundly affected observers elsewhere.⁹ The Russian emigration is also emblematic of this reciprocal impact, in that it both had an effect on host countries and interacted, often covertly, with the Soviet Union—and was then reclaimed for post-Soviet Russian culture.¹⁰ Transnational history is thus not (necessarily) a fashionable trend to be aped from other fields; Russian

Americanists, two were Africanists, one was a Latin Americanist, and one was a historian of Indian and global history. For critical explorations of the concept and historiography, see Patricia Clavin, “Introduction: Defining Transnationalism,” *Contemporary European History* 14, 4 (2005): 421–40.

⁸ György Péteri, “Nylon Curtain: Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe,” *Slavonica* 10, 2 (2004): 113–23. By contrast, Ransel, “Reflections on Transnational and World History,” places the burgeoning study of relations among nationalities within the Russian Empire and the USSR at the center of transnational history in the field. While such interactions clearly have cross-cultural and international dimensions, the study of empire and borderlands also belongs to a significant degree to domestic Russian and Soviet history—even as it draws inspiration from the attempt to transcend national histories in other fields.

⁹ Here significant works include Steven G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France (c. 1740–1880)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); and Lev Kopelev et al., eds., *Russen und Russland aus deutscher Sicht*, 5 vols. (Munich: W. Fink, 1985–2000).

¹⁰ The work that pioneered this field of study is Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

and Soviet history potentially offers its own distinctive and revealing type of transnational history.

Seen in this light, many of the component parts of what the Russian–Soviet field offers to transnational history are far from new. Foreign observers have from the first been central to the study of Muscovy; the adaptation of European models has been similarly crucial to the study of the Petrine revolution. The notion that major new interpretive dividends could be gained by “opening up” the 18th century to cross-border research might seem odd to any *dix-huitièmiste*. This is hardly to imply that ongoing attempts to investigate more deeply the mechanisms of cross-border or interimperial interactions will not continue to yield rich results.¹¹ Nor is it to deny that the emphasis on Russian–European interactions has slighted relations with many other key parts of the world, including the Ottoman Empire and China.¹² Rather, it is to assert that transnational history has the most far-reaching implications for the revolutionary and Soviet periods. It is here that the formative grand narratives explaining the emergence of the Soviet system—whether ideology and political control or social forces “from below”—have been largely domestic in focus. For a long time, the international dimensions of Soviet history were examined by a small and largely segregated group of foreign policy specialists.¹³ To be sure, Soviet isolationism, autarky, and self-proclaimed exceptionalism, which reached their extremes during the Stalin period, naturally reinforced this “internalist” focus.

To assess how transnational history is changing interpretations and what remains to be done, the discussion of works here has to be selective. It focuses on only a few areas of research, those that seem most revealing about transnational approaches and that have far-reaching interpretive implications: the history of science and professional knowledge; the role of experts and cultural exchange; and socialist consumerism.

Comparison, Ideology, and Exchange in the History of Science

I begin with the history of science because it so clearly modifies the claims of novelty associated with transnationalism. In fact, the traditional or default position in that field in the postwar period (itself a response to Nazi race science and Soviet “proletarian science”) was that the natural sciences are

¹¹ Here see Martin Aust, Rikarda Vul’pius [Ricarda Vulpius], and Aleksei Miller, eds., *Imperium inter pares: Rol’ transferov v istorii Rossiiskoi imperii (1700–1917)* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010).

¹² For an investigation of the former case, see “Models on the Margins: Russia and the Ottoman Empire,” special issue of *Kritika* 12, 2 (2011).

¹³ My own attempt to get at the international dimensions to the creation of the Soviet system through a transnational study is Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2011).

international and cosmopolitan. In the complex debate over how to modify this universalism, notions of national style in scientific thought were an important development. This was itself an inherently comparative enterprise well aware of the burgeoning investigation of the best-known cases of ideological influences on science such as Aryan physics and Lysenkoism.¹⁴ In other words, the study of Soviet science combined a long-standing attention to science as an international enterprise with intensive investigation of the impact of politics and ideology on knowledge. Ironically, the long-standing international concerns in the field of the history of Soviet science may have diminished somewhat in the wake of the opening of the former Soviet archives in the 1990s, whose riches seemed to lead back to the primarily domestic focus characteristic of much of the rest of the Soviet field. This emphasis on Soviet particularities made Lysenkoism, already well studied, appear so central to Soviet science that recent scholars saw the need to dethrone it from a central position.¹⁵ Others suggested that Russian–Soviet “big science” anticipated developments in other countries, found other ways to make Soviet science seem less anomalous through comparisons, or began to examine Lysenkoism itself in its international and global dimensions.¹⁶

In his pioneering work on the Bolshevization of the Academy of Sciences, the dean of Russian science studies, Loren R. Graham, demonstrated the same concern with the domestication of foreign models that was central to the study of post-Petrine Westernization.¹⁷ Most reform projects for the creation of research institutes were stymied by the tsarist government; and French, British, and U.S. examples were actively studied in the 1920s. But Soviet-era science administrators were especially enamored of the German Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, with its applied orientation and state support. Ultimately, by attempting to leap beyond the German model into a system in which a Bolshevized Academy would encompass a vast network of research

¹⁴ A good example is Jonathan Harwood, *Styles of Scientific Thought: The German Genetics Community, 1900–1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁵ See Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Alexei Kojevnikov, “The Great War, the Russian Civil War, and the Invention of Big Science,” *Science in Context* 15, 2 (2002): 239–75; Nikolai Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). By far the most comprehensive examination of the international dimensions of Lysenkoism was at the “International Workshop on Lysenkoism,” conference held at City University of New York Graduate Center and Columbia University, 4–5 December 2009.

¹⁷ The Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences of 1725 was itself the product of a transnational implantation of foreign models, primarily the Berlin model proposed to Peter the Great by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. See Michael D. Gordin, “The Importation of Being Earnest: The Early St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences,” *Isis* 91, 1 (2000): 1–31.

institutes, the Soviet science system was “a result of a blending of foreign, native, and revolutionary influences.”¹⁸

Over three decades later, Graham has teamed up with a French mathematician, Jean-Michel Kantor, to probe how religious and national cultural orientations—that is, extra-scientific influences—are connected to scientific breakthroughs. While key developments in set theory originated in Germany and were developed in France, where they were studied by Russians in Paris seminars, the way forward in French mathematics in the early 20th century became blocked by its rationalistic, Cartesian orientation. By contrast, the founders of the famous Moscow School of Mathematics, Nikolai Luzin and Dmitrii Egorov, profoundly influenced by the Orthodox priest and trained mathematician Pavel Florenskii, were immersed in deeply mystical and religious approaches. Specifically, Florenskii and the mathematicians adhered to Name Worshipping (*imiiaslavie* or *imiabozhie*), a heresy originating with a group of monks on Mt. Athos that was forcibly suppressed by Russian troops that stormed the monastery in 1913. Name Worshippers, whose theology was defined by the notion that the name of God is God himself, were immersed in the mystical techniques of the Jesus Prayer.

This context, the book demonstrates, not only propelled the rise of Soviet mathematics but, long after any religious roots could be openly discussed, shaped the Moscow School’s mathematical style. Name Worshipping was not a precondition of the mathematical discoveries, Graham and Kantor conclude, but it did prompt the Russian mathematicians to assign new names to entities in their work on set theory. Soviet political persecution and intense same-sex relationships also influenced the mathematical achievement.¹⁹ The biographical drama set against the revolutionary backdrop of political–ideological repression strongly evokes Graham’s *Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, a work that assessed the peculiar Soviet approach to engineering and technocracy-in-power; the exploration of religious mysticism is not unrelated to one of the central concerns of Graham’s oeuvre, the sometimes productive influence of Marxist-Leninist philosophy on Soviet science.²⁰

¹⁸ Loren R. Graham, “The Formation of Soviet Research Institutes: A Combination of Revolutionary Innovation and International Borrowing,” *Social Studies in Science* 5 (1975): 303–29, quotation 328, a thesis Kojevnikov attempts to modify by pointing to the importance of 1914 and early Soviet isolation (“The Great War,” 269–70). See also Graham, *The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Communist Party, 1927–1932* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967). For similarly comparative works, see Graham, “Science and Values: The Eugenics Movement in Germany and Russia in the 1920s,” *American Historical Review* 82, 5 (1977): 1133–64; and Mark B. Adams, ed., *The Well-Born Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Loren R. Graham and Jean-Michel Kantor, *Naming Infinity: A True Story of Religious Mysticism and Mathematical Creativity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Loren R. Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). On the latter point, see especially

At the same time, neither Graham's 1975 work on foreign models nor his 2009 work on Franco-Russian comparisons was intended to deeply investigate the actual cross-national interactions the works mentioned—say, during the West European tours of Academy of Sciences Permanent Secretary Sergei Ol'denburg in 1923 and 1926 or those Parisian seminars attended by the Moscow scholars.

The work of Susan Gross Solomon represents the most systematic and finely grained investigation in the Russian–Soviet field of the many factors and dimensions shaping transnational interactions in science, social science, and medicine. Solomon's approach to transnational research began in the 1990s with carefully crafted studies of Soviet–German medical relations, turned next to study of the Rockefeller Foundation and Soviet–American scientific ties, and most recently has moved to Soviet–French interactions through the prism of a key intermediary.²¹ In her 1993 work on the Soviet–German syphilis expedition to Buriat Mongolia, we already find analysis of the 1928 bilateral venture as “a classic illustration of the dynamics of cross-national science.”²² At the core of this work and its successors lies an analysis of the divergent agendas of two strange bedfellows (in this case German and Soviet scientists with often different views on nature and nurture, hygiene, sexual mores, and race). To explain agendas on both sides of an encounter Solomon typically sets out systematically to investigate their various dimensions; she evokes, in turn, international contexts, political interests and patronage, institutional settings, and perhaps most intensively, disciplinary frameworks in a time of revolutionary opportunity and flux. So closely interrogating a series of bilateral connections has logically led her to situate them more broadly among other competing networks and potential partners in other countries—at a time when revolutionary Russia could be perceived as a vast playground for unrealized plans and fantasies.²³

Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

²¹ For a sampling of her many publications, see Susan Gross Solomon, “Vergleichende Völkerpathologie auf unerforschtem Gebiet: Ludwig Aschoff's Reise nach Russland und in den Kaukasus im Jahre 1930,” in *Vergleichende Völkerpathologie oder Rassenpathologie*, ed. Solomon and Jochen Richter (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1998), 1–50; Solomon and Nikolai Kremontsov, “Giving and Taking across Borders: The Rockefeller Foundation in Russia, 1921–1927,” *Minerva* 39, 3 (2001): 265–98; Solomon, “Local Knowledge or Knowledge of the Local: Rockefeller Foundation Officers' Site Visits to Russia in the 1920s,” *Slavic Review* 62, 4 (2003): 710–33; and Solomon, “Entre Deux Mondes: Alexandre Nikolaevich Roubakine, 1889–1979,” in Alexandre Roubakine, *Gorod*, trans. Wladimir Berelowitch (Paris: Spiralthe, 2010).

²² Susan Gross Solomon, “The Soviet–German Syphilis Expedition to Buriat Mongolia, 1928: Scientific Research on National Minorities,” *Slavic Review* 52, 2 (1993): 204–32, quotation 207.

²³ Susan Gross Solomon, “Introduction: Germany, Russia, and Medical Cooperation between the Wars,” and Solomon, “Infertile Soil: Heinz Zeiss and the Import of Medical Geography

The point I would like to make here, however, is that this rigorous, multi-dimensional inquiry into the factors shaping scientific and disciplinary agendas is combined in Solomon's oeuvre with examination of the cultural outlooks and biographical dramas of key players. This links it inextricably to cultural history, where cross-cultural encounters, mental mapping, and images of the Other have long been central. For example, in *Doing Medicine Together* Solomon frames the discussion of cross-cultural transactions with a series of evocative metaphors: "choosing friends," the "outsider as insider," and "fault lines and bridges" of the Russian terrain.²⁴ Solomon's exquisitely calibrated studies of transnational science speak in a clear dialogue with cultural history.

Vera Tolz, who like Graham was earlier immersed in the history of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, contributes two important additional elements to transnational approaches in the context of Russian–Soviet knowledge and power.²⁵ First, in her recent work on Russian Oriental studies in the context of European Orientalism she effortlessly bridges the 1917 divide, showing how the pervasive concern with "Russia and the West" of the late imperial period shaped the altered, politicized scholarly orientations of the early Soviet Union. The most prominent generation of Orientologists after the 1880s, including Ol'denburg, Vasilii Bartol'd, and Nikolai Marr, developed a critique of European Orientalism as biased, fueled by imperialism, racism, and an unfounded sense of superiority over the supposedly stagnant "East." They also harbored great ambitions to reverse the traditional inferiority of Russian science. These attitudes, sharpened during World War I, were radicalized in dialogue with Soviet politics and ideology in the 1920s.²⁶ This dovetails with David Hoffmann's argument that the "nurturist" orientation of a wide range of intelligentsia experts in Russian natural and social science disciplines, and not Marxism-Leninism in isolation, molded early Soviet disciplinary orientations.²⁷

A second implication of Tolz's work on *vostokovedenie* has to do with the multidirectional impact or circulation of ideas across time and space. She spends much effort establishing links between Edward Said's famous work on Orientalism and the earlier Russian–Soviet critique of European Orientalism—

to Russia, 1922–1930," in *Doing Medicine Together: Germany and Russia Between the Wars*, ed. Solomon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 3–34, 240–90.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12, 240, 260.

²⁵ Vera Tolz, *Russian Academicians and the Revolution: Combining Professionalism and Politics* (London: St. Martin's, 1997).

²⁶ Vera Tolz, "European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika* 9, 1 (2008): 53–81; the full-length study has appeared as *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁷ David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2011).

via Arab authors of the 1960s. In her words, Said ultimately owed more to Ol'denburg—both essentialized the “West”—than to Foucault.²⁸ Rather than chronicling a simple transfer from West to East, Tolz probes a transnational web of circulation, anticipations, and temporal lags.

Experts and the State

The study of science, social science, and expertise is linked to politics and big questions of recent Soviet historiography—human transformation, state violence, modernity—through the study of the intelligentsia and professionals. In recent decades, Russian nonparty specialists after 1917 have been viewed not merely as victims of political and ideological repression. In a broad shift, they have come to be seen as participants in the attempt to sculpt the social body and launch projects of human transformation that were, to be sure, channeled through the Bolshevik Revolution. Attention has focused most on the human and medical sciences and the attempt to define deviance.²⁹ While transnational history is only beginning in this area, it already promises large dividends.

Hoffmann's forthcoming study of social interventionism after World War I is perhaps the first full-length work of comparative history that also makes an archival contribution to the Soviet field. With chapters on social welfare, public health, reproductive policy, surveillance and propaganda, and state violence, this work shows in detail—with reference mainly to Germany, France, Britain, and the United States—how similar modern practices and concepts of social intervention assumed differing forms in different social, political, and ideological settings. At the same time, one of his major conclusions is that Russian and Soviet experts who drew heavily on European ideas often look less anomalous when compared to modernizing elites in Mexico, Iran, Turkey, and Japan—who also saw science, enlightenment, and a strong state as keys to reversing a national sense of inferiority.³⁰

Hoffmann's book reinforces the notion that comparative and transnational history generally go hand in hand, because transnational exchange often illuminates similarities and differences. In Hoffmann's primarily comparative work, episodes of transnational interaction illuminate how Soviet knowledge and techniques were developed in international networks. This type of analysis is most evident in the chapter on public health. Analyzing the Narkomzdrav Department of Foreign Information established in 1921 and the foreign travel of Soviet physicians, Hoffmann discusses the “modified borrowing”

²⁸ Tolz, “European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial,” 78–80.

²⁹ For noteworthy recent examples, see Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Kenneth M. Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective: Suicide and the Promise of Soviet Socialism, 1921–1929* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

³⁰ Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*.

of Soviet labor hygienists, health officials involved in disease prevention, efficiency experts, and industrial psychologists. In a final chapter on political violence, which Hoffmann links generically to other forms of interwar Soviet social interventionism, both the experts and the transnational element fade into the background.³¹ By then, one is tempted to conclude that this was the domain of the Bolshevik professionals—professional revolutionaries—whose realm of theoretical expertise was Marxist-Leninist ideology and whose sphere of applied expertise was social engineering and political repression.

Daniel Beer discusses criminology and psychiatry as the disciplines most involved in consolidating a “biomedical discourse” centered around isolating deviance as a “social danger,” which was “an important part of the intellectual climate that legitimated the leadership’s assault on enemies real and imagined during the violent year of the Great Breakthrough.”³² But can one speak of a more immediate and direct domestication of international practices and disciplinary knowledge in the Great Terror, and in Soviet political violence more generally? In one intriguing study, for example, Yves Cohen has focused on the highly idiosyncratic Soviet reception of European and American research on administration and the associated technologies of administrative rule adopted in the Stalin era—card filing systems, telephone, telegraph, and dispatching.³³

Clearly, the transnational mode has much to offer future research into the intersection of practices, social science, and political violence. This proposition is wonderfully illustrated in the 2005 work of Francine Hirsch on ethnographers. Hirsch takes the new approach to intelligentsia experts and sets it in an international frame, writing that “the Bolsheviks and the ethnographers were part of the same world: both groups, along with other Russian intellectuals, were engaged in a pan-European conversation about the national idea.” Hirsch, much like Hoffmann, establishes the processes of “selective borrowing” by which imported ideas and practices were altered in the Soviet context. However, while the book discusses travel and international scholarly cooperation, as well as such issues as the influence of German models on KEPS (the Commission for the Study of the Natural Productive Resources of Russia, later the USSR) and the international discussion of race, the emphasis in much of the work is not directly on the actual mechanisms and processes of transmission across borders.³⁴ Rather, *Empire of Nations* is

³¹ Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*, chaps. 2 and 5. Note that I am commenting, with the author’s permission, on the penultimate version of the forthcoming ms.

³² Beer, *Renovating Russia*, chap. 5, quotation 199.

³³ Yves Cohen, “Administration, politique et techniques: Réflexions sur la matérialité des pratiques administratives dans la Russie stalinienne (1922–1940),” *Cahiers du monde russe* 44, 2–3 (2003): 269–307.

³⁴ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005): quotations 5, 35; on travel and cooperation, see, e.g., 234–35, 245–46.

most suggestive for the historiography of transnationalism for another reason. Two concluding chapters set the evolution of Soviet ethnographic knowledge in the 1930s against the backdrop of the rise to power of German National Socialism, showing that the external ideological threat of Nazi race science was central to Soviet developments. The Nazi geopolitical and ideological threat is key to the book's overall argument that the 1930s represented an acceleration of Soviet "state-sponsored evolutionism" (creating national territories and official national languages and cultures) launched in the 1920s. In Hirsch's work the intelligentsia experts do not merely help construct the context in which political violence was enacted; their own decimation at the hands of the NKVD during the purge era created a "feedback loop" between terror and ethnographic knowledge. Terrorized ethnographers and statisticians expunged diaspora nationalities from the official roster and "provided a scientific rationale for the NKVD's population policies."³⁵

This Nazi–Soviet interaction involves not borrowing or exchange but rather influence through repudiation, creating a live link between an external ideological–geopolitical threat and the internal order. This might best be termed a form of transnational entanglement. For example, Jan Plamper's work on the "alchemy of power" argues that many features of the Stalin cult—the imperative to avoid enshrining it as a cult and hence its fragmented institutional underpinnings, for example—were an implicit response to the Fascist cult of the Duce and the Nazi *Führerprinzip*.³⁶ It is rare that one can cite many archival documents to identify such entanglements; they are more frequently established out of deep knowledge of the Soviet context in relation to the international scene. All the same, international entanglements have a special resonance for the study of Soviet communism, since many cross-border influences were covert or semi-covert or involved competitive emulation or repudiation as well as imitation.³⁷

In Katerina Clark's forthcoming reinterpretation of Stalinist culture, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, the equivalent of scientific experts in the transnational

³⁵ *Ibid.*, chaps. 6, 7; quotations 8, 307.

³⁶ Ian [Jan] Plamper, *Alkhimiia vlasti: Kul't Stalina v izobrazitel'nom iskusstve* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010); an English edition is forthcoming from Yale University Press in 2012.

³⁷ "Fascination and Enmity: Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories, 1914–45," special issue of *Kritika* 10, 3 (2009). On Soviet–German entanglements, see also Mark Edle and Michael Geyer, "States of Exception: The Nazi–Soviet War as a System of Violence, 1939–1945," and Katerina Clark and Karl Schlögel, "Mutual Perceptions and Projections: Stalin's Russia in Nazi Germany—Nazi Germany in the Soviet Union," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 345–95, 396–442; the many transnational sections of Schlögel, *Berlin, Ostbahnhof Europas: Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Siedler, 1998), and Schlögel, *Terror und Traum: Moskau 1937* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2008); and, most recently, Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

studies discussed above, *mutatis mutandis*, are a peripatetic, cosmopolitan, polyglot cohort of intellectuals and “mediators” in the cultural sphere. These include the avant-gardist Sergei Tret’iakov, the cultural amphibians Ilya Ehrenburg and Sergei Eisenstein, and the adventurer and power-broker Mikhail Kol’tsov. But instead of looking at one or another discipline of scientific or social scientific knowledge Clark’s field is the vast canvas of 1930s culture as a whole, and particularly the nexus of literature, architecture, and power. It is difficult to overstate the implications of this trailblazing work. Clark’s agenda is nothing less than to insert a largely missing international dimension to our understanding of Stalinist culture.

Clark’s evocation of this international dimension is another illustration of my argument that Soviet transnational studies have the unusual opportunity simultaneously to theorize real and imagined, geographical and ideological border-crossings, the combination of which holds profound significance for remaking the internal order. The actual movement across borders in Clark’s work—which ranges from the mediators’ travel, which assumed outsized importance as borders closed for much of the rest of the population, to translations, influential cultural imports and exports, the activities of diasporas, and, most important, the dynamics of antifascist culture—assumes meaning within a grand bid to make a reconstructed Moscow into a center of world culture. The pursuit of cultural hegemony or what Clark would call an imperial dominance, spearheaded by Soviet intellectuals and ratified by the political leadership, paralleled the rise of Moscow as a model socialist city and a veritable cult of culture, in which literature and the written word assumed the dominant role. In place of earlier, “internalist” understandings of 1930s ideological and cultural shifts as a “Great Retreat” from early socialist values, Clark speaks about a “Great Appropriation”—not just from the Russian culture of the past but from the “world” heritage and from abroad. In both cases this mostly signifies continental Europe, the preoccupation of Soviet intellectuals in this period. Instead of Hoffmann and Hirsch’s selective or modified borrowings of concepts and practices, Clark is inclined to discuss a more fundamental process of cultural “reworking.”³⁸

If one central interpretive axis on which Clark’s work turns is the reflexive relationship between aesthetics and politics, the other is the interplay between forms of imperialism and nationalism, on the one hand, and internationalism and cosmopolitanism, on the other. All, Clark insists, coexisted in the Stalinist 1930s. The pursuit of cultural dominance in fact facilitated cosmopolitan contact. Here Clark is not only reinterpreting Stalinism but attempting to provide a prehistory, one almost deliberately bracketed in

³⁸ Katerina Clark, *Moscow, The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). I thank the author for providing me with the penultimate version of the manuscript.

contemporary discussions, for key concepts of today's literary and cultural studies: transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and world literature.³⁹ Surely this metacommentary on present-day transnationalism, a sometimes oblique thread throughout the manuscript, is a cautionary tale for naïve talk about transcending the national or failure to distinguish rigorously among different forms and meanings of cross-border exchange.

Does the sheer scope of the international dimensions of Stalinist culture revealed in Clark's work prompt us to modify our picture of Stalinism as one of the most isolationist and autarkic regimes of the century, or did the Stalin-era declaration of superiority in culture logically go hand in hand with the increasingly far-reaching closure of physical borders after the late 1920s? The approach in *Moscow, the Fourth Rome* for understanding the relationship between culture and politics under Stalin will surely provoke discussion. So, too, perhaps, will the issue of causality—which tends to be a central one for the historical discipline but not necessarily for Clark's analysis of a cultural-political ecosystem. Clark's book discusses causality mainly in a revisionist sense of dethroning the cipher "Stalin" and the political leadership from the driver's seat in all matters. In the end, so much has been written about culture and politics in the 1930s that the revelatory feel of Clark's *magnum opus* is one of the best testimonies for the promise of transnational approaches.

Socialist Consumerism and the End of Communism

As cross-border research is revising narratives about the formation of the Soviet system and Stalinism, it is also affecting interpretations of communism's demise. The literature about Soviet consumerism—until fairly recently, a notion considered as dubious as Soviet modernity—provides another case in point about the particular physiognomy of transnational history in the field. Intimately linked with comparison with the outside world, in particular the consumer societies of the "West," socialist consumerism was fundamentally about competitive, ideological comparisons and a shifting *imaginaire* of the world outside Soviet borders.

The embrace of a form of consumerism in the context of desperate mass shortages of the 1930s, along with the increasing emphasis on consumer goods and luxuries in the context of prewar Stalinism, was the place where intensive study of Soviet consumption was initially launched in the Anglophone literature. Advertisements for ice cream, eau de cologne, contraceptives, and ketchup were a branch of Socialist Realism, in that they depicted images of abundance through goods often impossible to obtain.⁴⁰ Amy Randall's 2008

³⁹ Clark, introduction to *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov, "Directed Desires: *Kul'turnost'* and Consumption," in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution, 1881–1940*, ed. Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291–313; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford

book, which concluded with a chapter stressing interwar state interventionism in retail trade in countries other than the USSR, challenged the notion that “if the masses cannot exercise their purchasing power freely or articulate their individuality through the consumption of particular products, then there is no mass consumer culture.” Soviet state interventionism was not unique in mobilizing consumers for political and economic ends, even if the politicized nature of Soviet consumption was especially overt. Yet socialist consumption was part of a broader cultural or even civilizational mission of overcoming backwardness by promoting “cultured” behavior (*kul'turnost*). “In contrast to the capitalist dream world,” Randall writes, “the Soviet version urged citizens to imagine retailing and consumption as vehicles for fostering socialist goals. Communist authorities conjured up a vision in which the retail sector would become yet another realm of modernity.”⁴¹ The result was a particular version of a national, mass consumer culture—a distinctive “dream world” even within an economy of shortages.

At the same time, actual border crossings were clearly crucial here as well. In the mid-1930s, the Soviet state sent numerous delegations to London, Berlin, and New York to study retailing and “cultured trade.” Jukka Gronow opened his 2003 work, *Caviar with Champagne*, with Anastas Mikoian's two-month visit to the United States in 1936, where he and his delegation toured hundreds of food industry factories and became particularly enamored of mass-produced, prepackaged, and canned items such as powdered milk, frankfurters, and ice cream. Although it was subsequently forgotten, the Old Bolshevik commissar's infatuation resulted in a number of kiosks built before 1941 to serve the products of what Mikoian rapturously called “machines that make 5,000 steaks an hour”: hamburgers.⁴²

The 1939 Main Meat Administration (Glavmiaso) advertisement by an unknown artist promotes such prepackaged foodstuffs as borscht and cutlets as a “full meal in 20 minutes.” The accompanying frame for this new kind of food—a

University Press, 1999), 90–93. In recent Russian historiography, research on material culture and consumption was initially carried out in the context of the study of everyday life. For a prominent example, see Nataliia Borisovna Leбина and Aleksandr Nikolaevich Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy: Kartiny povesednevnoi zhizni gorozhan v gody nepa i khrushcheskogo desiatiletiia* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003).

⁴¹ Amy Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), quotations 179, 4.

⁴² Perhaps if the Nazis had not invaded, there would be “Mikoian's” as well as McDonald's in Russia. See Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003): 1–2, 73–74, and on other delegations abroad, 75–79. See also Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 205, 334. For a new work on luxury goods in the communist world, see David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010).



Buy Food Concentrates, 1939 advertisement

Reproduced with permission of the Graphics Division of the Russian State Library. Published in Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, 33

clean, orderly table made aesthetically pleasing with its tablecloth, flowers, and almost geometrically arranged array of products—implicitly presents these products as components of a contemporary, cultured lifestyle. This encapsulates the link between Soviet consumption and the *kul'turnost'* campaign. Randi Cox has found that Soviet advertising, even during the height of the ascetic, class-war productionism of Stalin's Great Break, introduced "Westernized images of glamour and beauty." At the same time, during the campaign for "cultured trade" Soviet department stores were in theory supposed to serve as "educational sites dedicated to increasing the cultural level of consumers." Even shop windows were supposed to fulfill a "pedagogical task."⁴³

The literature on Stalin-era consumption, while it contains evocative comparisons and consideration of competitive borrowing from Western countries, has thus far explored cross-border exchanges only episodically. Would it be possible to write a dissertation about Mikoian's America?⁴⁴ The

⁴³ Randi Cox, "All This Can Be Yours! Soviet Commercial Advertising and the Social Construction of Space, 1928–1956," in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle: University of Washington, 2003), 139.

⁴⁴ In this regard, see the commentary in Erika Wolf, ed., *Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip: The 1935 Travelogue of Two Soviet Writers Ilia Ilf and Evgeny Petrov*, trans. Anne O. Fisher (New York: Cabinet Books and Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).

rewards of shifting the center of attention to the moment of transnational interaction is suggested by an in-depth comparison by Steven Harris of Soviet architects and housing experts' publications (in Britain in 1947) and travel (in the United States in 1955), in which he is able to recover motivations and interactive perceptions on both sides of the encounters.⁴⁵

It is in the period of the Thaw and the cultural Cold War that the transnational dimensions of consumption under communism have truly blossomed.⁴⁶ In part, this is because consumption was intimately linked with other international developments, including Khrushchev's new engagement with the outside world—reflecting the attempt to enhance Soviet international status through his “peaceful coexistence” strategy and a remarkably optimistic renewal of open cultural–diplomatic competition with the West.⁴⁷ Significant increases in travel and cultural traffic to and from the USSR, with the inevitably intense scrutiny of consumption elsewhere, reverberated throughout Soviet society and culture. For example, Anne Gorsuch's study of filmic representations of the West shows how intimately they were linked to the new tourism and ideological warnings about the allure of Western material culture—but also to images of Soviet modernity and civilized consumption that were, strikingly, derived from a “western, specifically European, model.”⁴⁸ A series of remarkable international openings took place inside the country: the sensational Picasso exhibit in 1956, the mass exhilaration of the World Youth Festival in 1957, and the unprecedented

⁴⁵ Steven E. Harris, “Two Lessons in Modernism: What the *Architectural Review* and America's Mass Media Taught Soviet Architects about the West,” *Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies*, no. 31 (August 2010).

⁴⁶ For example, see Eleonory Gilburd and Larissa Zakharova, eds., “Repenser le Dégel: Versions du socialisme, influences internationales et société soviétique,” special issue of *Cahiers du monde russe* 43, 1–2 (2006).

⁴⁷ Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), chap. 3; Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Michael David-Fox, “Toward the Cultural Cold War,” conclusion to *Showcasing the Great Experiment*.

⁴⁸ Anne E. Gorsuch, “From Iron Curtain to Silver Screen: Imagining the West in the Khrushchev Era,” in *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. György Péteri (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 153–71. On the opening of the country and travel more broadly, see Stephen Lovell, “From Isolationism to Globalization,” chap. 9 of *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941 to Present* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). For a new work containing much material on concrete cross-border contacts outside the capital cities during the Brezhnev period, see Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); on the imaginary West under late socialism, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 5.

American National Exhibition at Sokol'niki Park in the summer of 1959.⁴⁹ Khrushchev's declaration that the USSR would "catch up and overtake" the United States in consumption directly linked his effort to boost the retail sector and his mass housing campaign to the Cold War.

Exploration of another major historical development has directly shaped the new historiography: the creation of a "Soviet bloc" in Eastern Europe after the late 1940s and by extension the communist "second world." Soviet travel and interaction with the bloc countries became a major factor in Soviet history; the new, "socialist" transnational exchange had distinctly different dynamics than interactions with *kapstrany* (capitalist countries).⁵⁰ In historiographical terms, moreover, consumerism and related topics have become central issues in the post-1989 literature on communist East Central Europe.⁵¹ Interest in socialist consumerism and transnationalism has thus renewed the Soviet field's connections to Eastern Europe more than at any time in the decade and a half after 1989, when for geopolitical and institutional reasons the two fields were largely de-coupled.

Susan Reid, whose interest in consumption and everyday culture is complemented by her interests in modernism, design, and visual culture, has contributed to the study of the Cold War kitchen and mass housing in the Khrushchev period. Perhaps her most suggestively transnational publication thus far has been her 2008 *Kritika* article on the American National Exhibition in Sokol'niki Park, visited by over 2.7 million Soviet citizens in six weeks in the summer of 1959, for which she worked in U.S. as well as Soviet archives. Reid challenged the simplistic notion that the exhibition, and by extension American superiority in the realm of consumption, led inexorably to the collapse of communism. Studying the complex source of exhibition comment

⁴⁹ Eleanory Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 65–108; Pia Koivunen, "The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival: Propagating a New, Peaceful Image of the Soviet Union," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilić and Jeremy Smith (London: Routledge, 2009), 45–65. On 23 July 2009, on the 50th anniversary of the Sokol'niki exhibition, I attended the commemorative conference at George Washington University, "Face-off to Facebook: From the Nixon–Khrushchev Kitchen Debate to Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century," whose participants included dozens of former exhibit guides and staff.

⁵⁰ See Elidor Mëhilli, "The Socialist Design: Urban Dilemmas in Postwar Europe and the Soviet Union," review article forthcoming in *Kritika*, 2012. For an extended argument, see Michael David-Fox, "The Iron Curtain as Semi-Permeable Membrane: The Origins and Demise of the Stalinist Superiority Complex," in *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s*, ed. Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, forthcoming 2013).

⁵¹ For example, Péteri, ed., *Imagining the West*; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

books, she argued that 1959 was a “battle of claims and images” and that U.S. triumph was far from a foregone conclusion. At a moment when, she implies, an alternative, different, Soviet type of consumption was eminently conceivable, the message Soviets received from the exhibition was ambiguous. What, then, most distinguished socialist consumption under Khrushchev? Reid stresses how a significant strand of Soviet responses to the American exhibition stressed “enlightenment, not entertainment, self-development rather than self-gratification,” rational consumption over “glitter,” and culture over goods.⁵² One can infer from this stress on “cultured” and modern consumption in the 1950s that there are as yet not fully explored lines of continuity between the Thaw and the *kul'turnost'* campaign of the 1930s, itself a component part of a broader cultural revolution of the entire 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the roots are even deeper if one takes into account how Soviet cultural diplomacy staked claims of superiority not on consumer goods but workers' living standards, model workers' housing, and welfare in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁵³ In any event, in a recent commentary Reid underscores one of her main conclusions: the Soviet version was far from a “carbon copy of Western, capitalist consumption.”⁵⁴

As this emphasis on Soviet alterity underscores, we are also beyond the stage in the discussion when the mere fact that the Soviets tried to compete in the realm of consumption is depicted as a fateful move leading directly to collapse in 1991. However, prominent students of consumption in the East European context have advanced interpretations that differ in emphasis from Reid's. For example, György Péteri has argued that attempts to forge a distinctive form of communist consumerism in practice came too late to alter already well-established, everyday patterns in which Western-style acquisitive consumerism had already been replicated, especially by elites. In his work on Hungarian automobilism, Péteri shows how Khrushchev's scheme to promote a giant system of collectivist car pools over private use was undermined from the very start in the Hungarian case by *nomenklatura* elites and easily abandoned under reform communism. This represented, in his words, “the failure of the state-socialist social order to assert its systemic exceptionalism ... in the field of modern mobility.”⁵⁵ In his wide-ranging exploration of

⁵² Susan E. Reid, “Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008): 855–904.

⁵³ Erika Wolf, “USSR in Construction: From Avant-Garde to Socialist Realist Practice” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 80–123; David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, chap. 5.

⁵⁴ Susan E. Reid, “Consumption and Everyday Culture after Stalin,” *Russian Studies in History* 48, 1 (2009): 3–9, quotation 4.

⁵⁵ György Péteri, “Alternative Modernity? Everyday Practices of Elite Mobility in Communist Hungary, 1956–1980,” paper presented at the panel “Consumerism and the Fall of Communism,” Eighth World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICEEES), Stockholm, July 2011; his chapter of the same title will be

home design and domestic culture in the Cold War German Democratic Republic, Greg Castillo has characterized three successive “consumption regimes”: virtual (Socialist Realist); virtuous (the Thaw-era attempt to create a distinctively socialist consumer culture); and subversive (late socialism). Yet, much like Péteri, Castillo concludes that the second phase never truly got off the ground and led directly into the third: “The modernist dream of a *virtuous* consumption regime, far from producing ideal socialist subjects, had become a finishing school for the disenfranchised.”⁵⁶

How communist regimes attempted to reconcile an increasingly overt stress on consumption with the imperative of distinguishing socialism is being investigated by research into how consumption regimes were conceived ideologically *and* embedded in the planned economy and everyday culture. Here let us recognize the limits of transnational research. A focus on moments of international contact alone cannot fully inquire into how consumption functioned within a deep context framed in part by “socialist industry,” the black market, popular attitudes, and the culture of shortages—in short, the space “between ideology and the everyday.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

The concept of the “transnational” is not a precise one. It means different things to different scholars and, I have argued, is also being employed in various ways in numerous fields and subfields. This essay has suggested how transnational research, far from representing a sharp break in the historiography, has amplified certain long-standing concerns in the field: the import and reception of foreign models; the fundamental concern with delineating Russian and Soviet particularism and comparability; and the foundational historiographical topic of “Russia and the West.” In more immediate terms, the transnational research of the 2000s emerged out of the greater concern with comparative history, debates about Russian and Soviet modernity, and the concern with perceptions of the “Other” in the cultural history of the 1990s. What the new interest in transnationalism has done is to direct research more sharply toward the moments and mechanisms of exchange and two-sided examinations of international interactions.

published in *The Socialist Car: Automobility in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. Lewis Siegelbaum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2011); see also Péteri, “Streetcars of Desire: Cars and Automobility in Communist Hungary (1958–70),” *Social History* 34, 1 (2009): 1–28, quotation from Khrushchev, 8.

⁵⁶ Greg Castillo, “Virtual, Virtuous, Subversive: Shifting Household Consumption Regimes in the GDR,” paper presented at the panel “Consumerism and the Fall of Communism,” Eighth ICEEES World Congress, Stockholm, July 2010.

⁵⁷ Here I am quoting the subtitle of Ol’ga Gurova’s interesting study, *Sovetskoe nizhnee bel’e: Mezhdú ideologii i povsednevnost’iu* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008).

The number of citations here to very recent publications and forthcoming works suggests that the transnational turn gathered steam in the last years of the 2000s. Its impact on the historiography, most likely, has far from crested. In this regard, it should be noted that Russian–European and Soviet–American interactions have been examined far more than other parts of the world. This is not merely a historiographical issue but a linguistic one, since truly bilateral or multilateral studies demand high-level training. If in the American context transnationalism might be criticized as replicating a “United States and the world” approach, in the Russian context it should not simply reinscribe the focus on “Russia and the West.” To be sure, revealing new works could have been cited involving Russian–Soviet relations with China, the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, Japan, and other parts of the world.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, however, these areas remain very much underrepresented.

At the same time, it must be recognized that the competitive emulation of the West is one of the central features of Russian and Soviet history that gives transnational approaches in this context their singularity. Layered onto the history of imperial Russian “Westernization” and the great debates over national identity, Soviet-era isolationism and ideological competition imparted an outsized significance—both positive and negative—to international and especially Western contacts under communism. This has given examination of cross-border exchange in this area the unusual potential for revising hitherto largely internalist grand narratives, particularly in terms of understanding the formation and fall of the Soviet system. This potential derives from two features of transnational research in this field. The first is the centrality of not just goods and people crossing actual borders but the way “really-existing” exchanges were caught up with ideas and ideologies about the outside world, which deeply affected successive openings and closings; the second is the way those contacts, especially across the semipermeable membrane erected with the outside world in the Soviet period, illuminate the nexus between the Soviet system’s external and internal dimensions. Perhaps practitioners of transnational history in other fields will take notice.

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⁵⁸ On the period of the Cold War, see, for example, the works discussed in David Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” *Kritika* 12, 1 (2011): 183–211.