

**“RUSSIA OUTSIDE RUSSIA”: TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY, OBJECTS OF  
MIGRATION, AND DISCOURSES ON THE LOCUS OF CULTURE AMONGST  
EDUCATED RUSSIAN MIGRANTS IN PARIS, BERLIN, AND NEW YORK**

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES  
(Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

February 2019

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“Russia outside Russia”: Transnational Mobility, Objects of Migration, and Discourses on the Locus of Culture amongst Educated Russian Migrants in Paris, Berlin, and New York

submitted by Gregory Gan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines transnational Russian migration between Moscow, Berlin, Paris, and New York. In conversation with forty-five first- and second-generation Russian intellectuals who relocated from Russia and the former Soviet Union, the researcher investigates transnational Russian identity through ethnographic, auto-ethnographic, and visual anthropology methods. Educated migrants from Russia who shared with the researcher a comparable epistemic universe and experiential perspective, and who were themselves experts on migration, discuss what it means to belong to global transnational diasporas, how they position themselves in historical contexts of migration, and what they hope to contribute to modern intellectual migrant narratives. The research traces how such narratives are created and reproduced both across space, using transcultural approaches across multiple fieldwork sites, and through time, through diachronic comparisons of historical records, memoir literature, and present-day ethnographic interviews. Different anthropological “voices”—autobiographical, auto-ethnographic, empirical, and multi-media—are used throughout the dissertation, highlighting the positioned, intersubjective, and “emplaced” nature of the researcher. Using visual anthropology research methods, the presentation and dissemination of this research also moves beyond the textual mode. Interviews with research participants, recorded and edited into short vignettes, became part of an interactive multi-media installation and online archive on the tangible and intangible places, objects, and memories of Russian transnational migration.

## **Lay Summary**

This dissertation follows the researcher, born and raised in the Soviet Union, as he travels and talks with educated Russian migrants in Moscow, Paris, Berlin, and New York about moving to a new country. Forty-five of these conversations were recorded and edited into short stories, which became part of an interactive video and sound installation. Because there is a long history of emigration from Russia, there is also a strong tradition of writing about migration experiences in places such as Paris, Berlin, and New York. The researcher compares these historical records about migration with present-day migration stories, examined through interviews. The researcher also attempts to recreate his own migration journey by writing about his past. Both the written and the video work considers how people search for personal fulfillment across different political contexts. The video work attempts to reach a wider audience by using creative and interactive storytelling methods.

## Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Gregory Gan. The research project, of which this dissertation is part, received research ethics approval from the University of British Columbia Research Ethics Board, certificate number H15-000148, 2015-2018. Unless otherwise stated, translations from all the languages used in the dissertation are by the author.

Parts of Chapter 1 and Chapter 6 concerning space (1.2), place (6.2.1), and a “state of enchantment” (6.1) appear, differently framed, in a published paper, “Soaring to Dizzying Heights: Christ the Saviour Cathedral as a Historical Arena for the Persecution of Pussy Riot.” *Critique of Anthropology*, 2015, Vol. 35(2), Pp. 166-186.

Chapter 3 was presented, differently framed, as a talk, “Moving Pictures: Representing Migration in Ethnographic Film,” at a roundtable panel titled *Beyond Borders: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Migration* at the Liu Institute for Global Issues, UBC, in November 2014.

Chapter 4 was presented, differently framed, as “The Trope of the Suitcase: Narratives of Mobile Identities amongst Transnational Russian Migrants,” at the conference *Heritages of Migration: Moving Stories, Objects and Home*, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in April 2017, in press as conference proceedings.

Chapter 5 was presented, differently framed, as a paper, “And with me, my Russia / I Bring along in a Traveling Bag: Literary and Ethnographic Narratives of Russian Exile and Emigration, Past and Present,” presented at the *Young Researchers Conference: Centennial, Commemoration, Catastrophe, 1917-2017 as Past and Present in Russia and Beyond*, in Cuma, Italy, in June 2017. This paper was reworked for a special issue of *Revolutionary Russia* (in press, January 2019) dedicated to the conference, but appears in an altered form in the dissertation.

Chapter 6 was presented, differently framed, as “Burning Bridges: Ambivalent Metaphors of Russian State Power as Seen through the Symbolism of Bridges as Contentious Political Spaces,” at the conference *Bridge: The Heritages of Connecting Places and Cultures*, Ironbridge World Heritage Site, July 2017.

This research project includes a multi-media installation titled *Still Life with a Suitcase*, supported by the Public Scholars Initiative at the University of British Columbia. The installation was presented at the Digital Anthropologies/*Anthropologies Numériques* Film Festival in Paris, November 2018. It was subsequently exhibited at CityLab: Berlin, a satellite campus of Norwich University in December 2018, and at the Canadian Anthropology Society’s Annual Meeting in Santiago de Cuba, May 2018. Online links to video documentation from these presentations, as well as links to the media content of the installation are included in Supplementary Materials (for full list, see page ix), and in the Appendices A and B.

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## List of Supplementary Materials

A component of this dissertation is an interactive multi-media installation, *Still Life with a Suitcase*, which is intended to be exhibited in a physical space uniting diverse components, such as a suitcase that functions as a projection surface, “smart” clay objects, and video-mapped projections. The following supplementary materials will be available in perpetuity in cIRcle, University of British Columbia’s open-access digital repository for research, and online links are made available to those readers unable to access the installation by other means.

### Participant Narratives, Background Video, and Installation Documentation:

1. Installation video 1: George Kiesevalter (1:27min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/259033827/dc97262b44>)
2. Installation video 2: Nune Barsegian (1:41min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/259045883/56e082621a>)
3. Installation video 3: Alexandr Genis (3:58min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/259055553/69408e3114>)
4. Installation video 4: Phillip Schneider (2:48min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/259081044/90b9dd990a>)
5. Installation video 5: Vadim Fadin and Anna Perchenok (4:56min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/267546817/10c2bc80cf>)
6. Installation video 6: Marina Dobuševa (4:24min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/267909618/3a2282ad0b>)
7. Installation video 7: Ekaterina Etkind (5:30min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/267967396/c840016e6f>)
8. Installation video 8: Dmitry Khmel'nitsky (5:18min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/293269161/49742882c2>)
9. Installation video 9: Compilation: Bridges (3:19min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/260502304/c549863b1c>)
10. Installation video 10: Background video (10:53min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/293396647/f87fc688fe>)
11. Installation Documentation (9:05min)  
(Online link: <https://vimeo.com/293278432/8bd7e48592>)

## Note on Transliteration

In this dissertation, I use the simplified BGN/PCGN (Board of Geographic Names and Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use) convention of English transliteration from foreign languages. This system uses basic English letters and punctuation and typically avoids the use of diacritics, thus not requiring specialist knowledge. Foreign words are italicized in the regular text and rendered regular in italicized passages. Where transliteration is ambiguous, this work strives to represent vernacular usage.

Notably for the Russian alphabet, BGN/PCGN converts the Cyrillic ж to *zh* (i.e., PMZh), х to *kh* (i.e., Khvostentko), ц to *ts* (i.e., Церетели=Tseretelli), ч to *ch* (i.e., Чечня=Chechnya), ш to *sh* (i.e., Тишина=Tishina), щ to *shch* (i.e., Хрущев=Khrushchev), ю to *yū* (i.e., Июль=Iyul'), and to я to *ya* (i.e., Ялта=Yalta). The mute soft sign, ь, converts to the prime symbol ('), not to be confused with an apostrophe ('). I have chosen to simplify Russian *e* to English *e* or *ye*, and Russian *ě* to *yo*, to ease the reader's comprehension of the text at the cost of perfect pronunciation, and because the diaeresis (¨) in *ě* is often omitted in Russian. Where it helps to distinguish a Russian word from an English homonym (*babúshka* vs. *bábushka*), I place an accent on the stressed syllable.

Where appropriate, instead of transliteration, I rely on local transcriptions of Russian words, especially when proper nouns are used as placenames in non-English-language contexts (i.e. in Paris, a library named after the writer Ivan Turgenev is transcribed as *La Bibliothèque Russe Tourguenev*). Discrepancies are especially prevalent amongst Russian public figures who have adopted an English translation of their name, which is often a simplified version of BGN/PCGN transliteration (i.e. Tarkovsky, rather than Tarkovskiy). Where possible, I also honour my research participants' preferred English-language spellings. When participants have published work outside a Russophone context, I use their non-Cyrillic name, written in Latin characters.

I make two final exceptions for not using BGN/PCGN transliteration: when quoting authors who use another transliteration system (i.e. Journal *Razsvet* in Cassedy, Steven (1993) vs. *Rassvet* (BGN/PCGN)), and when I use Russian words that have received wide English use, except when I define their Russian equivalents, in which case I italicize them (i.e. glasnost, rather than *glastnost'*; perestroika, rather than *perestroyka*; intelligentsia, rather than *intelligentsiya*).

## Acknowledgements

Although my name appears on the title page, this dissertation could not have been made without the support of those people to whom I owe profound gratitude, but whose responsibility for any errors, I unambiguously disavow and claim as my own.

This work owes a tremendous debt to Prof. Alexia Bloch, who has motivated me to be a better scholar by helping me navigate my PhD across major life transitions, tight deadlines, and long distances, unwaveringly offering both intellectual mentorship and tremendous practical support. I am grateful to Dr. Leslie Robertson for her encouragement in helping me discover my scholarly and creative voices, as well as her personable and attentive critique of my methods, and Dr. Patrick Moore, who reminded me to approach my work with calm and steadfastness, and whose early guidance inspired me to explore multi-media approaches in this dissertation.

I am grateful to people who offered intellectual guidance at different stages of this project, including Prof. Dr. Georg Witte, my host supervisor for a SSHRC-funded Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement in Berlin; my examiners, Prof. Michael Lambek, Dr. Nicola Levell, and Dr. Katherine Bowers; Dr. Benjamin Sutcliffe; Dr. Stephen Norris; Dr. Reade Davis; Nadine Wanono; Boris Raev; Viktor Misiano; Els Opsomer; Anita Doron; Club Maté: Dr. Alec Brookes, Dr. Francesca Silano, Zachary Rewinski, and Prof. Sharon Roseman, who inspires me to strive to express my ideas with the same grace she achieves innately.

I am indebted to Maria and Daria Echeistova, the great-granddaughter and the great-great-granddaughter of my great-great-grandfather, whose memoirs they meticulously retyped and shared with my immediate family. While I have never met them, I also hope my use of these texts will please his descendants still living in Chernigov, Ukraine.

I owe a debt to people who have connected me to members of the Russian community abroad, or have otherwise encouraged, facilitated, or advanced my research, including Julia Zimena, Dr. Andrej Tchernodarov, Dr. Catriona Kelly, Alexander Formozov, Larisa Kuracheva, Slava Polunin, Psoy Korolenko and Alena Galich, who, over a decade ago, urged me to consider making a film that would pick up from where my Master's thesis left off.

This dissertation would not exist if it were not for the grace, generosity and insight of my research participants. I wish to thank: in Russia, Lev Rubinstein, George Kiesewalter, Danila Kuznetsov, Aleksandr Smirnov, Vania Kuznetsov, Misha Kuznetsov, Nikita das Gupta, Mitia Mihajlov, Katia Selezneva, Fedor Remizov, Anna Mihaylova, Olga Satarova, Oksana Mihaylova, Mikhail Chervinsky, Nina, and Irina Gavrilova; in Germany, Aleksandr Morozov, Dmitri Vrubel, Viktoria Timofeeva, Genia Chef, Nune Barsegian, Dmitry Khmel'nitsky, Sonja Margolina, Zhenya Oks, Vadim Fadin, and Anna Perchenok; in France, Ekaterina Etkind, Kamil Tchalaev, Yaroslav Gorbanevsky, Nikita Krougly-Enke, Natalia Krouglaya, Masha Volodina, Alexei Batoussov, Anatoly/Naftali Rakuzin, Annie, and Erika; in the United States, Alexander Genis, Vitaly Komar, Nina Alovert, Elena Dovlatova, Igor Satanovsky, Matvei Yankelevich, Yevgeniy Fiks, and Philip Schneider; in Canada, Dmitry Zhukovsky, and Igor Zhukovsky; in Czech Republic, Marina Dobuševa, and Anastasia Vasilievna Kopshivova, and in Poland, Malika Marinike.

I wish to thank my hosts across different countries, who, whether they opened their doors to a relative stranger, or a friend, always made me feel at home: Stefan Pernthaller,

Chiyoko Szlavnic, Marta Kucza, Christian Picon, Elsa Maury, Anaëlle Maury, Eva Ntormousi, Maggie Schreiner, Abigail Miller, Dana Schneider, Annie-Michele Azerot, Anita Doron, Fred Mazurier, and my gracious couchsurfing hosts, Katerina, Julien, Mika, Liza and Achim.

I no longer consider solitude a virtue, having shared company with a group of people who have made my life both more joyful, and more meaningful: Ozren Stambuk, Andrée-Anne Fafard St.-Germain, Allison LaSorda, Alex Ireland, Heather Lougheed, Kristyna Balaban, Adam Široký, Evelyn Lessem, Marta Kucza, Mareike Lee, Chiyoko Szlavnic, Maggie Schreiner, Abigail Miller, Suzanne Watt, Geoff Watt, Robin Alam, Jonathan Schatz, Mark Huggan, Mitya Mihaylov, Katia Selezneva, Anton Gordeyev, Mascha Gugganigová, Davoud Geramifard, Charley Wu, Guillaume Guérin, and Julia Collins, who prompts me to strive to be a gentler person.

I am grateful to Kristina Balaban for her idea to make the multi-media installation interactive, and to Adam Široký, for his technical and creative expertise in bringing this idea to life, even when it meant traveling back and forth between Prague and Berlin. A special thank you is owed to GianCarlo Greco who helped me document the installation; Anton Laiko, my studio partner in Berlin; Yoan Robin, with whom I had the privilege to co-present our work in Paris, and various teams that helped me set it up and take it down. A special thank you is owed to the staff at Casa Dranguet in Cuba: Alfredo S. Falcón, Yaumara L. Segrera, Edgar B. Maranillo, Leira L. Rodriguez, Lianet G. Godinez and Odalis G. Arévalo. I am grateful to Niagara Custom Labs and Frame Discreet in Toronto, for processing and digitizing countless rolls of 16mm film.

This research project would not be possible without substantial financial support from SSHRC-Doctoral Canada Graduate Scholarship. Additional funding for travel was provided by SSHRC's Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement. My PhD program was supported at various stages by University of British Columbia's Faculty of Arts Graduate Award, the Four-Year Fellowship for PhD Students, the Arts Research Graduate Award, and the Graduate Student Travel Award; the Public Scholars Award gave me the freedom and the funds to develop and exhibit the multi-media component of this dissertation. The final phase of my PhD program was supported by the Department of Anthropology's PhD Writing Awards, for which I am grateful. The Canadian Anthropology Society provided funds to offset travel costs for its annual meeting in Cuba, where I presented the installation, and the Havighurst Centre at Miami University generously offered room and board during the Young Researchers' Conference in Cuma, Italy.

I was thrilled to reconnect with my grandfather's side of the family, Irina Lebedeva, Tanya Shipileva, Zhenya Shipileva. During my fieldwork, Valera Shipilev, whose charisma and brimming smile I will always cherish, passed away tragically and unexpectedly. I am at a loss in how to express my gratitude to my grandmother, Irina Pavlovna Gavrilova, and her two sisters, Svetlana Pavlovna and Tatiana Pavlovna, who offered close-to unconditional love and support throughout my life, and who instilled in me a love for what I do.

Words are feeble in expressing my indebtedness to my partner, Julia Zimena, whose selflessness, intellect, and sense of humour I can only aspire to emulate, but which I feel even luckier to experience firsthand, as we continue to share our life together.

Finally, I wish to thank my mother, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Mom, while I seldom acknowledge it, your courage, resilience and intelligence have been a source of inspiration for as long as I can remember. Thank you for giving me this life.

To my mom, Olga Gan

In memory of my grandfather, Igor' Sergeevich Gan

## Chapter 1: Uncertain Space(s); Uncertain Time(s)

### 1.1 My Grandfather's Suitcase

*In a photograph that survives from my childhood, I stand next to my grandfather, who came to visit my mom and me shortly after we moved to France. We lived in a small town, in an attic apartment overlooking the main city square, occupied prominently by the opera house. His arms are crossed, he wears a long blue trench coat and a tilted black beret, and most importantly, he looks genuinely happy. One day, when we came home, he excitedly opened the door to reveal a gift; behind him stood a set of three hard-shelled vinyl suitcases, to serve as a reminder for us to visit our Moscow home. When he left to the airport several days later, his own suitcase was packed to the brim—food, power tools, souvenirs; he even got my grandmother a new red skirt—but it turned out his baggage was ten kilos over the weight limit. Hoping to avoid the fine for excess weight, my grandfather went to the airport bathroom and put on every item of clothing in his possession; several layers of pants, shirts and sweaters. Finally, carefully tucked under his trench-coat, was my grandmother's brand new red skirt.*

Having re-written and re-read my opening paragraph dozens of times, I now wonder, self-consciously, if it is appropriate to speak about my migration trajectory through such easily digestible intimacies. A personal vignette that casually opens an academic manuscript, is a more-or-less predictable gesture to lend authority to the anthropologist, and a strategy of bringing the reader into the fold, “You are there, because I was there” (Clifford 1983:118). In a famous opening vignette describing running with locals from a police raid on a Balinese cockfight, Clifford Geertz (1973) writes from an embodied experience, propelling himself from being a

precarious outsider, to an insider, positioned to share cultural knowledge on the Balinese. However, as Eric Lassiter suggests, this narrative is “a rhetorical trick” (2005:106), which does little to interrogate the author’s situated position in the process of ethnographic knowledge-making. Neither is authority automatically conferred to a “native anthropologist,” implying that there exists an “authentic” experience of culture (Narayan 1993:678).

In this dissertation, which examines transnational Russian discourses on migration, I use personal narrative as an “unabashedly subjective” (Narayan 1993:682) storytelling device, as autobiographic retelling of my family’s migration journey, and as a means to enter into a dialogue with transnational Russian migrants intimately familiar with the genre of Russian memoir literature. The text above is deliberately italicized as a play on the title of a famous Russian émigré memoir, *The Italics are Mine* (Berberova 1996[1972]), critiqued, in its time, for its deliberately subjective tone. However, I also share the opening vignette because it has entered our family vernacular and has been told and retold hundreds of times. It became a trope, used as much to explain my family’s propensity for travel, as a reminder of where we came from.

*I had no control over my migration from Russia to France in 1993, when I was nine years old. From my mom’s stories, I recognize how much our move depended on a series of lucky coincidences: mom’s chance encounter in the hallways of her research lab, the recent availability of foreign passports in Russia, my grandparents’ tacit agreement with our move. We lived in France for almost two years, but a new series of coincidences beckoned my mom to move us to Toronto, Canada. We took my grandfather’s suitcases with us, having since kept them in a storage locker stuffed with old school notebooks and childhood mementos. It was also*

*in Canada that I learned of his passing, sobbing over a late-night long-distance call with mom, who went back to Russia to oversee his final care.*

Suitcases have become more lightweight, but the weight of my grandfather's suitcases is one of memories. As these memories fade and become replaced by representations—captured in stories, objects, and photographs—I felt an urgency to make sense of my migration journey, undertaking a PhD project that would vaguely recreate the places and memories of my migration, allow me to explore possible future homes, and discover a new community abroad.

In early drafts of the dissertation, I concealed these motives behind academic rhetoric, proposing to focus on “historically significant places of Russian emigration” without revealing my autobiographic motives (Knowles 1999:56). It is only in this final version—written part in Toronto, Canada and part in Berlin, Germany, two places between which I have precariously settled—that I felt coming clean about my motives was an epistemological necessity. I have already pointed to the opening ethnographic vignette as a source of auto-biographic inquiry. But writing *these* lines, I am similarly aware that despite a long history of “switching codes” both in more experimental scholarship (Anzaldúa 1987:iv), and in ethnographic writing (Briggs 1970:6), I risk alienating a reader oriented toward positivism, as the narrative is now self-referentially turned towards the very process of writing.

I write this text in lighter typeface to contextualize and comment on the first from a different order; not as self-reflection, but as self-reference. I am proposing a model for reflexive anthropology that not only draws attention to the positionality of the researcher through auto-biographic content (Davies 2008:3), but combines it with reflexive approaches that make

apparent its form (Ruby 2000:266), as auto-ethnography, which focuses on “textual strategies that evoke fragmented and estranged subjectivities” (Grant, Short, Turner 2013:7), drawing attention to the very construction of the text.

I separate authorial subjectivity from my responsibility of representation, presenting my personal account in the hope that it may resonate with other experiences of migration, but without claiming that it can represent my research participants. I consider it an ethical prerogative to distinguish between publicly avowable experiences of migration, which are represented in my ethnographic interviews and which my participants were eager for me to collect (Fine et al. 2003:194), and private experiences, which I considered a trespass on the privacy of my interlocutors, as well as a risk for these narratives to be exploited by others. This is not to say that I deprived my participants of the agency to share intimate aspects of their lives; rather, I prefer to share private experience through personal narrative, acknowledging, to borrow from Luke E. Lassiter, that it is “*only* mine and it should be understood as just and only that” (Lassiter 2005:114).

An auto-biography is my effort to reconstruct my memories, “fragmented and collaged together like mosaics in consciousness and unconscious maneuverings” (Fischer 2003:180). But it is also an attempt to enter into a conversation with my participants, acknowledging the plurality of our voices. Michael Fischer describes this process as follows:

Autobiographical voices are often thought of as deeply singular attempts to inscribe individual “identity” (one voice); however, they not only are mosaic compositions but often may be structured through processes of mirroring and dialogic relations with cross-historical and cross-cultural others and thus may resonate with various sorts of double voicings (two voices); in modern times, increasingly important is mediation by collective (three voices) rational and rationalizing endeavors such as the sciences, which themselves depend on explicit triangulations among multiple perspectival positionings and understandings” (Fischer 2003:179).

I mirror these three perspectives as voices in my own text. The first, embeds the researcher in wider social and cultural discourses (Fischer 2003:180-181) and it is mainly represented in my bold, italicized personal vignettes; the second allows cross-cultural comparison in dialogic relationships with research participants (2003:183), represented mainly in a mode of self-referential text that utilizes a lighter typeface, and the third, grounds the research in wider storytelling and social science discourses (2003:183). This last trope of academic prose is represented by a bolder typeface in the dissertation, which I turn to now.

### **1.1.1 Research Focus and Objectives**

This dissertation is based on multi-sited, ethnographic, and auto-ethnographic research that took place between April 2015 and August 2016 in Moscow, Berlin, Paris, and New York. I chose these sites as *historically significant places of Russian emigration* to the representation of which Russian intellectuals, including myself, devote a disproportionately large amount of creative energy. I argue that these places are (re)produced as “centers of Russian emigration” through an interplay between the émigré literary tradition, discourses of Russian intellectuals abroad, and popular discourses of migration in Russia, and strategically used by different actors in the global cultural economy in what Arjun Appadurai calls the *work of imagination* (1996:3). I situate this *work* by examining both historical and present-day representations of Russian migration, accessed through archival and library research at each fieldwork site, as well as ethnographic methods, such as visual anthropology, auto-ethnography, participant observation, and interviews with research participants.

In conducting ethnographic research, I asked forty-five research participants who

identified as Russian migrants and public intellectuals to share their life stories, including memories of their migration journeys, their past and current relationship with Russia, and their engagement with wider emigration narratives. Our conversations also touched upon my participants' social networks, professional occupation, family history, Soviet and post-Soviet history, politics, art, media, and literature. In "studying up" (Nader 1974:284), I chose to work with research participants who were themselves experts on migration, both from an intellectual and an experiential perspective, and who shared with me a comparable epistemic universe, had access to representational media and a degree of social privilege often afforded by a professional university education.

My main research objectives were spurred on by a conversation with a research participant who challenged me to think about how migrants negotiate their belonging in wider communities and across transnational contexts. During our interview, Nune Barsegian, a writer and a psychologist who lives in Berlin, reflected on her migration trajectory:

*Nune Barsegian:* I initially left from Armenia to Moscow, Russia. That was my first emigration. At a certain moment, having finished school, I stopped speaking Armenian. My language became preserved from that time. When I speak Armenian, I'm a different person. I am *that* person who did not develop alongside me, and their concepts remain from that time. For many, [...] if they do not continue to speak it, language is preserved from the time they left. Every wave of migration is preserved in their time, and lives according to the meanings of the time during which they emigrated. And a *mirovozzrenie*, a worldview, is preserved even more.

Intuitively, I understood Nune's evocation: I often felt that whenever I began to speak Russian, I would semi-consciously perform an identity tied to my past; however, I was at a loss about how

to enunciate this in an academic work, especially since Johannes Fabian urged ethnographers to “recognize the people whom they study as their coevals” (2007:22). I hesitated about how to articulate such categories as migration “waves” that remained “preserved” in their “worldview” using contemporary anthropological paradigms. However, I was not satisfied to analyze Nune’s intimate narrative through such concepts as “partible” personhood (Strathern 1988:178), causing feelings of dislocation, displacement and fragmentation (Hoskins 1998:10), or discussing migrants as “rootless cosmopolitans” whose “driving forces and push-pull factors [revolve around] age-old patterns” (Remmenick 2007:36), or as having “diasporic consciousness” as a “political struggle to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (Clifford 1994:308). Concepts such as these seemed foreign and disrespectful in describing participants’ lives, but they seem even more alien to Nune’s life, since she was born in Armenia, identifies as Russian, and lives in Berlin. I write with the aspiration that were my participants to read this dissertation, they would not find themselves reduced to a scientific sample. I am aspiring to write as if extending the conversation started with my participants several years ago, but continued here from where we left off.

In this research project, I analyze how Russian intellectuals in Russia and abroad, as well as scholars of Russian migration, strategically evoke reified categories of belonging—through such terms as “the intelligentsia,” “migration waves” or “diaspora”; categories, membership to which is flexible—to negotiate group boundaries and belonging within personal and social networks of a Russian community outside Russia. I trace how these intellectual discourses, which could be playfully termed “intellectual vernacular,” are created and reproduced, both

across space, using transcultural approaches across multiple fieldwork sites, and through time, through diachronic comparisons between historical records, memoir literature, and present-day ethnographic interviews. I also investigate intersections between material culture and mobility, examining the significance of biographical objects in migration. Finally, I gather these analytical approaches together in a visual anthropology companion project to the written dissertation: an interactive multi-media ethnographic installation titled *Still Life with a Suitcase* (see Supplementary Materials, and Appendices A and B).

## **1.2 Moving Places: Elusive Definitions of Traveling Terms**

*In the weeks before departing for fieldwork, I had already moved three times, relocating my former partner and myself across three addresses in Canada—our past, present and future. Everything that I could not carry myself, I sent in boxes from Vancouver, where I have been living for three years as a graduate student, to my mother’s apartment in Toronto. The boxes left as neatly-packed cardboard cubes, but arrived as perfectly-rounded spheres; the delivery person rolled them down the hall of the building. They had a difficult trip. My relationship also ended, and I began my fieldwork mustering little excitement, but plenty of melancholy.*

*I left for Moscow in April 2015, around the same time of year that my grandmother travels back from Canada to Russia. As a landed immigrant, she lives with her daughter in Canada, but spends time with her sisters at the dacha, our summer cottage near Moscow. We flew in the same airplane, and my first “field site” was the apartment where I spent the first nine years of my life. Over the next year and a half, I traveled to places immanently connected with my past; places that had ceased being “svoi” (see Yurchak, 2006:102), “my own,” but which,*

*legitimated by fieldwork, I wanted to reclaim in my memories and imagination. Fieldwork also afforded me the opportunity to attend—and, equally, miss—celebrations, holidays, birthdays, and funerals of family and friends.*

*Travel became routine, but it never became impersonal. Time slowed to a crawl in anticipation of someone waiting for me at my destination, and accelerated again before an imminent departure. When my great-aunt, a geologist who conducted her own type of fieldwork in Mongolia, saw me off on my way from Moscow to Paris, she told me, “when you see a train, you just want to jump on it.” My chest tightened as the train began moving, but she remained waving goodbye on the platform. Fieldwork became a social and intimate act, constitutive of life, and vice-versa.*

A common narrative style, which Mary Pratt terms “arrival stories” (1986:27-28), predominates in early ethnographic texts, legitimating the author’s presence in “the field” (see Firth (2004[1936]); Evans-Pritchard 1940; Lévi-Strauss 1974[1955]; Geertz 1973). This is also how Bronislaw Malinowski’s classic ethnography, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1964[1922]) on the Trobriand Islanders’ ceremonial exchange, begins:

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight [...] you have nothing to do, but to start at once on your ethnographic work. (1964[1922]:4)

In this first-person narrative, the reader senses the complete isolation of an intrepid traveler, evoked as an archetype of a mythical hero (Stocking Jr. 1983:109), who is positioned to “objectively” disclose knowledge about a faraway place.

For a “field” to exist as a distinct entity, there must be something to position it against, which Caroline Knowles argues is “home”: “Home and field invoke the duality of belonging and alienation, familiarity and investigation, which implicitly function as fieldwork strategies” (Knowles 1999:54). The author argues that anthropologists conceal autobiographical motives for their field site choices, which offer a place “in which the shortcomings of our regular life can be, at least temporarily, adjusted.” (1999:58). By negotiating, and to some extent, routinizing transnational movement through fieldwork, Knowles uncovers her own sense of belonging as “belonging of displacement” (1999:64). Similarly, rather than obfuscating mobility both in the project design and in ethnographic writing, the author encourages ethnographers to be upfront about their motives for moving places (1999:56). In a similarly reflexive vein, scholars revisited earlier ethnographies, interrogating whether the “field” is as static as it is made out to be.

Paul Basu and Simon Coleman read Malinowski’s ethnography as an intensely mobile account: “[i]ronically, his work is often assumed to present the methodological ideal of studying a territorially bound culture. But in fact, he was describing a ‘migrant world’, albeit a very particular one” (Basu and Coleman 2008:321-322). The implications for anthropology are, as Arjun Appadurai (1996:3) has argued, away from the confines of a single, linear history defined by locality. James Clifford similarly proposed that culture does not reside in places, but in divergent histories, understood in the “sites of dwelling *and* travel” (1992:105).

Whether in revisiting classic ethnography, or examining present-day migration flows, Mimi Sheller and John Urry propose that anthropology has undergone a “mobility turn,” (2006:208) which requires a move away from “sedentarist” theories that located “bounded and authentic places or regions or nations as fundamental basis of human identity and experience”

(2006:208-209). This also means that the very nature of place must be re-imagined:

Places are like ships [...] seen as travelling, slow or fast, greater or shorter distances, within networks of human and nonhuman agents. Places are about relationships, about the placing of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform (Sheller and Urry 2006:214).

I became captivated with concepts advanced by the “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006), recognizing an exciting methodological opportunity for expressing my participants’—and my own—iterant, transnational lifestyles (2006:218). This shift to mobility was seemingly reinforced by my conversations: research participants in Moscow considered themselves to be “internal emigrants,” revealing their desire to emigrate from Russia, expressed by the caustic phrase, “it’s time to jet” (“*pora valit' otsyuda*”), whereas participants abroad gave the impression of being jet-setting cosmopolites, similarly captivated by mobile terms. Initially, I was entirely convinced by such logic, which was reinforced in my conversations with research participants.

Genia Chef, an artist living in Berlin, described his relationship with his artistic practice: “I compare the life of an artist to a world wanderer; they are a guest wherever they travel, and wherever they travel, they find their studio. Wherever they appear and place their creative objects, they produce their own creative space.” Genia exhibited a work titled “My Personal Temple” at the Moscow Biennale (2007). Inside a canvas tent, he placed dozens of objects related to his personal life and his artistic practice.

*Genia:* As if in my own studio and surrounded by these symbols, I gathered all my friends who were in Moscow at the time. I could celebrate in a space full of symbols from my Berlin studio. In other words, it was a moment of displacement, and for me, it was a sign of freedom.

As an artist educated in the Soviet Union, living in Berlin, and exhibiting in Moscow, Genia considers displacement a creative process, a liberating counterpoint to “place.” Genia left the Soviet Union in 1985. When the train carried him across the Polish border, he recalls, “I had a feeling I was escaping a constant nightmare and humiliation.” A “place,” then, is associated with parochialism, or worse, with stifling restrictions on mobility characteristic of the Soviet Union. “Places” do, indeed, “travel” (Sheller and Urry 2006:214). Or do they?

Edward Casey argues that the predominant view in Western philosophy is that “places” are rendered particular when they are compartmentalized into space, which is conceived as a “blank environment” (1997:14). Inspired by phenomenologists such as Gaston Bachelard (1958) and Martin Heidegger (1951), Casey argues that familiar *dwelling places*, such as the home (or the artist’s studio) ground people in space. Rather than seeing place “as a delimited part or portion of space” (Casey 1997:294), according to Casey, place prefigures space and gives it definition. A place “takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*. (1996:27). Casey underlines that “equally eventful [...] are journeys we take between the dwellings in which we reside, for we also dwell in the intermediate places, the *interplaces* of travel, [places that are] never uneventful” (1996:39). In re-reading Casey, I recognized that Genia’s account does not only show how he travels between places, or that places *themselves* travel—what James Clifford calls “traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling” (1992:108)—but highlights different modes of travel, as physical displacement, as the displacement of tangible and intangible cultures, and as the displacement of the *imagination*

(Appadurai 1996:3). However, such dissipation of the meaning of travel needs to be refined.

Jonathan Friedman critiques the use of metaphors of mobility and transnationalism as a reflection of the new global order (2002:22). The author argues that using such metaphors conceals differential access to mobility, where “less than 2 per cent of the world’s population is on the move, internationally” (2002:33). These metaphors unintentionally celebrate structures of global inequality, such as “the colonial economy of pluralism” and “cheap labor import” (2002:28), and reveal the chauvinism of academic elites and traveling intellectuals as “the expression of the experience of those who themselves move from conference to conference” (2002:26). It is easy to recognize myself in this last description, but it is worth restating that my research participants and I are precisely part of an educated, intellectual class, which maintains professional and personal transnational ties with Russia from abroad. Taking heed of Friedman’s critique to be cautious in generalizing metaphors of mobility, it is precisely in the transnational journeys that I wish to situate my work.

Arguing both against an overemphasis on displacement, and the mystification of “home sites as imaginary places simply of longing and belonging” (395), Julie Chu (2006) looks at the cultural identities of Fuzhounese migrants who build houses and temples through remittances, but which they themselves do not occupy. The migrants’ conspicuous absence highlights their privileged access to mobility in their local villages (2006:409). Following Paul Gilroy, Chu understands displacement as a “shared experience of feeling out of ‘place’ within and across the boundaries of the nation-state” (2006:396). She argues that to feel displaced, inhabitants did not need to leave their village, but only had to imagine the newly built environment around them as a space of privilege they were not privy to. Avoiding essentializing terms that

dichotomize either stasis, or movement, Chu argues that “‘place’ and ‘home’ can no longer be assumed to be stable objects and points of anchorage” (2006:399), but that migrants and village inhabitants are variously “displaced” and “emplaced” through local and transnational processes. The question is not whether places “move,” or “stay still,” but how people articulate places as dynamic entities, and to what end.

Exploring novel ways of representing places as dynamic, and trying to convey how “global mobility is emplaced” (2014:6), Stephen Köhn sets up a multi-screen installation showing videos from two African islands with vastly different access to resources. Scenes of daily life in Anjouan, an island forming part of Comoros, are juxtaposed with scenes from the port of the neighbouring island of Mayotte, a Department of France, which becomes a site for the deportation of Anjouan migrants who illegally cross into French territory (2014:9). Köhn is inspired by George Marcus’ invocation of “montage” as a metaphor for “multivocal” and “multiperspectival” anthropological methods (2014:2). With two screens standing opposite one another, the exhibition space “mirrors the complex spatial formation that transnationalism, as a prolific social force, has brought about” (2014:14). The material configuration of a video display conveys a spatial relationship between two physical entities. But how can a video installation represent intangible processes of transnationalism? I explore this question in my own multi-media installation, focusing on representations of Russian transnational migration.

### **1.2.1 Visual Anthropology on the Move: A Suitcase as a Vessel**

*Digging through old cupboards of our Moscow apartment, I discovered my grandfather’s slide collection. Setting up the projector, which was last used to display Soviet microfiche*

*cartoons in my childhood, I screened the images onto my bedroom door. The motor whirred dangerously, and the lamp illuminated dust particles dancing in its path. The slides were mostly taken in the 1970s, before I was born, when my grandfather became aware that the iconic Arbat neighbourhood in Moscow was slated to be demolished to make way for a new road to the Kremlin. The slides show nondescript wooden houses of Staraya Moskva, Old Moscow, often without any people in the frame. These photographs, visible only in the fragile transfer of light between the projector and the bedroom door, revealed my grandfather's point of view—from the places I imagined he stood to look through the viewfinder. I walked around the same streets with my camera in hand, catching myself drawn to the same subjects: storefronts, cityscapes and architectural details, only most of the buildings in the frame were now gone, replaced by the neighbourhood known as New Arbat.*

It is not entirely true that my grandfather's slides do not exist outside the negative slide and its projected image. Behind the projector, I set up my digital camera to capture the process of viewing and manually changing the slides, frame by frame. This footage became one of several personal vignettes of a traveling film installation, titled *Still Life with a Suitcase*, which is now a component of this dissertation. As part of my research, I developed an interactive multi-media installation on the tangible and intangible objects of Russian transnational migration. The installation was based on field recordings, personal reflections, and ethnographic interviews recorded using audiovisual equipment. It seeks to connect various dissertation themes, linking visual and written modes of ethnographic representation, and exploring mobility, material culture, and novel ways of disseminating research through publicly accessible means.

*Still Life with a Suitcase* is a *video installation*, because it is set up on two projection surfaces: a screen, and a suitcase that stands in front of the screen, onto which I mapped video sequences. The suitcase is a family heirloom which I used to transport my belongings during fieldwork. I brought it to my interviews, asking participants to momentarily place an object they found significant to their migration journey inside it. Filming participants as they engaged in this “staged encounter” (Irving 2007:186), or while they held the object in their hands, I asked them to describe its significance in an unstructured interview, editing our conversations into short vignettes (see Supplementary Materials: Participant narratives).

*Still Life with a Suitcase* is also a *multi-media project*, because in my artistic effort to engage with my participants’ object stories, I recreated a dozen of these objects using clay. Because the original objects were no longer accessible to me, I created these artifacts using images from our interviews. Walter Benjamin argued that the process of photo-mechanical reproduction results in the loss of “aura,” (1936:22) replacing the authenticity of the original objects with “trace” (1936:21). By creating artifacts from digital images, I metaphorically tried to restore the objects’ “aura” (see Supplementary Materials: Installation documentation).

Finally, *Still Life with a Suitcase* is an interactive project, because each clay figurine was programmed to synchronize with the edited vignette related to the participant who contributed the original object. Working with Adam Široký, a digital media specialist, I set up a micro-computer to digitally “read” these objects. Adam programmed object-recognition hardware, placed inconspicuously under the suitcase, and set up video projection software to launch a corresponding vignette each time an object came within range of the computer’s sensor. This meant that when an audience member placed an object into the suitcase, a video corresponding

to this object began playing on the screen, showing videos of research participants as they displayed, talked about, and placed their objects inside the suitcase.

### **1.2.2 Migration and Material Culture: A Suitcase as an Object**

In dialogue with research on migration and material culture (Basu 2011; Erickson 2003; Lury 1997), I propose that narratives of migration are inherently connected to material culture, not only for the spaces transnational migrants come to inhabit, but also for the ones they traverse, and not only for what they pack inside their suitcases, bags, and boxes, but also for all the tangible and the intangible things transnational migrants leave behind. I take the suitcase to be an emblematic object of travel (Burrell 2008; Basu and Coleman 2008), exploring this object as a trope, as a utilitarian *thing*, and as a vessel for carrying other objects significant to one's biography. However, before I discuss material culture as it relates to my research, I wish to briefly examine how objects have been theorized in anthropological literature.

In his early work on material culture, Arjun Appadurai proposed to treat commodity exchange as a social process (1986:13), suggesting that some objects follow the path of exchange, while others are "singularized" (1986:17) through culturally-mediated processes that restrict and control exchange (1986:24). Igor Kopytoff describes the path of an object's "various singularizations" as a "biography": "as with persons, the drama here lies in the uncertainties of valuation and of identity" (1986:90). However, "singularized" objects may re-enter exchange: Annette Weiner (1994) distinguishes between "less dense" biographical objects, which form part of exchange in the Trobriand Islands, and "more dense" objects, kept as inalienable possessions that stand outside the reciprocity model (1994:394). In contrast to Marcel Mauss

(1967), who proposed that exchanging objects such as gifts involves constant competition, Weiner argues that reciprocal exchange can be based on cooperation, where “value is created by trying to keep certain possessions out of exchange in the face of obligations to engage in exchange” (Weiner 1994:395).

During my research, I asked participants to select an object they considered significant to their migration, understood broadly, and to describe this object’s “biography.” During our conversations, it became apparent that objects participants talked about were heavily interwoven with their biographies: “a prop, a storytelling device, and also a mnemonic for certain experiences” (Hoskins 1998:4). According to Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, part of the value of an object is not so much what it means, which is what scholars predominantly focus on, but rather, on how it came to be acquired, “the social process of assembling a collection” (2014:52). Thus, “biographical objects” reveal a history of exchanges and negotiations, but also the process of identity formation, as people endow objects with “a personal identity,” as much as they use them to refashion their own (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton quoted in Hoskins 1998:194). However, while objects may reveal many things, can they really “speak,” either on behalf of, or independently from their owners?

As Bruno Latour suggests, scholars should be more generous in accepting “*non-human elements*” (Latour 2005:71) into their “anthropocentric” analysis. Indeed, Latour is a vocal proponent of assigning agency to non-human actors, or, in fact, to “*anything* that [modifies] a state of affairs by making a difference” (2005:71). However, does this analysis not obscure human scale, as well as the priorities, values, and frames of reference that people assign to the world around them? Philosophically, anthropologist Daniel Miller sides with Latour, arguing

that materiality is a pre-condition of consciousness; indeed, things and people are mutually constitutive (Miller 2005:9). However, Miller argues for an *anthropological* view of materiality, grounding the anthropologist in “ethnographic empathy and ordinary language” (2005:15). This perspective allows anthropologists to be aware of how objects cue people’s behavior: “objects are important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not “see” them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations” (Miller 2005:5). This paradox challenges me to engage with my participants’ stories about objects in a way that recognizes my own subjectivity as a researcher, and a visual anthropologist: I may “see” objects very differently from how my participants see them. This was illustrated to me during an interview with Nikita das Gupta, an organic chemist, who chose to talk about the significance of a cross around his neck, an object that he selected as his contribution to the installation:

*Nikita das Gupta:* I think organic chemistry is the most creative subfield of science. In my range of work, I create new substances that did not exist earlier in nature. When science stops being an instrument for the accumulation of knowledge and becomes a way to *create* knowledge, the investigator becomes akin to a Creator. My personal belief is that a scientist cannot be an atheist. They may not accept God. But to deny the existence of something unexplainable, I don’t think a real scientist can do that.

In what I initially perceived to be discrepant belief systems, Nikita saw continuity, revealed through an object that integrated his religious belief and the metaphysics of scientific study.

In research on migration, it is fruitful to think of biographical objects and migration journeys as inherently interconnected. Celia Lury argues that, generally, “culture of other places has been attributed to objects” (1997:5) that are “inscribed in its very contours, in the practices

of acquisition, collection and display” (1997:5). We can also regard migration journeys as intensely material experiences, as does Kathy Burrell, who argues that such objects as the suitcase—subject to weight limits and packed with gifts and souvenirs—provides “tangible cornerstones of family history” (Burrell 2008:362), whereby movement itself becomes “firmly embedded in ordinary life” (2008:370). This is to say that the “biography of objects, as they move or stay still, [adds] to what we can say about the lives of people that travel” (Lury 1997:6). My approach documented narratives about personal objects “on the move” (Rodgers 2012) and interrogated how these objects picked up new identities abroad. It was beyond the scope of my research to compare how different participants described similar objects, nor did I examine how an object chosen by one person could pick up new meanings in someone else’s hands. Even when an object may have been passed on to participants by members of their family, or may have belonged to someone else in the past, my examination always concerned itself with how research participants described an object that they themselves chose to speak about during our interview.

During my meetings with participants, I strove to maintain rapport that felt natural to me, allowing our conversation to develop organically. This is to say there were times when this rapport was minimal, or when it unravelled in the bureaucratic minutiae of gaining free and informed consent (Fine et al. 2003:178). Judith Stacey describes such situations as highlighting inauthenticity or dissimilitude between the researcher and the researched,

For no matter how welcome, even enjoyable, the field worker’s presence may appear to locals, social work often represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships [...] the researcher is far freer than the researched to leave (Stacey quoted in Fine et al. 2003:178).

This statement highlights the fieldworker's differential position and accountability to research participants (Fine et al. 2003:178). However, it also presents a challenge for ways to establish rapport without exploiting the power inequalities or the intimacy of the interview situation (Fine et al. 2003:181).

In this dissertation, a suitcase is used both as a methodological tool to metaphorize my personal journey and as a vessel for organizing research participants' stories about their objects of migration. However, in the interview context, the suitcase functioned as a tool to "break the ice." A brown, vintage, cardboard suitcase with metal latches and wooden cross-bars inevitably became a "conversation piece" around which our interview began. In a curious reversal in the performance of roles between researcher and researched, I was asked about *my* object of migration before even having a chance to ask about my *participants'* objects. The suitcase, therefore, helped my participants to place me as a fellow migrant whose research project was inspired by a personal life trajectory. These initial conversations took place on the threshold of participants' homes, as I was taking off my coat in the hallway, or putting on slippers that were offered to me by my hosts. They provided an immediate opportunity to answer to my participants' expectations, to test my credentials, or to share a joke, as I did, perhaps unsuccessfully, subverting my Moscow participants' allegorical joke, into a metaphorical one:

*Me:* It's a traveling suitcase, an archive, a museum.

*George:* A Pandora's Box! (laughing)

*Me:* Only insofar as it connects Russian migrants across different places.

As we began to speak about objects participants chose, I was reminded how Janet Hoskins (1988) approached participants in conducting biographical interviews. While she found that

people in here research were reluctant to share their biographies with her directly, she approached them by way of detour, by asking them about domestic objects: “I could not collect the histories of objects and the life histories of persons separately. People and things they valued were so complexly intertwined they could not be disentangled” (Hoskins 1998:2). Indeed, as Hoskins argues, “very personal, grounded narratives... are made up of metaphors involving objects, which tell a story that then provides a unity to a sometimes disparate self” (1998:12). Objects were used to narrate transnational identity, but they also gave participants the opportunity to veto the researcher: to interrogate my intentions, or, inversely, to find common ground.

### **1.2.3 *Diaspora and Diasporic Consciousness amongst Russian Migrants***

This research interrogates the use of the term *diaspora* to describe the way research participants position themselves abroad. The term was first theorized in the 1970s by John Armstrong, who examined a surge of interest in the study of multiethnic societies. Armstrong provided a rudimentary definition of diaspora as “any ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a given polity” (1976:393). In more recent scholarship, diaspora is variously understood as “criss-crossing itineraries of people” (Gilroy in Clifford 1994:317), a “diasporic consciousness” (Clifford 1994:306-307), a “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1993:747), a “hybrid identity” (Hall 2003:235), or even as the dispersal of objects across museum collections (Basu 2011). *Diaspora* may be considered a political strategy, as a “struggle to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacements” (Clifford 1994:308), but may equally be challenged precisely for this reason, “insofar as groups are no longer tightly

territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous” (Appadurai 1996:48).

Scholars working in Russia have problematized the objective use of the term in the context of post-Soviet space, arguing it is too encompassing when applied to Russian-speaking populations living abroad. In the Russian legal-political context, the term *diaspora* describes Russian “compatriots,” defined as “all people who came from the Russian Empire, the RSFSR, the USSR, the Russian Federation, and their direct descendants” (Tishkov 2003[2002]:55). Notably, the population of “compatriots” legally covered by the definition, currently surpasses the population of Russia (2003[2002]:55). Large numbers notwithstanding, Valery Tishkov examines the weaknesses of the theoretical use of the term as outlined by Armstrong, considering it an analytical error to rely on objective factors such as “ethnic collectivity” or “given polity,” which depend on a subjective sense of attachment to a historical homeland as a “territorial base” (2003[2002]:55). There are other complications: for a term that describes displacement, it does not include the movement of state borders, “as the result of which a culturally related population residing in one country finds itself in tow or in several countries without having moved anywhere in space” (2003[2002]:56).

Challenging metaphorical uses of the term *diaspora*, Martin Baumann traces the etymology of the word to Ancient Greece, where it was used to mean “dispersal” (2000:315). However, the author argues that the term was only used with negative connotations and did not apply to Greek colonies in Asia Minor, for example. The term acquired soteriological meaning, incorporating the doctrine of salvation when used by Jewish-Greek translators to refer to Jews living outside the “Promised Land” (2000:318), but was made distinct from the

word *Gola*, meaning exile. “Diaspora” presumed a return to the homeland after redemption (2000:319), and was associated not only with the land of dispersal, but the activity of dispersal and a dispersed people (2000:319). The term only picked up its geographical-sociological connotations following the Protestant Reformation, when Protestant minorities were documented as living in Roman Catholic environments (2000:320). Owing to its semantic origins, Baumann is critical of the way the term has been so widely used as to encompass consciousness, experience and metaphors of displacement. Instead, he proposes to define the term as an adjective, instead of a noun (2000:326). Diaspora, the author argues, is a “perpetual recollecting identification with a fictitious or far away existent geographic territory and its cultural-religious traditions” (2000:327). While the scholar’s background in religious studies complicates an anthropological use of the term, it may nevertheless be productive to think of diaspora as an adjective. Such a use highlights the term’s dimensions and attributes, rather than its essential features. In this sense, diaspora may not need to have territorial dimensions at all, but can be applied as a generative concept, used to establish an attitude or to negotiate a sense of belonging, instead of being used as a term to ascribe an identity to migrants.

#### **1.2.4 A Russian Community Abroad**

*Soon after we arrived in Canada, mom made friends with fellow Russian scientists with whom we would inevitably spend our weekends. I became requisite friends with their kids, and we would be taken to see various tourist sites around southern Ontario, or be left to play computer games while the adults hosted dinner parties on Russian holidays. Part of the group still celebrates New Year’s together, but I have lost touch with my playmates who may now*

*have families of their own. Over the years, mom moved between various social circles, accumulating memberships in Toronto's cultural institutions and athletic clubs: the Toronto Cinémathèque, the tennis club, the outing club, the Canadian Opera Company, the Art Gallery of Ontario, all culminating in a membership in such a quintessentially Canadian pastime, that it represented to me a full embrace of her newfound identity: curling.*

*I never felt that I was part of a "community." My preferred hobbies—like knitting, or printmaking—were a little too idiosyncratic; my favourite sports—like cycling and swimming—a little too anti-social, and my studies—in anthropology and filmmaking—hinged on what I mistakenly believed were romantic notions of solitary work. The irony was, of course, that I had devoted my professional life to communicating with people. However, the Canada I came to know was a country of new immigrants, an impression afforded to me by life in downtown Toronto. Our apartment was at the end of a long hallway, permeated by a range of unfamiliar culinary smells. I spoke English with an accent and was teased for it in school, and I could barely understand Québécois French, which I heard mainly heard on TV, despite being enrolled in a French immersion program. I shared wide-eyed dismay about where I settled with my immigrant friends, but I also wholeheartedly wanted to be accepted into North American culture.*

*In the summertime, I would return to Russia, spending careless months at the dacha riding my bicycle full speed into muddy puddles, or inversely, shamed by my aunts into reading classical Russian literature. Back in Canada, I sent letters to my Russian friends pledging lasting friendship, written with increasing ineptitude. By the time I reached adulthood, I no longer felt I had to fake being "Canadian," but this did not help my feelings for Russia, which ranged somewhere between apprehension and nostalgia, which I felt especially strongly in a rare phone*

*call with my grandmother in late spring. When I started to revolve my professional identity around Russia, I began to think of that part of the world as a place that gave me an opportunity to articulate my social and political conscience (what George Marcus has critically called “circumstantial activism” (1995:113)) and which I would occasionally visit to see family, friends, and recreate memories of my childhood. Until, that is, I began my PhD studies, during which I hoped to discover and connect with a similarly-minded Russian community abroad.*

While my PhD proposal clearly delineated Paris, Berlin and New York as three field sites where I would recruit “Russian transnational migrants,” the experience of fieldwork took me along more circuitous routes. For example, I found myself drinking vodka with jailbirds outside Marc Chagall’s house in Vitebsk, becoming a subject of a late-night smoking-cessation exorcism while hitchhiking across Belorussia, collecting mineral water from hot springs in Karlovy Vary, couch-surfing in Bretagne, staying in a squat in Warsaw, and taking part in numerous events, festivals, protests, performances, and even a sunset tea-drinking ceremony, in Berlin, Paris and New York. In each new place, “suddenly set down surrounded by all [my] gear,” (Malinowski 1964[1922]:4), I often questioned the parameters I used to recruit participants to my research project. Initially, I proposed to interview members of a Russian intellectual community abroad; however, in such a research project, this seemed to encompass every Russian speaker with a university education. In practice, research participants were drawn from a much less clearly delineated sample: I invited people with whom I was genuinely curious to speak, and who, having learned about the project, reciprocated in my curiosity by volunteering to participate in it.

Does it make sense to unite research participants under the banner of a Russian intellectual community abroad? In 1993, Fran Markowitz suggested that despite not having formal organizations or religious affiliation, Soviet Jewish émigrés in New York formed a “community in spite of itself” (1993). This New York community was further sub-divided by neighbourhood, former city of residence, professional status, and by such group self-definitions as being “cosmopolitan” or belonging to the “intelligentsia” (Markowitz 1993:55). Helen Kopnina formalizes these subdivisions in her work amongst young Russian migrants in London and Amsterdam, proposing that “Russian *subcommunities* exhibit a number of unique features, such as their strong emphasis on occupational subcultures [...], and their sharply pronounced antagonism between Russian social classes (such as the broadly defined *intelligentsia* and those seen as non-intellectuals)” (Kopnina 2005:127, *my emphasis*). Concerning both authors, such community subgroups as “intelligentsia,” “cosmopolitans,” and especially “subcommunity,” require further clarification.

“Subcommunities,” according to Kopnina, “do not constitute a community, but replicate and imitate it by which they simultaneously reaffirm and negate a community” (2005: 127). Membership in these sub-communities may be based on professional or leisure activities, shared interests, or social class, and is further split between members who become “ideal types,” and those who represent “liminal figures.” The latter may be associated with other subcommunities, and may thus move laterally between various groups. Members may also maintain social networks through *svyazi*, connections, or shift between various modes of visibility and invisibility as they negotiate their legal status abroad (Kopnina 2005:127).

Markowitz and Kopnina’s accounts each present a set of challenges for imagining a

Russian community abroad. In Markowitz's case, the title of the book implies her participants' identities were seemingly thrust on them against their will. Kopnina's research begins from the ground up, but the divisions and subdivisions she creates imply different orders of belonging, reifying the very categories the author problematizes. What if the problem is not with the fluid and shifting nature of membership, but with the very definition of community, which suggests that there must be some set of values, meanings, norms or symbols held "in common" by participants, somewhere "out there," just waiting to be discovered (Amit 2010:358)?

Vered Amit suggests that rather than searching for an ever-narrowing definition, the term "community" should reflect the uncertainties and ambiguities with which it is so ubiquitously used in the real world (2010:359). Thus, Amit proposes that communities may be linked by joint commitment, some form of "common knowledge" (2010:359), or bound by affect and belonging (2010:360). A community's members are interdependent, but their membership may be conflictual and tense, and they do not necessarily need to vocalize their belonging (2010:360). Explicit assertions of belonging happen only "when people are responding to unusual or even extreme circumstances" (2010:360). Quoting Anthony Cohen, Amit argues that communities mark boundaries between "us and them" when "a feeling of difference from others outside the collectivity superseded divergences within it" (Cohen in Amit 2010:360). Therefore, forms of association are necessarily open-ended (2010:362), since they reflect flexible identities in relation to outside pressures. It is helpful to think of communities in as similarly processual terms as the term "diaspora," as *journeys* that "provide a mechanism for thinking about social difference" (Amit 2010:369), strategically invoked, socially negotiated, and inherently flexible.

Ultimately, my choice of research participants fell on people who were keen to speak about, or instruct me, about their personal and wider historical experiences of Russian migration. These were Russian intellectuals: artists, academics, journalists, and writers, who, much like myself, and often by way of detour, left Russia to live abroad, but continued to professionally investigate or interrogate their relationship with it. I recruited participants by posting announcements on internet forums, soliciting people outside foreign consulates in Moscow, or by researching and contacting people online. Through “snowball sampling techniques,” my existing social contacts in Moscow gave me recommendations about who to contact in my future fieldwork locations; meeting these participants proved to be an invaluable introduction to a new place, as we would often walk around their neighbourhood, or other parts of the city, and they would share their knowledge of Russian placenames and histories with me.

I solicited the participation of individuals who considered themselves to be culturally Russian, although ethnically they may have identified as Russian, Ukrainian, Armenian, Hungarian, Latvian, Chechen or Jewish. As Steven Gold describes, this diversity was not unusual for migrants moving to the United States from the Soviet Union and Russia over the past century: “less than 20 percent have been ethnically Russian: about half were Jews, others were Catholics, Protestants, Latvians, Poles, and Armenians” (2002: vii-viii). However, a history of ethnic persecution in the Soviet Union, as well as the infamous “fifth line” in Soviet passports that made it mandatory for Soviet citizens to declare their *natsional'nost'*, or “nationality,” meaning ethnicity, meant that people concealed diverse ethnic origins under a blanket “Russian” identity. People currently researching their family history, may use the ethnicity of a distant relative as a migration strategy, as one of my Moscow participants explained:

*Participant:* Everyone is trying to uncover their Jewish roots. Our acquaintances are searching for their grandparents' passports. I have a harder time with Israeli citizenship; because my grandmother and my great-grandmother are one-hundred percent Russian, I am not formally Jewish. But now they're accepting grandparents' documents. Mom doesn't have those documents, but we do have a document from my great-great-grandmother, saying she was originally Jewish but was baptized for her engagement. It dates to the 19th century. It's the sole document I have through which I can build a chain of a family history to prove my Jewishness and leave for Israel.

Ethnic identification may certainly be used as a criterion of identity, but it is also used to take advantage of bureaucratic opportunities afforded by a second citizenship.

As much as I chose participants for my research, participants also chose me. One person agreed to be interviewed only after they had an opportunity to review all my previous films. Another person asked me to draft a separate consent form and to write out all my questions in advance. There were times when I was invited into people's homes immediately after our initial meeting; other times, I scheduled our interviews up to nine months in advance. Participants had a choice of whether to use their real names or to use a pseudonym in the published version of the work. However, because I recorded interviews using audio and video equipment, I acknowledged that I could not guarantee my participants' anonymity. I gathered approximately 60 hours of interview material with my participants, which was subsequently transcribed, coded, edited for content, and included in the written or visual components of the dissertation, or both.

I found there was a problem in defining a group of participants for this research project as a community, especially using such general terms as "transnational," "Russian," or "intellectual". My participants were well integrated into the societies where they lived, worked, shopped, and sent their kids to school. Moreover, they differentiated themselves from Russian

ethnic enclaves, typically embraced a cosmopolitan identity, and considered themselves to be an educated, urban class. In other words, much like myself, they assumed highly flexible identities that questioned rigid definitions of a “Russian community.” In this respect, a “methodological problem has been revealed as constitutive of the very fabric of society” (Fine et al. 2003:176). I could not separate subjective factors, such as the series of lucky coincidences that led me to introduce myself as a Russian migrant to a potential participant, from objective factors that would narrow the identity of a participant to a “transnational Russian intellectual.” In other words, I created a “community” as I forged ahead, and this “community” responded in kind.

### ***1.2.5 Migration Waves and Generations of Russian Migrants***

The easiest way to get to Jersey City from downtown Manhattan is via the Lincoln Tunnel, an underground passageway that connects the state of New York with the state of New Jersey. Before ducking into the tunnel in Manhattan on a Jersey-bound bus, I was surrounded by skyscrapers, but when I emerged on the New Jersey turnpike, the Manhattan skyline appeared postcard perfect, strewn across the wide expanse of the Hudson River. I came to New Jersey to visit Alexander Genis, a journalist and a writer who emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1977. Alexander lived in a row house on a quiet street on a hillside. Wild parrots landed on a tree in front of his porch: “I wrote a lot about these parrots,” Alexander tells me. During our interview, Alexander talks about how Russian migration has been classified throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*Alexander Genis*: Migration is divided into waves. Not generations, but waves, because kids of immigrants cease to be immigrants [...] This is why there are no generations of emigrations. The first, second, third wave. The first and second are closer to each other. The third is radically different from them. After these waves, there is a constant in-flow. They don't have characteristics to separate them as a unique group.

The concept of migration “waves” used to describe historical group movements for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has wide resonance amongst both Russian and international scholars, as well as Russians living in and outside Russia. The “first wave” is described as a group forged by the Russian Revolution of 1917, because they were forced to emigrate in confrontation with Bolshevik ideology. The resulting Civil War, associated with the White Movement, earned the “first wave” the moniker *Beloimmigranti*, or the White Émigrés. During their hurried departure, hundreds of thousands of émigrés believed they would be returning to Russia in a matter of weeks, as soon as the Bolsheviks were defeated. However, following the defeat of White Armies, and by a Soviet decree issued in 1922, they became stateless citizens abroad. The League of Nations issued Russian refugees specially-created “Nansen passports,” granting them political asylum (Glad 1999:235). The White Armies dispersed to such diverse places as Harbin, Belgrade, and Constantinople, while members of the creative, educated and landowning classes, including the aristocracy, settled in European capitals, such as Prague, Berlin, and Paris.

The “second wave” comprising Russian refugees and POWs (Barker and Grant 2010:571) is associated with massive displacements following WWII, in tandem with a flight from Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union. In the early 1970s, during Leonid Brezhnev's era of stagnation, Russian Jews were given permission to emigrate to Israel. Simultaneously, several prominent writers, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky, were exiled from the Soviet Union

for anti-Soviet activities. The “third wave” comprised political exiles, Soviet Jews, and *nevozvrashchentsy*, non-returnees, who settled in Israel or detoured to various cities in Europe and the United States. While some scholars have argued that the “third wave” has persisted since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Gold 2002), others have argued that new waves have superseded it (Remmenick 2007:4; Vishnevskii and Zaionchkovskaia 1992:46), or that the concept no longer makes sense in an epoch of heightened global mobility (Tishkov 2003[2002]:72).

On the Brooklyn side of New York, I met Matvei Yankelevich. During the 1970s in the Soviet Union, Matvei’s father surreptitiously worked for the *Moscow Helsinki Group* and the *Chronicle of Current Events*.<sup>1</sup> He was exposed in 1977, and when Matvei was four years old, his family relocated to New York. Matvei tells me, “they didn’t want to leave, of course. I think dad just thought it better to emigrate than to end up in the Gulag, which would’ve been the next logical step. Although many had to leave, they did not see departure as a positive event, because they wanted to continue working for the movement.” Matvei became a publisher, writer and translator, receiving awards for his English-language interpretation of avant-garde poet Daniil Kharms.

In the late 1990s, together with a group of friends, Matvei co-established an independent publishing company. He now curates the Eastern European Poets Series, publishing

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<sup>1</sup> *Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytiy* was an underground publication that documented Soviet human rights abuses, and existed in the Soviet Union between 1968 and 1983.

underrepresented poets and writers from Eastern Europe. Despite strong ties to the Russian language, Matvei reveals a tense relationship with his Russian identity:

*Matve Yankelevich:* Meeting a Russian-speaking person in the States, I am not always geared towards conversation. Or friendship. Although I have friends in immigrant circles with whom I speak Russian, some reticence remains. Because of various waves of migration, various associations with the Russian language, there is some infatuation with the writers I translate; however, my family history beckons me to be careful in some ways.

Although Matvei prefers to express himself in English, we spoke Russian during our interview, partly because our conversation concerned Russian migration, and partly because Matvei wanted to test his language skills with a fellow Russian migrant. While he admits he is cautious when meeting Russian speakers, Matvei lived in Moscow for a short time in his youth, before moving back to New York City. I ask him how he felt going back to Russia on his return visits. He says, “I learned a lot during my trips, because the contemporary language of youth is so different than it was back then. When I was about twenty and living in Moscow, my friends and I spoke with a certain generational dialect.”

Matvei’s narrative complicates Alexander’s definition of migration “waves,” united by a shared migration trajectory. As Alexander states, “We were the third wave. We had a distinct understanding that we emerged from the Soviet Union. We emerged precisely from the Soviet Union. We were its continuation.” Alexander’s narrative underlines a strategic use of migration “waves” as a historical marker of identity. Matvei’s family can similarly claim belonging to this cohort of migrants; however, Matvei, who arrived in the United States at the age of four, has not ceased to identify with his Russian past, owing precisely to inter-generational connections with his family. He also shares a connection to Russian literary history:

*Matvei Yankelevich*: Of course, in my family, it was customary to read poems out loud, remembering them by heart [...] My grandmother read poetry by Mayakovsky, Esenin, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova, and, of course, Pushkin. This literature carried a stamp of authenticity, precisely in the oral tradition [...] The authority of poetry bewildered me. In my adolescence, I was even a bit irritated by this constant reading of poetry.

Remembering the poetry of preeminent Russian and Soviet poets is a tradition that continues a Russian intellectual history, as well as a family lineage. Similarly, Matvei underlines his family's influence in starting an independent press, and translating and publishing marginalized Russian poets. At some points in Matvei's narrative, generational concepts claim prominence over historical "waves"; at other points, it is the other way around.

Writing about the last Soviet generation that came to maturity before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Alexei Yurchak argues it is common in Russia to compare the experiences of generations, "to use specific names to identify them, to mention events and cultural phenomena that are seen as important for the formation of a common generational experience, to describe the continuities between generations, and so on. These discourses not only reflect generations but also contribute to their production" (Yurchak 2006:31). Could it be that "migration waves" are produced along similar lines?

I consider "waves" of Russian migration to be shorthand for how participants classify historically-situated mass movement of people. However, I challenge this classification as an objective marker of group identity. I imagine migration "waves" to be what Michael Herzfeld calls a "practical essentialism" (2005:26), insofar as these terms help understand the priorities and prejudices of how group boundaries are made, and how participants position themselves

within such boundaries. As I will show in the subsequent chapters, membership in a migration “wave” is highly contested, since it transgresses spatial geo-political boundaries, as well as temporal categories.

### **1.2.6 *The Russian Intelligentsia***

The most resounding literary event in Russia in 1909 was the publication of a collection of essays, *Vekhi* (1909), Milestones, in which, on the heels of major revolutionary upheavals of 1905, major thinkers, theologians, and philosophers attempted to articulate the role of the Russian intelligentsia. Contributors included cultural historian Mikhail Gershenzon, religious philosopher Sergei Bulgakov, historian and politician Petr Struve, and Christian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev.

Reacting against Marxist atheist doctrines of the times, Berdyaev called for the true *intelligentsiya* (intelligentsia), as opposed to the “*intelligentshchina*” (pseudo-intelligentsia), to do away with social activism and to return to a peculiarly Russian spiritual philosophy: “A tragedy befell the Russian intelligentsia in light of its historical contingency—the love for justice, for the social good and for national wellbeing have paralyzed the love for truth” (Berdyaev 1990[1909]:5). In the same volume, Gershenzon calls for the awakening of the intelligentsia’s creative self-consciousness: “a member of the Russian intelligentsia is, above all, a person who lives outside of themselves; literally, in that the only object worthy of their interest and participation is something that lies outside their identity—it is the people, society, the state” (Gershenzon 1990[1909]:74). In both accounts, the intelligentsia stands over and above “the people,” which it simultaneously safeguards through a moralizing discourse. And

while the authors are critical of the intelligentsia's role, they do not question its chosen task of articulating Russia's national identity. Above all, such a paternalistic discourse demonstrated just how out of touch "the intelligentsia" was from "the people," revealing a thinly-veiled defense of tsarism and a radical misunderstanding of the times.

At the turn of the century, the term *intelligentsia* was not a novel concept; the word appeared in circulation around the 1860s to describe a radical educated class willing to overthrow the tsarist regime (Morson 2009; Gooding 2002). However, according to Gary Saul Morson, "the term never had a fixed meaning and it named overlapping groups," encompassing "conservatives and radicals, believers and atheists, nationalists and internationalists, economic materialists and aesthetes, liberals and terrorists, gradualists and revolutionaries" (Morson quoted in Service 2002:65). Half a century later, writers of *Vekhi* seemed to embody the same contradictions.

The above description is made to underline the ambivalent role the Russian intelligentsia historically occupied. Did they espouse an oppositional, or a conformist attitude toward the state? Did they speak as "organic" intellectuals, articulating their group's function (Gramsci 1971[1957]:133), or as "traditional" intellectuals, self-perpetuating a privileged class position (137)? And while no individual is immune against the system of social relations which they embody, did the intelligentsia occupy what Pierre Bourdieu calls an "intellectual field" (Bourdieu 1969:89)? The definition of the intelligentsia, a term that has become transliterated from Russian to English, losing much of its political and cultural sway, remains widely contentious in

Russia, mainly because everyone seems to intuit what it means, but few can claim ownership over its definition.

In the Soviet Union, the intelligentsia continued to consider itself to be a spiritual saviour of *narod*, the people. However, under Joseph Stalin, highly educated individuals were elevated to the status of “professional intelligentsia” (Gessen 2000), renouncing their symbolic position as moral role models. Svetlana Boym argues that a plethora of “modal personalities and cultural myths” (Boym 2005[1994]:67) developed surrounding the intelligentsia. In the epoch of late socialism, one of these myths concerned members of the intelligentsia leaving “sophisticated professional careers for occupations that offered more free time [... as] boiler room technicians (*kohegary*), or street sweepers (*dvorniki*)” (Yurchak 2006:151). Dmitry Khmelnitsky, a research participant in Berlin, described his experience as follows:

*Dmitry Khmelnitsky*: I hated the Soviet regime. Radically. And of course, I really wanted to leave. For a few years, I was leading the life of a so-called *internal migrant*. I worked as a technician in a boiler room. It was a wonderful time. And practically everyone there was a fleeing member of the Soviet intelligentsia.

Implicit in Dmitry’s account is the intelligentsia’s intellectual *and* moral ideals, valued above material and personal well-being. Thus, a member of the intelligentsia can be loosely defined as someone who belongs to an educated social class, and who also espouses a moral attitude. The term is often contrasted to the term, *intellektual*, or “intellectual,” a term that I frequently use, recognizing it as a similarly loaded concept. In the Soviet Union, the term *intellektual* carried negative connotations amongst the intelligentsia, describing a highly-educated, but erudite professional class, lacking the requisite moral characteristics of members of the intelligentsia;

however, I use it here to describe an educated group of people striving to gain access to higher education, whether through formal or informal means.

As Soviet society began to transform during the period of glasnost and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a rift occurred between those arguing that the time is ripe for the intelligentsia to fulfill its social role (Nakhushev 2007), and those who believed the intelligentsia no longer had a social function, or that it has altogether ceased to exist (Gessen 1997; Ryvkina 2007; Sinyavsky 1997). As I have argued elsewhere (Gan 2010), it is misleading to ask whether the intelligentsia has remained relevant; this ignores shifting categories people often use to assert their belonging to an intellectual community.

In conversations with participants, the mark of a “true member of the intelligentsia” often hinged on one’s denial of self-identification with the *intelligentsiya* as a sign of humility. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term also came to be used derisively. It signaled a collaborationist attitude with a (foreign) state power, a hypocritical, morally superior, holier-than-thou attitude, or the futile idealism of political opposition. I approached the problem of self-identification by asking potential participants whether they considered themselves to be *kul'turnyye proizvoditeli*, “cultural producers,” tasked with publicly articulating a common set of experiences related to their migration trajectory. Several times, participants responded by saying, “you mean, the intelligentsia?” I was also curious to see whether such terms as *intellektual*, or *intelligent*, carry a similar valence abroad—and three decades removed from the dissolution of the Soviet Union—as they did for previous generations, for whom these terms described a tense relationship with state power. To the extent that the term “intelligentsia” is a

floating signifier, it is also possible to analyze how intellectual discourses have circulated both inside and outside Russia.

Following the Revolution of 1917, all the contributors to *Vekhi*, except for Gershenzon, were exiled from Bolshevik Russia. Termed the “Philosophers’ Ships,” owing to a number of prominent philosophers ousted from Russia on steamboats, I discuss this process at length in Chapter Five. In exile, several philosophers tried to reconcile émigré and Bolshevik intellectuals, agitating for their return to Bolshevik Russia. They became known as *smenovekhovtsy* (or, “those belonging to *changing* milestones,” referencing the 1909 publication) who were often imprisoned or executed by the NKVD upon their return.<sup>2</sup> Learning of the fate of the returnees, White Army General Wrangel united all the military exiles under an umbrella organization, the *Russkiy Obshche-Voinskiy Soyuz (ROVS)*, or the Russian Common-Military Association), and they became known as the *nevozvrashchentsy* (“non-returnees”)<sup>3</sup>, united by an irredentist and radically anti-Bolshevik Eurasianist philosophy. Thus, arguments about the role of the intelligentsia—a conciliatory intelligentsia seeking amnesty with the Bolsheviks, a democratically-oriented liberal intelligentsia, and an irredentist, reactionary group—became significantly more heated abroad than they were in Bolshevik Russia, which considered political opponents an ideological threat and which sought to consolidate its power by expelling or executing those who did not conform to the politics of the nascent regime (Finkel 2007:2-3).

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<sup>2</sup> *Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*, The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, was a much-loathed secret police responsible for political repressions that existed between 1934 and 1946.

<sup>3</sup> Note that this is the same term that later came to describe migrants in the 1960s and 1970s who left the Soviet Union, usually by official means, but who chose not to return.

Valery Tishkov argues that it was precisely White émigré intellectuals that facilitated the way historians “construct a myth of the ‘golden age’ of Russian emigration” (2003:77). This stratum articulated their historical predicament as “exiles,” believing that they were “carrying Russia with them” on their journey abroad (Khodasevich 1923; Gul 1989; Struve 1996:15). This new discourse, of “Russia (existing) outside Russia” developed largely owing to the intelligentsia, but it gained wide resonance precisely because of the migrants’ elite character, as well as their “emotionally tinged attitude toward “Rossiia” (Tishkov 2003[2002]:77). As Tishkov argues, “without intellectuals as producers of subjective concepts, there is no diaspora; there is merely an émigré population” (2003[2002]:72).

Pierre Bourdieu offers a more nuanced analysis on the social influence of intellectuals in his discussion of an “intellectual field,” which is conceived as a relationship between a creative artist, their work, and the system of social relations they embody (1969:89). According to Bourdieu, creative artists are conferred a certain degree of legitimacy by institutional authorities, such as schools or universities. These authorities “consecrate” certain creative pursuits, assimilating them into “traditional culture” (1969:107-111), and marginalize others, abandoning them “to the anarchy of individual preference” (1969:108). As Bourdieu argues,

Every intellectual brings into his relations with other intellectuals a claim to cultural consecration (or legitimacy) which depends, for the form it takes and the grounds it quotes, on the position he [*sic*] occupies in the intellectual field. (1969:111)

Bourdieu argues that whether intellectuals occupy a central or marginal role, they will unconsciously internalize their place in the intellectual field, unable to truly position themselves outside of it: “all influence and constraint exercised by an authority outside the intellectual field is always *refracted* by the structure of the intellectual field” (1969:118). However, as diffuse and

unconscious as this process may seem, Bourdieu's analysis still privileges the existence of a structure existing "somewhere out there," validating, and organizing individual choices within larger social structures.

Investigating an epistemic shift in anthropology in the mid-1990s, Michael Kearney proposes that globalization has displaced formerly hierarchical concepts, such as the assumed authority of "first-world intellectuals," or the boundedness of "cultural groups" (1995:556), in favour of diasporic communities shaped "from below" (1995:559). Such analysis is especially relevant in discussions of educated migrants who negotiate multiple identities (Ong 1993:745), pursuing diverse strategies in developing a shared discourse about their former homeland, raising the status of their community abroad, or struggling to have their diasporic rights recognized (Smith 1999:520). In acknowledging the existence of multiple diasporic identities, it becomes irrelevant to ask whether the Russian intelligentsia is "alive" or "dead," but it is worth analyzing how such discourses are constructed in Russia and abroad, to what ends they are used, and by whom.

### **1.2.7 *Before I Forget: Memory, Life Story, Life History and Auto-Ethnography***

Lévi-Strauss' sole ethnography, *Tristes Tropiques* (1974[1955]), begins with the evocative line, "I hate travelling and explorers. Yet here I am proposing to tell the story of my expeditions" (1974[1955]:3). This ironic juxtaposition between an uncontrived, personal account and the structured empiricism of the text that follows, characterizes much of Lévi-Strauss' writing. In a later passage in the book, he describes the lure of the discipline for him, "Anthropology affords me intellectual satisfaction: as a form of history, linking up at opposite

ends with world history and my own history, it thus reveals the rationale common to both” (1974[1955]:51). Without overdetermining Lévi-Strauss’ uses of history, his account situates his personal past within wider social and cultural contexts. This reverberates with another axiomatic statement by L.L. Langness, that “virtually all anthropology is biography” (1965:4).

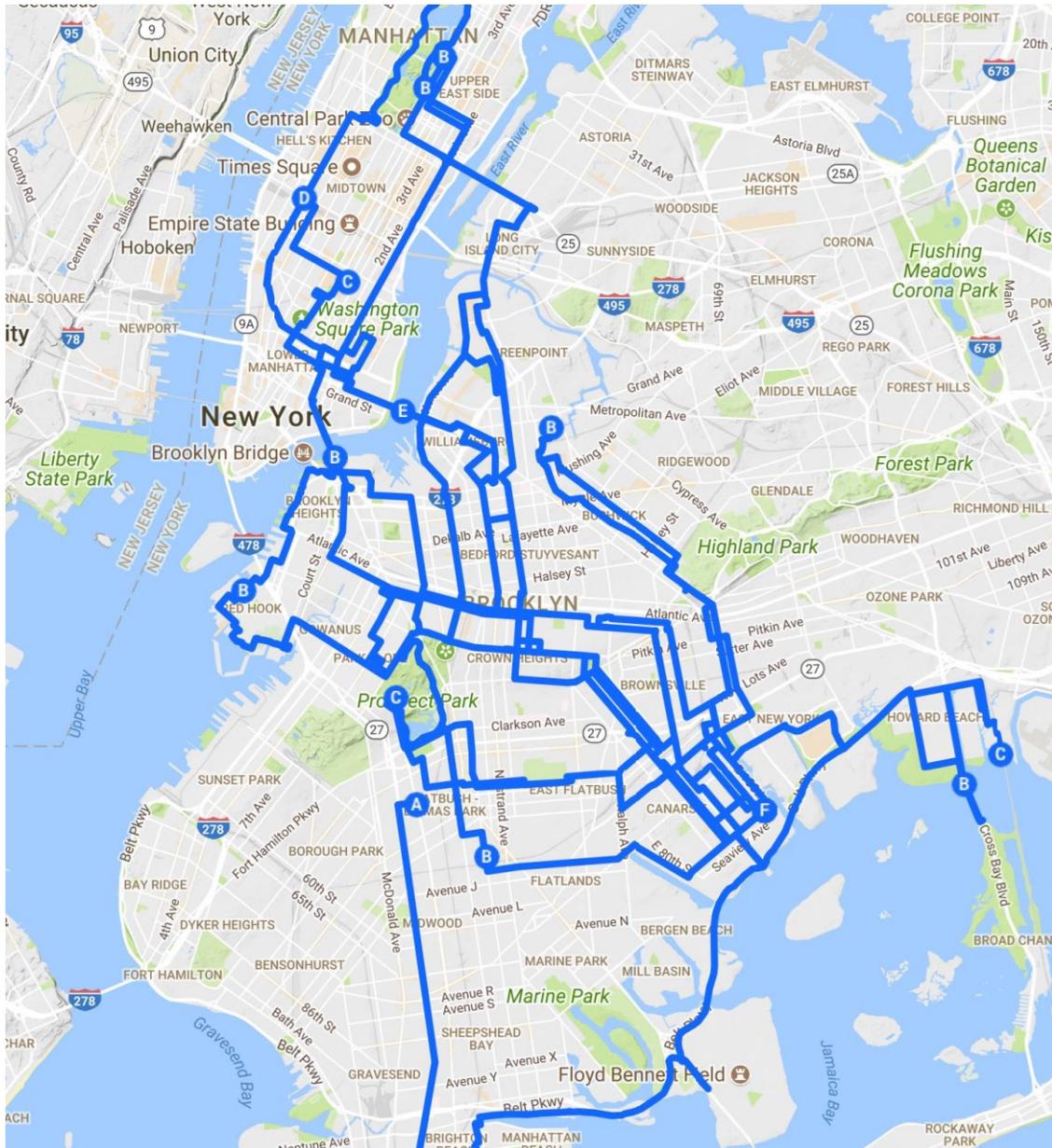


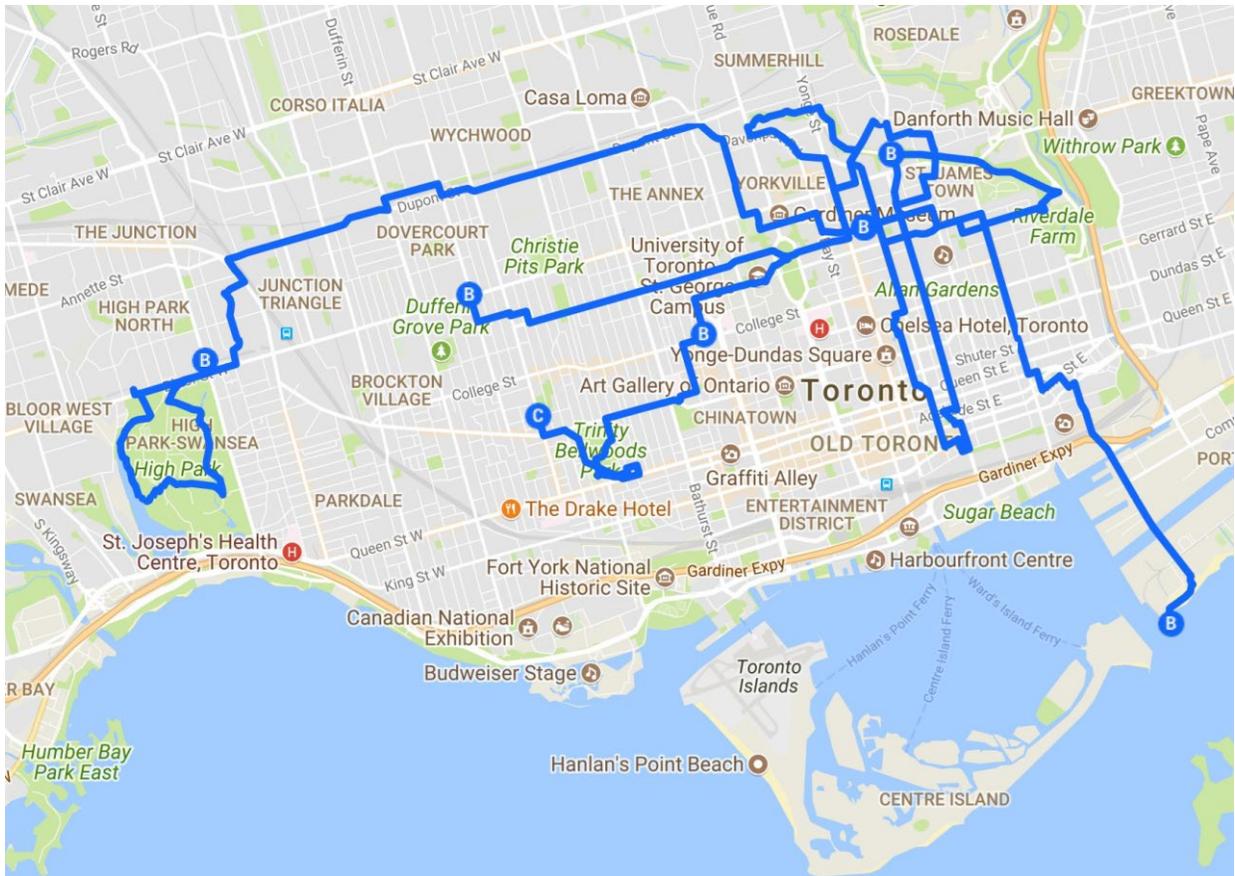
Figure 1: Map of velo-mobilities in New York City

*While doing fieldwork in New York, I stayed in a neighbourhood in South Brooklyn about twenty stops away from Manhattan on the L-train. I rarely took the subway. To get around the city, I borrowed a friend's vintage road bicycle with drop-down handlebars. I found it liberating to propel myself on two wheels, feeling a rush careening over the Manhattan Bridge, or speeding past the bumper-to-bumper traffic along the Belt Driveway. Over the course of several weeks, I chronicled my routes on a map, which soon began to resemble an Etch-a-Sketch drawing (Figure 1). I was proud of this map, showing a graphic representation of my able-bodied ambition. Then, something unexpected happened.*

*After a hefty bike ride to Manhattan, I came home feeling nauseous and slurring my speech. Two years later, I still feel the effects of a herniated disc, which leaves me exhausted at the end of each day. My mind is foggy, my disposition, aloof. I no longer feel like myself.*

*Or, was it the concussion I received when I lost consciousness in the Moscow metro?*

*I feel that I have been uncertain about my perception for some time now, whether this is a side effect of various displacements, or the result of accumulated injuries. Changing environments, changing moods, memories change from day to day. I still carry loose change in a foreign currency in my pocket. I have become an unreliable narrator, failing to recognize myself in the text each time that I return to it. I feel an urgency to document what I can remember, to patch together my story, to legitimate its veracity by seeing it written, and to recover lost ground of an increasingly fragile identity. I no longer rode a bicycle, but when I returned to Toronto following my fieldwork, I mapped long walks that I took with my dog (Figure 2).*



**Figure 2: Map of walking in Toronto with a non-human being**

In her fieldwork in Spain, Ruth Behar set out to describe a profound sense of discontinuity felt by elderly peasants preparing for death in Santa María del Monte. Meanwhile, as she was conducting this research, her grandfather passed away in Miami, Florida. Bridging “ethnographic writing” and “personal memoir” (Behar 1991:373), the author recognizes her experience of transnational loss both in her anthropological work and in her family’s story. She acknowledges that being away from “home” brought emotional power to situations at “home”:

“In the course of these movements and shifts of perspective, the boundary between social realms that are purely personal and those that are part of ethnographic fieldwork become blurred” (375).

What uses does biography have in social science research? In anthropological contexts, as verbal accounts are collected, translated, and edited by anthropologists, a written interpretation of people's "biography" or "autobiography" is termed a "life history" (Crane and Angrosino 1984:77). However, in an early account of the use of life history in anthropology, L.L. Langness defines it as "an extensive record of a person's life as it is reported either by the person himself or by others or both" (1965:4-5) and sees no "reason for restricting the term to only first person accounts" (1965:5). According to the author, a life history is a structured account of someone's biography "gathered," or assembled from one participant, or from many.

Edward Bruner defines a life history as "a tale that is at least twice told—to and by the anthropologist—and even more steps removed from the life as actually lived (Bruner quoted in Blackman 1991:56). The life history is understood as the "coming together of the distinct subjectivities of interviewee and interviewer" (Blackman 1991:56), with the recognition that they are often "shaped by Western conventions of biography. That is, they are presented as retrospective accounts of a cumulative life story" (1991:56).

Behar's situated, personal anthropology represents a turn away from "grand" narratives, and towards narrative forms that embrace pluralism (Short et al. 2013:3) and multiple perspectives inherent in fieldwork situations. But Behar also urges anthropologists to recognize the problematic notion that a life "history" is something that can be unquestionably represented. The author moves from the "life history" to a "life story" approach (Behar 1990:224), which emphasizes the "fictions of self-representations" (1990:224-225) and which focuses on "the ways in which a life is made in the telling" (1990:225). In contrast to the life history, the *life story*, "emphasizes the truth of the telling versus telling the truth; it focuses on

the strategies speakers use to fashion coherence from the disparate and potentially contradictory experiences of their lives” (Gelya 1995:145). Whereas life histories assemble historical evidence, life stories evaluate people’s narratives. This approach represents an epistemological shift in recognizing the anthropologist’s role in the research process as no longer a distant observer, but as a positioned and subjective interpreter.

I approached research participants with questions related to specific periods of their lives, which they usually recounted in a chronological manner. I asked about their upbringing and childhood experiences, their education and the start of their professional careers. I also asked specific questions relating to my participants’ migration journey; what made participants decide to move (provided the choice was theirs)? what did they pack inside their suitcases? and what were their first impressions abroad? In the same vein, I asked questions about how participants settled abroad. Therefore, I borrow from life history devices to situate my participants’ descriptions of their life trajectories, and I also use life *story* techniques as “narrative devices individuals use to make sense of experience” (Frank 1995:145), especially as they relate to participants’ migration journeys.

Alongside my participants’ life stories, I reflect on my own migration journey, both within the genre of ethnographic writing, and as a way to reflect on my role as a “positioned subject” whose “lived experience both enables and inhibits particular kinds of insight” (Rosaldo 2014:135). Situating myself in this research, I take inspiration from Jean Briggs, who, while conducting research with the Utku at Chantrey Inlet, wrote about how her emotions clashed with her participants as a source of ethnographic insight: “I was an intrinsic part of the research

situation” (Briggs 1970:6). In asking participants about their migration journeys, or their first impressions upon their arrival abroad, I inevitably constructed questions out of the fabric of my own experience, trading in nostalgia and memories of the past.

Eric Lassiter comments on discourse that helps position the ethnographer: “[u]ltimately the issue is one of honesty, of placing co-interpretation squarely in the world of coexperience, intersubjectivity, and dialogue rather than distance, objectivity, and authority (Lassiter 2005:103-104). However, Lassiter cautions anthropologists from using auto-biography solely to lend ethnographic authority to their text, arguing that it is not only ethically, but epistemologically misleading to claim to move from personal experience to a project of shared anthropology “without couching these experiences within ongoing dialogues with consultants, the personal experience of the ethnographer is irrelevant to the collaborative ethnographic project” (2005:144).

A more radical approach to reflexivity is found in auto-ethnography, defined as “a contemporary qualitative research methodology, demanding unusually rigorous, multi-layered levels of researcher reflexivity, given that the researcher/s and the researched are normally the same people” (Grant et al. 2013:1). As Tami Spry suggests, “auto-ethnographers” critically interrogate the situated nature of the fieldwork encounter, representing lives that may be very similar or very different from their own (Spry quoted in Grant et al. 2013:2).

How can anthropologists make evident a plurality of voices, which may even encompass the plural inner voices of the ethnographer? Responding to social change of the last few decades, Michael Fischer suggests that anthropology may be productively complemented by

autobiographical strategies, precisely because these answer the call to “multiple-voiced textualities” (2003:20). Therefore, in this dissertation, I combine my personal stories with the life stories of my research participants, straddling the methodologies of auto-ethnography and autobiography through modes of self-reference and self-reflection, respectively.

### **1.3 Summary of Chapters**

This research project investigates interrelated themes of mobility, material culture and historical and present-day narratives surrounding migration. Subsequent chapters examine my research sites (Chapter Two) and visual anthropology research methods (Chapter Three). Chapters that follow investigate the intersections between mobility and material culture (Chapter Four), explore how historical narratives about displacement resonate with present-day migrants (Chapter Five), and examine how these narratives are negotiated between intellectuals and official state discourses both inside and outside Russia (Chapters Five and Six).

I begin to develop the theme of transnational migration in Chapter Two, by approaching the study of mobility experientially. In my research, Moscow always served as a point of departure, allowing me to re-enact, albeit under very different circumstances, migration journeys undertaken by research participants through a variety of means, such as by airplane, train, bus, and automobile. Much of the chapter is devoted to “emplacing” my fieldwork sites, providing a kind of traveler’s log that foregrounds my conversations with research participants. I contextualize both these kinetic and static processes by asking research participants about their own migration journeys, and the places where they travel to, either through physical journeys, or in their imaginations.

In Chapter Three, I discuss my use of visual anthropology methods in wider conversation with multimedia ethnography and cinema studies. I describe how I combined audio and video recordings of my interviews with impressionistic recordings of places to which I traveled, both of which I utilized to produce a multi-media installation titled *Still Life with a Suitcase* (see Supplementary Materials, and Appendices A and B). I investigate how these recordings positioned me as a participant-observer carrying out a reflexive, ethnographic research project, and I also discuss how such methods permitted alternative modes of research dissemination.

I explore the theme of material culture as it relates to the theme of personal dispossession in Chapter Four, where I analyze metaphors of changing cultural identity in new material and cultural environments, ontological security in light of tumultuous biographical change, and the process of integrating diverse experiences into a cohesive life narrative.

While I describe the process of moving *places* with *things*, I also investigate the process of *narrativizing* the lived experience of migration. In Chapter Five, I turn to archival research, focusing on the way intellectual discourses have historically reproduced Russian literary representations of migration, beginning with literary narratives that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917. At the time of writing, my analysis reflected commemorations surrounding the Revolution's centennial. Taking inspiration from this chance occurrence, I analyze how revolutionary intellectual discourses on exile, material privation and resistance to the state, have remained relevant amongst present-day Russian migrants, but also how such discourses have become coopted by Russian state strategists.

Much has been said, and written, about Russian migration since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Chapter Six, I explore ambivalent attitudes towards migration espoused by the

current Russian administration, which simultaneously exalts Russian émigrés as heroes, and denounces them as traitors. In this chapter, I examine how state administrators, literary figures, cultural commentators, and pundits promote historical pan-Slavic migrant discourses and how Russian policy-makers position themselves in relation to neighbouring nation-states. I argue that current state strategies produce polarizing discourses that reflect an irredentist, primordial nationalism in a tense relationship with the outside Other (Alexseev 2011:509; Schenk 2010). This chapter also explores how migrants abroad either denounce such polarizing discourses, or contribute to their production, negotiating their own identity and relationship with Russia. I conclude this research project with a few final remarks on a dispersed, pluralistic and mobile identity of contemporary Russian migration.

## Chapter 2: In Search of Lost Place: Situating Fieldwork within Mobile Terrains

### 2.1 Mobile Anxieties

*Several years ago, I was strolling with my grandmother through downtown Moscow. This was unusual for us, even extraordinary, since we often had incongruous goals for being in the city: I came to aimlessly wander around, and usually on my own, while my grandmother came with a friend and a purpose: to hear a concert at the conservatory, or to visit an art gallery. We also walked at different paces, because as a nonagenarian, my grandmother has walked for over half a century longer than I have. Four generations of my family, including my great-great-grandparents, spent the better part of the last century living in a communal apartment in the city centre. My grandmother tells me that seeing a window light up in one of Kremlin's towers on her walk back from school, made her imagine Stalin working late into the night for the benefit of the Soviet people. She now acknowledges she was deceived by state mythology of the time. We turned the corner from Mokhovaya to Vozdvizhenka street to come face to face with Leninka.<sup>4</sup> As we walked past, my grandmother told me, "this was our metro stop. It took me 30 minutes to get to work from here." When the state evicted all the tenants from the building in 1977, and my family was forced to relocate to the outer limits of the city, her daily commute to the Moscow State University tripled. But more to the point, my grandmother told me, "when we were resettled, my heart shattered. I knew every stone, every crevice in this sidewalk."*

*Our current neighbourhood, located in Moscow's distant periphery, is a classic example of Soviet planning: long, grey, nine-storey panel apartment blocks form neat, geometric mosaics*

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<sup>4</sup> Leninka was a diminutive name for the Russian State library named in honour of V.I. Lenin in Soviet times.

*on an aerial map. I was born in June 1984 and lived here until 1994. I had a “normal, Soviet childhood” (see Kelly 2007). My kindergarten was a short walk from my house, as was my school. My grandmother made me porridge in the mornings, and I watched a nightly children’s television show, Spokoynoi Nochi Malyshei, Good Night Children, before going to bed. I would walk to the Khimkinskoe Vodokhranilishche, The Khimki Reservoir, with my great-aunt to feed ducks with stale white bread. Our most distinctive neighbourhood landmark used to be a cinema, before it was replaced by the Kaleydoskop shopping mall, which boasts a year-round indoor skating rink. There were other recollections, of course: a broken arm, earned while going down a homemade ice slide in my courtyard; my family glued to the TV while tanks crisscrossed Moscow, and various other impressions, supplanted by photographs, family stories, and research projects. There is a boulevard lined with birches in front of our building. The bus stops at the corner, and the metro is nearby. The sidewalks, however, have been repaved.*

In a reflexive, personal project on the experience of displacement, I had to ask myself why I was so drawn to recreating my own migration journey, even if this journey was not going to take me directly to the places where I had once lived, or take me to them through circuitous routes and unfamiliar detours. I recognized that my personal experiences could not be disentangled from my impressions of the places to which I was traveling, so I decided to approach these places experientially. I structure subsequent discussion around my sensory experiences of my field sites, my movements within and between them, and my encounters with research participants in each of them. Before I do this, however, I discuss my use of walking as a research method.

Walking—moving through space on foot—may elicit a tremendously rich set of impressions, responses and personal reflections, either privately, or amongst people who walk together. By sharing movement “rhythmically resonant with the movements of others around us” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:2), people may also share stories, or personal thoughts about where they live. Thus, as Andrew Irving argues, “by accompanying people on their [walking] journey we actually gain a ‘sense,’ if not an understanding, of how a particular type of past [...] connects people to prior events and mediates their experiences of their neighborhood” (2007:187). Whether alone, or together with research participants, walking was central to how I experienced urban environments, criss-crossing each new city that I came to inhabit for as long as time permitted, and as far as my feet would carry me.

Michel de Certeau calls walking the city an “enunciative act” (1984:97) because, contrary to the intentions of city planners and bureaucrats, the process of traversing the city on foot “carve[s] out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings” (104). In the personal vignette above, my grandmother revealed how intimately her sense of identity was connected to the place she inhabited, when, many years after her resettlement, she shared her experience of loss of a familiar neighbourhood, much as I have, having moved abroad. As de Certeau argues, “A *migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city” (1984:93). Displacement can be examined both from the perspective of “home,” and the perspective of migration, and imagined as a “shared experience of feeling out of ‘place’ within and across boundaries of the nation-state” (Chu 2006:396).

While de Certeau argues that pedestrian movements challenge disciplinary measures (1984:96), or at least create ambiguities within them (1984:101), Sharon Roseman (1996)

proposes that people “make do” with state projects that subordinate them. “Subordinated people who may acquiesce and thus partially accommodate themselves to the terms set by state bureaucracies,” Roseman contends (1996:838), will nevertheless “regard their past [and their] historical identities as negotiable” (1996:838). Thus, people may not only re-appropriate their movement across space, but negotiate their lived history across time. I propose that the narrative I present above is at least as important for what it articulates, as for what it leaves out. I have long suspected that my grandmother steers away from walking the city centre to safeguard memories of her past. “To walk is to lack a place” (1984:103), de Certeau writes, suggesting that the process of remembering places simultaneously reflects their absence. Inversely, it is only by being absent from places that people remember them in the first place.

While my focus in this chapter is on transnational movement across wide geographical terrains, I also wish to draw attention to space and place, “not as a predefined locale with particular functions, but as a process of unfolding in time, something ‘done by people’,” as Gisa Weszkalnys argues (quoted in Moretti 2015:11). For this reason, Roseman urges anthropologists to pay attention to people’s narratives and to “continue to foreground the ‘local’ in our ethnographies,” while paying attention to how embedded ‘local events’ play out in the “wider, translocal context” (1996:852). I take up this challenge with the recognition that both “local” and “global”—terms that are “equally abstract and ideological” (Clifford 2017:41)—are metaphors that anthropologists use to parse out social meaning, but that may not themselves be anthropological, in that they do not reflect “a position taken from [an] empathetic encounter with the least abstracted and most fully engaged practices of the various peoples of the world” (Miller 2005:14).

On a walk with Aleksandr Morozov, a Russian political scientist and blogger who recently moved to Bonn, we improvise our movements through the bustling modern city streets. Bonn is a small city situated along the Rhine River in western Germany, which used to serve as the capital of the Federal Republic, before it moved to Berlin following German re-unification. A wireless microphone is attached to Aleksandr's lapel, and I balance my camera on my shoulder, often walking backwards while recording our conversation.

*Aleksandr Morozov:* We're passing by a place that registers foreigners. This is the Bonn *Auslanderbehörde*.

*Gregory:* Did you register when you came here as well?

*Aleksandr:* Yes, both me and my wife, who is pregnant at the moment. A very kind woman registered us. Of course, the topic of emigration, of migration, or of leaving Russia in protest, is very acute right now. In the last three years, there has been a *vsplesk*, a splash. A good friend tallied up how many of her Facebook friends left in the last half a year. She counted fifty-three. I've also noticed this. In the current situation in Russia, people do what they can to leave. Academics try to find teaching jobs; journalists are switching to publishers abroad. Of course, this isn't the same as the global migration processes, like the million-and-a-half Syrians resettling in Turkey. It mostly resembles a kind of... existential journey, maybe. Cultural tourism.

Aleksandr's walk, during which we passed by a state bureau that registers migrants, provoked his reflections on his own citizenship status, as well as observations about migration from Russia and the Middle East. A walk through the city may not only elicit individual histories, but may provoke wider associations as well, as Christina Moretti points out following her walks with participants through Milan: "a simple walk in the city can elicit a whole universe of stories, memories and interpretations, deeply connected not just to one person's experiences but also to wider social,

economic and cultural processes and structures” (2015:20). Moreover, a walk may not only provoke the sharing of personal details, as well as observations concerning social processes, but may also reveal more abstract existential concerns.

I structure this chapter along the same principles as a walk might take, “[f]or a walk of life is not a unidirectional progress from start to finish [...] it rather goes *around* A, B, C, D, E and any number of further places, in a circuitous movement. Leaving any place, in such a movement, is part of the process of returning to it” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:17). I propose a “montage of social analysis and ethnographic description” (Stoller 2002:36), coupled with autobiographical text. Theoretically, I adapt a mode of writing known as “ethnographic realism” that “presupposes a fractured, contestable narrative perspective” (Clifford 2017:41). As James Clifford argues, in such a mode, “[t]here is no longer a standpoint from which to definitely map particular, local stories in an over-arching sequence” (2017:41); histories are rendered “partial,” they “travel and translate,” and they are “alert to their constitutive tensions” (2017:41).

To structure this circuitous journey, I map my fieldwork sites using three different interpretive routes: a sensory route, a spatial route, and a relational route. Approaching the first, sensory route, titled “senses of place,” I interpret how I see, hear and feel being in each place where I conducted fieldwork. In a section titled “measures of distance,” I explore the city spatially, measuring the city’s topography, and evaluating its temporal and spatial hierarchies. Here, I approach the city much like Benjamin’s *flâneur* (1999[1940]), “a wanderer who impresses the byways of the city with his feet” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:15). Finally, traveling along a relational route, in a section titled “imagined communities” after Benedict Anderson’s

(2006) seminal work, I attempt to examine how each place images and imagines other global places. Here, I also describe my interaction with several key participants from each fieldwork site. In this way, I “emplace” (Chu 2006) each one of my field sites—Moscow, Berlin, Paris and New York—within “a larger global and transnational social field” (2006:403).

## **2.2 Moscow**

### **2.2.1 Senses of Place**

Everybody says: Kremlin, Kremlin. I hear it from everybody, but I’ve never seen it. How many times (a thousand times), drunk or hungover, have I walked through Moscow, from the north to the south, from the west to the limit, criss-crossing it and however else – and I have never seen the Kremlin.

—Venedikt Erofeyev, *Moscow-Petushki* (2000[1970]:13)

I am jokingly warned that it is impossible to stumble on a sober person in the city centre preceding the winter holidays, because Muscovites are returning from their work *kooperativs*, office parties, tipsy or drunk. Already by mid-December, outsized Christmas tree ornaments decorate *Manezh*, a large outdoor square in front of the Kremlin, and kitschy Christmas stalls sell gifts for the occasion. An outdoor photo gallery features women preparing pre-Revolutionary Christmas packages for soldiers at the front, and an overabundance of flashing, shimmering, twinkling, and cascading lights adorn trees, lampposts, and makeshift light tunnels in front of the Nikitskiye Gates, the Bol'shoy Theatre, and Tverskoy Boulevard. Traditionally, Orthodox Muscovites celebrate Christmas according to the Julian calendar, on January 7<sup>th</sup>, but this year, Christmas came early, as a consumer holiday and as an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm 1983:1), syncretizing Soviet, Russian, and Western customs.

In the Soviet Union, New Year's Eve was the main holiday of the year, a time of happy childhood memories, described by research participants as an "absolute symbol of joy" (Lev Rubinstein) and a "celebration that remains with you for a long time" (George Kiesewalter).<sup>5</sup> New Year's celebrations were organized as a gathering of family and friends. Owing to a shortage of chairs in Soviet apartments, the sofa would be pulled up to the table, the surface of which would get covered by holiday dishes, prepared over many hours, and sometimes, over several days: *salat Oliv'ye*<sup>6</sup>, *sel'd' pod shuboy* (herring "under a coat," which refers to a layer of beet salad), *zakuski* (snacks, like roe served on white bread), the main course, and various *garniry* (sides), chocolate candies and cakes, and sparkling wine, unflinchingly called champagne.<sup>7</sup>

*I am on foot. When I arrive to the Kremlin to see the New Years' fireworks, I discover it is closed for the filming of a reality show. This year, the fireworks are a paid event. I set up my camera across the Moscow River, at the foot of the Bol'shoy Moskvoretskiy Bridge. The fireworks are late, and people begin to murmur that this is a bad omen on which to start the new year. The temperatures hover in the low thirties. I feel my extremities going numb, my feet are frozen, and my moustache and beard have become heavy under the weight of icicles.*

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<sup>5</sup> In contrast to celebrations in Moscow, Yaroslav Gorbanevsky describes his impressions of New Year's holidays celebrated abroad: "We left the Soviet Union in '75. We arrived in the West right before Christmas; to beautiful, snow-filled Vienna, replete with children's stores filled with toys. I remember how much this amazed me and my brother. Tiny stores filled with a giant number of toys, in contrast to *Detskiy Mir* ("Children's World" a Soviet-era children's department store in the centre of Moscow), which was itself giant, but had, like, five toys."

<sup>6</sup> *Salat Oliv'ye* is a quintessential potato, pea and pickle salad in Russian cuisine, nicknamed *toska po rodine*, or "longing for the motherland" in immigrant circles.

<sup>7</sup> In the Soviet Union, the only sanctioned sparkling wine was produced under state initiative and was called *Sovetskoye Shampanskoye*, Soviet Champagne.

In the winter of 1926-1927, Walter Benjamin traveled to Moscow, partly to contemplate whether to join the Communist Party, and partly to rekindle his love affair with Asja Lacinis, a Latvian actress he met abroad. In his diary, Benjamin writes, “Life here in the winter is richer by a dimension: space literally changes according to whether it is hot or cold. People live on the street as if in a frosty hall of mirrors, and every decision, every stop becomes incredibly difficult” (1985:35). It is difficult to get around Moscow in the winter. Snow rapidly accumulates in the northerly city, quickly turning to brown slush. Waiting at the bus stop, the wind pierces through layers of clothing that never seem sufficient. Street traffic slows to a crawl.

*Fireworks start with a jolt, and they are spectacular. They are accompanied by the gasps and cheers of the crowd, by the sound of bottles being uncorked, and by firecrackers that spill confetti onto the street. Despite the extreme weather conditions, people are laughing and kissing each other.*

*I travel to see friends. They have set up an antique toy: a miniature New Year’s tree crafted from thin, metal strips. Heat from a candle under its branches, sets them in motion, spinning and making a chiming sound. In my apartment, I have also dug up antique New Year’s toys: a papier-mâché swan, mushrooms and bicycles, Ded Moroz—Father Frost, a bearded man with a cane that brings children presents on New Year’s Day—as well as toy soldiers dangling from multi-colored parachutes. But I have also broken with my New Year’s tradition. At this time, and lagging six hours behind, my mom and grandmother must be preparing to join their friends in a tall condo with a view of the Toronto City Hall. Despite my vehement protests, the TV usually blasts Russian estrada, pop tunes, on state-run Channel One, as we uncork bottles*

*and clink glasses to send off the Old Year and greet the New, and watch reruns of the fireworks display launched from the tops of the Kremlin towers.*

The quote that opens this section is taken from the opening lines of a 1969 novel by Venedikt Erofejev, *Moscow-Petushki*. The novel's hero, a visitor to Moscow, drunkenly stumbles around the city, but always misses its main attraction, the Kremlin. On one such failed journey, he arrives instead at the Kursk Train station and boards the train to a neighbouring town, *Petushki*. In a commentary to Erofejev's novel, Eduard Vlasov argues that "practically all proper and educated people visiting Moscow, begin their acquaintance with it by visiting the Kremlin and Red Square" (Vlasov 2000:127). Thus, the novel positions the protagonist, who arrives to Moscow from Siberia, as a quintessential outsider (Vlasov 2000:126). Another famous depiction of Moscow is represented in the film, *I walk around Moscow* (1964). In contrast to Erofejev's protagonist, upon arriving to Moscow, the film character heads straight to the Kremlin, all the while singing a catchy tune:

And I go, walking around Moscow,  
And I can walk some more,  
Across the salty Pacific Ocean,  
Across the tundra, and the taiga (quoted in Vlasov 2000:126)

This route takes the protagonist on an imaginary journey, whereas Erofejev's narrator takes part in a familiar, roundabout route familiar to Soviet audiences: from the town, to the capital, and back again. However, Erofejev subverts expectations when the narrator's journey takes the opposite direction, from the capital, to the town of *Petushki*, to which travel is forbidden by Soviet authorities, but ends with his morbid death at the Kremlin wall (Erofejev 2000[1970]:119). The novel thus positions the protagonist not only as an outsider, but also as a

martyr of the Soviet regime. Having never seen the Kremlin, the seat of Soviet power, the protagonist is free from its control. However, when he innocently brushes up against it, he is killed. In contrast to the novel, the film protagonist's light-hearted stroll fulfills Soviet expectations; meanwhile, he travels to distant places—across the Pacific Ocean, the Siberian Steppes and the Arctic—in his imagination.

In *Moscow-Petushki*, a walk takes on both existential and political dimensions. It is also a sensory experience that measures distance according to the protagonist's points of arrival and departure: the Kursk train station, in counterpoint to the Kremlin. During Soviet times, the Kremlin assumed a semiotic function: as a signifier, it was a physical landmark, but as a signified, it represented Soviet power, punishing indifference, ignorance, and dissent. It occupied a central role in popular celebrations, symbolized by the launch of fireworks, and in state mythology, symbolized by an illuminated window in one of Kremlin's towers, which represented Stalin working. Judging by its ubiquitous status as a Moscow landmark, it is worth questioning how much the Kremlin continues to structure and define expectations today.

### **2.2.2 Measures of Distance**

The inner structure of time: time as experienced by the body in a great variety of ways. Time structured by repetition, by flow, by fatigue, by novelty; time which is felt only in moments of transition, where duration is only figured in retrospect: this is the time we know, as opposed the time which is told. The immense richness of the network by which we feel time is a crucial part of the way we experience life.

—Michael Pisaro, "Time's Underground" (1997)

Many discussions about Moscow are structured around the city's topographical hierarchy – a series of concentric rings that start from the Kremlin and build outwards: the

Boulevard Ring, the Garden Road Ring, the Third Ring Road, and the *MKAD*, the Moscow Ring Road. Thus, Moscow may be interpreted as a “fortress city” (Low 1999:18) both in terms of city planning, and as a metaphor that represents “cutting off communities by visual boundaries, growing distances, and ultimately walls” (1999:18).<sup>8</sup> However, if Moscow is approached as a mobile site, it can be examined less through its hierarchies of concentric power, as symbolized by rings emanating from an immutable centre, and more through its sites of movement; its transportation hubs and arteries that connect the city through underground and aboveground networks.

The Moscow Metro is the pride of many Muscovites. It runs late into the night, operating frequently and efficiently. Having begun operations in the city core as early as 1935, its underground, Stalinist-era platforms and passageways are decorated with an impressive array of ornate mosaics and artworks, but it is also a transit network that transports up to 10 million people daily (*GUP “Moskovskiy Metropoliten”* 2018). The metro makes manifest a conspicuously high number of menial jobs. Janitors push piles of sawdust across wide platforms; ticket vendors and escalator monitors, confined to glass booths, ensure people move through the system quickly. Over the last decade, metal detectors installed at the entrances serve as a physical reminder of the capital’s security apparatus,<sup>9</sup> further corralling transit riders through a series of barriers and corridors.

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<sup>8</sup> Alternately, a 2001 UN Global Report on Human Settlements called Moscow, New York, and Paris “controlling cities,” follow the model of a *citadel*, “where those at the top of the economic hierarchy live, work, consume and recreate in protected spaces of their own.” (2001:34)

<sup>9</sup> In contrast, when I traveled to St. Petersburg in the summer of 2015, I was struck by the conspicuous absence of police on city streets and inside the metro.

As Alaina Lemon argues, since the 1980s, the Moscow metro became a place where “‘transition’ was most visible to inhabitants of the city. [...] Riding public transit was how Moscow saw itself, it was where each day the masses encountered thousands of other faces, all somehow marked as belonging to fellow citizen or ‘alien’” (2000:14). Since the Soviet era, freedom of movement, as well as the right to live in the city, was controlled by a *propiska*, a residency permit. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Moscow became a hub for labour migrants from the former Soviet Republics, the *propiska* remained a way to control movement, and consequently, to restrict access to work permits, health care, and education. Lemon argues that since the 1990s, it has become harder to spot Westerners from their posture or style of dress, because “more Muscovites were buying imported clothes and shoes” (Lemon 2000:28). However, Madeleine Reeves convincingly argues the opposite tendency: “They can tell a newby from the knees down,” her informant Kairat, a Kyrgyz migrant worker, tells the anthropologist (2013:517).

Since the mid-1990s, and owing to the influx of Central Asian migrants, the metro has become a site for ethnic profiling of individuals recognized as *litsa kavkazskoy natsional'nosti*, “individuals of Caucasus nationality,” or *neslavyanskoy vneshnosti*, “non-Slavic appearance,” (Reeves 2013:512). While Muscovites may take obstinate pride in spotting a foreigner by their posture or style of dress, for illegal migrants, knowing metro stops and their corresponding addresses becomes crucial for “successfully performing a right to the city and a convincing knowledge of its geography” (2013:515), and thus, avoiding random document checks and police extortion.

For Muscovites who have moved away, but who periodically return to Russia, the Moscow metro functions as a metonym for the drastic change of pace from their usual routines. One of my participants, Anna Perchenok, who has lived in Berlin since 1996, describes her return visits to Moscow:

*Anna Perchenok:* We go to Moscow for two-three weeks a year. It is very difficult. After Moscow, you need a *dom otdykha*, a health sanatorium. [...] Because the tempo, the transit, the Metro, it's all very difficult in Moscow.

The Metro, argues Lemon, remains “a reference for calibrating practice to time and place” (2000:18).

Johannes Fabian proposed that “[n]either political Space nor political Time are natural resources. They are ideologically construed instruments of power” (Fabian 2007:144). Indeed, Moscow’s striated spaces (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:384-385), spaces that dominate cityscapes and demonstrate the verticality of power, point to a strenuous relationship between space, time, and differential access to resources. To get anywhere in Moscow, one needs an important resource: time. Distance traveled is often measured not so much through space, as through time; for Muscovites traveling by car or riding the metro, commute times may span hours. When giving directions, locals do not tell you the distance in metres, or in feet, but by the number of bus stops. The Metro is instructive in this sense: instead of counting down to the next train, the clocks on the platform count the number of minutes since a train has departed.

Katherine Verdery writes of the “etatization of time” (1996) during Ceaucescu’s regime in Romania—a means for the state to control the social life of its subjects. In present-day Russia, there are no longer lineups for basic goods, which may take hours, days, or even years.

But there are waiting lists to see a doctor, to get a child into daycare, or to pay apartment bills. One could now *buy time* by giving a *vzyatka*, a bribe, or by hiring someone who will stand in line, photocopy requisite forms, or process documents in an accelerated fashion.

In Moscow, time may not always flow in a linear fashion. Before the advent of online apps revealing the approximate location of the next bus, its arrival was estimated by the number of passengers waiting at the stop. Before they were outlawed in 2016, this was the case with *marshrutki*—semi-private vans that mirrored or extended existing bus networks—they left only as soon as they filled every seat with passengers.

Other forms of mobility in Moscow include taxis; *bombily* (from the Russian, “to bomb”), which are illegal cab drivers who stop with a wave of a hand, and a rapidly-expanding number of online-based ride-sharing platforms, such as *Uber*. The concentric ring model of the city is useful to explain that the closer one gets to the center of the capital, the denser the traffic on the “Ring roads,” which can often delay travelers for many hours.<sup>10</sup> The concentric ring model also mirrors the value of real estate, and living in the city centre is closely associated with social prestige. Similarly, outside city limits, beyond the outer Ring Road, the prestige of *dachas*, summer cottages, is counted by the number of kilometers away from the Kremlin, and during the Soviet era, exiles were sent at least a hundred kilometers outside Moscow, to the “*sto-pervyy kilometr*,” the hundred-and-first kilometer. Moving inwards, along the tree-lined and monument-clad boulevards closest to the city centre, the Boulevard Ring provides Muscovites with another

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<sup>10</sup> In 2010, a social movement called *Obshchestvo Sinikh Vederok*, the Blue Bucket Society, protested the arbitrariness of the blue emergency vehicle lighting used by civil servants trying to beat Moscow traffic.

mode of getting around: on foot. The Kremlin, a medieval fortress, forms the final ring as a citadel for the seat of power of the current Russian President.

### **2.2.3 Imagined Community**

*Nikita* (in Moscow): I was born in Moscow. I grew up here. It's correct to call it my homeland, Moscow. It's more of my homeland than Russia, because Moscow is radically different from Russia.

Nikita is a student preparing to move to North America to pursue a professional degree. A short excerpt from our interview reveals how strongly some participants may identify with Russia's *stolitsa*, the capital city. This narrative also reveals Nikita's precarious sense of belonging amongst *svoi*, "one's own" community.

In Soviet discourses, being *svoy*, or *nash*, expressed a collective identity of being outside the Soviet system (Yurchak 2006: 288). In post-Soviet space, this marker of identity has become inverted, whereby being "nash" has generally come to mean supporting the status quo. Although any group can claim to have their *svoikh* – "their own" members, until recently, the main pro-Kremlin youth movement was called "Nashi." While they were sardonically nicknamed "Nashists" and *Putinjugend* in oppositional media, Daria Krivonos (2015) argues that those youth who identify with the movement and whose loyalty to the state agenda is continuously demanded (2015:45), nevertheless interpret their political and social roles more, rather than less, subjectively (2015:44).

In emigration, during the Soviet period, symbols of belonging become inverted once again, as the protagonist in Vasiliy Aksenov's autobiographical novel, *In Search of Melancholy Baby* (1992[1987]), reveals upon his arrival to the United States:

We were constantly confusing *nashi* ("ours") and *vashi* ("yours"). At the beginning, we called Soviet bullies and liars *nashi*, but Americans who gave us shelter in their country, "them," "their," *vashi*, etc.

—Let's agree: their *nashi* – are no longer *nashi*, but our *nashi* — these are really *nashi*, ok? (1992[1987]:388).

The marker of belonging in Moscow is measured by one's generational pedigree in the city. This pedigree is proclaimed by one's status as a *korennoy moskvich*, a "rooted Muscovite," because being more "rooted" adds perceived authority to one's right to the city. It is a point of pride to be able to recount the history of heritage buildings, to give directions knowing the confusing numbering system of an apartment complex, or to use Soviet-era names when describing city streets. Walking the city with friends, or wandering alone, I slowly came to learn these "fragmentary and inward-turning histories" (de Certeau 1984:108). "Rooted" Muscovites criticize Moscow's changing landscape, or lament the loss of this type of local knowledge, which becomes "frozen," as one research participant suggests, when one leaves the capital.

Having received a visa to study abroad, and having already made travel arrangements, Nikita shares his hesitation about leaving: "despite my enthusiasm and my optimism, there is an unwillingness to go anywhere. A large part of my social and emotional ties remain here."

Moreover, Nikita says that he feels a "logical hesitation about this departure":

*Nikita*: I discussed this a lot with my family and friends. The thing is, it's apparent to every Russian person living here that our country is..., not the most comfortable for an average citizen, to say the least. We have our problems, our grudges, our negative factors. At the same time, we're organically prepared for these conditions, we know how to navigate through them. I feel there is a danger that living in a country with significantly better material conditions, I will lose this *hvatka*, these skills.

Knowledge of a way of being in a place is intimately tied to one's identity, or as Keith Basso argues, "landscapes and the places that fill them become tools for the imagination" (Basso 1998:102), which in turn begin to represent people's stories and identities (1998:107). Analyzing how the Western Apache "speak with names," Basso proposes that "[i]nhabitants of their landscape... are thus inhabited *by* it as well" (1998:122). Nikita takes pride in knowing how to navigate the city as a form of insider knowledge, as a marker of belonging. This form of knowledge is not only experiential and local, but becomes embodied in the cultural landscape as a posture and a skill.

## **2.3 Berlin**

### **2.3.1 Senses of Place**

A walk up the long ramp to the Soviet Memorial is a humbling and emotional experience. Passing the sculpture of a grieving mother—a symbol of the homeland—I walk flanked by rows of evenly-spaced poplar and birch trees. On each side, two enormous red granite slabs, each bearing the emblem of a hammer and sickle, represent two furled flags. Underneath each, a soldier kneels, bowing his head. The landscape opens like an interior of a cathedral: the nave is decorated with flower beds; the aisles display white marble bas-reliefs, symbolizing the bravery

of the Red Army, and inscribed with Joseph Stalin's aphorisms. In the space of the main altar, there stands a monumental symbol of victory over fascism: a giant bronze statue of a Soviet soldier holding a child in one arm and shattering the swastika with his sword, held in the other. The monument is built from salvaged ruins of Hitler's *Reich* chancellery (Koshar 2000:191), and serves as a burial ground for thousands of Soviet soldiers killed in the Battle of Berlin.

As Rudy Koshar writes, it is customary in Germany to speak of a "'memory landscape,' or *Erinnerungslandschaft*" (2000:9), which may evoke a wide array of associations with architectural landmarks, monuments, street names, historic sites, and even entire townscapes (2000:9). Indeed, as Koshar argues, German topography "is steeped in memories and images that may be intensely personal but also highly public in the sense that large numbers of individuals recognize the collective meaning of certain buildings or spaces" (2000:9). Monuments and memorials across the city underscore this "memory landscape," oftentimes by the sheer incongruity standing next to anachronistic city architecture.

The Brandenburg Gate, a maligned eighteenth century symbol of peace, is a monumental arch capped by a *quadriga* – a sculpture of a chariot with horses. The monument was looted by Napoleon following Prussia's disastrous defeat at the Battle of Jena in 1806, but soon returned to Berlin, becoming a symbol of military victory (Koshar 2000:17). At some point, its orientation must have changed, because it no longer welcomed visitors from Brandenburg, but faced inwards, into the city. It served as a gateway for victorious German troops returning from France in 1871, when a unified German nation was proclaimed inside the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, and again as a parade ground for Nazi marches, replicated today by ultra-right-wing

anti-refugee rallies held by PEGIDA and AfD.<sup>11</sup> The Gate was visible in the background of an iconic photograph representing the end of the Second World War, when a Soviet flag was hoisted from the burnt-out and shelled remains of the Reichstag building, and in 1987, it served as a backdrop for Ronald Reagan, who demonstratively urged Mikhail Gorbachev to “tear down this wall” separating East and West Berlin.

The Berlin Wall remains visible in the form of long metal strips embedded in the pavement, and in commemorative plaques, monuments and public art displays. One of my research participants, Dmitri Vrubel, a Berlin artist who painted the infamous mural depicting Leonid Brezhnev kissing Erich Honecker on the Berlin Wall, comments on the open-air East Side Gallery, where this work is on display,

*Dmitri Vrubel:* I think that if it wasn't for Brezhnev and Honecker, for the East Side Gallery and the work of 80 other artists, the Berlin Wall would have remained in history like it can be seen in *Nordbahnhof*, or *Bernauer Strasse*—a gray fence, and behind it, a sombre history of people killed, plaques commemorating underground passages, etc. People would have gone on tours to see this with sombre faces. This is really how it was; it's an accurate representation of history. But suddenly, along the No. 10 tram line, the Berlin Wall provokes completely different reactions. When people come to Brezhnev and Honecker, they begin laughing and kissing each other. [...] This, above all, represents the victory of art over the normal course of history; victory of art over politics.

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<sup>11</sup> PEGIDA, which stands for “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamicization of the West,” is a German right-wing organization, the membership of which significantly overlaps with AfD, “Alternative for Germany,” a political party that has received significant electoral support in the 2017 German parliamentary elections.

Within a span of a single generation, Berlin was transformed from two walled-in territories mirroring an ideological divide of the Cold War, into a cosmopolitan capital of a re-unified Germany. Such symbols of the city as the *Reichstag* and the Brandenburg Gate have now become Berlin's biggest tourist draws. A rebuilt spiralling glass dome of the Reichstag, situated above parliamentary chambers, allows visitors to symbolically experience the primacy of people over their government, and the Brandenburg Gate serves as a backdrop for thousands of selfies, competing for space with organ grinders and street protests. While the city has been re-united, the symbols of a "divided city" (Low 1999:7) remain ubiquitous. As John Borneman argues, during the Cold War, state policies of one ideological side were provoked by its opponents, and vice-versa (Borneman 1992:47). Such mirror strategies between East and West Germany were reflected in the post-War topography of East and West Berlin.

The focal point of former East Berlin is an omnipresent symbol of socialist positivism and technological progress, a 368-metre *Fernsehturm*, Berlin's television tower—a window to the world. *Alexanderplatz*, where the tower stands, has several other uncanny symbols that underlined the melancholic irony of a city walled off from its neighbours: a World Clock and a Fountain of International Friendship. Traces of East Berlin are also recognizable in blocks of Soviet-inspired panel high-rises, and in intrepid socialist-realist monuments to Soviet sacrifice during the Second World War, erected while the city still lay in ruins.

Any description of the public memory of West Berlin requires a more conscious process of defamiliarization, since following re-unification, Germany largely adopted policies of the Federal Republic, such as the *Grundgesetz*, the Basic Law, and its currency, the West German mark. Post-war restoration in West Berlin was canonized by the efforts of the *Trümmerfrauen*,

the “rubble women” who cleared away Berlin’s bombed-out buildings. However, as Rudy Koshar argues, the experience of these women was “universalized” to encompass all victims of Nazism (Koshar 2000:222), while their specific contribution has been usurped as symbols of German resilience and willingness to renounce Nazism—a process that is, at best, unfinished. Such ambiguities remain the most apt metaphors for present-day Berlin, a city ambivalent in its relationship with the past, and rushing headlong towards an uncertain future. Research participants underscore such ambiguities by comparing the present-day resurgence of extremist social movements in Germany and Russia with historical processes of denazification and destalinization.

During our conversation, political scientist and journalist Aleksandr Morozov discusses confrontations between democratic and extremist forces in post-War Germany and in post-Soviet Russia:

*Aleksandr Morozov:* Today, we bear witness to the fact that twenty-five years went by, but Russian society cannot resist a kind of neo-Stalinism. I compare this to Germany. Two decades after Nazism, Germany also faced extreme right-wingers, as well as RAF and the ultra-left, who believed that the emergent system was too similar to Nazism. There was a strong confrontation, but German society overcame it because of the efforts of social and Christian democrats and political philosophers. But we couldn’t do it [following the perestroika]. It’s not a question of blame, because other journalists of my generation and I: we tried our best. But it was a historically difficult question.

During the perestroika, democratic efforts in Russia did not prove entirely successful in demythologizing symbols of totalitarianism; each year, on the anniversaries of Stalin’s birth and death, crowds of devotees gather at the Kremlin Wall to lay flowers at his monument. Berlin’s “memory landscape” (Koshar 2000:9) makes such historical anachronisms more conspicuous. It

is a city replete with clashing symbols: from memorials that signal the Nazi erasure of Jewish history, to Soviet monuments that glorify Soviet resistance against it, competing with post-reunification monuments that vilify the Soviet occupation, which are, in turn, converted into commercial artscapes.

### **2.3.2 Measures of Distance**

*It's moving day. I am told I am lucky to have an Anmeldung, a Berlin residency, which is notoriously difficult to get. It will be an Altbau, an "old construction," dating to the late nineteenth century. A plaque on the top floor of the five-storey building cites a law prohibiting the use of gas lanterns. My partner and I are moving from the neighbourhood of Prenzlauer Berg, formerly in East Berlin, to Wedding, in the West. We recreate a historic journey across the Bornholmer Bridge, where on November 9, 1989, at 10:45pm, the East German commander yielded to the crowds flooding the checkpoint: East Berliners crossed to meet West Berliners, who waited for them with flowers and champagne. "Red Wedding!" it used to be called, because as a working-class neighbourhood, it voted majority communist. In the winters, we heat our apartment with coal we haul in 25-kilo bundles from the cellar. I am warned not to store my electronic equipment in the same room, because it will get damaged by coal dust. Two years later, management will pressure us to replace the ceramic coal stove with modern gas heating.*

*Renovating our apartment was like conducting everyday archaeology. A new fridge replaced the hole in the window sill. We tore up wood panelling that arched across our ceilings, reflecting the German concept of Gemütlichkeit. To experience "coziness, or comfort," spaces*

*had to feel small. As we peeled the wallpaper underneath the wood, we discovered layers of twenty-, then forty-year-old newspapers. When we tackled the floor, we ripped up shaggy carpeting, uncovering a layer of neon laminate. Underneath this, there were more laminate floors, featuring pastel-coloured mid-century modern designs. Further down, a thickly-painted layer of Ochsenblut, the colour of “ox blood,” a Berlin classic. We peeled layers of domestic history, of family life, and replaced them with our own coatings of comfort and coziness. I felt little lament for taking over from the old tenant, a former police officer in West Berlin; in the storage space, I found a knife with an emblazoned swastika.*

*After weeks of work, the apartment finally stood empty of equipment and paint supplies. Our floors were sanded and varnished, our walls were spackled and painted, and the apartment waited only to be occupied. With no elevators, I count four floors, eighty-one steps down from the old apartment, and three floors, sixty-four steps, up to the new. Our collection of things is more or less organized: boxes of kitchen utensils, dishes, clothes, bags, belts, binders, books. Four of us carry the couch and the vintage hutch, eighty-one steps down; the laundry machine, the book shelves, sixty-four steps up. We return the rented van when it is already dark and our muscles feel wobbly, and treat ourselves to Chinese food. Overtired and underslept, we come home, sixty-four steps up, and fire up the coal stove. A feeling of calm serenity sweeps over us.*

I first set foot in Berlin during a five-hour train layover I had while traveling between Brussels and Moscow. My train arrived in the middle of the night, and from *Hauptbahnhof*, the main railway station, I walked along the winding Spree, which reflected the utopian geometry of the *Bundestag*. I stood alone under the arches to the Brandenburg Gate. I then walked towards

the towering high-rises of Potsdamer Platz, a self-proclaimed symbol of a re-unified Germany, but was stopped short by a structure of evenly-spaced concrete slabs, which occupied an entire city block. This was the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*. When I entered the monument, the slabs were level with my knees, but they soon rose to my waist and then my head. As I descended further and further down, they began to tower above me, and I felt overcome with terror.

Following German re-unification, and reflecting a heterogeneity of voices vying for public memory (Costello 2013:6), a new language of architecture emerged to commemorate the past, which James Young has called a “counter-monument” (1992). For many years in the German memory landscape, sites of Jewish memory had been represented “by empty spaces where a synagogue or a school once stood” (Kosher 2000:253). The void left by the erasure of Jewish culture was reflected in the construction of buildings and memorials that amplified erasures, absences, and traces. The jagged, postmodern design of the Jewish Museum highlights what architect Daniel Libeskind claims is a building constructed “around a void that runs through it, a void that is to be experienced by the public” (Libeskind in Young 2000:11). As James Young argues, “the walls themselves are important only insofar as they lend shape to these spaces and define their borders” (Young 2000:11), representing destruction and discontinuity of European-Jewish heritage.

The linear historical narrative of the city has been broken, reflecting an ambiguous trajectory made up of fragments and absences. However, it can be argued that there has never

been a successful linear rendering of a city. Having returned to Berlin from Moscow, Walter Benjamin writes of the city in contrast to Moscow's intimacy and liveliness:

For someone who has arrived from Moscow, Berlin is a dead city. The people on the street seem desperately isolated, each one at a great distance from the next, all alone in the midst of a broad stretch of street. (1985[1927]: 112-113)

Several years earlier, walking the streets of Berlin evoked diametrically opposite reactions from writers. At the turn of the twentieth century, a stroll through *Friedrichstraße* was associated with feelings of "astonishment, curiosity, surprise, romance, pleasure" (Prestel 2017:84). A 1905 text titled *Berlin and Berliners* described the street as follows: "*Friedrichstraße. Les affaires sont les affaires*. Nightlife already during the day. Most multifaceted promenade. Called a veritable 'stroll'" (2017:85). The idea of co-mingling with formerly clearly-demarcated social classes subverted turn-of-the-century expectations, "offering a variety of feelings that eluded preconceived categories" (2017:85). It can be argued that the city, any city, is a place rife with diverse interpretations, absences, fragments, and ambiguities.

### **2.3.3 Imagined Community**

*Zhenya Oks*: Russian immigrants—I, too, am a Russian immigrant, but—Russian immigrants live in a closed world. They have their own little Russian Berlin. Their *Charlottengrad*. It was like this back then, and it's like this now.

*Sonja Margolina*: Now, in Berlin, there are officially 300,000 Russians. This is more than at the peak of the emigrant movement. It's a completely different history.

These lines reflect very different perceptions of the historically-situated presence of Russian migrants in Berlin. In negotiating their sense of belonging abroad, I examine how recent

migrants imagine an earlier, post-Revolutionary Russian émigré community, in contrast with their current observations of “Russian Berlin.”

The tangible presence of the pre-war history of Russians in Berlin has been virtually effaced. The Second World War left a tremendous mark on the city, owing both to the human victims of a fanatical racialist doctrine of the Third Reich, and the destructive power of Allied bombings. As Sonja Margolina states, “it should be underlined that Berlin was an awfully destroyed city [...]. Topographically, everything is different here.” Following the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, in the early 1920s, Berlin was nicknamed the “capital of Russian emigration” (Azarov 2005:117). A wide range of people escaped Bolshevik Russia, including soldiers of the defeated White armies, representatives of exiled political parties, members of the aristocracy, landowners, merchants and the intelligentsia. As Y. Azarov estimates (2005:118), the population of Russians in Germany numbered approximately one-and-a-quarter millions, and Lesley Chamberlain proposes that there were as many as 360,000 Russian émigrés living in Berlin (2006:206).

In 1922, the Rapallo Treaty normalized diplomatic relations between Bolshevik Russia and Germany. Previously-clashing political and social groups started to intermingle, as ousted politicians began to organize political momentum to support diverse émigré causes, White Army generals negotiated with the Reds, and literary publications attempted to consolidate émigré and non-émigré voices (Schlögel 2006:11). Karl Schlögel makes a point not to describe “Russian Berlin” through a common topography, nor to see it as solely “logocentric,” focused on the textual production of émigré writers and intellectuals (2006:12). Russian Berlin and the

post-Revolutionary Russian diaspora, argues Schlögel, should be considered both part, and predecessor to “wider diasporas of the tragic twentieth century, as a unique expression of the violent side of globalization, and as an expression of displacement and the emergence of national and hybrid cultures” (2006:19). Before I consider cultural continuities of Russian Berlin in contemporary migration discourses, I want to discuss the tangible places frequented by Russian émigrés, as unrecognizable as they may seem in the present-day topography of the city.

Lesley Chamberlain describes different Berlin neighbourhoods where Russian migrants came to live in the 1920s: the intelligentsia settled in the neighbourhoods of *Charlottenburg* and *Wilmdersdorf*, writers met near *Nollendorfplatz*, and the avant-garde frequented *Prager Platz*, or *Prager Diele*: “Someone invented the verb *pragerdilstvovat*, which summed up all that was entailed in going there regularly” (Chamberlain 2006:207). Referencing this landmark, Sonja Margolina reiterates that “Tsvetaeva mentions *Prager Diele* in her memoirs, and if you cross *Prager Platz*, you will see the house where she lived; there is a small memorial plaque there; Andrey Bely also danced not far from here, either drunk or high.” Reminders of a peculiarly “Russian Berlin” persist for a small niche of intellectuals. Sonja Margolina is a journalist and writer who came to West Berlin in 1986. She argues that post-Soviet migration is incomparable with the post-Revolutionary influx of Russian refugees:

*Sonja Margolina*: For us, the ideal emigration is the one from the first generation. It’s the emigration of old classes, political dissidents, Mensheviks, intelligentsia, Philosopher’s Boats, etc. The “Sausage emigration” from the late 1980s onward is completely different. These people came for a better life, however they rationalized it for themselves.

In the early 1990s, more than 570,000 Russian migrants left for Germany, which received more Russian migrants during this period than Israel and the US combined (Savoskul 2016:47). As Sveta Roberman argues, from that cohort of migrants, over 200,000 were Russian Jews, who, not unlike other groups, came in the pursuit of well-being for themselves and their families (Roberman 2013:4-12). Under the *Kontingentflüchtling*, “quota refugee” program, Russian Jewish migrants were offered permanent residence, welfare protection, and permission to work (2013:17), until the program was quietly discontinued in 2005. Another mass movement, which complicates the total tally of immigrants, includes the resettlement of approximately one million ethnic *Spätaussiedler*, “late” German repatriates (Kranz 2016:12), who came from various parts of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Both migrant groups faced barriers, negotiated new identities, and experienced various degrees of satisfaction in their personal and professional pursuits in Germany (Roberman 2013:4-12); however, it is worth noting that they experienced Germany very differently one from another.

While Sonja is extremely well versed in the history of Russians in Germany, she is also hesitant to embrace it as part of her self-identity: “For me, maybe because of my personality, it’s the past. When I started working here, this history got in the way, because it presupposes a certain regard, which I rejected. An emigrant gaze. In time, I relativized these things for myself.”

Zhenya Oks is a musician and poet living in Berlin since the early 2000s. As we walked the late-night-early-morning streets of the city, Zhenya and I talked, amongst other things, about the legacy of Russian writers in Berlin. Zhenya reminds me that the department store *KaDeWe*, became a source of inspiration for Vladimir Nabokov; his novel, *Korol', Dama, Valet* (*King, Queen,*

*Knave*, 1928) bears the same initials in Russian. One of Nabokov's poems, *Berlin Spring* (1925), describes the protagonist as he gloomily wanders the streets of Berlin. When he comes home late at night, he is accosted by his German neighbour, knocking angrily against the wall: "this line remains relevant to this day," Zhenya intones. Nabokov lived in Berlin for over a decade, writing for his father's daily newspaper under the pseudonym V. Sirin. The newspaper, *Rul'*, the Helm, represented the democratic Cadet Movement. In a tragic confrontation with political radicals, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov was murdered in Berlin in 1922. He is buried in the Russian cemetery in Tegel, which, allegorically, may be the most tangible remnant of post-Revolutionary Russian presence in Berlin.

Zhenya tells me about parallels he notices between the émigré community of the 1920s, and present-day Russian migration:

*Zhenya Oks:* There are people who move and who quickly learn a new language. They preserve their 'world,' but also communicate with the locals. Then, there are people who negate all this. They live in their own circle, and this circle remains the same for 20-30 years. They bring their own little Russia [or other countries] over here, and it becomes a closed world. A small, parallel one."

Despite similar narratives trajectories, Sonja and Zhenya offer diametrically different perspectives on the physical and literary influence of the Russian émigré community abroad. Zhenya argues that the Russian literary history provides a link to the past, transcending the insular nature of diasporic community. Sonja discusses Russian legacy in Berlin as a rupture, making hardline distinctions between the city's literary history, and its qualitatively different migrations, past and present.

In a distant West-end Berlin neighbourhood of Spandau, a museum dedicated to a little-known avant-garde émigré painter Nikolay Zagrekov stands as an unlikely symbol of Russian continuity between different migration “waves.” The museum is supported by a foundation, which organizes fundraisers, art exhibitions, and literary events to preserve the artist’s legacy. Born in 1897, Nikolay Zagrekov moved to Germany following the Russian Revolution, in 1921. As a painter, he evolved in style from cubo-futurism to abstract expressionism, in tandem with the artistic trends of his time, which also meant that he continued living and working in Spandau during the Second World War. He died in Germany of old age in 1992.

During an art opening at the Zagrekov Museum, I met Vadim Fadin and his wife, Anna Perchenok. The couple who arrived from Moscow to Berlin in 1996 already in their sixties, organize a monthly literary salon in their apartment. Their inspiration comes from *Zelenaya Lampa*, the Green Lamp, a turn-of-the-century salon organized in St. Petersburg, and then Berlin and Paris by a famous literary couple, Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius. To date, Vadim and Anna published two anthologies inspired by these gatherings. Anna is tasked with organizational labour—“according to an old tradition, Russian salons were governed by women,” writes Vadim Fadin, “and we do not break with old customs” (2017)—while Vadim pens an introduction to each edition. In the second anthology, Vadim’s foreword read as follows:

“The preservation of Russian culture” – these are not empty words and they do not represent an easy task, especially in our time, when people are withdrawing from books, turning dangerously, as Nabokov had said, into “those emigrants, whose only hope and profession became their past.” (Fadin 2017: 8)

The legacy of the post-Revolutionary intellectual migration continues to be negotiated, less as a “topography,” or a “textual tradition” that survives from post-Revolutionary discourses, but as a

living, imaginative space of invented traditions (Hobsbawm 1983:1), which takes as its arduous task “the preservation of Russian culture” in Russian Berlin.

## **2.4 Paris**

### **2.4.1 Senses of Place**

*I was nine years old when I arrived in France, and I used to remember it with a fondness reserved only for the most precious childhood memories. When I returned nine years later, the town where I lived, which seemed so foundational to my life in Canada—I spoke French, attended a French immersion school, and occasionally bragged about having lived in France—appeared drab and provincial. And Paris? That Paris of magical childhood impressions, of stairway climbs up the Eiffel Tower, and boat rides on the Seine, had been seemingly swapped by a city of long lineups to overcrowded tourist attractions and expensive tchotchkes.*

The site of world fairs—which gave the world its most famous entrance gate, the Eiffel Tower, which now sparkles at night—or the home to the clichéd Moulin Rouge—which, to this day, hosts its own chauvinistic brand of cabaret *spectacles*—the “capital of the nineteenth century” (Benjamin 1935) hosts a hefty amount of globally recognized symbols of lavishness, licentiousness, and luxury. Yet, there is no single way to interpret Paris; neither flâneuristic observation, nor political-economic analysis should overdetermine complex readings of a global metropolis. Despite this, I have arrived at no better explanation to describe my disillusionment with the city, than the grumblings of a hypercritical teenager beginning to develop a political consciousness, and becoming attuned to the “fundamentals of class relations” (Harvey 2006:23).

Ideally, this kind of reflexivity should have allowed me to relativize my class position in other parts of the world to which I traveled, but this did not come until much later.

As one of my Parisian participants, Yaroslav Gorbanevsky told me, when I asked him about remembering places where he once lived, “that which draws a person to the past may not be geographical space. Sometimes it is chronological space; a space which includes memories.” Almost fifteen years went by since my fated visit, and I was once again traveling to a place that triggered such diverse impressions, but now as a PhD student who had learned how to keep his emotions, and his youthful idealism, at bay.

*When I entered the Métro, the smell of burnt rubber typical of the train cars, the sound of trains swooshing to a smooth halt inside the tiled walls of the half-moon platforms, and the colourful wall-high advertisements had completely overwhelmed me. I felt a cognitive dissonance experiencing this place. While my sensory memories beckoned me to relive the sights, smells and sounds of the past, my kinaesthetic memories betrayed me; my body did not remember how to orient itself in Paris. Above all, this dissonance reminded me of the passage of time revealed by many years of absence, which provoked a deep feeling of nostalgia. This dissonance had also caused me to get on the wrong metro line.*

As Sarah Ahmed observes, “[t]he journeys of migration involve a splitting of home as place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience” (Ahmed 1999:341-342). In my case, the experience became inverted; I was reminded of a sensory world through a myriad of associations with the past, and I was experiencing a former home not as a place of origin, but as a temporary stop along my migration journey. Ahmed continues, arguing that

“migration narratives involve [...] a spatial reconfiguration of an embodied self: a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied” (1999:341-342). Migration may thus be experienced as a feeling of disorientation; as being “out of place.”

*One day in January, I stopped at my local bakery at Mairie d’Ivry. I felt clumsy and anxious, and I wanted to distract myself with a treat. Having ordered a black coffee and a galette, I started toward the metro, eating as I walked. In the first few bites, the delectable puffed pastry with almond frangipane, almond butter filling, seemingly melted in my mouth, but when I took another bite, I felt a sharp and unexpected pain. I discovered a small glass object in my galette, which might belong in a cosmetic shop, or a medical lab, but certainly not in a piece of pastry. I returned to the bakery, waiting my turn in line, and discreetly explained the nature of my problem to the person behind the counter. Unabashedly, they exclaimed, “Vous êtes le roi!” “You’re a king!” Dismayed, I asked whether my pastry could be replaced. “C’est la fève, Monsieur, vous l’avez retrouvé!” You found it. I could not understand what it was that “I found,” but I responded with a confused smile. Later, I looked up the French Catholic custom, which occurs near the day of the Epiphany, when a small ceramic charm is hidden in the flat round cakes named les galettes des rois, the cakes of kings. The person who discovers the lucky charm is proclaimed king or queen.*

*This episode shook me out of my anxiety, reawakening my sense of wonder for discovering a new place. I began to see my surroundings unfiltered by a cynical attitude. “Having lived in France,” I arrived feeling like an experienced traveler, speaking the language,*

*and confident in my familiarity with France's many customs. Yet, in the most unexpected of places, I suddenly discovered that "I was king."*

Identity, according to Ahmed, is not only embodied, but remembered and narrativized as well: "migration involves not only a spatial dislocation, but also a temporal dislocation: 'the past' becomes associated with a home that is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present" (1999:343). At least for my research, personal reflections on returning to a place I once called "home" elicited conversations with participants about what they felt living in the cities where I met them, or returning to their former "home," whether in their thoughts and imaginations, or during physical travel.

#### **2.4.2 Measures of Distance**

In a highly allegorical, cult-like film directed by Yuri Mamin, *A Window to Paris* (1993), the protagonist, Chizhov, discovers that a wardrobe closet in a St. Petersburg apartment hides a window that opens directly onto a Paris rooftop. In one sequence, having traveled to Paris through the window, the protagonist stumbles on his émigré friend, a fellow musician who earns a living in a strip club by playing a violin placed provocatively between his legs. His friend waxes nostalgic about living in his former communal apartment in "Leningrad," or strolling through the main city thoroughfare, the *Nevskiy Prospekt*, all the while dismissing the French as gluttonous and uncultured. Unaware of the existence of a shortcut to Russia, the friend plays along when Chizhov blindfolds him and takes him back to St. Petersburg. But when he discovers he is about to be jettisoned there, Chizhov's friend pleads to be taken back to Paris. *A Window to Paris* is a

multi-layered film, commenting on the failure of the intelligentsia to assimilate abroad, on the economic uncertainty of post-Soviet Russia, and on travel restrictions in the Soviet Union – it turns out the window opens only once every few years.

The resonance of this film for formerly Soviet citizens is partially lost to contemporary audiences: the “Iron Curtain” has fallen, and one can travel between St. Petersburg and Paris with few constraints. Nevertheless, because there are no reciprocal visa agreements between France and Russia, even short-term stays require a visa application, along with proof of medical insurance, sufficient finances, and pre-booked accommodations. Meanwhile, many participants living in France replicate Chizhov’s friend’s narrative, assessing Paris as an unfriendly and privileged place with a single aphorism: “the French never invite you over.”

“Parisians make the street an interior,” writes Walter Benjamin (1999[1935]:421). From my conversations with Parisians, a common response to the complaint that people do not invite each other into their homes, is that their apartments are too small to host people.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the distance traveled between these private and public realms has long provoked Russian writers to hypothesize about the true nature of French identity. In her memoirs, Nina Odoevtsova recreates her conversation with Ivan Bunin, a Nobel laureate living in Paris in the 1920s. Bunin wishes to enter a café where he sees a French waiter cutting open oysters, but stops himself:

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<sup>12</sup> Apartments are also expensive. When I searched for a rental in the 14<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, I was offered a room in a shared accommodation. The landlord was asking for €650.00 per month, or approximately \$1,000 Canadian, in a space totaling approximately forty square metres. When I asked about a recent law in France that prohibits landlords from charging over a certain percentage above the market value of their district, my potential landlord divulged that landlords generally ignore it.

Between us, Russians, and them, there is a chasm. They are different, incomprehensible to us. But we do not understand them to the same extent that they do not understand us. They assign to us an *âme slave* [a Slavic soul], for what it's worth, but they are right – the difference is mainly between our souls. (Odoevtsova 1989[1983]:378)

Bunin continues, identifying the French as “calculating, mercantile, joyful, emotional,” while Russians are contrasted as being “lyrical, ascetic, somber and impulsive” (1989[1983]:379). Bunin’s essentialist hypothesis, as recounted by Odoevtsova, is provoked by the distance between the café and the sidewalk.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city became further subdivided “into a respectable west and a less fortunate and largely neglected east” (Harvey 2006:30), or the “left” and “right” banks of the Seine. The deplorable living conditions of Russian émigrés relegated to live in working-class neighbourhoods along *La Rive Gauche* (the left bank), became a common subject of memoir literature (Sapgir 2012; Odoevtsova 1989[1983]). In the 1920s, the working-class neighbourhood of Montparnasse became a stomping ground for Paris’ artistic community, comprising many Russian émigré artists, including Wassily Kandinsky and Marc Chagall. Lesley Chamberlain suggests, that “hundreds of Russian painters in Paris alone followed from the Bolshevik ban on abstract art in 1922” (2006:232). These artists occupied studios in *La Ruche*, the beehive, and frequented Russian aristocrat Marie Vassilieff’s soup kitchen. Over the next decades, the space changed many hands. At one point, it became *Musée de Montparnasse*, run as a non-profit museum open to the public until 2012. The space has since been converted into a private art gallery, and the patron’s name exists only as an epithet.

Street addresses in Paris are demarcated by the city’s *arrondissements*. Parisians measure distance by the prestige of having a postal code with the lowest number. The *arrondissements* are counted beginning with the royal palaces of the Louvre, and continuing in

a clockwise direction to each of Paris' twenty *quartiers*, neighbourhoods. If walking the street may "transform Paris into one great interior," writes Benjamin (1999[1935]), Paris is "a house whose rooms are the *quartiers*, no less clearly demarcated by thresholds than are real rooms" (1999[1935]:422). Benjamin's metaphor parses the city into administrative regions, each complete with a function and character. However, Richard Sennett proposes that historically, the *quartiers* were formed as political tools to segregate urban dwellers: "An ecology of *quartiers* as an ecology of classes: this was the new wall Haussmann<sup>13</sup> erected between the citizens of the city as well as around the city itself" (Senett in Harvey 2006:22). Municipal initiatives have attempted to redress the hierarchy of the *quartiers*, mandating that cultural and administrative institutions, such as universities, libraries, and city archives be built in outlying Parisian districts.

Paris is further subdivided along an *Axe Historique*, a historical axis, a line of boulevards and monuments bisecting Paris, from The Louvre, to the *Arc de Triomphe*, and complemented by the modern addition of the *Arche de la Défense*. Everything that lies outside the *Périphérique*, the peripheral ring road that marks a symbolic border between Paris and its *banlieus*, marks a division between Parisians and those living elsewhere. The last stops of the Métro also signal to this transition, as they are named for communities that lie beyond Paris: Porte de Choisy, Porte de Montreuil, etc. Research participants who lived just outside the city, nevertheless considered themselves Parisians. While these divisions are largely symbolic, they loom large, intersecting national and transnational space, and local identity:

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<sup>13</sup> Georges-Eugène Haussmann, known as Baron Haussmann, was the city planner responsible for modernizing Paris between 1853-70.

With a shrug of the shoulders, the true Parisian, though he may never travel out of the city for years at a stretch, refuses to live in <Paris>. He lives in the *treizième* or the *deuxième* or the *dix-huitième*; not in Paris but in his *arrondissement*—in the third, seventh, or twentieth. And this is the provinces. Here, perhaps, is the secret of the gentle hegemony which the city maintains over France: in the heart of its neighborhoods, and <that is to say, its> provinces, it has welcomed the other into itself, and so possesses more provinces than the whole of France. (Benjamin 1999[1935]:832)

When Marina Tsvetaeva lived in the city, she wrote: “In Paris, one has to live for Paris.

Otherwise, your existence inside Paris, and its existence inside you do not make any sense”

(Tsvetaeva quoted in Bérard-Zarzycka 1989:360). Tsvetaeva’s spiritual, if not carnal metaphor

of a union between two bodies—the urban, and the individual—offers an implicit warning:

become one with the city, or get lost. The distance measured between French and Russian

culture, between the private and the public, and between the sidewalk and the café seemed to

be at the center of every conversation about belonging in Paris.

### **2.4.3 Imagined Community**

In Vladimir Nabokov’s short story, “A Visit to a Museum” (1997[1938]), the protagonist visits a small museum in a drab, provincial French town. The exhibits predictably bore the visitor, but as he ventures further and further, uncovering new rooms filled with phantasmagorical displays, he suddenly finds himself in a new place: “I advanced, and immediately a joyous and unmistakable sensation of reality at last replaced all the unreal trash amid which I had been dashing to and fro” (1997[1938]:284). The visitor finds himself in St. Petersburg, stepping on freshly fallen snow: “already I knew, irrevocably, where I was. Alas, it was not the Russia I remembered, but the factual Russia of today, forbidden to me, hopelessly slavish, and hopelessly my own native land” (1997[1938]:284). Alas, this is not the long-awaited reunion with old Russia,

but an encounter with a newfound Soviet reality. Shedding “all the integument of exile” (1997[1938]:225), and fearing for his life, the visitor tears up his French documents and throws off his foreign clothes. Lo and behold, whereas Chizhov strives to return to Russia, the Visit’s protagonist wishes to spare the reader the details of his arrest, and the “incredible patience and effort [needed] to get back abroad” (1997[1938]:285).

Lesley Chamberlain observes that in the early 1920s, writers publishing stories and memoirs written in Soviet Russia and in emigration were “always aware of the other and thinking similar thoughts, whether or not they were actively watching over or intervening in each other’s lives” (2006:250). Contrary to Chamberlain, who argues that such stories reveal a “twisted and troubled psychological reality among the émigrés” (2006:251), I consider these narratives to express the precarity of migrant identities. In discussing present-day migrants escaping civil war, Michael Jackson evokes their “extreme cultural disorientation” (2008:60), coupled with their encounter with what Hannah Arendt calls the “dead letter” of a system (Arendt in Jackson 2008:65). Migrants in precarious circumstances become “complete stranger[s], linguistically inept, economically insecure and socially stigmatized” (2008:69).

The Golden Era of the Weimar Republic, 1924-1929, years of relative prosperity and economic recovery, eluded Russian émigrés. Already beginning in 1925, the French capital became the cultural, religious, and political center of Russians abroad. Scholars argue that Paris was a natural fit for Russian aristocrats, who historically employed French political émigrés fleeing the French Revolution as governesses, and were therefore socially and linguistically well-versed in French culture (Azarov 2005:28). Similarly, Diaghilev’s *Ballets russes*, Russian

Ballets, Merezhkovsky and Gippius' literary salon, as well as Paris' academic ties with Russia, provided a solid foundation for post-Revolutionary exiles (Chamberlain 2006:230). Many of the institutions created by Russian émigrés in France continue to exist today.

*La Bibliothèque Russe Tourguenev*, Ivan Turgenev's Russian Library, founded by the writer himself in 1875, became a cultural epicentre for Russian émigrés. Its collection "totalled 100,000 volumes on the eve of the Second World War" (Chamberlain 2006:231). The library was decimated during the war, but its collection was restored in 1959. When I first arrived to the non-descript residential building, I believed I had the wrong address because there were no signs to point to the library's existence. The library occupies a second-floor apartment. In the reading room, a large cupboard houses the library catalogue, accessed by pulling out wooden drawers full of typewritten index cards. Upon request, the librarian fastidiously retrieves requested items from the stacks. A sign at the front door reads *tishina*, silence.

YMCA-Press became an important publisher of Russian émigré literature. Mirroring Russian migration westward, it was first founded in Prague in 1921 as a charitable project of the American YMCA; it then moved to Berlin in 1923, and to Paris in 1925. The press is now almost defunct, publishing an infrequent Christian journal called *Vestnik*, "News Source." The press survives as a bookstore, where Russian books stacked up to the ceiling have acquired the patina of old age. In the 1970s, YMCA-Press became legendary as the first press to publish Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1973-1975), and it continued to publish dissident literature into the 1980s. In 1995, Nikita Struve, the son of exiled "first-wave" politician Petr Struve, passed on many of the original manuscripts, letters, and archives of YMCA-Press to a foundation

founded by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Dom russkogo zarubezh'ya*, House of Russian Abroad, in Moscow. Russian emigration “came home.”

Taking a regional train an hour away from Paris, I arrived at the cemetery of St. Genéviève-des-Bois, another Russian institution that deserves a special mention in the history of Russian emigration. The Russian cemetery is a burial place of several generations of émigrés: writers, politicians, princes, and dukes, as well as an entire White Army military division. Cemeteries do not exist in perpetuity in France. In 2005, when St. Genéviève-des-Bois was under threat of redevelopment, the Russian government stepped in to renew its lease, taking the opportunity to rebury A.I. Denikin, a leading general of the White Army, on Russian soil. In that same year, on Vladimir Putin’s personal request, philosopher Ivan Ilyin’s remains were also repatriated from Switzerland to Russia, truly shedding all the “integument of exile” of a key thinker of the Eurasianist movement, whose philosophy suddenly found favour amongst Russia’s top state officials.

Connections between the two cultures travel both directions. Around the corner from my house, I came across *Rue Lénine*, Lenin Street, and the *Terrain de Football – Complexe Sportif Lénine*, Lenin Football Field and Sports Complex. In a quiet Parisian suburb famous, or perhaps infamous, for its utopian, brutalist architecture, I also discovered *la Cité Youri-Gagarine*, Yuri Gagarin City, a social housing project named after the first person in space. In 1963, this working-class neighbourhood became the first foreign destination for the Soviet astronaut following his return from the cosmos. The visit is commemorated in a photo album at the mayor’s office, and through films available in the archives of the French Communist Party (FCP)(Cinearchives.org 1963). Politically, the working-class commune leaned so far left, that in the 1970s, it was

nicknamed Little Moscow. French admiration for the Soviets, reflected in strong electoral support of the Communist Party, caused dismay amongst newly-arrived immigrants, highly critical of communist initiatives as practiced by the Soviet government.

French intellectuals have remarked on a close “spiritual bond” between Russia and France. As Svetlana Cecovic (2017) argues, present-day representations of Russia in France have shed nineteenth-century exoticism, which describes Russians as “generous, peaceful and obedient” (2017:1). Russia is no longer a place where a traveler may “learn more about themselves” than about its inhabitants (Cecovic 2017:2). However, in everyday conversations, I sometimes had to challenge my French interlocutors, whose comments about Russia combined orientalist and paternalistic attitudes: “Russians are so unfortunate to live under a dictatorship; don’t they know any better?” or “People live with such distrust, as if they were under a constant state of surveillance. However, once the vodka comes out, they are willing to go to the end of the world for you.” It took me “incredible patience and effort” to convince my French interlocutors that we are all political subjects, shaped by our own situated knowledges and ideologies.

*I often felt ambivalence, if not defensiveness, about discovering placenames and institutions named after Russian celebrities in Paris. Place Stravinsky occupies a central square beside Centre Pompidou, decorated by sculptures created by Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely depicting each one of his works. However, I felt these whimsical, multicoloured pieces to be more appropriate for a children’s playground, than to serve as a representation of a composer whose ardour provoked a riot in Paris during the 1913 premiere of the Rite of Spring. I*

*was also dismayed to discover that Kremlin-Bicêtre borrows its name from the time Napoleon's Grande Armée occupied Moscow. In Russian grade school, I was taught that Napoleon fought a disastrous campaign in Russia and was defeated. When I came to France, I was taught the opposite.*

Early one morning, I arrived at *Place Colette* to take part in a walking tour dedicated to Alexander Pushkin's Paris. There were four of us; a Russian woman with her young daughter, our tour guide, Ekaterina Efimovna Etkind, and me. We began the tour at *La Comédie Française*. As we passed monuments to Voltaire, Molière, and Victor Hugo, Ekaterina described Pushkin's love for France, his fluency in the French language, and the various writers and thinkers who influenced the poet. In 1974, when she was twenty-five years old, Ekaterina's father, a translator and scholar, spoke in defence of Joseph Brodsky during the poet's trial. Following this, he was asked either to leave the Soviet Union or go to prison. He relocated his family to France.

During our interview, Ekaterina tells me, "my father, Professor Etkind, had as his goal to present Pushkin to the French, and in French. He organized a group of translators, and they translated practically all of Pushkin. [...] He left me this book, saying that now it is my turn to acquaint the French with Pushkin and with Russia." Our conversation revolves around Russian identity in France. Ekaterina tells me, "I still consider myself Russian. Even though I have an accent and people hear it, I am not embarrassed by it, quite the opposite. I consider myself a proud carrier of the Russian language" (see Supplementary Materials: Ekaterina Etkind). She organizes the three-hour tour to preserve her father's legacy, despite the conspicuous fact that the famous Russian poet never set foot in Paris.

## 2.5 New York

### 2.5.1 *Senses of Place*

*Soon after landing at John F. Kennedy Airport, I take a shuttle train to Jamaica Terminal, where I catch the Long Island Railroad to Atlantic Terminal, making my way to the Q-train. I hear chirpy train announcements over the PA: a female voice calls out the stops, and a male voice chimes in, “be careful of the closing doors.” Without a way to locate them, the placenames evoke a play of the imagination, warping time, and extending the city’s geography across wide terrains. Yet, on the sides of the glittering, silver MTA trains, an emblem of a white-headed bald eagle stands against the red, white, and blue of the American flag. In New York, mobility is not a free-floating concept; it can very much be emplaced. In the 1970s and ‘80s, before rapid gentrification mobilized politicians to declare a “war on graffiti,” subway cars were considered public canvases for artistic expression (see Dickinson 2008). Memory betrays me, because I do not recall whether I have ever seen these opaque, art-filled subway cars during my childhood trips to New York in the 1990s, or whether I imagined them to be this way from movies and books. In any case, the subway cars are graffiti-free now.*

Sharing stories of their first impressions of the city, research participants offered vivid descriptions about arriving to New York City. Igor Satanovsky tells me, “I was under no illusions about America being a land of milk and honey, but when we got out at JFK, I was ready to kiss the ground. I was certain that whatever was going to happen here could in no way be worse than where I came from.” Nina Alovert described her initial experience of getting lost on the subway, after which she vowed to memorize the complicated, intertwining network plan; Elena Dovlatova

recounts how upon arriving to New York with her daughter, they walked “from 27<sup>th</sup> to Bowery Streets”—a long stretch along the Island of Manhattan—and how by the end of the journey, her daughter had completely worn out her shoes.

Participants shared the excitement, anxiety or embarrassment of first impressions, with a self-awareness befitting people who take pride in having learned the ins and outs of city life. New York is arguably a place where the quintessential story of arrival—a long sea voyage that ends when the Statue of Liberty emerges out of the fog against the Manhattan skyline<sup>14</sup>—is constitutive of its very identity. For participants, such a narrative also offered a symbolic rebirth, an origin story for what it meant to be a non-indigenous American settler.

Stereotypical images of “poor, illiterate [migrants] who disembarked from the crowded boats” at Ellis Island (Remmenick 2007:170), dominate the historical narrative of immigration. It is also a narrative that highlights American generosity: “only two percent were turned away, lest they become a burden on society,” the audio guide at Ellis Island intones. Of course, this narrative ignores racist immigration laws of 1921 and 1934, which restricted the number of immigrants to a negligible percentage of the ethnic population in the U.S. according to the censuses of 1890 and 1910<sup>15</sup> (Pierpont 2004:12).

Migration by continent, year, religion, gender, and occupation, and the social, economic, racial, and spatial disparities it reveals, could arguably be the defining narrative of New York

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<sup>14</sup> In the 2015 audio guide at the Statue of Liberty, I hear the monument anthropomorphized and gendered as “Lady Liberty,” “The Mother of Exiles,” and the “Birth-Mother to America.”

<sup>15</sup> These dates were deliberately chosen to permit entry to the highest ratio of white, Western European immigrants.

City. However, Paul Stoller argues that “[t]he forces that made New York a global city have also provoked massive economic and spatial dislocations,” (2002:53). He cites a duality between the “relatively cohesive ‘core’ group of professionals who are wired into the global corporate economy,” and an “ethnically and culturally diverse ‘periphery’” (Stoller 2002:53-54). However, this classification as applied to educated Russian migrants must be weighed against their relative privilege in the global economy. In a city demarcated by ethnic divisions, ethnic Russians are in the majority white; they have likely had access to higher education, even if they lack the linguistic and cultural fluency to gainfully apply it abroad, and they often arrive having worked in professional positions, whether these positions are recognized in America, or not. Therefore, it is more productive to think about differential social, economic and political constraints encountered by Soviet and post-Soviet migrants along a spectrum, rather than in terms of polarity. I argue it is more helpful to understand Russian migration, as Alexander Genis and Petr Vayl' suggest, “not [as a] statistical phenomenon, but a process” (1984:185).

*My first impressions of New York were, above all, auditory. Everything was loud: the rattling of above-ground subway cars; the persistent refrain of ice-cream trucks (I arrived in the middle of summer); the constant exchange of car horns, honked to issue a greeting, rather than to express a warning; the sound of hovering helicopters and emergency sirens. I could not find sanctuary anywhere in the city; even in parks, cicadas created a chorus of chittering, trilling and chirping, until they themselves were overpowered by music blasting from portable loudspeakers carried by joggers and bicyclists, emanating from boom boxes in deli shops, from open car windows, subway platforms, street performers, and people's backyards. Even a free concert of*

*classical music in Prospect Park ended with a booming firework finale! In New York, I was often reminded of early twentieth-century American composer Charles Ives, who, in one of his pieces, imagined two marching bands intersecting with each other at a city intersection.*

*Walking the city, making choices about where to film, eat, rest, take transit, turn back home; negotiating hunger and tiredness, danger and safety, street intersections and crowds, and heat—heat that made me swoon, and which caused my film equipment to jam and overheat—I often felt that I was being pulled in many different directions. Men at Canarsie Pier bragged to me that the control tower at JFK would occasionally send a cruiser their way, because their kites flew so high, they interfered with airplanes landing at the airport. A chess hustler on Union Square, whom I recognized by his Russian prison tattoos, told me things I probably should not repeat here, and in Williamsburg, I ate borsht at the punk-pop-klezmer Russian-Jewish Yiddish-revival “Borsht Ball.” I was invited to a Russian tea-drinking ceremony, where participants held hands and chanted “Om” on Brighton Beach, and I sang show tunes to piano accompaniment with musical theatre graduates in Washington Heights. None of these experiences seemed to correspond with stories I heard about the respective neighbourhoods where they took place. Moreover, I often heard anxious testaments about how people’s neighbourhoods were undergoing rapid change: gentrifying, decaying, undergoing austerity, undergoing revival. I stopped wondering whether similarly disjointed experiences in the Village, in Central Park, in Soho, Flatbush, Bedstuy, Red Hook, Forest Hills or Rego Park, were characteristic of the neighbourhoods I found myself in, or whether I assigned them characteristics as an easy mnemonic, a way to comprehend an overwhelming number of sensory impressions.*

*All was quiet when I arrived in Canarsie early Sunday morning. The only business open in the sleepy, residential Brooklyn neighbourhood was a bakery. A customer in front of me ordered something in French, and half-awake, I followed suit, buying a chocolate milk and a croissant. As soon as I tasted the key lime in the chocolate milk, I clued in that my baker was Creole. My neighbourhood was predominantly black, but I was naïve about how diverse it truly was. One of my first conversations with my hosts was about the post-War Jewish “white flight” to the suburbs. Race seemed to be on everyone’s mind, even before Donald Trump’s election ignited racial tensions. Black Lives Matter hosted distressful protests in Brooklyn, chanting “Hands up, don’t shoot!” and I walked alongside mothers who lost their children to police violence. As a white man arriving to New York from a more racially homogeneous Moscow, I awkwardly recognized how much I had internalized white hegemony. My solidarity against racial injustice was tempered by embarrassing questions, like whether I could take an empty seat on a bus—“of course you can, this is a bus!”—overcompensating for my eagerness to fit in. In New York, I stowed away the charade of being a “neutral observer” I never was.*

### **2.5.2 Measures of Distance**

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost.

—Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (2006[1985]:4)

*Traveling in the subway between Brooklyn and Manhattan is a disjunctive experience: underground passageways seemed utterly disconnected from the aboveground landscape. Entering at the sleepy Park Slope neighbourhood in Brooklyn, I would emerge in mid-town Manhattan amongst skyscrapers, yellow taxis, and flashing displays of street food carts,*

*blinking, "Hot Dogs, Burgers, Fries. God Bless America." This disconnect would get momentarily resolved when the subway crossed the Manhattan Bridge, revealing a quintessential cityscape of the New York City skyline.*

I had already written the above paragraph when I stumbled on the following passage in Yasha Klots's article, "The Ultimate City: New York in Russian Immigrant Narratives" (2011):

*Train rides to Brooklyn [...] become an important topos in many works of New York immigrant fiction, highlighting the border between the two spheres of the characters' lives: the Russian ghettos, where they start from, and the temptations of the City (2011:52).*

Could it be that I, too, had internalized this narrative? While stories about arriving to New York represented a kind of rebirth, moving through the city has often been associated with a search for identity, an existential journey reflected in Paul Auster's (2006[1985]) opening quote.

*For several years, around Christmastime, mom and I would take the Greyhound on a 14-hour ride to New York City, with stops in Buffalo, Albany, and Syracuse. I remember being surprised by the fact that people really did skate at Rockefeller Centre, just like in the movies. When I was a teenager, I played out my own fantasies for what I was supposed to experience in New York: finding shelter in a Buddhist temple in Brooklyn, drinking whisky alone in Central Park, or going to poetry readings in subterranean venues on the Lower East Side, and listening to amateur writers stumble through novels with cliché titles, like "New York, Summer of '69."*

When I began living in New York as part of my fieldwork, I quickly realized that a narrative of the way New York is experienced felt dramatically different from the inner dialogue I was

having with the city.<sup>16</sup> New York represented many different things to many different people, but for three months, it was to be my home. Besides the requisites of my research, such as visits to the Brooklyn Library and meetings with research participants, I also visited friends, ordered takeout, paid rent, cooked, smoked, did laundry, waited for subway trains on sweltering hot platforms, celebrated my birthday on Coney Island, and maintained a long-distance relationship across six time zones. These daily, monthly, or yearly routines, each filled with its own set of impressions, may not have felt as enticing to write about, but they were every bit as central to my positioned narrative of living in the city as naturalistic observation and archival research.

“A nightmare and a horror!” exclaims Alexander Genis, offering a narrative markedly different from the usual adulatory praise of New York City,

*Alexander Genis:* I thought New York would be a city of the future. A city of geometry and glass. But New York seemed very old-fashioned, occupied mainly by fire escapes. I lived in Riga, and it was a very beautiful city. When I first saw New York, I almost cried. We were taken to Hotel Greystone—it still exists on Broadway and 91<sup>st</sup>. There was an object I did not recognize; it was a gas switch. The hotel was so old, it had artifacts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because, excuse me, what are gas switches? This was my first impression of New York.

Presently, Alexander considers New York to be this kind of “a city of the future”; however, he notes, “I discovered this only after many years. I did not learn to love New York for a very long time. Now it’s my favourite city.” New York became the writer’s home, but it was also a city against the background of which Alexander developed his personal and professional identity: “If I

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<sup>16</sup> Lévi-Strauss describes this process as follows, “For us to be able to accept them, memories have to be sorted and sifted; through a degree of manipulation which, in the most sincere writers, takes place below the level of consciousness, actual experience is replaced by stereotypes (1974[1955]:28).

would have remained in Russia, I would have been a different person. I know that I didn't become an American. But I also stopped being a Russian."

In 1994, following a stopover in Cleveland, Ohio—"where seemingly nothing happens. A sleepy, quiet, provincial place"—contemporary artist Yevgeniy Fiks moved to New York. For someone in his early twenties, Cleveland's pace stood in sharp contrast to the pace of Moscow in the 1990s, where "everything transformed quickly and radically." Even in New York, Yevgeniy noticed life moved slower than in Russia at the time:

*Yevgeniy Fiks:* You can't compare New York to Moscow at the beginning of the 1990s. There were no radical transformations here. There were changes, of course, some gentrification processes, some reduction in crime, but this was only noticeable to locals who lived here earlier.

Yevgeniy describes his initial readiness to move to New York: "my mentality as a Soviet artist was oriented to the West. I was interested in conceptualism, American pop-art, and this was apparent in my work in Moscow." However, Yevgeniy admits that "having arrived here, it took me almost ten years to create something carefully thought-out." Initially, Yevgeniy interrogated Soviet and post-Soviet space: "At first, my art was more universal, outside of identity politics. I was performing a kind of post-Soviet subject, without nationality or sexual orientation."

Paradoxically, his art mirrored the way New Yorkers interpret Soviet identity: "In New York, Soviet history looks flat and one-dimensional. This is especially true of the Soviet subject, a being without gender, nationality, or sexual orientation. Just Soviet. I wanted to complicate this image." As Yevgeniy assimilated into life in New York, he sought to professionally interrogate Soviet and post-Soviet identity from the perspective of queer theory and Jewish history.

I first became acquainted with Yevgeniy's written work when I was employed as a translator of contemporary art criticism. In one of his essays, Yevgeniy advanced "a theory of *pleshka*" (2014). A "*pleshka*," is "a term from Soviet gay argot designating homosexual cruising spots in the public spaces of Moscow and other cities in the Soviet Union. Today, the Moscow *pleshkas* from Soviet times [...] no longer function" (Fiks 2014). According to Yevgeniy, Western queer theory represents a process of globalization, whereas he proposes to nationalize queer theory using local, post-Soviet references: "The theory of *pleshka* is a theory of the tangible, the political and the everyday. The word '*pleshka*' simultaneously demonstrates our marginality, oppression, and invisibility and at the same time, the feeling of our self-esteem and self-irony" (Fiks 2014). In his writing, Yevgeniy cautions scholars in applying global theoretical concepts to local contexts; by imagining queer theory as a local Moscow practice, he reclaims Soviet and post-Soviet places from the space of his New York art studio and his writing desk.

### **2.5.3 Imagined Community**

In a nondescript neighbourhood in Queen's, I asked a passerby for directions to Sergei Dovlatov Way, a street named in honour of the writer who, together with his contemporaries, established a new genre of Russian émigré literature in New York, which became known as the "Third Wave" (see Matich and Heim 1984). Hearing the Russian name, the man evaded my question: "when I was growing up, this used to be a nice Jewish neighbourhood, but now it's overrun by Russians." Thinking back to his implied racism, I began to think about how to approach complex classifications of national and ethno-religious belonging among Russians and Russian Jews through a cross-cultural and historical context.

The history of Russian emigration to New York cannot be entirely disconnected from Jewish emigration to the United States. Between the 1870s and the 1920s, Jews from Imperial Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe came to America *en masse*. They numbered approximately 3.2 million people, and were considered “the poorest and the least desirable group of immigrants in the eyes of the hegemonic Christian majority” (Remmenick 2007:170). While the first generation of Jewish migrants settled in the tenements of the Lower East Side, their children and grandchildren entered professions of the “American middle class, becoming urban and secular at the same time” (2007:170). By the early 1920s, galvanized by the availability of new dwellings and the construction of subway lines to previously underpopulated areas of New York, Jews settled in diverse neighbourhoods in Queens, such as Jamaica, Astoria and Forest Hills (Moore et al. 2012:10-15). Simultaneously, Beth Wenger describes how the Lower East Side shifted from being a “center of Jewish population and activity and became instead a primary site of Jewish memory and a physical space for the invention of Jewish identity in America” (Wenger 1997:3). As early as the 1920s, Jews living in various parts of New York City, such as the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, would return to the Lower East Side to patronize kosher delicatessens and “immigrant” restaurants (Moore et al. 2012:21).

Today, the visible remains of a boisterous Jewish community on the Lower East Side, comprise a few weather-worn signs advertising haberdashers and Kosher grocers on the sides of brick tenements; however, memories of the Jewish neighbourhood loom large, reflected in such institutions as the Tenement Museum, where guided tours called “Hard Times,” or “Sweatshop Workers,” extol the stories of ordinary immigrant families—the Gumpertzs, or the Levines—who

had previously occupied the tenements. Thus, what constitutes a “nice Jewish neighbourhood,” or any neighbourhood for that matter, has as much to do with the stories people tell about it—whether legitimated through official discourse in museums, or uttered on the sidewalk to a passerby—as with the lived experience of its residents.

In the Soviet Union, despite the relative freedom afforded by the Russian Revolution, Jews were encouraged to “leave behind the parochialism of the Pale for participation in the new Soviet state” (Markowitz 1993:29). In light of a militant Marxist atheism espoused by the Bolsheviks, Jews were forced to abandon Hebrew, the language of scripture, in favour of Yiddish. In response, Russian-Jewish intellectuals often clandestinely adopted Christianity as a “spiritual anchor” (Remmenick 2007:33). Yet, Jews were still classified as a “nationality,” identified by the infamous “fifth line” in their passports, which later gave Soviet authorities power to impose tacit quotas on the number of Jewish applicants to universities, or to limit access to prestigious jobs (Remennick 2007:37). Overt institutional racism was amongst a range of factors that made Soviet Jews eager to leave the Soviet Union as soon as this became possible (Remennick 2007:3).

The United States was amongst the last Western countries to recognize the sovereignty of the Soviet Union, in part, argues Lesley Chamberlain, to keep emerging Nazism in Germany in check (Chamberlain 2006:237). At the height of Stalin’s Purges, and without the benefit of hindsight, Russian émigrés considered the rescue of “prospective emigrants” from Soviet labour camps more urgent than the rescue of Jews from concentration camps (Schaufuss 1939:53). While emigration remained closed to Soviet citizens, a small trickle of Russian post-Revolutionary

exiles were permitted entry into the United States through the Immigration Act of 1934. At the time, Tatiana Schaufuss, the director of the Tolstoy Foundation tasked with helping Russian émigrés resettle in the United States, wrote,

The United States represents the promised land to all aliens who enter the country legally under the existing immigration laws, and, therefore, the country best suited to the normal assimilation of the refugee and to the solution to his problems (Schaufuss 1939:52).

For Soviet citizens, a “solution to the refugee problem” would not become available for at least another three decades.

Before any other group from the Soviet Union, emigration was made possible to Soviet Jews beginning in 1971, when “Brezhnev’s regime had to make concessions to Western pressure, and Jewish emigration became its chief bargaining chip” (Remennick 2007:3). The Tolstoy Foundation began to administer the transit of Soviet Jews, en route from the Soviet Union to Rome, Italy, and onwards to the United States. However, a research participant who moved to the United States in the early 1970s, describes the anti-Semitism they encountered from members of the Tolstoy Foundation tasked with helping Jews resettle in New York:

*Participant:* The Tolstoy Foundation accepted us. They had to. Someone had to. But all these *knyaz’ya*, princes, and *graf’ya*, counts, they despised us. We were for them communists, Jews, refugees.

In the decade between 1971 and 1981, Markowitz estimates that “around 100,000 [Soviet Jews] resettled in the United States, about half of whom chose to live in greater New York City” (1993:3). Migrants were partially supported by NYANA, the New York Agency for New Americans, which subsidized families with a monthly sum of \$180 towards rent and another

\$100 towards other expenses (Ripp 1984:45).

As Fran Markowitz suggests, migrants divided themselves into diverse groups, reflecting their city of origin, their occupation, or their status as intellectuals. While the Lower East Side was no longer financially accessible to newly-arrived Soviet Jewish migrants, cosmopolitan professional from Moscow and Leningrad favoured Queens' neighbourhoods of Rego Park and Forest Hills, whereas Jews from Kiev and Odessa settled in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach, which was considered less prestigious (1993:55). Having encountered ample anti-Semitism during Soviet times, Russian-Jewish informants who came to the United States often concealed their Jewish identity, favouring to identify themselves as Russian (Isurin 2011).<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, my biased interlocutor who failed to give me directions, may still have been living in a "nice Jewish neighbourhood," in which inhabitants from the former Soviet Union publicly identified as Russian, but privately, as Jewish. Finally, in discussing Russian identity, I want to touch on how Russian migrants imagine New York City within broader migrant narratives.

Soviet and Russian immigrant narratives are mirrored in the genre of "third wave" migrant literature, arguably, itself reflecting "the ancient travel genre due to its essentially nomadic, displaced perspectives on the world" (Klots 2011:39). In the second half of the

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<sup>17</sup> Unbeknownst to new arrivals who felt "continuous loyalty to the Russian language and culture" (Remennick 2007:7), their expressions of Jewish identity clashed with expectations from the Jewish communities and Jewish organizations that had "lured Russian Jews to America by offering them generous financial aid" (2007:41). Further conflicts emerged when Soviet Jews arriving as refugees wished to retain their high professional status in America, but were met with American hurdles of bureaucratic restrictions and anti-Semitism (Markowitz 1993:7).

twentieth century (2011:44), and beginning with writers of the “third wave” who resettled, or were forcibly exiled from the Soviet Union (as was the case for Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, who was ousted for “parasitism”), New York became the literary center of Russian emigration. As Alexandra Berlina argues (2014), while Brodsky was “fated to go West and to carry modern Russian poetry, art and music with him” (2014:118), in his early poetry, and with characteristic self-irony, he depicted himself as a centaur, speaking two languages and sharing two identities. Despite embracing English-language poetry and having eventually moved to New York—the embodiment of the West—Brodsky never made it his home, nor did he ever return to Russia, even when the return trip became possible. According to Susan Sontag, the poet always lived “elsewhere” (Sontag in Wakamiya 2009:147). Finding his home “between two elsewheres” (Wakamiya 2009:147), he was unwilling to “unravel his hard-won exilic discourses and construct a rhetoric of return” (2009:147).

Other writers have used similar tropes of displacement in describing their move to New York. In Vasily Aksenov’s novels, the character “Mr. Axolotl,” to which the writer alludes as an autobiographical image, is “both a misunderstood creature behind glass and a cosmopolitan amphibian who traverses discursive worlds with ease” (Wakamiya 2009:48). Writer, and later, ultra right-wing politician Eduard Limonov who made New York a backdrop for himself as a marginalized outsider in the autobiographical novel *It’s Me, Eddie* (1978), describes his estrangement both from New York, and the émigré literary milieu, which he also saw as a “kind of exile” (Wakamiya 2009:110).

As a scholar studying Russian migration, I often felt compelled to visit Brighton Beach, where shops conspicuously displayed their names in Cyrillic, and where I heard Russian spoken on every street corner. A long boardwalk borders the neighbourhood along a strip of sandy beach. Walking on the boardwalk, I often overheard conversations made by strolling elderly Russian Jews wearing Adidas track suits, but the promenade equally captures New York's ethnic diversity. Anticipating a free fireworks display on Friday nights during the summer, families from all boroughs of the city come to walk along the boardwalk to neighbouring Coney Island. The patios of the Russian restaurant "Tatiana" overflows onto the boardwalk. Night entertainment in Brighton Beach is famous for gaudy Las-Vegas-inspired cabaret performances, replete with laser shows; however, the neighbourhood also hosts tribute concerts to the deceased bard singer Alexander Galich, a central émigré figure amongst Soviet Union dissidents and intellectuals.

Igor Satanovsky tells me that when he arrived to New York, he had to stay away from Brighton Beach: "it was too close." It was only after some years went by that he began to visit the neighbourhood, and at some point, he even lived there. He describes his strenuous relationship with Brighton Beach by relativizing it against his experience of other places:

*Igor Satanovsky:* There's New York, with half a million, or a million Russian-speaking people. It's the population of Minsk. So there's New York, and inside it, Minsk. It's dispersed, but wherever you exit from the subway, you hear Russian spoken. In contrast to Brighton Beach, you arrive to Moscow, and you see a kind of cultural provincialism. Over there, they're laughing about the provincialism of Brighton Beach: how people here speak with a Kiev dialect, or have a distinct accent... But there's another side to this: yes, there is provincialism inside this "Minsk." But at least you're a New Yorker!

It is plausible to suggest, following Wenger's analysis of the Lower East Side as a site of invention of Jewish identity (1997:3), that Brighton Beach occupies a similar space for Russians in America. In an op-ed piece for *The New York Times*, Boris Fishman writes, "in Brighton Beach, the heavily Russian community in Brooklyn [...], I found a late-70s Soviet aesthetic joined to the coarse materialism possible only in a capitalist society" (2004). Brighton Beach represents a "moment in and out of time" (Turner 1966:66), itself an anachronism named after a seaside resort town in England, and replete with British street names, such as "Amherst, Beaumont, and Coleridge" (Bernardo and Weiss 2006:158), which evoke British elitism of nineteenth-century developers.

In the "third wave" of Russian émigré literature, New York is often represented as an elusive, changeable and fleeting place. In 1994, Petr Vayl' wrote that "surprisingly, even Americans do not have a literary paradigm of New York: the city emerges piece by piece" (quoted in Klots 2011:46). Sergei Dovlatov emphasized New York's "antithetical poles and the overall urban mosaic that almost breaks into separate pieces: New York, according to Dovlatov, is a chameleon whose 'wide smile quickly changes to a scornful grimace'" (quoted in Klots 2011:46). While New York is scattered, fragmented and shifting, I contrast this with the way "Third Wave" writers describe their own migration trajectories. For example, in the essay novel *Paradise Lost*, subtitled, "Emigration, an attempt at an auto-portrait," Vayl' and Genis (1984) write, "And here, we arrived. And we felt ourselves to be a community. Thus, from the grandiose diversity of Russia, we united in a compact little heap called 'we'" (1984:183). The trajectory of Genis and Vayl's journey proceeds from a loss of identification in the multitude (in grandiose diversity), to the individual who recognizes themselves to be part of a community.

In Franz Masereel's wordless novel, *The City* (1925), based on the artist's woodcuts, the first image reveals a protagonist who sits on the outskirts of a city, gazing at its geometric façades, rooftops, and billowing chimneys. Subsequent tableaux depict people of all social classes participating in city life—going to school; going shopping; getting married; working in industry, science, and letters, and finally, being galvanized to march through city streets—all seen as if from the protagonist's perspective. However, while the tableaux assume the protagonist's point of view, this individual no longer belongs inside the frame:

The disappearance of a single protagonist, and his replacement by the multitude of individuals who make up the city might seem to weaken [Masereel's] emotive power; but at a second glance, it gains in depth as an extraordinary testimonial to the modern city, to its energy, its splendours and its misery (Warner 1988:4).

This movement, argues Marina Warner (1988:4), proceeds in an opposite direction from Genis and Vayl's journey, from the multitude, to a community, to the individual.

In this chapter, I have followed yet another trajectory, beginning with personal reflections on walking through Moscow with my grandmother, and describing each place to which I traveled based on my sensory impressions; my peripatetic journeys, usually on foot, and my relations with "individuals who make up the city" (Warner 1988:4). Thus, my trajectory followed the individual, positioning my own multi-sited journey under the subheadings titled "senses of place"; then proceeded to discuss the multitude, placing my narrative in broader scholarly discourses about each place I lived under the subheadings titled "measures of distance," and finally, I returned to a participant-focused approach, in which I investigated how people negotiate their sense of community abroad under the subheadings titled "imagined community." Meanwhile, I intermingled these "routes," with various "voices," investigating their

intersections in a “montage of social analysis and ethnographic description” (Stoller 2002:36), and piecing together a “fractured, contestable narrative perspective” (Clifford 2017:41).

While in this chapter, I investigated relationships between these voices, separated by orders of magnitude, I dedicate the remaining chapters to questions surrounding representation of mobility and transnational migration from the perspective of cinema studies and multimedia ethnography (Chapter Three); to narratives surrounding material culture (Chapter Four); to historical discourses surrounding migration (Chapter Five); and to the relationship Russian migrants establish with places they come from, and to which they periodically return (Chapter Six).

## **Chapter 3: Moving Pictures: Placemaking, Mobile Representation and Authorship in Multimedia Ethnography.**

### **3.1 Introduction: In Focus and Out of Place**

This chapter interrogates two approaches to transnational ethnographic filmmaking, as inspired by early Soviet cinematic pioneers: participatory cinema, practiced by Alexander Medvedkin, and a cinema of montage, pioneered by Dziga Vertov. While the former filmmaker inspired reflexive approaches that interrogate the realism of the cinematic frame, and that influenced such subgenres as the essay film, pioneered by Chris Marker, the latter approach inspired a performative turn in ethnographic filmmaking, evident in the cinema of Jean Rouch. I evaluate both these approaches against my own cinematic representation of Russian transnational migration by discussing a selection of research participants' life stories featured in the multi-media installation *Still Life in a Suitcase* (Supplementary Materials; Appendices A & B).

The installation *Still Life with a Suitcase* was created as a component of this dissertation following fifteen months of ethnographic interviews and audio-visual recordings at each of my fieldwork sites. I assembled this footage into an interactive, mobile, multi-media work, which was exhibited internationally and which came to be shared with participants, scholars, and members of the public. The installation was envisioned as a mobile project, which packs all the requisite equipment needed both to record and to display itself, inside a vintage suitcase. It is made part of this dissertation, because I propose it as a novel genre of *multimedia ethnography*, which combines ethnographic film with reflexive and observational film methods, computer programming and video-mapping, as well as non-linear storytelling techniques, whereby audiences can manipulate the narrative flow of the audio-visual presentation.

### 3.2 Moving places: Alexandr Medvedkin's *Kinopoezd*

In 1931, in the heady days of the first Five-Year Plan, Soviet filmmaker Alexander Medvedkin assembled a crew of thirty-two filmmakers to work in the following conditions: “one square meter of living space [...] for one year,” “no restrictions on working hours,” and “obligatory deckhand chores at any time of day or night” (Medvedkin 2016[1972]:31). These unusual stipulations were the result of Medvedkin’s insistence that cinema must be used as a weapon against the enemies of socialism, accompanied by the motto, “Today we shoot. Tomorrow we screen!” (Medvedkin 2016[1972]:27). To be useful to the socialist cause, a film studio would not sit on the sidelines, but participate in “sorties.” To do this, three railway cars were fashioned into a “mobile, traveling laboratory, projection room, and living quarters” (Lary 2016:vii), equipped with sleeping berths, cameras, projectors, a film lab, and even a car. This mobile film studio became known as the *Kinopoezd*, or Kino-Train.

The *Kinopoezd* took off to Ukraine in 1932, beginning to create and to simultaneously disseminate films. The studio chronicled the working conditions of metallurgical workers in such films as *How Goes it Comrade Miner?* (Medvedkin 2016[1932]:317) and *Pickax Heroes* (2016[1932]:319); it made films about “avant-garde” farmers, such as *Sheaving the Wheat!* (2016[1932]:318), and animations, such as *Adventures of a Camel on the Railway Tracks* (2016[1932]:320); it produced its own newspaper, *Tempo* (Medvedkin 2016[1972]:31), as well as several photo-newspapers and posters (2016[1972]:87). Medvedkin’s film crews worked around the clock, making films that were “shot in one day, processed during the night, edited the following day, and screened in front of the very people who had participated in its making” (Marker 2016:328). The films were projected on readily-available surfaces, such as the wall of

the railway station, or the side of the train car itself.

*Kinopoezd* productions were “no ordinary, pacific documentaries and newsreels,” as Medvedkin describes, “but rather, merciless exposures of scandalous situations and the causes of [work] stoppages. Display the *real agents of evil* on the movie screen and confront them with documented evidence for the charges” (Medvedkin 2016[1972]:27). “Real agents of evil” were exposed as lazy and inefficient with the help of satire and pre-made intertitles: engineers in supervisory positions were scolded, while striking workers were given a voice, resulting in heated confrontations during film screenings. Despite Medvedkin’s militant communism, Nikita Lary argues that, at its core, *Kinopoezd* was a subversive platform, because films could not be centrally vetted over the course of their production cycle (Lary 2016:x). *Kinopoezd* films were also distinct from the widely-disseminated Soviet agitprop films, which had “a ready-made program, and were not concerned with local life” (2016:ix), nor were their primary audiences the workers who took part in their making (2016:ix).

Medvedkin soon fell into relative obscurity, and the *Kinopoezd* films were considered lost. However, the filmmaker’s work was accidentally discovered by French experimental filmmaker Chris Marker, who was so inspired by what he saw, that in 1967, he organized his own *Groupe Medvedkine* in order to document workers’ strikes in Besançon, France. His commitment to raising Medvedkin’s profile led to the making of two documentaries, *Le Train en Marche*, *The Train that Rolls* (1971); and *Le Tombeau d’Alexandre*, “Alexander’s Tomb,” translated in English as *The Last Bolshevik* (1992), which coincided with a sudden discovery, in 1987, of eight *Kinopoezd* films at the Krasnogorsk Archive of Documentary Film.

*Before every trip, I would go down the checklist of equipment I had to pack with me: my DSLR video camera with lenses, memory cards, batteries, chargers, and cables; my sound recorder, batteries, and empty storage media, and my 16mm film camera, along with a light meter, colour 16mm film, and lens filters. There was also the matter of packing my tripod, a shoulder mount, and a video slider, along with all the requisite accessories: mattes, gaffer tape, straps, and bags. Electronics accompanied me in my backpack, while all the hardware traveled in a vintage suitcase, which I wheeled around on a foldable cart. On a train, the suitcase would sit on a shelf above my seat, or get tucked underneath my bunk in a sleeper car; it would get lifted into the cabins of eighteen-wheelers that stopped to give me a ride, or get wrapped in cellophane to protect it from the perilous underground journey through automated conveyor belts, picked up and thrown into the belly of an airplane.*

*Crossing international borders, the suitcase had to be opened for inspection, and I had to answer tired questions about each piece of equipment. Encountering metal detectors and x-rays, I had to obstinately explain that my undeveloped film had to be hand inspected, so as not to expose footage that I was taking to one of two film processing labs on route, to Berlin or Toronto. At one point in Moscow, I was harangued by a police officer who shared his thoughts on the matter: “enough with film already, the whole world’s gone digital.”*

In seeking inspiration from early Soviet cinema, I was equal parts deferential and defiant in adopting Medvedkin’s mobile cinema. Much humbler than a train car, my “studio” was transported in a suitcase, which could be assembled either to record or display audio-visual material. Similarly to Medvedkin’s *Kinopoezd*, I took the suitcase across multiple sites, and used it

as a display surface, sharing my work with participants who helped contribute to it. Finally, much like Medvedkin, I was interested in “local” encounters that shed light on wider social processes. Most importantly, I consider Medvedkin’s *Kinopoezd* films to be early examples of reflexive filmmaking, from which my project takes inspiration.

Reflexivity, argues Jay Ruby, hinges on the premise that an image producer, intentionally reveals to his or her audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him or her to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally, to present his or her findings in a particular way. (Ruby 2000:156)

Medvedkin was forthcoming about using film as a document to confront labour inefficiencies and to reorganize the work sector (Medvedkin 2016[1972]:27). His epistemology was rooted in socialist doctrine, and he presented his findings with the goal of increasing industrial production. In screening film material back to his participants, Medvedkin was clearly ahead of his time. As Ruby argued some seven decades later, having achieved certain technological advances, image producers are “able to show the images they create to the people portrayed, enabling those depicted to actively engage in the[ir] creation [...], thus adding another layer of reflexivity to their work” (Ruby 2000:38). Medvedkin’s process of producing and screening films back to his participants, could be considered an early version of what visual anthropologists would later call “feedback” (Rouch 2003:44), “elicitation” (Krebs 1975; el Guindi 2004), and “participatory filmmaking” (Yang 2012).

While theoretically, Medvedkin’s *Kinopoezd* may align itself with reflexive approaches, it is undoubtedly an uneasy classification. Historically, it is impossible to ignore Medvedkin’s “merciless exposure of scandalous situations” in the context of increasingly repressive measures the Soviet Union adopted in the 1930s, when every misdemeanour could land someone in the

newly-established Gulag,<sup>18</sup> and where prisoners were worked to near-death to meet ever-tightening deadlines of the Five-Year Plans. Even Chris Marker (2016), very much sympathetic to Medvedkin's socialist principles, asks: "as exceptional as his freedom of action was on the Train, how was his team perceived by the people [...]? Weren't they also, willy nilly, symbols of a hated central authority?" (331) Both in scholarly documents and in Medvedkin's own reflections, this critical dimension of the encounter between filmmaker and participants is left largely hidden behind ideological rhetoric. Medvedkin went to make other films, including a satirical film about the Russian peasantry, *Schast'ye, Happiness* (1935), which he called "a double-edged sword," because it unintentionally invited his audiences to question his faith in communism (Lary 2016:xi-xii). As radical experimentation in the arts gave way to Stalinist repressions, Medvedkin was slowly pushed to the margins, having "survived, while enduring a slow artistic death" (Lary 2016: xiii). Marker nicknamed Medvedkin the "last Bolshevik," because in contrast to other artists who readily responded to political changes happening around them, the filmmaker lived his entire adult life a devout communist: as a seventeen-year old, Medvedkin fought in the First Cavalry Army during the Russian Revolution, and he died in 1989, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As Kyung-Hwa Yang contends, Ruby's argument that reflexivity implies transparency is based on "researcher-centered discourse" (Yang 2012:101), ignoring "reflexivity from the participants' viewpoint" (2012:101). Yang suggests that to be "reflexive" from the participants'

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<sup>18</sup> An acronym for *Glavnoe Upravlenie Ispravitel'no-trudovykh Lagerey* (Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Colonies), officially established in 1930.

perspective, means to use “reflexivity to investigate [participants’] own experiences while making videos related to their lives” (2012:101). In that case, reflexivity “challenges the conventional binary division between filmmakers and film subjects and urges the latter to make films about themselves and see themselves through the films” (2012:102). Based on this argument, I contend that reflexivity inherent in Medvedkin’s *Kinopoezd* films is strictly limited to the production side of the filmmaking process. As such, while the films are technically reflexive, they are not fully participatory. I positioned my research analogously, as “research-centered reflexivity,” although, rather than applying the “merciless exposure” which Medvedkin advocated, I had to look elsewhere to build an ethical relationship with my participants.

### **3.2.1 Research-centered Reflexivity**

In one of Chris Marker’s early films, *La Jetée* (1962), the protagonist discovers that he can foresee his own future. The black-and-white dystopian fiction film is told (almost) entirely through photographic stills. Marker calls this genre a *photo-roman*, or a “photo-novel,” which, as Arnd Schneider argues, evokes “experiments with time and disruption of linear narrative from literature” (2014:28). Until his death in 2012, Marker defied genre conventions, creating many films placed “somewhere between documentary and fictional modes of representation” (Russell 1999:238), invoking personal reflections, playing with intertextual approaches, and challenging common cinematic tropes. The genre most often attributed to the filmmaker is the essay film, “characterized by a loose, fragmentary, playful even ironic approach,” and raising “new questions about the construction of the subject, the relationship of the subject to the world and the aesthetic possibilities of cinema” (Papazian and Eades 2016:1). Marker’s

filmmaking has also been characterized as “auto-ethnography,” mixing “personal cinema and cultural representation” (Russell 1999:xv).

One of the most famous cinematic experiment in the essay-, or auto-ethnographic mode, Chris Marker’s film *Sans Soleil* (Sunless) (1983), reveals extraordinary juxtapositions: three children on a road in Iceland give way to cityscapes of Tokyo, and to images of a West African tribe, all accompanied by the voice of a female narrator. The narration is “written in the form of her retelling the contents of letters she has received from a man who travels around the world filming people, places, and animals” (Russell 1999:301). This technique provokes Catherine Russell to charge Marker with concealing his authorship as “yet another belated traveler” (1999:301), claiming the narration “demonstrates the impossibility of an absolutely postmodern, decentered ethnographic film” (1999:305). Stella Bruzzi disagrees, arguing the film reveals a disconnect where “the boundaries between these various personae are far from rigid and thus the central relationship between image and words, traditionally so logical, becomes, in *Sunless*, fluid and mutable” (Bruzzi 2006:66).

*After I finished my undergrad in anthropology, I took to travel and volunteer on organic farms in Latin America. I brought with me a point-and-shoot 35mm photo camera. In Russia, these used to be called milnitsas, because they resembled “soapboxes,” lacking all but the most basic features, like the shutter release, a lens and a viewfinder. Preoccupied with having a positive intercultural exchange, and trying to respect diverse indigenous and local customs around photography, I took thousands of photos, mostly of landscapes. When I developed the film, I discovered that the wide-angle lens captured cold and detached snapshots of my journey,*

*completely at odds with the rapport I developed with the people I met in the places I had traveled. With a stubborn resolve to master a visual mode of representation, and as soon as I returned to Canada, I enrolled in film school.*

*In Ryerson's evening classes in Toronto, my classmates and I learned to shoot on 16mm Bell & Howell film cameras, first used in World War I. We screened our rushes in front of the class and learned how to manually cut and splice film strips. I was a voracious student, watching several films per day, gifting films I made as birthday presents, and sending them as love letters. I also felt I had to confront my discomfort with the camera by filming people in forbidden places, like inside the Toronto subway. Drawn to interstitial places, marginal subjects, and eccentric people, I smoked, drank heavily, and brainstormed with fellow filmmakers about how we were going to change the world.*

*When I began to make films in earnest, I was still grappling with my discomfort about placing a camera between myself and my film participants. In *Turning Back the Waves* (2008), I filmed members of my family—my grandmother and her two sisters—as they recounted childhood experiences of the War, their professional and family life around the collapse of the Soviet Union, and their advancing years in post-Soviet Russia. I approached this film, on a friend's advice, "like a well-fashioned suit, where the presence of the tailor had to remain invisible." In the final film, I omitted my voice, used intertitles, and spliced in archival footage to illustrate interview material. In my next film, *The Theory of Happiness* (2014), I joined a Ukrainian sect trying to discover happiness through mathematics, and approached my role differently, allowing all the film's conflicts to run through me. I used narration subjectively, gave my participants a second camera, and screened parts of the film back to them, incorporating*

*their reflection in the final version of the film. When I began making Still Life with a Suitcase, a project about Russian transnational migration, I recognized that I needed to adopt yet another approach.*

Much like I did in the written work, adopting different voices as an exploration of the “boundaries between various personae” (Bruzzi 2006:66), I took inspiration from Chris Marker in using multiple voices in the multimedia component of this dissertation. In using autobiographical, autoethnographic, and observational modes of cinematic representation, I (cautiously) adopt (research-centered) reflexivity in my multimedia work (Ruby 2000:155). However, I also heed Ruby’s advice not to use such terms as autobiography, self-reference and self-consciousness simply to legitimize “reflexive” projects that may not be reflexive after all.

According to Ruby, in autobiographical work, the producer “can be unselfconscious in the presentation of the autobiography, [...] simply follow[ing] the established conventions of the genre” (2000:155). Similarly, while self-reference may employ a metaphorical, or allegorical use of the self (2000:155), it may forego reflexivity, although I would expand Ruby’s definition here to include work that draws attention to itself, which I have done, following Douglas R. Hofstadter (1999[1979]:130), in this very sentence. Finally, as Ruby argues, self-consciousness can be “reflective without being reflexive,” in that the author may be “self-conscious without being conscious of that self-consciousness” (Ruby 2000:155). To be reflexive, argues Ruby, means “to know what aspects of the self must be revealed to an audience to enable them to understand the process employed, as well as the resultant product, and to know how much revelation is purposive, intentional, and when it becomes narcissistic or accidentally revealing” (2000:155).

In a project that uses multi-sited fieldwork methods and explores displacement inherent in migration, I was initially challenged to consider how to position myself in my research. Understanding what place (and how much space) I occupy, both physically, and metaphorically, seemed central to a reflexive multimedia project. Thus, I want to make overt the conceptual challenge of representing “places” across transnational space, not only as a researcher talking and writing about them, but as a filmmaker, positioned to represent them through visual means.

I have already outlined the challenge of representing “place” in scholarly literature. “Places” may be static (Bachelard 1958) or mobile entities (Basu and Coleman 2008:313). They may be variously emplaced (Chu 2006:399), embodied (Sheller and Urry 2006:216), affective (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Ahmed 1999:341), inhabited (Basso 1998), and delimited (Casey 1996:14). Places are “social constructions *par excellence*” (Basso 1998:101), landscapes that involve the “*work of the imagination*” (Appadurai 1996:3) and yet, they are also “relational, historical and concerned with identity” (Augé 1995:78), as well as “fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read” (de Certeau 1984:108). In responding to such divergent understandings, artists, filmmakers and anthropologists have been challenged to develop a new visual language for conceptualizing the shifting terrains and places of migration.

In the multi-screen installation on trans-Saharan migration networks, *Sahara Chronicle*, artist Ursula Biemann records the experience of undocumented migrants traveling along migration routes in Niger, Morocco, and Libya (Bayraktar 2016:150). Videos recorded using a handheld camera from multiple vantage points are projected onto multiple screens. The

camera is either positioned at a distance, showing migrants going about their daily life; placed in the back of a truck, portraying migrants crossing the Sahara Desert, or scanning migrants' faces, as they are detained by military personnel:

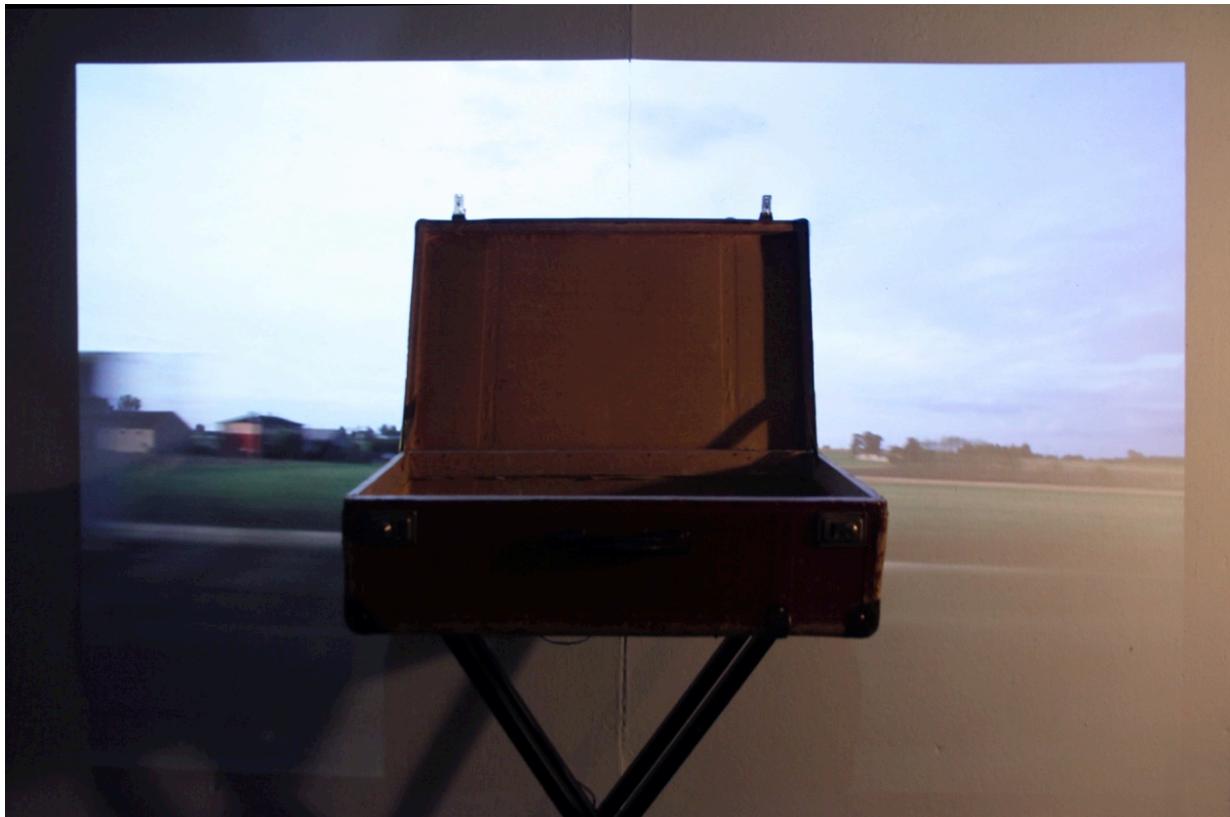
With a specific focus on spaces of mobility and stillness, such as transport vehicles, border areas, detention camps, and surveillance aircraft, *Sahara Chronicle* shows how individuals develop itinerant relationships and provisional social infrastructures as they go, forging an existence that can be described as “dwelling-in-motion. (Bayraktar 2016:152)

The installation explores migrants' multiple perspectives, but I would argue that it also develops a language of representing places of migration. The videos do not portray the Sahara Desert as a clichéd, inhospitable, empty space, but as a dynamic place “shaped by cross-regional mobilities” (Bayraktar 2016:159). Different vantage points reveal the varied relationship between the filmmaker's camera, and the people and place it portrays; on the back of a truck, it is a companion; at a border checkpoint, an instrument of surveillance, and at a transit hub, a distant observer. Every new vantage point offers a new definition of a place it represents, as well as a new form of rapport between the filmmaker and the filmed participants.

In the installation, *Still Life with a Suitcase*, audience members are invited to enter an exhibition space where they encounter an open suitcase standing against a screen. An edited video sequence is projected against the background omitting the suitcase, and plays on a 12-minute loop (see Figure 3; *Installation video 10*: Background video). The video sequence is composed of scenes recorded from inside a moving vantage point: a train, as it crosses snowy fields and railway yards in Russia; an airplane, flying over Norwegian fjords and New York suburbs, or a bus crossing the U.S.-Canada border, accompanied by the rhythmic beating of

wipers against the windshield. These scenes represent what Marc Augé terms “undifferentiated space” (1995:86), places where an individual may feel themselves “a spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle” (1995:86). The author calls such spaces—motorways, airports and train stations—“non-places” (1995:78).

My camera, immobile against a shifting landscape fleeting across the screen (see *Installation video 10: Background video*), represents places as mobile and undifferentiated. But I also leave the space inside the suitcase empty, as a blank space, which fragments and displaces the film screen. This destabilizes the spatial uniformity of the projected image, representing the displacement inherent in physical mobility itself. A suitcase against images of a mobile landscape is a cliché representation of migration, to be sure, but I offer it as a counterpoint to other programmatic elements in the installation.



**Figure 3: Installation setup, with suitcase seen in foreground.**

*As the train decelerated at Hauptbahnhof, Berlin's central train station, I felt I had entered a nineteenth-century palace, except that the glass dome of the train station represented the opposite trajectory, towards supermodernity (Augé 1995), a utopian fantasy made from steel and glass. Berlin, after all, used to be the main railroad interchange of Central Europe, and "the first station for all passengers leaving the Russian Empire" (Schlögel 2004:33). Karl Schlögel describes Berlin's train stations, journeying South, to the Alps; North, to resorts of the Baltic Sea; East and West, via the now-defunct Silesian train station as "windows to the world" (Schlögel 2004:39).*

*Moscow has nine train stations, each with its designated placename, and each linking the capital to places it had formerly ruled through arterial lines emanating from its centre: trains from Rizhskiy Vokzal travel to Riga; from Belorusskiy Vokzal, to Minsk, and from Kiyevskiy Vokzal, to Kiev. The Metro stops that service the train stations are named eponymously, and are all heavily ornamented with traditional motifs and bas-reliefs from the former Soviet Republics, now sovereign states. It is apparent these placenames connect not only to the physical places, but also imagined ones, reminding travelers of the Soviet Union's former grandeur.*

*Road networks and train stations also connect Muscovites to one of three recently renovated and expanded city airports: Sheremetyevo, Vnukovo, and Domodedovo. Modern express trains that service them, bringing passengers to and fro, espouse individualized comforts: cushioned seating and on-board service, but they also cost a premium. Compared to the suburban trains, the elektrichkas, with their crammed passenger cars, hustlers walking the aisles, and wooden benches that face each other, forcing passengers to negotiate where to shift their knees, the airport shuttles are quiet, efficient, and empty. They are adorned with colourful*

*advertisements playing on the desirability of Moscow's real-estate market: "Soho is losing its sleep," "Hollywood is losing its stars," and "Miami Beach has dug its head in the sand!"*

*Already in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin wrote about Paris as though the city imagined itself as being a "global elsewhere":*

*If you want my advice, I'd recommend the Gare Saint-Lazare. There you have half of France and half of Europe around you; names like Le Havre, Provence, Rome, Amsterdam, Constantinople are spread through the street like sweet filling through a torte. It is the so-called Quartier Europe, in which the greatest cities of Europe all commissioned a street as emblem of their prestige. (Benjamin 1999[1927-1930]:831)*

*As I traveled between these various places with my suitcase in tow, I was continuously interrogating how to represent mobility, if mobility itself constantly extended outwards, evoking and enacting the global imaginary.*

Marc Augé's definition of a "non-place" has been widely criticized for rendering places of mobility as absences, whereas they are, rather, "both materially 'filled' and culturally specific" (Basu and Coleman 2008:323). In asking research participants to describe their migration journeys, I often heard stories of departure from Russia and the Soviet Union as a visceral journey, but it was especially so when participants traveled from Russia by train, facilitating "the real distance of the migration to be felt, both in terms of physical travel, and in economic disparity between Eastern and Western Europe" (Burrell 2008:360).

Participants recounted their impressions of train journeys abroad using vivid visual language, which lent their storytelling a cinematic quality. Genia Chef left the Soviet Union for Germany in 1985. Harassed at the border for having a few Russian rubles that he was not permitted to bring with him, he bought with them a pair of binoculars. He boarded his train,

and as it began moving, he recalls, “I looked at the receding landscape through the binoculars with a feeling that I had escaped the constant nightmare and humiliation.” He saw the landscape through a set of lenses, as though he himself was watching a movie. Approaching his destination, he shares his impressions of the journey:

*Genia Chef:* It was a very unusual feeling. It was night. The earth had been tilled. We were on the border. On one side, flew a GDR flag, illuminated by projectors. On the other side, flew FDR's flag. There was complete silence. The train was crossing the border very slowly. But fanfares were going off in my ears.

One can easily picture this eerie, cinematic scene, juxtaposed with a jubilant musical soundtrack. Alexander offers a similar account of crossing the border into Austria by train:

*Alexander Genis:* It was like a step onto the moon. I still remember the feeling. Later on, it got erased. But the happiness I experienced on the other side of Soviet life was one of the brightest moments of my biography. I still remember the convulsive joy of the feeling that I was safe. I knew I was on the other side of evil.

Both Genia and Alexander’s poetic descriptions share a visceral quality, as both are experienced in the body as an “affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement, and construct emotional geographies” (Sheller and Urry 2006:216). Indeed, as Sarah Ahmed argues, “migration narratives involve [...] spatial reconfiguration of an embodied self: a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied” (Ahmed 1999:341-342). Finally, Kathy Burrell encourages anthropologists to pay attention to the significance of migrant journeys and border crossing, precisely because they are highly material, emotional undertakings (Burrell 2008:355). Much like Genia saw a receding landscape from a pair of binoculars, such affective spaces require another way of seeing.

I respond to the challenge of representing affective places of migration by switching to another cinematic “voice,” and another camera “lens” (see *Installation video 10: Background video*). As a second programmatic element in the installation, I introduce a set of personal “interventions.” These interventions are edited directly into the background video loop, thus interrupting monotonous scenes of travel and mobility, much like memories or thoughts might pop during moments of contemplation. These scenes are composed of autobiographical vignettes, telling the story of my own migration journey, recounted through memories of my childhood travels: from my Moscow apartment, a viewer is transported to a small-town fair in France, or to the illuminated billboards at Times Square.

These vignettes were mainly filmed with *Krasnogorsk-3*, a silent wind-up 16mm film camera.<sup>19</sup> Because of the scarcity of places that develop 16mm film, and only one lab in Toronto that professionally digitized it, I did not know what this material would look like until I returned from fieldwork. The lag between data collection and review, characteristic of analog filmmaking, allowed me to relive my memories of filming places—which became, in turn, places of my memories—months after filming. Shooting on film is expensive. My recordings were also limited to a three-minute magazine, and to approximately twenty-second scenes per wind. Thus, I had to carefully deliberate what I could afford to capture. Owing to these constraints, I call this way of filmmaking “making memory in the present,” or, following Stella Bruzzi’s analysis of Marker’s *Sunless*, making “analogous the acts of remembering and filming” (2006:69).

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<sup>19</sup> I bought this camera in Vancouver, Canada prior to beginning fieldwork, although it was manufactured 20 kilometers outside of Moscow around the same year that I was born. It would be interesting to trace the camera’s migration journey to Vancouver, considering that it took a very circuitous route to return practically to its point of origin.

I approached this type of filmmaking as an affective activity, closely associated with places that provoked an affective response in me. Migration, as Sarah Ahmed argues, is erroneously associated with the loss of home – a metaphorical term signaling estrangement, rather than with dislocation – a literal term that signals mobility (1999:333). Ahmed proposes to treat “home” as an affective space, which may involve movement and dislocation within its very formation: “The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging—where do I originate from—but that it is *sentimentalized as a space of belonging*” (1999:340-341). Because they are captured on film, my personal interventions retain a vintage quality, reminiscent of home movies. In the voice-over narration that accompanies the moving image, I talk about my hesitation of remembering my past, of returning to places of my memories, and of my identity as an ethnographer moving between transnational spaces. Using impressionistic, subjective, and uncertain narration, my approach challenges traditional, expository narration characteristic of traditional voice-over documentaries, in that there is no “definite correspondence between image and narration” (Bruzzi 2006:69). This approach also “stages subjectivity” (Russell 1999:276), collapsing boundaries between ethnographer and the Other (1999:280), and testing fragmented, insecure and plural identities (1999:279).

Within this affective space of personal intervention, I also experiment with what Lev Manovich calls “spatial montage” (2002:322-326), playing with boundaries of the cinematic frame through such means as a second screen—the inside surface of the suitcase. This approach follows Christina Turner’s challenge to James Clifford, who proposed to see culture as a “traveling term” (1992). Turner suggests it is a mistake for ethnographers to focus solely on “literal travel,” but rather important to explore “different modalities of inside-outside

connection” (Turner in Clifford 1992:103). I explore these modalities quite literally, by projecting my personal stories inside a suitcase, while placing representations of train, plane and bus journeys on the outside (see *Installation video 10: Background video*).

Because there is no unifying voice in my narration, nor an attempt to provide an overarching commentary, my personal interventions interrupt relatively uniform sequences of mobility, reminding audiences of the constructed nature of the filmic material of the installation (see *Installation video 10: Background video*). The interaction between affective and mobile spaces hints at the way recollections of the past may be triggered by an image, a feeling, or a sensory impression, when distant memories of faraway places give way to transnational journeys, and vice-versa. The filmic “voices” used to represent these places are inter-dependent. By decentering the film frame, favouring open-ended narration, and juxtaposing movement and stillness through observational and affective-autobiographical modes of documentary filmmaking, I reflexively call attention to the conventions and the medium of documentary film (Nichols 1991).

### **3.3 Train Journeys: *In Lieu* of a Narrative Transition**

In Russian literature, it is common to find strong metaphorical associations between travel as a physical journey, and as an existential one, represented by journeys beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, journeys within those borders, but also journeys of return, which transport the protagonist back to the Soviet Union from abroad. Because travel outside the Soviet Union was reserved for a privileged few, anything outside state borders was termed *zagranița* (literally, beyond the border), signifying “an imaginary place that was simultaneously

knowable and unattainable, tangible and abstract, mundane and exotic” (Yurchak 2006:159). This “imaginary elsewhere,” not necessarily anchored to any real place, began to be actively represented in literature and film (Yurchak 2006:159-160).

The title of Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker* (1979), describes a guide, a “stalker,” who sneaks visitors into “The Zone,” a place where their deepest desires become a reality. When one such group travels to their destination on a railroad push-trolley, the scenery changes from a sepia-toned, toxic, industrial landscape, into an equally decrepit, but at once colourful one. The “stalker” intones, “here we are; we’re home. It’s so quiet. This is the quietest place on earthy... so beautiful here.” The scene, reminiscent of Genia Chef’s slow-moving train across a militarized zone, leaves ambiguous whether the visitors have fallen prey to the stalker’s overactive imagination, or whether their desires will, indeed, come true. As Yurchak explains, “The Zone did not imply any concrete ‘real’ territory, it referred to a certain imaginary space that was simultaneously internal and external to late-socialist reality. Crucial was its paradoxical status—intimate, within reach, and yet unattainable” (Yurchak 2006:161). As Svetlana Boym explains, “In the 1960s and 1970s, when traveling abroad was nearly impossible, Soviet citizens engaged in ‘virtual travels’” (Boym 2005[1994]:157). This type of travel created a romantic vision of a nomadic lifestyle and elevated travel in a *platskart*<sup>20</sup> train car—the cheapest form of sleeper car available—to the domain of the sentimental, affective, and highly symbolic.

As Yakov Klots argues, in literary representations, train journeys recreate the “cultural motif of a road, which presumes travel not only in space, but in time” (2012:311). As a vehicle

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<sup>20</sup> The name *Platz-Karte* comes from the German, meaning “place card,” or a separate ticket for a reserved seat. However, in the Soviet Union, the name only applied to non-private sleeping accommodations in a *couchette* car.

moving forward through time, trains begin to represent not only the passage of time, but also existential experience, represented not only from the “outside” but “inside the train car, where ‘the journey’s hero [is] a ‘moving observer’” (2012:317). This is especially true in Joseph Brodsky’s poems, where his perspective is not only anchored to a real landscape, but to the “landscape” of his own life, where the terminus station is a metaphor for death (2012:317). The vantage points between a train station and the train journey may be at odds with each other:

The movement of the train in space, and the journey of the hero-passenger in time, present two vectors pointing in different directions: [...] the spatial vector (the movement of the train) and the temporal vector (the movement of the hero’s thought) [...]. If the train is moving forward, the hero’s thoughts are, as a rule, retrospective. (2012:323)

Exceptions exist, as in Brodsky’s poem “Isaac and Abraham,” where the train follows a figure “8,” traveling through air or gliding on water, and mythologizing space and time with Biblical allusions of the parting of the Red Sea (2012:317).

Much like journeys outward, return journeys to Russia, especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, often take on hugely symbolic meanings. Many migrants departing the Soviet Union left on a one-way ticket abroad, believing they would never be able to return. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when return travel to Russia became possible, exiled writers such as Vasily Aksenov, Eduard Limonov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who had earlier framed experiences of their migration in their writing, sought new narrative trajectories that could provide coherence to their public identities (Wakamiya 2009:2). In 1993, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn organized a two-month return journey, traveling on the trans-Siberian train from Vladivostok to Moscow. Upon his arrival in Moscow, he published a book of short “binary tales,” juxtaposing impressions from his journey with events set in Russia in the 1920s and

1930s, and showing “dislocation between the past and the present—personified in the figure of a traveler” (Wakamiya 2009:74).

*I loved traveling by train ever since I was a kid. In preparation for our trips, my grandmother would wrap potatoes, eggs, cheese, cutlets, and cucumbers in tinfoil. We’d bring salt in a container, enamel dishes, and tea bags. When the train took off, the conductor would bring hot water from the boiler in glass cups with podstakanniki, ornamented metal cup holders, and we would unwrap our picnic, which we would share with fellow passengers. I was not allowed to sleep on the top bunk, because I tossed in my sleep, but I lobbied to occupy it as much as I could during the day. One time, traveling on a summer vacation to Crimea, I even exchanged blows with my best friend who challenged my place on it. The floor was lava.*

*As I became older, I bonded with mom on train trips through Europe, as we lit cigarettes and talked politics. When I traveled by myself, train journeys became as much the destination, as the destinations became two points between the train’s departure and arrival. My first film experiments involved train travel between Moscow and Istanbul, where I stopped to interview people in various cities along the way. My journey almost came to a halt when I was poisoned at the Bucharest train station, but I escaped unscathed. I made the trip between Moscow and Beijing when I worked on *Turning Back the Waves* (2008), accidentally filling the train car with fine-grained sand when I opened the window in the Gobi Desert. I travelled by train from Moscow to Ukraine with film participants while making *The Theory of Happiness* (2014), and I criss-crossed Canada, from Truro, Nova Scotia, to Vancouver, British Columbia, moving places, visiting friends, and writing papers on the train. During my fieldwork, I took the train between*

*Paris, Berlin and Moscow at least a dozen times. In a train depot in Belarus, the train cars would get lifted above the ground, and a new set of chassis would be rolled under the train cars to conform to the European gauge in a process exceptionally termed a bogie exchange. If I am bragging here, it is with the self-awareness that these journeys also define the exceptional: negative spaces that stand in stark counterpoint to daily life. These train journeys were spaces where I re-enacted my childhood, bonded with family, performed masculinity, developed my professional work, experienced embarrassment, felt danger, witnessed injustice, wallowed in sadness after separations with loved ones, and anxiously anticipated reunions. It is difficult for me to think of a more apt and less cliché metaphor for the journey of life, than the journey undertaken by train.*

*Recently traveling to a conference in Cuba, and having packed my installation inside the suitcase, I took the train from Havana to Santiago. I was initially excited to ride the Tren Francés, The French Train, refurbished from the Trans-Europe Express that serviced European cities before it was replaced by the high-speed Thalys trains. However, when I entered the train car, I discovered that the train doors did not close, tempered glass had been replaced by Plexiglas, and the foam cushions were torn out of their seats. Filled with diesel fumes from the locomotive and scarcely protected from outside elements, the journey across the island took a full day, underlining drastically differential access to resources, including the resource of mobility, between the Caribbean Island and various European cities. It also reminded me that romantic notions of train travel are undoubtedly cultural, framed by memories, experiences, and access to resources, because the choice way to travel across Cuba is by bus.*

Amongst research participants, narratives about train journeys were personal, affective, cultural, and highly metaphorical. When one of my participants, Ekaterina Etkind, described her return trip to her native St. Petersburg in the late 1980s, having moved to Paris a decade prior, it was with the pathos of a sentimental, highly symbolic and affective journey:

Ekaterina Etkind: I was very enthusiastic and very frightened. Frightened, because I didn't know how people would view us. People who feared us. There were changes, too. After perestroika, everything changed. Everything was different. And I had tremendous nostalgia for it all. I didn't even anticipate it. I was traveling by train, not by plane. When I saw church cupolas, I started crying. I was never an Orthodox adherent, nor a believer. We were brought up atheist. But when I saw those cupolas, I started crying. (see also *Installation video 7: Ekaterina Etkind*)

A self-centered mode of ethnographic telling rings shallow and disrespectful in interpreting such an emotional journey. Another mode is needed to interpret participants' narratives ethnographically. In the next section, I explore how I used a third, allegorical and performative filmic "lens," as another voice through which to interpret "places" of migration.

### **3.4 Seeing Things: Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Glaz***

We... take as the point of departure the use of the camera as a *kino-eye*, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space.

— Dziga Vertov (1984[1923]:14-15)

Dziga Vertov, a trailblazing filmmaker of early Soviet cinema, articulated this statement as part of the *Kino-Eye* philosophy, which represented "a conscious, indeed reflexive, attempt to socially engineer vision" (Tomas 2013:5). This philosophy is best represented in the film *Chelovek s Kinoapparatom*, *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), where the protagonist, a

Vertovian *kinok*—a neologism translated as a “cinema-eye man” (Vertov 1984:5) describing a being with machine vision and human intelligence—goes about filming, editing, and screening a film chronicling a day in the life of a socialist city. Visionary cinematographic and editing techniques display such scenes as a camera “eye”—its lens, superimposed over a human eye—or an animated, anthropomorphized tripod that bows to an audience gathered at the cinema. Thus, Vertov draws attention to the technology of representation (Tomas 2013:28) by pointing to the mediation of a camera between the filmmaker and social reality, as well as the mediation of a projector between that social reality and the audience.

As David Tomas argues, the film *Man with a Movie Camera* has dual ethnographic value, both as a record of the vision of a new socialist society and as an innovative way of presenting visual material (2013:17). In developing a new cinematic language, Vertov attempts not only to represent society, but to reshape it in the process of that representation. For example, this is how Vertov describes a 1926 film titled *One Sixth of the World*: “This film has, strictly speaking, no ‘viewers’ within the borders of the USSR, since all the working people of the USSR [...] are not viewers but participants in this film” (Vertov quoted in Papazian and Eades 2016:103). This statement, which represents a true utopian vision against the division of labour, demonstrates Vertov’s desire to collapse the boundary between representation as a process of cinematic capture, and participation inside a film, on the other side of the lens.

In a similar way that Chris Marker found inspiration in Alexander Medvedkin, the pioneer of French ethnographic filmmaking, Jean Rouch, discovered Dziga Vertov. Rouch was a recognizable figure of the French New Wave, as well as a progenitor of the *cinéma-vérité* genre, itself borrowed from Vertov’s *kinopravda*, or “film-truth” (i.e. “truth obtained by cinematic

means” Vertov 1984[1934]:131). Steven Feld argues that Rouch was attracted to Vertov’s idea that the “truth of a film is always a socially constructed one” (Feld 2003:14), and saw in film and anthropology “the same essential concerns with the nature of intersubjectivity” (2003:14). Rouch’s films—*Jaguar* (1967), where three main protagonists improvise their narration over footage of their adventures crossing West African state borders, or *Chronique d’un Été* (1961), where Rouch asks his protagonist, Marceline, to approach Parisians with the question “are you happy?”—further interrogate distinctions between participation and representation. But Rouch goes even further in advancing his ethnographic film philosophy.

Following days of idle waiting for a possession ritual amongst the Songhay in West Africa, Jean Rouch is surprised to witness the ritual begin the moment he picks up his camera. According to Rouch, it is the camera that triggers the possession dance (2003[1973]:97). Introspecting on how he may have been perceived as someone who “looks at [his participants] only through the intermediary of a strange appendage and hears them only through the intermediary of a shotgun microphone” (2009[1973]:99), Rouch argues that “paradoxically it is due to this equipment and this new behavior [...] that the filmmaker can throw himself [*sic*] into a ritual, integrate himself with it, and follow it step-by-step” (2003[1973]:99). Borrowing Vertov’s lexicon, Rouch calls his movements with a camera a *ciné-transe*, a film-trance (2003[1973]:98-99). In a *ciné-transe*, “my ‘self’ is altered in front of [the Songhay’s] eyes in the same way as is the ‘self’ of the possession dancers” (2003[1973]:99). The ethnographer modifies themselves, but is in turn modified, a process that Rouch calls a “shared anthropology” (2003[1973]:100-101). However, pointing to the incongruity between the soundtrack and the filmmaker’s later

remarks, Catherine Russell argues that “Rouch’s claim to have crossed over into the consciousness of the Other is really a claim about himself, his subjectivity, and his presence, which dominates the soundtracks of so many of his films” (1999:220).

*Adventure has no place in the anthropologist’s profession; it is merely one of those unavoidable drawbacks, which detract from his [sic] effective work through the incidental loss of weeks or months; there are hours of inaction when the informant is not available; periods of hunger, exhaustion, sickness perhaps; and always the thousand and one dreary tasks which eat away the days to no purpose and reduce dangerous living in the heart of the virgin forest to an imitation of military service. (Lévi-Strauss 1974[1955]:17)*

*Despite an enviable amount of travel, as well as a chance to revisit my past, I spent a lot of my time during fieldwork dwelling on the quote above. Fieldwork was, above everything else, a lonely exercise. Having exhausted my list of contacts, or having spent too many days inside a library, I would sometimes be at a loss about how to spend my time, using the excuse that I was making a film as my only pretense to leave the house. Traveling to unexplored neighbourhoods of a city, I would walk around with my camera, seemingly without a purpose. On those days, my social interactions were often limited to a polite exchange with a grocery store clerk, or small talk with a fellow elevator passenger. However, my video memory cards would get filled up with hundreds of different scenes captured across the city.*

*In the dreary winter months in Moscow, when the sun set around 3pm and an icy wind made walking around the city an ordeal, I would stay in my overheated apartment, sift through my family archives and peruse objects from my childhood. Fridge magnets, New Year’s tree ornaments, or my grandfather’s stamp collection began to serve as filmic inspiration, much like the everyday objects that lay hidden in plain sight around the apartment. I was drawn to these*

*objects of nostalgic kitsch, reminiscent of my own travel journeys. Now, journeying out to diverse neighbourhoods, I filmed collections of objects I found displayed in souvenir parlours, shop windows, or flea markets.*

*I expanded my collection of filmed objects to other field sites as well, and extended it to encompass more diverse themes. I began to document my routines on camera, filming myself drinking coffee in the morning, or packing my suitcase on the eve of a journey. I filmed cityscapes and transit hubs; I was drawn to capture architectural details, like windows and archways, and monuments; I filmed ubiquitous city ornaments, like clocks and monuments, and I sought out geometric shapes and abstract textures, reflections and shadows. In short, I recorded scenes held together by a desire to occupy and ground myself, and to establish aesthetic continuity between various places I traveled. Thus, I developed a personal fieldwork archive of thousands of moving images from dozens of different places, resulting in approximately 60 hours of footage.*

Both Dziga Vertov, and Jean Rouch aspired to overcome the divide between film participants and audience members, and film participants and filmmaker, respectively. The ubiquity and accessibility of digital media brought Vertov's fantasy much closer to reality for certain visual modes, such as online gaming and video streaming, where virtually anyone can become a media broadcaster. However, Rouch's aspirations to create a "shared anthropology" that challenges the dominance of a single voice in favour of a participatory, dialogical approach still begs the question, "whose story is it?" (MacDougall 1991). Visual anthropologists have long written about collaborative filmmaking "in which ordinary boundaries between image maker and

subject, between scholar and ordinary men and women dissolve or become permeable” (Elder 1995:101), or about a cinema where filmmakers and participants recognize and negotiate different goals for the final film project, but act to mutually empower each other (Flores 2004).

In a now classic essay, David MacDougall eloquently asks, “if ethnographies now incorporate other voices, what textual independence do these voices actually have? In an absolute sense, all texts used in this way are subordinated to the text of the author” (1991:5). In other words, do filmmakers include other voices as a perfunctory gesture to legitimate their own work? If, on the other hand, collaboration is considered a gold standard for sharing knowledge and developing mutual trust, how could I involve forty-five participants of divergent backgrounds and differing interests across disparate places? Moreover, at what point of the filmmaking process could I beckon my participants to work as collaborators, presumably for free: during filming, editing, or research dissemination?

I did not engage in a traditional collaborative approach in my research. Rather, a central motif of my filmmaking became an attempt to curate a reflexive digital archive of migration, which, I hoped, would engage participants on a personal and intellectual level. This approach, which began from the intimate spaces of my home, and expanded across various places abroad, attempted to gather “pieces of comparison capable of being refigured in endless combination, flotsam brought together, moving in the same direction to make certain forms of meaning” (Edwards and Hart 2004:56). I was thus provoked to draw mental maps and geographies, making cross-cultural comparisons between where I was, and where I was coming from. Gathering this material began to serve a dual purpose; as a kind of visual diary, and as a point of conversation with participants about objects in their home, places in their neighbourhood and representations

of their city. In time, I recognized that I was creating a subjective collection of images as a multi-sited, visual archive, which in turn began to resonate with participants' life stories, or the objects they chose to describe. Thus, I began to assemble, code and edit my collection of moving images as a means to interpret my participants' interviews.

Christopher Wright challenges visual anthropologists to move beyond using images that simply illustrate text and to embrace new modes of interpreting visual material (1998:17). Unlike the *kinok*, whose fusion with the camera represented an attempt to develop a new vision of reality, new film technologies permit contemporary filmmakers to no longer look through the viewfinder of a camera, but at a screen—to “look *with* the camera, not *through* it” (1998:19). As Wright argues, this mode of filmmaking signals “a partial collapse of the difference between filming and viewing” (1998:19), provoking visual anthropologists to examine filmmaking within a wider set of media practices that engage with diverse forms of creative expression, such as art and experimentation (1998:21).

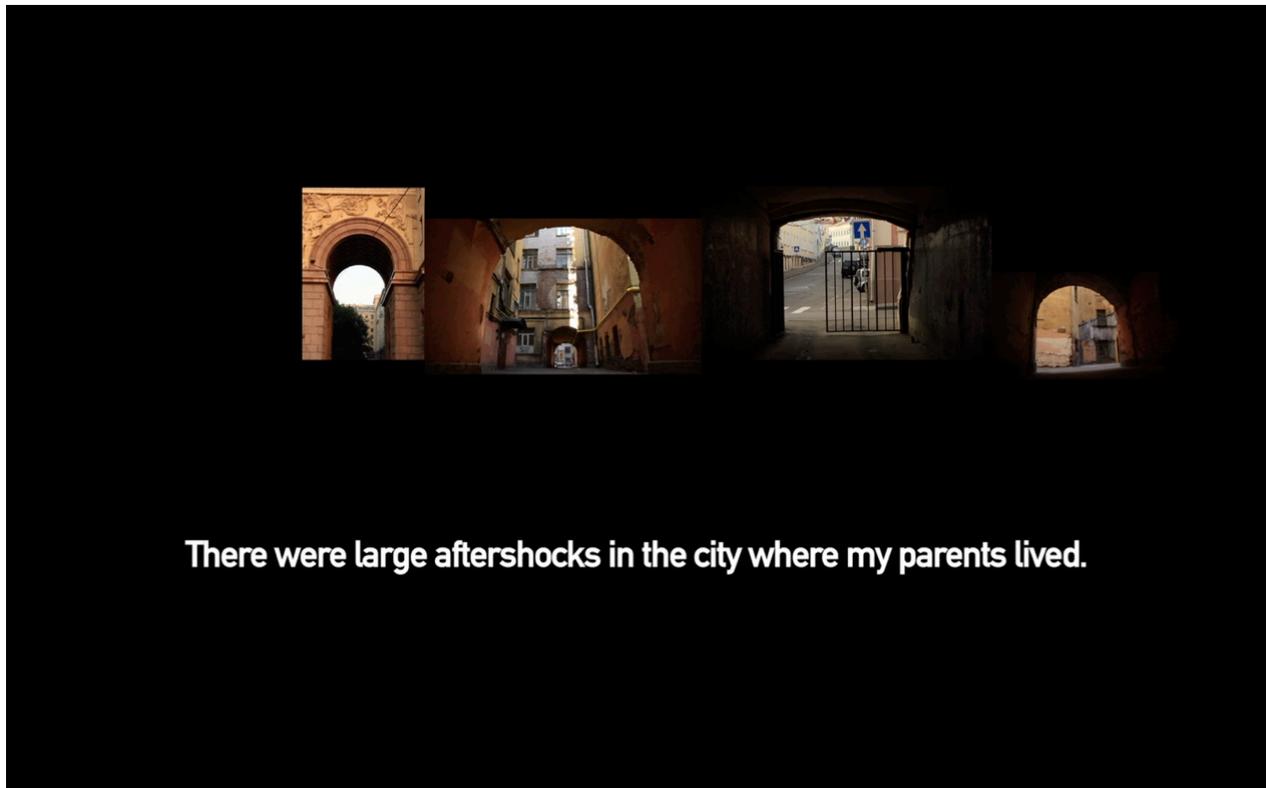
“How much can we know about the people who offer their presence to the lens?” asks Les Back (2004:134). For example, Anastassios Kavassos interprets the role of the filmmaker as a hunter, for whom “cameras are like weapons” (2004:135); the filmmaker does not look through the lens, but has trained himself to fix the camera on his subject. But Back argues that “It is a mistake [...] to see the lens as only looking one way” (2004:137). People look back and offer their presence to the filmmaker. Similarly, in investigating the ways in which people talk about their lives, Andrew Irving urges anthropologists to examine ethnographic research as facilitating a performance of identity. Instead of “fossilizing” people’s experience, Irving evokes

the “process of *poesis* rather than *mimesis* as persons are not reproducing the past but actively performing and re-interpreting it” (2007:205).

Nune Barsegian, a participant currently living in Berlin and originally from Armenia, spoke to me about revisiting places of her childhood. I edited our dialogue into a short vignette (see Figure 4 and *Installation video 2: Nune Barsegian*), in which I presented the following narrative:

*Nune Barsegian:* I remember my shock when a large earthquake hit Armenia. There were large aftershocks in the city where my parents lived. I went to look at my school. It was still standing and I was very happy [...] I went back there five years ago. So much time had passed. Imagine you’re going somewhere and you know a building from childhood, and suddenly, it’s no longer there. The school was hurt in the earthquake after all. Something had cracked in it, and after a few years, it collapsed. Imagine you’re going someplace. You turn the corner, and the building you were expecting to see is no longer there. [...] So I don’t have a feeling that you return to where you left. You return to a different place. (see also *Installation video 2: Nune Barsegian*)

I began to interpret conversations with participants through a set of visual metaphors – a productive, artistic engagement with my research participants’ interview material as a form of *poesis* (Irving 2007:205). I would begin by editing down an hour-, or two-hour long interview into a short audio vignette between two to six minutes long. I usually focused on a single life episode and did not heavily edit dialogue, preserving a naturalistic way research participants told their stories. Based on this audio material, I then developed a set of visuals drawn from my fieldwork archive. I interpreted Nune’s interview by editing a series of archways together, representing how Nune relates physical buildings with places and memories of her past. As an architectural structure, the archway typically supports the weight of a wall, which, in this case, collapsed.



**Figure 4: A collection of re-framed archways with intertitle**

As Johannes Fabian argues, any collection is already always dispersed (Fabian 2007:105). When I began to compile a set of moving pictures from my visual archive, I also reassembled them by theme, rather than by the place where they were recorded. This type of visual treatment, bringing together disparate, displaced elements, or what George Marcus calls “montage as practice” (2013:303), became reminiscent of early Soviet experiments in montage. However, this approach also highlighted an alternative practice for ethnographic cinema, “as an alternative cinematic poetics that is ‘capable of understanding and conveying the experience of living in worlds of (dis)location and of (a)synchronism’” (Wilma Kiener [2008] in Köhn 2014:3). In editing using graphic, rhythmic and intellectual montage, I interpreted my participants’ vignettes by a process of association, thus drawing attention to the dialogical and performative aspects of our encounter. In the above example, in response to Nune’s description of her home town, I

resized and placed a series of video clips of archways in a row, set against a black background. While these archways were delimited by empty space, both inside, and around them, the effect I tried to achieve the effect of an imagined cityscape (Figure 4), as if a spectator was looking at a series of buildings, albeit framed by absence as negative space.

In editing the installation, I also decentered the filmic frame through methods such as split-screen techniques (Figure 4; *Installation video 2*: Nune Barsegian). I used this type of visual language as a way to engage with the *mise-en-scène*—the geometry of various elements on the screen—another method to highlight the constructed nature of cinema. The assembly of each individual vignette was a taxing process: each interview took several weeks of work to transcribe, code, edit, and interpret visually. However, by decentering the filmic frame, I was able to move away from using visual language as illustration, and toward a creative interpretation of research participants’ narratives, drawing attention to the “staged encounter” (Irving 2007:185) between research participants and myself.

### **3.4.1 Staging Object Encounters**

*Meeting participants in their homes, or in public places, I arrived to our interview carrying all my film equipment inside a vintage suitcase. Every piece of gear would then come into play, as I assembled various components to be able to record our conversation. I gave my participants a wireless lavalier microphone, which transmitted their voice to an audio recorder that I placed in front of me, to monitor audio levels. A notebook in which I drafted short biographical sketches and key questions for my interlocutors sat open on my lap. The digital camera sat balanced on a shoulder rig, which allowed me to split my attention between*

*checking my framing in the viewfinder and making eye contact with participants.*

*In preparation for the interview, I asked participants to select an object they found significant to their migration journey. As soon as we would meet, I would set up the suitcase against a black matte, and carefully measure the distance and angle at which to place my camera, preserving the same geometry of the frame across all interviews. I would then ask participants to describe an object they have chosen, recording them as they placed this object inside the suitcase. This became a way to “break the ice,” which introduced participants to my filmmaking practice and set the tone for the rest of the interview. Holding their chosen object in their hands, twisting and turning it in front of the camera, and figuring where to place it inside the suitcase, participants became implicated in a filmic rapport, conscious both of the presence of a recording device, and their own performance in front of it.*

Researching the experience of people living with terminal illness, Andrew Irving discusses the centrality of “memories, reverie, and imagination to ethnographic practice” (2007:186). Ethnographers engage participants in physical spaces they inhabit, such as their homes, or their neighbourhoods, places which may “slip between metaphor and material object, between infrastructure and imagery, between remnants of matter and mind” (Stoler 2008:203). Yet, ethnographers have no independent access to people’s “consciousness, memories, or the past” (Irving 2007:186), rendering interpretation of such processes speculative, at best. Irving proposes that to gain a “sense” of a person’s past, “at once cultural and idiosyncratic” (2007:187), a new form of collaborative research and representation is needed.

Walking with participants in their neighbourhoods, eliciting their memories, and allowing them to pick where to go next, Irving establishes a “staged encounter” (Irving 2007:185), where ethnographic work is treated as a type of performance that creates mnemonic contexts that would not otherwise exist (2007:185). This type of approach hinges on participants’ willingness to “inhabit unaccustomed roles” (2007:185). Moreover, this approach presupposes a certain openness, as “informants make their way round the city and as events and episodes are drawn out of the city’s streets, buildings, and market-places and turned into public narratives” (2007:187).

Memory can be similarly provoked by household objects that may be either visibly displayed, or that may lay dormant for years, but which, once consciously retrieved, may bring up a myriad of associations. Working in the domain of material culture, and using an open-ended approach similar to Irving’s “staged encounter” (2007:185), visual anthropologist Alyssa Grossman “allowed material objects themselves to direct [her] research, thereby supplementing *and* transforming its direction, form, contents, and theoretical implications” (2014:132). Grossman interviewed participants about everyday objects from their past in communist Romania. She then used these “material objects and the medium of film to generate, rather than merely reflect, different modes of anthropological understanding” (2014:132). Grossman invited artist-filmmaker Selena Kimblall to creatively animate the movements of objects such as a typewriter, an ice cube tray, or a seltzer bottle, all donated to the project. Grossman then synced these visual sequences with her interviews, setting up both video feeds as a dual-screen display. The resulting installation, *Memory Objects, Memory Dialogues* (2011), thus subverts linear narratives, conveying “multiple perspectives, times, and

spaces” (2014:132). By taking conscious and unconscious inspiration from these approaches for the installation *Still Life with a Suitcase*, I began to develop a similar type of “generative mode” as an “allegorical voice,” in a hopeful dialogue with research participants.

“The past is trapped within the souvenir – just as the roar of the ocean is imprisoned inside a single seashell,” writes Ludwig Giesz (1968:169). Half a century ago, the author elaborated, cynically, that souvenirs are collected not so much to experience “abroad,” but to recreate a sentimental and comforting experience of home:

a self-indulgent desire for privacy; feelings of tenderness towards one’s home and family; an attempt to make every experience seem familiar by transforming it into something cosy and snug. (Giesz 1968:159)

Such is the experience of kitsch that on the one hand, it transcends the divide between private and public space, between tangible objects and objects of memory, and on the other, it makes tourist experiences familiar and personal (1968:169). No matter how hard I tried to trick myself into being a “native” anthropologist, I had to acknowledge that my experiences were “unabashedly subjective” (Narayan 1993:682) and that my knowledge about places I traveled was situated, subjective, shifting (Narayan 1993:678-682), and to some extent, even kitsch.

Accepting Sarah Pink’s invocation that the home—a private sphere that implicates the sensory worlds of the ethnographer and her informants—is a fruitful place from which to develop a self-reflexive, sensory ethnography (2004:27), I also decided to engage the haptic sense in my work, “interpreting fieldwork as a sensory, embodied experience” (2004:32). Having assembled a digital collection of participant’s objects, I began to recreate these objects using clay. I wanted to get a sense of how the object felt in my participants’ hands, and in the

process, I had to infer its three-dimensional texture, weight, and scale from a two-dimensional surface on which I viewed my video recordings. Clay, an earthen material, can be molded when wet, and hardened when baked at high temperatures. It readily conveys texture, it is durable, and it conducts heat, taking on the temperature of the environment, or the warmth of the hand. It is also experienced as a “warm” object, both “familiar and personal” (Giesz 1968:169), as it is transformed from an amorphous mass, into a shape reflecting its maker’s style and skill. I interpreted nine articles participants shared with me on video, sculpting them out of clay and firing them at high temperatures, until they hardened into brick-coloured ceramic objects.

Danila Kuznetsov is a Moscow filmmaker considering moving to Paris, France. When I asked Danila to find something significant to his planned migration, he selected not one, but two objects. The first was a set of Hindu rosaries made from bone, which Danila acquired in Moscow and with which he used to practice yoga. Danila later converted them to Orthodox rosaries, attaching a cross and adding an extra bead, from the Hindu 108 to the Orthodox 109. The second object was a set of Christian rosaries acquired on a visit to the *Sacré-Coeur* in Paris. Holding a set in each hand, Danila lifts them up one by one: “this is where we’re coming from, and this is where we’re going.” When I ask Danila what these rosaries represent to him as he prepares to move to a new place, Danila tells me:

*Danila Kuznetsov:* It is a symbol of spiritual continuity, that your religion is always with you, no matter where you are. I recently had a debate with a friend about whether your religion is connected to the place you live. She had to leave in half an hour, but instead, we stayed talking for three. I don’t think you’re so bound to the place where you live. Moreover, Orthodox churches are everywhere.

Using these objects, Danila offers a set of visual representations to his own imagined migration trajectory. The elegant rosaries made of blue opal brought from France stand in stark contrast to the carved bone rosaries with a coarse, handmade wooden cross acquired in Russia. They are bestowed a special status as unique, representative objects. But these objects also serve a practical purpose, helping Danila read prayers: “You see, rosaries are dispensable. In active use, they’re good for about a year, a year and a half, and then something breaks. They tear up. They don’t live for long, and I change them.” People who take such an object into their hands, feeling its weight and texture or thumbing through the beads, may be reminded, first and foremost, of its practical value as a thing, before they engage with its narrative-, or metaphorical value. Yet, even practical, “dispensable” objects begin to acquire metaphorical meanings when participants discuss them in relation to their migration journey. Initially, I considered simply displaying these objects to materially illustrate my video footage. In the installation’s final iteration, I developed a different representational technique for disseminating my research, which I discuss below.

### **3.5 Putting it All Together: *Still Life with a Suitcase***

The final design of the installation, *Still Life with a Suitcase*, combined various representational and programmatic elements outlined in this chapter. Using observational and autobiographical filmic sequences, I juxtaposed projection inside and outside the cinematic screen and the back lid of the suitcase. This approach reverberated with the first half of the chapter, where I discussed research-centered reflexive methods proposed by Jay Ruby (2000), and inspired by Alexander Medvedkin’s early Soviet experiments. Using the suitcase as a separate screening surface allowed me to incorporate a set of personal, visual interventions in

the installation, distinguishing my autobiographical voice from interview content. Echoing Medvedkin's mobile production and exhibition methods, I carried all the equipment I needed to record, and later, to display the installation inside a suitcase, which served as a mobile studio and a digital projection surface. At the time of writing, *Still Life with a Suitcase* has been exhibited at Digital Anthropologies/*Anthropologies Numériques* in Paris (December 2017); at *CityLab: Berlin*, an international campus of Norwich University (December 2017), and as part of *Centre for Imaginative Ethnography's* program at the Canadian Anthropology Society's annual meeting in Santiago, Cuba (May 2018).

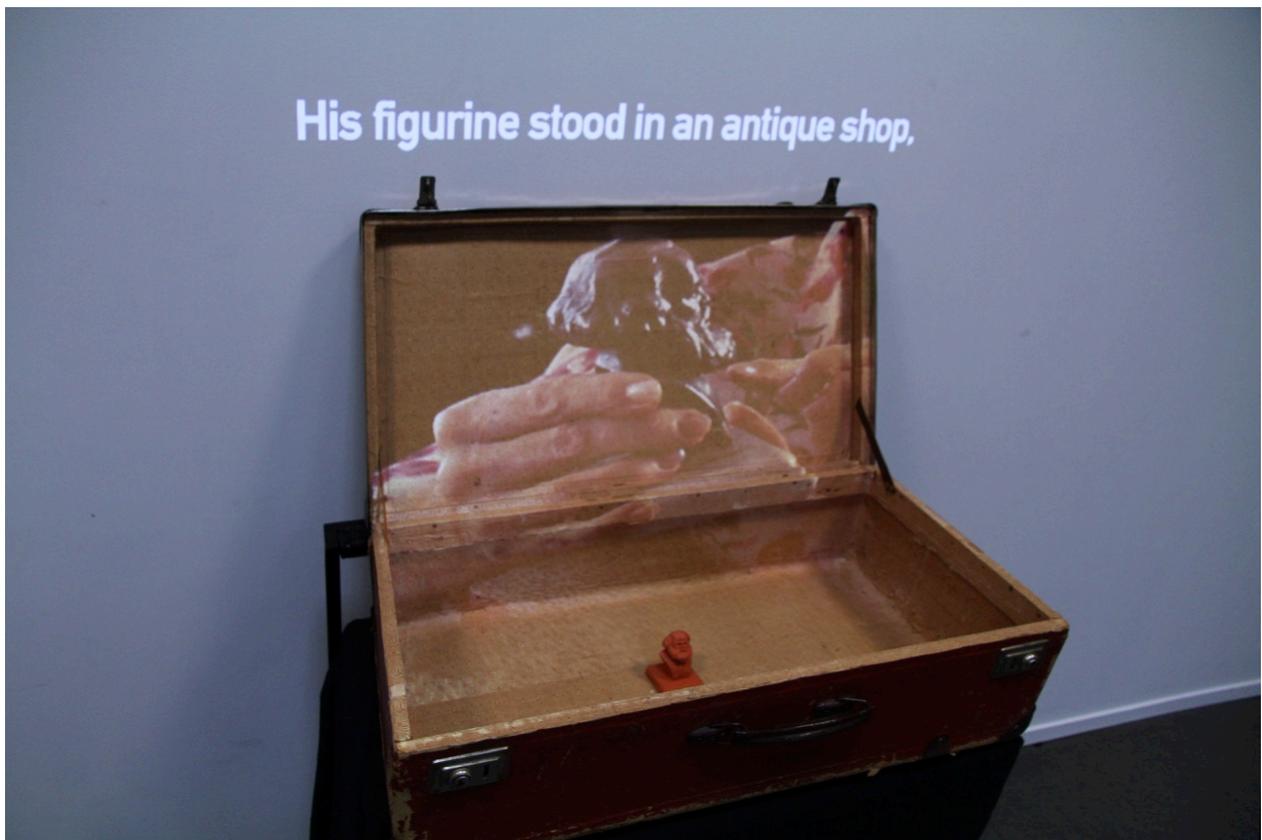


Figure 5: Object triggering video projection inside the suitcase.

In the second half of this chapter, in which I discussed participatory, poetic and sensory ethnography, I was inspired to “stage encounters” (Irving 2007:186) around a set of evocative objects with my participants, which I later recreated in the installation. During our interviews, I filmed participants as they described and placed an object they found important to their migration journey inside my suitcase. I then recreated nine objects, and together with a digital video specialist, Adam Široký, who programmed the installation, we set these objects to trigger videos using RFID tags.<sup>21</sup> As audience members enter the space of the installation, they see a projection of moving landscapes playing on a screen behind an open suitcase. This is consistent with a “reflexive approach” in that such a display draws attention to the medium of representation through the very form of the installation. But audience members are also invited to interact with the installation by placing clay objects inside the suitcase in the order they themselves choose. By manipulating objects, audience members launch video vignettes corresponding to these objects on screen, thus controlling the narrative flow of the installation.

According to Walter Benjamin, objects reproduced by means such as a film camera lose their “aura,” their “unique existence in a particular place” (Benjamin 2008[1936]:22), which is connected to their traditional and ritual functions (2008[1936]:22-24). Technological reproduction is tantamount to the “shattering of tradition” (2008[1936]:22); thus, “the social significance of film,” as Benjamin saw it, “is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage” (2008[1936]:22). Filming our encounter, I had similarly destroyed the original object’s “aura,” having reproduced it using

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<sup>21</sup> RFID, or radio-frequency identification tags, work along the same principle as key cards and transit passes.

digital means. However, in asking participants to perform a small ritual on film (2008[1936]:31), I attempted to restore this aura. Similarly, I recreated my participants' objects using clay as a "staged encounter," a means to invite audience members to perform a similar ritual to the original and to experience a quaint moment of "cinematic magic," seeing an inanimate object they handled animated on screen (2008[1936]:24). Thus, when an object becomes re-animated, and its aura is restored—mediated, by this time, by the multi-media installation, instead of by the camera—I invite audiences to reflect on the very nature of ethnographic performance and the consumption of ethnographic. The object is re-animated, and its "aura" restored, mediated, this time, by the multi-media installation, rather than by the camera. Therefore, *Still Life with a Suitcase* highlights different types of engagement: observational, autobiographical and participatory—at the level of media capture, incorporating visual, auditory and haptic modes, and at the level of sensory perception, by recreating objects out of clay, and by staging encounters, performing object stories, and taking part in their ethnographic re-enactment. Rather than focus on any one approach, I choose to adopt a more holistic attitude, calling this type of work "multi-media ethnography."

## Chapter 4: The Trope of the Suitcase: Narratives of Mobile Identities amongst Transnational Russian Migrants

A photograph is a reduction of the endless and unmanageable world to a little rectangle. A photograph is our measure of the world. A photograph is also a memory. Remembering means reducing the world to little rectangles. Arranging the little rectangles in an album is autobiography.

—Dubravka Ugrešić, *Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998:30)

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates migrant material culture, problematizing the “search for meaning” of biographical objects. I contend that because biographical objects can be used to articulate diverse meanings, it is worth examining objects within the framework of a “staged encounter” (Irving 2007:186), where the subjectivities of both researcher and participants come into play. Within the scope of this encounter, participants describe how diverse objects come to represent their homes, embody their life histories, or convey their relationship to Russia within historical and social migration processes. This approach allows a certain flexibility to interpret participants’ objects, allowing me to examine how objects of Russian migration are represented through literary, autobiographic, and ethnographic discourses. Thus, I propose three possible ways to examine biographical objects: as *mementos*, generating narratives that look inwards and backwards; as *metaphors*, articulating identity negotiations across physical and cultural displacements, and as objects of cultural *heritage*, reflexive of the way Russian intellectual migrants contribute to cultural narratives about migration.

*I often joke that entering my childhood apartment in Moscow is like entering a museum of domestic life of the late Soviet epoch. My grandmother fastidiously preserved my childhood*

*apartment, yielding only to the breakdown of old appliances: we now have a new gas stove, a cordless telephone and an electric kettle, which all seem a little anachronistic set against our Soviet décor. The apartment eschews what Svetlana Boym calls the domestic trash of socialism (Boym 2005:1994:67); rather, it has affectionately preserved objects from our past: a glass chandelier, wooden bird whistles, childhood photos behind lacquered wood finishes of bookshelves with glass doors, nicknamed “stenki,” or walls, because they span the entire length of the living room wall. Of course, I am conscious of the mundane Soviet uniqueness of the apartment only when a visitor arrives from abroad. While they may see the décor as our genuine expression of domestic byt, everyday lifestyle, they may not be aware that for our family, these objects represent our communal kitsch, an “Ostalgie” that attempts to “recuperate, validate, and anchor a collective memory of a shared past” (Berdahl 1999b:203). Nothing changes, but nothing should change; everything should remain, because it anchors our shared memories. Yet, in front of my North American visitors, the rug hanging on the wall suddenly juts out as a source of self-conscious embarrassment, and the separate toilet room and bathroom with cross-wired light switches (our switches!), a source of awkward confusion.*

In Sergei Dovlatov’s novel, *The Suitcase* (1990), the narrator describes packing to move to New York, fitting all his meagre possessions into a single suitcase. He intones:

I almost wept with self-pity. After all, I was thirty-six years old. Had worked eighteen of them. I earned money, bought things with it. I owned a certain amount, it seemed to me. And still I only needed one suitcase - and of rather modest dimensions at that (1990:5).

In the novel, the suitcase is abandoned in the closet of the narrator’s New York apartment, until several years later, the protagonist discovers it again:

On top was a decent double-breasted suit, intended for interviews, symposiums, lectures and fancy receptions. I figured it would do for Nobel ceremonies, too. Then a poplin shirt and shoes wrapped in paper. Beneath them, a corduroy jacket lined with fake fur. To the left, a winter hat of fake sealskin. Three pairs of Finnish nylon crêpe socks. Driving gloves. And last but not least, an officer's leather belt" (1990:7).

Dovlatov writes, "at that point, memories engulfed me" (1990:7). Each object inside the suitcase pertains to a chapter from the narrator's life, thus structuring the novel. These objects are not simply nostalgic, they are metaphorical, because they reveal how values become displaced by migration. The writer deliberately accentuates value discrepancies between the objects' former, Soviet, and present lives—nylon socks are no longer valuable commodities in New York—but in drawing attention to their misplaced value, he restores their uniqueness as biographical objects.

Dovlatov's self-conscious, retrospective storytelling was not dissimilar to the way research participants shared their stories of migration. Migration journeys were often described as transformative events, provoking reflections on past relationships and abandoned possessions, or inversely, possessions naïvely packed abroad. During our interview, Elena Dovlatova, the writer's widow, revealed that one of the objects her husband brought with him to New York was a set of training weights. If biographical objects structure the novel's narrative, standing above the fray of everydayness, they did not provide the same structure to research participants' life stories. Rather, object narratives were indelibly woven into the rich tapestry of life. When I asked participants to isolate and describe an object they found significant to their migration journey, I discovered that participants willingly elaborated on the object's meaning, to the point that it came to represent many different aspects of their identity. The fluidity of participants' narratives, beckoned me to question whether it was at all effective to analyze the meanings people attach to objects (Appadurai 1986; Czikszenmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton

1981). Rather, I propose to investigate the dynamics of the reverse, but complementary process, of how objects came to acquire the meanings they did, while enabling their bearers to articulate identity within wider migration journeys, or even to shape wider cultural and literary narratives surrounding migration, bearing in mind the urge to preserve, much like my grandmother has, continuity with the past.

#### **4.2 Home Contexts: Weaving Object Stories**

*“Memories of our living quarters and its furnishings are still lively in my mind. Our house consisted of one small, low room, and a tiny kitchen. In one corner stood a triangular table on which lay the gospel, various prayer books and a piece of incense. On the wall above the table hung icons of the Virgin and Christ, flanked by icons of saints of various ranks [...] On the opposite wall, hung pastoral pictures—two girls with baskets and flowers in their hands; two portraits of Alexander II—one, which portrayed him as young and reform-minded, and the other, when he already turned back his reins and carried himself like a typical gendarme-sergeant [...] There was also an antediluvian wall clock, the raucous sounding of which resembled the desperate cough of an emphysema patient, and that never corresponded to the time indicated by the arrow. On another wall hung a mirror, which skewed and distorted any handsome man’s face. The furniture in this room, apart from the triangular table underneath the icons, consisted of another wobbly table, a few similarly-wobbly chairs, a cupboard for the dishes, a wooden sofa, and a trunk. In the kitchen, there stood a bed and a kitchen cupboard. In the windows, sumptuous fuchsia—the child of my sister, Katie. This was our home.”*

Above is an excerpt from a memoir written by my great-great-grandfather, Vasiliy Mikhaylovich Gavrilov, describing his home in Rzhyschiv, Ukraine. My step-aunt and step-cousin who share him as an ancestor, lovingly typed up and bound his memoirs as a gift to our family. The memoir is dated to 1926, when he was already in his 70s, but the description of his childhood home dates to the 1850s. While his parents were both ethnically Jewish, his father was forced to convert to Christianity, so Vasiliy Mikhaylovich grew up Russian Orthodox. He became a rural schoolteacher, and soon after, a fervent supporter of the Marxist revolutionary movement. He had eleven siblings, three of whom died in infancy. Establishing the place of the home as a familial, and familiar, setting—against which Vasiliy describes celebrating major religious holidays, being tutored in the neighbouring room, or spending gloomy winter evenings holed up with his brothers—becomes an essential element of his storytelling. The object itself, a typewritten book of memoirs, reflects the intersections between stories, places, and things, which I pursue as a technique of “domestic ethnography” (Renov 1999:218). Thus, I use home objects, family relationships, and my own history of migration “as a kind of supplementary autobiographical practice; [...] a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familiar other” (Renov 1999:218).

Conducting “domestic ethnography” is a challenge for me, since I have not had a permanent domicile for over twelve years. I currently live in Berlin, Germany, and I periodically return to Toronto, Canada. Each time that I return to my “home city,” I stay in my mom’s apartment, where I have, embarrassingly, maintained an enormous collection of books, records, musical instruments, and film equipment. I use these objects as a placeholder of my identity, even as they afford me the privilege of living a minimalist lifestyle elsewhere. To be sure, I have

placed much of my stuff in storage, donated it to charity, or shuttled it with me to Germany, and back again. However, Vasiliy's book of memoirs came from one of my bookshelves, as did a photo album, which will come into play in a few pages.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, a "home" is considered an intimate space (Casey 1997:294), "a lived experience of locality" (Ahmed 1999:341) where "most of what matters to people is happening" (Miller quoted in Pink 2004:26). A "home" also becomes a key site for investigating people's relationship with the material world, described as "inter-animation" (Basso 1998:122) between people's bodies, situated in space, and their lived environment, because "the landscape in which people dwell can be said to dwell in them" (1998:122). In this context, migration has often been imagined as a transgressive departure that dislocates someone's "home" identity (see Iain Chambers quoted in Ahmed 1999:340), which subsequently becomes reconstituted abroad.

Anna Pechurina approached her study of Russian migrants' homes by investigating "'diasporic' objects which remind migrants of home country and help them feel themselves Russians while living in the UK" (2015:91). Pechurina's analysis hinges on the premises that "migrants generally tend to accumulate similar types of possessions on immigration" (2015:35), and that the home can be understood "as a set of practices through which one can experience and realise it as an ongoing creative project" (2015:34). This premise is supported by Mimi Sheller and John Urry, who argue that "in leaving a place migrants often carry parts of it with them which are reassembled in the material form of souvenirs, textures, foods, colours, scents, and sounds—reconfiguring the place of arrival both figuratively and imaginatively" (2006:211).

In this case, by “looking at material objects and asking which of them are considered to be Russian by their owners” (2015:25), Pechurina discovers three types of traveling objects as evidence of migrant home-making: religious objects, such as symbols of Russian Orthodoxy; traditional souvenirs, such as *matryoshkas* and other folk crafts, and books, characteristic of Russian intellectual culture. However, Pechurina concedes that in classifying objects that make up a Russian home, “the meaning of things is never clear or fixed; moreover, something can have more than one meaning depending on the experience of the individual” (2015:113). This echoes Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s argument that there is “enormous flexibility with which people can attach meanings to objects, and therefore derive meanings from them. Almost anything can be made to represent a set of meanings” (1981:87).

Svetlana Boym has analyzed a similar trope in how formerly Soviet immigrants living in Boston and New York relate to home objects, a relationship which hinges on “nostalgia experienced by Soviet immigrants in the States, for whom home becomes a ‘personal memory museum’” (Boym 2001:328). Boym suggests,

The domestic interiors of ex-Soviet immigrants in the United States and their collections of diasporic souvenirs tempt us at first glance with a heartwrenching symbolism of the abandoned mother country; yet the stories these owners tell about their objects reveal more about making a home abroad than about reconstructing the original loss. (Boym 2001:328)

A home, according to Boym, is “not really a place,” but a “sense of intimacy with the world” (2001:251). For Pechurina, too, a home can be “understood as a set of practices through which one can experience and realise it as an ongoing creative project” (2015:34).

Both authors hint that in the context of migration, homes and the objects they contain are no longer strictly attached to fixed categories of belonging. Indeed, as Sarah Ahmed argued,

“there is movement and dislocation within the very forming of homes as complex and contingent spaces of inhabitation” (Ahmed 1999:340). Homes are thus variously “emplaced” and “displaced” (Chu 2006:399), formed and forming expectations, possibilities and articulations of migrant identities. There is an emergent quality to home-making, whereby “the forms of objects are not imposed from above but grow from the mutual involvement of people and materials in an environment” (Ingold 2000:68). Therefore, homes, the objects they contain, and the systems of relations they embody, cannot be taken as separate from people’s identities; rather, they are “interweaved” (2000:64), simultaneously shaped and shaping people’s identities. This type of approach has direct implications for the kinds of questions anthropologists ask, interrogating, for example, whether buildings have identities (Fortier 2000), or how people are affected by living amongst ruins, that are shaped as much by environmental factors, as by historical and political contingencies (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 4-9). In my research, I ask whether objects are constitutive of migrant identities, whether the symbolic meanings people attach to objects helps to tangibly reconstitute their identities abroad.

*While I can usually maintain decorum during initial moments of a breakup, I experience the end of a relationship as a series of aftershocks. Initial grief makes way to other losses, both material and immaterial. A breakup represents the loss of a large part of my identity, a loss that I have previously experienced as an overwhelming feeling of emptiness. Losing ground under my feet, I feel like I also lose my home, a place where I feel most like myself. Subsequent grief comes in waves, when my former partner and I begin to separate each other’s things, claiming objects that once helped us define each other, and ourselves to each other, while objects that we*

*acquired together lose their shared optimism. The final loss is not that many months or years later these objects may trigger painful memories, but just the inverse, in that they do not.*

*An empty apartment has a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, it signals to new opportunities, representing a chance for a fresh start. On the other, it does not feel like it is truly mine until I spill coffee on the carpet, or leave a dent on the wall through an awkward misstep. Scratches, stains, tears and paint splatters—accidents, in short—make a place inhabitable. Artwork on the walls, paper piles, dusty closet corners and packed storage spaces close the gap between a house that I live in, and a place that makes me “feel at home.” When I described this to a friend, they told me that they do not attach such sentiments to things. However, on the eve of a new relationship, they said they had a dream about forks. Kitchen implements signaled shared domesticity.*

Entering the apartment of architect and writer Dmitry Khmel'nitsky, I encountered a bright space with high ceilings. Tall bookshelves filled with books stood on the perimeter of the apartment. Large oil paintings, which Dmitry painted himself, occupied the spaces in between. An easel with a large unfinished canvas stood in the corner of the room. Research participants shared experiences resettling abroad in close tandem with experiences of “home,” revealing their relationship to each place they lived in the process. Dmitry described his disdain for the Soviet regime as the main impetus for emigrating in 1987. During our interview, he shared his first impressions of moving to West Berlin:

*Dmitry Khmel'nitsky:* My first weeks in Berlin were an absolutely wonderful time. I immediately felt that I was at home. I didn't know the culture, nor the language. But the atmosphere was wonderful. It's not that it was easy, but it was psychologically comfortable. When we went to East Berlin to visit friends, it felt like a nightmare, as if we were back in the USSR. Coming back on the metro, we thought thank God we're home. Berlin was considered home. (see also *Installation video 8: Dmitry Khmel'nitsky*)

In the 1990s, Dmitry enrolled in a PhD program, looking to research Stalinist architecture. While it was already possible to return to Russia, Dmitry found all the Russian-language research materials he needed in Berlin, refusing to go back to Russia as a matter of principle. Dmitry continues to view his Berlin apartment as his home: "My books. My paintings. My work. And I could do this work from anywhere."

Inviting me into his Moscow home, filmmaker Danila Kuznetsov described his preparations for his journey abroad,

*Danila Kuznetsov:* With advancing years, I have fewer and fewer things, thank God.

Practically the only things I have are books. There are a lot of books. I deliberately do not get rid of them, even useless ones, because for me, they are a landscape. An apartment without books feels uninhabited, as if it was a hotel. Ideally, that's the only thing I would bring with me... *Omnia mea mecum porto*. All that I own, I carry with me.

As Danila gets older, he tries to get rid of objects that have significance "merely" as souvenirs or mementoes, because "in significant things, you can also drown." Too many things, Danila says, and "you get Plyushkinism. For Plyushkin, everything carries a significance. Every rag is a treasure, and everything can be used or sold." Danila makes a reference to Nikolai Gogol's classic novel, *Dead Souls* (2014[1842]), which tells the story of a merchant who buys registers of deceased serfs. One of the characters he meets along the way, Plyushkin, is a *skopidom*, a

hoarder unwilling to part with his registers. The Russian term is a compound word, meaning someone who “collects house.” In preparing to move homes, Danila renounces a purely sentimental attachment to objects.

As participants such as Danila negotiate what to bring and what to leave behind on their migration journeys, they find ways to “express in material form the goal of transcending our attachment to material life” (Miller 2005:1). For Danila, books become objects that transcend their own materiality, because, as Alfred Gell would argue, beyond artifact, they are the “creative products of a person or people [that] become their ‘distributed mind’” (Gell quoted in Miller 2005:13). Danila’s account shares Daniel Miller’s concern that, paradoxically, amongst philosophies that renounce materiality, “material culture has been of considerable consequence as a means of expressing that conviction” (Miller 2005:1). Whereas, as Danila suggests, the fewer things he possesses, the more valuable they become, as he prepares for his move abroad, the opposite becomes true for Dmitry: while he could have studied Russian architecture anywhere, he depended on Berlin libraries to be able to do so from the comfort of his Berlin home.

### **4.3 Object Contexts; Object Histories**

Diverse anthropological theories propose examining people’s relationship to material culture as shaped by an individual’s life trajectory (Csizszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981:16), by factors that are economically moderated (Appadurai 1986:37), historically situated (Buchli 2002:1), and culturally mediated (Miller 2005:34). Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, scholars in the region became intensely interested in the effects of Western liberal “shock therapy” of the 1990s. On the one hand, liberalization made available a range of

previously unavailable consumer goods in Russia; on the other, it encouraged, sometimes quite forcibly, a new set of practices that emerged from privatization and free trade. As Caroline Humphrey has argued, the decentralized market was “not experienced as a purely economic phenomenon” (2002:1); rather, changing market forces caused profound transformations at the political, institutional and social levels, to which ordinary people responded “according to their own priorities, social pressures and values” (2002:12). Thomas Matza has argued that a discourse of neoliberal governmentality disseminated through popular media, such as self-help radio, gave rise to new subjectivities “consistent with neoliberal political rationality” (Matza 2009:508). It is worth examining whether such subjectivities apply to intellectuals, who have traditionally espoused a different set of values, and to contemporary transnational migrants, who may seek opportunities abroad precisely because such opportunities offer a counterpoint to Russia’s recent focus on materiality.

Jennifer Patico articulates a seemingly contradictory set of values espoused by schoolteachers in St. Petersburg; on the one hand, they esteemed being “cultured,” decrying “post-Soviet class developments and crass nouveau riche materialism” (2005:480) over such moral embodiments of value as kindness and respectability (2005:480). On the other hand, they esteemed being “civilized,” embodiments of value asserted by material possessions as a set of “lifestyle possibilities presented by global capitalist integration” (2005:479-480). Michelle Rivkin-Fish argues that such seemingly contradictory values co-exist amongst middle-class, educated Russians, who see themselves both as a consumer class, embracing new modes of social stratification, and as members of the intelligentsia (2009:79). While the “intelligentsia” conveys an “image of respect, admiration, and moral authority” (2009:91), it also involves a

narrative of moral restitution for past material privation incurred at the hands of the Soviet regime (2009:85).

Hypothetically, these discourses ought to be replicated by post-Soviet migrant intellectuals, who, as an educated class, are usually better positioned to seek economic opportunities abroad. M.C. Savoskul contends that in the 1990s, the main motivation for highly-qualified Russian migrants to move abroad was the possibility of improving their material well-being in economically prosperous countries like Germany (2014:127). This earned migrants the derisive nickname, the “sausage emigration” (which I further discuss in Chapter Six), because they managed to evade food shortages in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s. However, in tandem with Savoskul, my research did not substantiate similar motivations amongst present-day migrants, who had seemingly turned this relationship on its head. Acknowledging that their Russian colleagues likely earn more money, Russian intellectuals described moving abroad in pursuit of personal and professional growth (2014:128). In my interviews, I discovered that Soviet, rather than post-Soviet intellectual migrants, placed higher symbolic importance on material possessions, if not, more generally, on material well-being.

Aleksandr Morozov lived in Prague for several years before accepting a temporary academic position in Bonn, Germany. During our walk around the city, he describes his relationship to Russia, as well as his reasons for moving to Europe:

*Aleksandr Morozov:* I am very rooted in Russian life. I was born and raised there. I always liked it. I liked living both in the Soviet Union, and without the Soviet Union, and I was well established there. Suddenly, around five years ago, I noticed that what drew me to Russia had disappeared. [...] Suddenly, I thought, why am I not traveling and seeing the world? I was already 50, 51 at the time. I decided that I will go and live in Europe, simply as a tourist. I went to the Czech Republic for three months. [...] Those three months changed me. I said, I should continue. [...] For me, it's not easy. I am not so young, in contrast to the youth who surrounds me. The youth belong to a global world, they speak English, and they easily learn new languages. For me, it's not easy, but it is very interesting.

Migration is considered a journey of personal self-discovery. As a political scientist, Aleksandr maintains a professional relationship with Russian audiences, but seeks opportunities abroad as a “tourist,” an explanation that underlines his flexibility as a global traveler, years after his move. Comparing examples from literature with his own experiences, Aleksandr describes how he sees people evaluate Soviet and post-Soviet material worlds:

*Aleksandr Morozov:* Reading Nabokov, for example, *Invitation of a Beheading*, there is tremendous meaning attributed to the material world. Every table, every chifferonier has meaning. Having moved abroad, the author lost his material environment, if not the makeup of his entire world [...] I don't prescribe myself to the people who mourn the loss of a Soviet material world. I interpret it with humour. That I lived in a Soviet home. When I was ten, my family, who were factory workers, received an apartment. I now had a small nine-metre room, a standard writing desk, and a sofa. The world was equal to all. These were the circumstances of the Soviet world. You could have a Soviet dish set, or a very good Romanian dish set. If you had a good family, your pencils were not Soviet, but Koh-I-Noor, from Czechoslovakia. But that was the end of the road. Now, the world is completely different in this respect. I say this, because in contrast to those who came to Europe back then, I have nothing to lament.

Aleksandr argues that in contrast to present-day migrants, Soviet émigrés lost a large part of their material world. Moreover, present-day migrants are more globally-oriented, and they no longer desire to live in Russian-specific material contexts, but according to the values of their host societies. It is worth noting that Aleksandr discusses people's changing relationship to objects in a similar manner he discusses his own migration: as a metonym of a globalized world.

Aleksandr's description is palpable when contrasted with an excerpt from Vladimir Nabokov's autobiography, *Invitation of a Memory* (1966), in which, following the Russian Revolution, the writer chronicles his journey from St. Petersburg to Europe and the United States, all with his *valise* in hand:

In 1917 it transported from St. Petersburg to Crimea and then to London a handful of jewels. Around 1930, it lost to a pawnbroker its expensive receptacles of crystal and silver leaving empty the cunningly contrived leathern holders on the inside of the lid. But that loss has been amply recouped during the thirty years it then traveled with me—from Prague to Paris, from St. Nazaire to New York and through the mirrors of more than two hundred motel rooms and rented houses, in forty-six states. The fact that of our Russian heritage the hardiest survivor proved to be a traveling bag is both logical and emblematic (1966:143)

Nabokov's description reveals that "immateriality can only be expressed through materiality" (Miller 2005:28), in that the author's family valise only grows in symbolic importance as it sheds more and more of its "Russian identity" on its journey. Janet Hoskins (1998) describes objects that acquire patina and that share their lives with people: "[as] they gradually deteriorate and fade with years, we recognize our own aging in the mirror of these personal possessions" (Hoskins 1998:8). In both accounts, ethnographic and literary, biographical objects are deeply interwoven with their owners' cultural identity.

In the process of moving from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and '80s, Soviet intellectuals had to renounce their passports, representing their Soviet citizenship; give up their state-sanctioned apartments, and accept harsh limitations to what they could carry in their luggage, and the amount of currency they could bring. Ekaterina Etkind describes her migration journey in the context of her family's exile from Russia: "my father once said, and he said this very well: we are well received here, but we will always be guests. We'll never be 'svoi' [one's own], even after receiving French citizenship." In St. Petersburg, Ekaterina worked at *Moyka-12*, the nickname and the address for the *All-Soviet Museum-Apartment of A.S. Pushkin*, dedicated to Russia's most celebrated nineteenth-century Russian poet. "You will not believe me anyways," says Ekaterina, "but I held in my hands Pushkin's own notebook, in which he played battleship with his mother." After working at the archives, Ekaterina started giving tours of the museum-apartment:

*Ekaterina Etkind:* I remember it by heart. I could host a tour in my sleep. I see a leather couch, his desk, on which there is a letter from [Aleksandra] Ishimova, a children's author who wrote Russian history books. Pushkin's reply he never sent, along with a review of that book. At that time, every staff member had to guard the premises for one night. When it was my turn, I had the impression that Alexander Sergeevich would come out and say, "what are you doing here?"

A material world preserved both in the space of the museum and in Ekaterina's memories is remembered to the last detail. Upon moving to France, Ekaterina felt she had to continue working to preserve Pushkin's legacy, because before leaving the Soviet Union, her colleagues gifted her a copy of Pushkin's death mask: "I couldn't not continue. They said, 'you will not be able to live over there without Pushkin.' And it's true. This became the foundation for the opening of the exhibit on Pushkin in Paris in 1995." The death mask symbolizes Ekaterina's

connection to the poet, but also her professional identity and her family history. As Daniel Miller would argue (2005:28), the more transcendent Ekaterina's valuation of her personal mission to acquaint the French with Alexander Pushkin, the more symbolic weight she attached to the material form of this transcendence.

#### **4.4 Object Identities**

During my interviews, I asked research participants to select and describe an object they found significant to their migration journey. I only asked that participants limit the maximum size of the object to the dimensions of the suitcase, and that they would be willing to talk about what they selected in front of a camera. During our interview, I asked participants to momentarily place this object inside a vintage suitcase that later became the foundation for a multi-media installation, *Still Life with a Suitcase*. Thus, in recording my research interviews, I was simultaneously assembling my own digital research archive of participants' objects of migration.

I found that the best way to examine how participants interpreted objects was to ask participants about them, and to interpret their answers using the same categories that participants themselves used. In Chapter One, I discussed my research participant Genia Chef's installation, *My Personal Temple* (2007), in which the artist placed objects inside a tent as way to claim an artistic space for himself. The exhibition totalled thirty-one objects belonging to the artist, which included a set of keys from his studio, his watch, his cell phone, some paint—"umbra, which I brought from Moscow," Genia tells me—and his boots, "in which I traveled from Moscow to the West." Genia argues that "for an artist to feel at home, they need at least one object! But this object should be an important fetish that aids them in their life."

Genia's contribution to my digital archive was a wristwatch. The object was presented to him as "a valuable gift" during his graduation from the Moscow Polygraphic Institute for his work illustrating a book of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry. Following the artist's migration, this object acquired new meanings as a relic of a nomadic artist:

*Genia Chef:* I have the term, "Around the Corner," [spoken in English] *Za uglom*. It's a border state where something unexpected happens. [...] I made illustrations to Poe and exhibited them in front of my defence committee. And I received first place. It was a very personal victory. I didn't just win first place, but I was also given this watch, a "valuable gift." This watch became a symbol for me. A symbol that we have to trust time. Time brings everything to the one who knows how to wait.

Genia's narrative reveals that an object such as a wristwatch can become an important symbol that would allow him to "feel at home." When this object was displayed in the exhibition *My Personal Temple* (2007), it both connected the artist to his practice, and also underlined his migration journey. The object thus reinforces Genia's mobile identity as a global nomad: "a guest wherever [...] he produces his creative space."

For his contribution to the digital archive, Matvei Yankelevich, an independent publisher who runs a small press in Brooklyn, chose a *samizdat* booklet, a self-published work by Moscow avant-garde poet Dmitry Prigov. In the Soviet Union, such booklets were printed on a typewriter, under layers of calque paper that could produce up to five simultaneous copies. Matvei explains the significance of this object to him:

*Matvei Yankelevich*: Recently, or maybe not so recently, I've been asking myself questions about my role running a "small press," an independent press that distributes non-commercial literature in the States. How is this system of connections similar or dissimilar to the samizdat situation? [...] I don't understand what attracts me to printing machines, to the underground. It's old equipment that is handed over to non-professionals like me, who try to print and distribute books, including poetry. But we also print books by Prigov, Rubinstein, and that whole generation. This was important for my family.

Matvei's object is one that carries both a personal significance, in that the object affirms his role as a "small press" publisher; a social role, in that it places him within the purview of the family's intellectual and dissident "underground" tradition, and a historical significance, in that the object is a memento of Soviet *samizdat* literature printed by a prominent avant-garde poet.

In her study of border crossings in postsocialist Poland, Kathy Burrell argues that objects such as suitcases become powerful metaphors for migration studies, because they represent "loss, trauma and displacement" (Burrell 2008:362). However, they also serve as companions, figuratively embodying "the new life promised by moving to another country" (2008:362), which "strengthen, and to some extent shape, the transnational bonds of migrants" (2008:367). The sheer diversity of meanings evident in participants' descriptions about objects they chose to talk about render such binary definitions suspect. While objects participants describe traveled abroad, they cannot be considered solely as "tripper, traveler or tourist objects" (Lury 1997:6-7). Neither could they be interpreted as uniquely metaphorical, or as objects of *Ostalgie* (Berdahl 1999b:203), representing nostalgia for a collective post-Soviet memory. Finally, despite originating in Russia, it would either be saying too little, or too much to claim these objects represented "Russianness" (Pechurina 2015:25), owing to their hybrid identities and

adaptations to new cultural contexts.

Diverse and often contradictory meanings people attach to objects suggest that the problem of interpretation is not the lack of theoretical refinement, but the fact that anthropologists do not have “independent access to people’s consciousness, memories, or the past” (Irving 2007:186). Considering such constraints, should ethnographers studying material culture continue to pursue the “meaning of things” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981)? Or, in less categorical terms, should ethnographers seek to become “mediators,” or “midwives” of meaning (Karp and Kratz 2014)? As Karp and Kratz contend, meanings attached to things “are not always articulated or easily articulable” (2014:54). On the one hand, “meaning can be tacit or implicit and often bound to context” (2014:55), and on the other, meaning may not be made manifest during an ethnographic interview, because “telling can often get in the way of meaning” (2014:55). Using the example of assembling a museum collection, Karp and Kratz argue that curators must recognize that museum visitors will “construct narrative continuities, even if unintended” (2014:59). Consequently, the authors suggest that a diversity of interpretations signals to the fact that curators should strive to mediate, rather than impose a set of meanings on a collection. However, should curators be seen as external to the process of interpreting a collection if they are themselves responsible for its assembly?

Ethnographies are not “neutral interpretive instruments” (Wertsch 2001:511), because ethnography is itself mediated by field notes, diaries, transcriptions, textual translation, and video and audio recordings that must be decontextualized from dispersed sources, only to be brought together again. An ethnographic collection, which results from an ethnographic

encounter, “obliterates what it preserves” (Fabian 2007:102), meaning that anthropologists are actively involved not only in mediating meaning, but in creating it. As Daniel Miller suggests, our relationship to things and the meanings we attribute to them is mutually constitutive (2015:15), because “the very act of creating form creates consciousness [which] thereby transforms both form and the self-consciousness of that which has consciousness” (2015:9). I argue that at least part of this meaning is created during an ethnographic interview, when ethnographers ask their participants to describe the “meaning of things.”

In the previous chapter, I followed Andrew Irving’s suggestion that people’s interpretation of objects in an ethnographic setting should be considered a “staged encounter” (Irving 2007:186). Such an encounter, “carried out as a social drama aimed at self-representation” (Irving 2007:193), is a performance of identity that cannot be reduced to a single set of parameters, because memories, experiences, places, and objects of migration will be enunciated differently by different people, in different contexts, and at different times. As Irving suggests, an approach “recognizing the capacity for people to be their own theorists” (2007:197), takes seriously “the role of informants in shaping anthropological debate” (2007:197). This approach, which solicits input from participants by favouring performative, rather than informative ethnographic methods (van Diederren 2009), can be contextualized more broadly, since, as Johannes Fabian argues, what “we call ‘performance’ is involved in creatively giving expression and meaning to experience; it is also required to studying such expression” (1990:xv). Subsequent sections of this chapter are therefore shaped by framing—and listening to how research participants wished to frame—a performance of identity as recounted through transnational objects of migration.

#### **4.4.1 Object Mementos**

*On the next page (Figure 6), I attached a digital copy of a colour photograph of my family. I did not know this photograph existed, and I do not remember posing for it. It was taken at our family dacha, the country cottage where I spent every summer of my childhood. The photograph could very well be my contribution to a digital migration archive. To me, it represents a perfectly innocent childhood moment, but to make it happen, all the adult members of my family had to synchronize their summer vacations for when mom and I visited from Canada. At that point, we had been abroad for less than three years.*

*In the back of the photograph, and at least a head taller than everyone else, stands my grandfather. My grandmother's sisters stand in front of him; the youngest wraps her hand around the middle sister's hand, barely in view of the camera. My grandmother playfully clutches her daughter, as well as an awkward, wriggly preteen whom I barely recognize. It must be me. I discovered the photograph recently, in my mother's photo album labeled "1996," which stood on a bookshelf by my bedside in Toronto. The preceding page of the album depicts a trip to France with my mom, and the subsequent one, our return trip to Canada through Montreal, during which my grandmother came to visit us in Toronto for the first time.*



Figure 6. A photograph of my family at the *dacha*, 1996.

Across the metro stop *Park Kultury*, the Park of Culture, formerly known as *Park Gor'kogo*, Gorky Park, I walk up a long, spiralling cement ramp leading into a large exhibition space. I came to an art opening at the Museum of Moscow for a retrospective exhibition of Moscow non-conformist artists active in the 1970s and 1980s and known as the Moscow Conceptualists. In one corner of the large gallery space, the curators meticulously recreated an artist's apartment, decorated with what Svetlana Boym terms the "domestic trash" of socialism (Boym 1994:290), rubber plants and Soviet kitsch, standing against avant-garde paintings hanging on the walls. George Kiesewalter is one of the featured artists in the exhibit. George was one of the founding members of the art group "Collective Actions" and a member of the Apt-Art movement, where artists organized art shows in each other's apartments, much like the replica that stood in the corner of the exhibit.

Beginning in the early 1970s, George began taking candid black and white photographs chronicling the performances, lifestyles, and living spaces of the Moscow Conceptualists, thus producing a large archive of the movement. As a non-conformist artist in the Soviet Union, he first described himself as an "internal emigrant," but when the opportunity arose in 1996, he emigrated from Russia to Canada. Dissatisfied with his prospects as an artist there, he returned to Moscow a decade later. Upon his return, George describes clearing out his apartment:

*George Kiesewalter:* Things – they occasionally elicit shock. I remember when I just came back from Canada, I had to clear things out of my apartment for a move, and I climbed up to the attic. I started to dig out things I had completely forgotten about. They became foreign to me, and now they spilled over me. I was *v polnom daune*, in total gloom, because I didn't know what to do with them. I had already transitioned to another life. This is why I wrote in my book that having gone to Canada and then having come back, I died twice. (See also *Installation video 1: George Kiesewalter*)

For our interview about a personal object, George picked a small teddy-bear:

*George Kieseewalter:* This object relates to, as I later understood it, my mother. Originally, it was her toy, during her childhood. That was some time in the 1930s. Then, when I was small, we hung it as a New Year's tree ornament, but when I was ten or eleven—a fairly grown up boy—I suddenly rediscovered this bear. I started having breakfast with it, putting it on the table next to me. We had very tender relations. I would also put him to bed. So, this object, this teddy bear, reminds me of my mom, with tenderness, and of this interesting period in my life. (see also *Installation video 1: George Kieseewalter*)

George's object restores continuity between his family history and his younger self. It is an object from a lost time, before any type of "internal" or "external" emigration, and the Canadian period is notably absent from his narrative. He describes the years in Canada as a lonely experience, one which gave him "a lot of time to think." His object is reminiscent of what many of us describe as the happiest period of our lives: our childhood. Toys hung up as New Year's ornaments signalled to a happy time of family gatherings and celebrations. As Susan Stewart (1984) argues, this type of object, a nostalgic, miniature toy, generates narratives that look backwards and inwards, rather than outwards and towards the future, a time expressing a lost world, forever gone for adults (quoted in Witcomb 2012: 41).

In the novel *Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, author Dubravka Ugrešić describes her mother's photo collection, which lay in the closet "hidden in a lady's pigskin bag" (1998:16). As family members grow older or pass away, the weathered bag is replaced by neatly organized and constantly reordered photo albums:

[T]he act of arranging pictures in an album is dictated by our unconscious desire to show life in all its variety, and as a consequence life is reduced to a series of dead fragments. Autobiography has similar problems in the technology of remembering; it is concerned with what once was, and the trouble is that what was once is being recorded by someone who is now (Ugrešić 1998a:31).

Personal memories, represented by objects stuffed into a pigskin bag, are chaotically entangled with the lives of the living: they are “living memories.” Photo albums “freeze time,” allowing people to arrange a coherent narrative of their lives, but a narrative that unfolds as “the life of ‘the past’ in the present” (Radstone 2011:113). Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey suggest that personal mementos such as photographs also mediate our relationship with death (2001:3). However, the meanings of these objects are not easily decipherable, because “memories flood forward through marginal materials or objects so ordinary that they once commanded no special attention” (Hallam and Hockey 2001:12). As I have shown above, even an object such as a teddy bear, esteemed by George as a memento representing a “lost world,” picks up important meanings along the way, representing memories following both the physical death of his mother, and a symbolic death, represented by his own migration.

#### **4.4.2 Object Metaphors**

*What I find so extraordinary about my family photo is how ordinary it must have felt to pose for it in that moment, and how distant that moment feels now. I am also reminded how significantly my life was shaped by the women in the photograph who wear long summer sarafans with flowered patterns. Sometimes stern, but more often kind, and always self-respecting, the three sisters have had a profound impact on my life. Their vocations, as professors of geology, psychology and geography, loomed large in my decision to pursue an*

*academic career, but jobs never exclusively defined members of my family. To me, the three sisters have always been Sveta, Tanya, and bábushka, or grandma.*

*There is a familiar geometry in the composition of the frame. All the women stand at approximately the same height, forming a straight line across the photograph. My grandfather stands in the back, next to my grandmother, partially occupying a space made vacant by my short height. I imagine that we form an axis that crosses the frame diagonally. My grandfather was, and remains, the most positive male role model I had in my life. I grew up to be as tall as him, although we never had the chance to stand side by side for comparison. I selfishly feel that somehow, the lines converge on me, both as a perk of being an only child, and as a responsibility. I was unable to return to Russia this summer, reliving summer memories by revisiting old photo albums. When I took this photograph out of the album to scan it, I realized how fragile this object, which framed three generations of family history, really was. When I ask my mom about my grandmother and her sisters, she tells me about their summer progress at the dacha, picking raspberries and making preserves, updates that I receive with a deep sense of melancholy.*

Photographs are “tactile, sensory things” (Edwards 2006:28). But they are also relational objects, which “not only represent but also evoke, [...] maintaining, reproducing and articulating shifting [social] relations” (2006:29). Photographs are also forms of extended personhood, projecting the past into the future and allowing people to tell histories (2006:32). But equally, as Les Back argues, “[t]he figures in these portraits look back” (2007:137). Photographs are not only taken, they are also given:

There are at least two senses in which these pictures are given. The first is in the sense of the verb, to give. Those who look back give them; their look is a gift that is received. The second is in the sense of the adjective, something that is assumed as a premise. This is a description of a condition that outlines a sense of being that isn't fully articulated. (Back 2004:138)

In combining an analysis of my personal object—a family photograph—with participants' objects—a *samizdat* booklet, a wristwatch, or a teddy bear—I claim to share a similar experiential realm with my participants. Making such claims, I concur with Michael Renov, who argues that for “the domestic ethnographer, there is no fully outside position available” (Renov 1999:142). In a situation where traditional and domestic ethnography are combined in a single text, I am keen to recognize that “[a]uthorial subjectivity is explicitly in question or on display” (1999:143). When describing something as complex as a photograph, “[i]n dealing with personal and social memories that are perceived as distinctively ‘intangible,’ recourse to metaphor has provided a means by which they are made accessible” (Hallam and Hockey 2001:23). In this section, I have so far focused on the metaphorical qualities of objects to communicate a complex and entangled process of migration. Shifting to a dialogic approach, I now turn to the way participants discuss metaphorical qualities of biographical objects, which represent their migration journeys.

When I first came to interview Nune at her home in Berlin, I was invited to a cup of coffee. Nune is an Armenian-born writer and psychologist who studied at the Moscow State University, but who left Russia for Berlin in 1993. Having worked as a psychological counsellor for Russian migrants in hospices and intensive care, Nune became inspired to write fiction. She recently published a novel, *A Diary for Friends* (A. Nune 2015), where the narrator tells the story

from beyond the grave. In selecting her object, Nune chose a *cezve*, a traditional Armenian coffee pot with a handle:

*Nune Barsegian*: Armenia, where I am from originally, is a country that favours coffee. Over there, young women must know how to brew coffee. It's an entire ritual; it's all very hard. I had to learn it, and I learned it. Then, I developed more contemporary feminist views, and I decided that I shouldn't have to do this. Later, guests started coming to visit me from Russia. They were all obsessed with brewed coffee in the *cezve*, and everyone was dismayed that I didn't have this *cezve*, and that they were deprived of this coffee in the mornings. So I asked someone to bring this *cezve* from Armenia, specifically for these guests. When they come, I brew coffee in this *cezve*. And I also drink it myself. (See also *Installation video 2*: Nune Barsegian)

Nune's narrative may be interpreted as an example of the separation between her Russian-Armenian identity, which she temporarily rejects, but which she later performs for her Russian visitors, and her current identity, galvanized by Western European and feminist values. However, Nune's account of her objects reveals a different narrative trajectory. Following Hoskins, who focuses on "metaphors involving objects, which tell a story that then provides a unity to a sometimes disparate self" (Hoskins 1998:12), I argue that Nune's object functions as a metaphor for the synthesis of cultural identities. The *cezve* becomes a biographical object when it is brought back from Armenia and assimilated into her migrant identity as a tool that provides personal continuity in the face of cultural change. However, rather than performing a patriarchal ritual, the object becomes part of a new tradition: preparing coffee for friends. It is first narrated as a metaphor that symbolizes traditional Armenian patriarchy, but soon begins to represent Nune's agency—a self-conscious synthesis of Armenian and Western values. In such a use of the object, it is instructive to recall Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey's argument that memory is

not only embodied (2001:43), but conceptualized through metaphor (2001:32), allowing Nune both to transcend and synthesize diverse forms of cultural expression.

#### **4.4.3 Object Heritage**

*Back then, my family ran the dacha like a small factory. I realize now that my role was enviable, because I could seamlessly weave from one activity to the next. With my grandfather, who constantly engineered improvements on the territory, I helped hammer in nails and saw lumber. My grandmother, the oldest of the three sisters, tended after the flower garden in front of the house, and I would reluctantly help her weed the garden beds, where we planted carrots, beets and herbs. The middle sister, my great-aunt, used to take the long scythe to the goutweeds, and I'd rake the weeds together into big piles. I'd coax the youngest sister to go on walks to the river to avoid picking various fruit and berries cultivated on the property: apples, plums, raspberries and blackberries, red- and blackcurrant, and gooseberries, which I loathed, because its needles would prick the skin. We would then hull the berries and deseed the fruit to make dozens of jams and preserves, which we stored in the cellar under my grandfather's shed. In the early days, we also planted potatoes, which fed the family during food shortages.*

*As the matriarch of the family, my grandmother would oversee all food preparation. I remember her making Gogol'-mogol', a mousse she prepared by hand-beating eggs and sugar together in an enamel mug, or by adding raspberries into the mix, until my grandfather intervened by fashioning a hand-mixer out of his electric drill. Our life at the dacha seemingly revolved around our meals, which we ate together on the veranda. Afterwards, everyone would retreat for a nap, but I could never sleep during the day and would go read in the hammock.*

For our interview, Alexander Genis chose a large ledger notebook, which was used in his hometown of Riga to track ships arriving into the port, but which now stored family recipes.

*Alexander Genis:* There are recipes here passed down from my mom, my aunt and my grandmother. The most valuable thing we had were these recipes, which preserve family continuity. I already thought about what remains from our parents, our home, our past. Recipes. When my mother died, I realized that I will never eat gefilte fish again. And along with a school friend, we thoroughly restored our mothers' recipes, and prepared gefilte fish. My mom's gefilte fish recipe, which she cooked, is in here. (see also *Installation video 3: Alexander Genis*)

As a family object, the recipe book is not dissimilar from the previous two examples; it is a memento that provides personal continuity, especially in light of Alexander's mother's passing, and because it does not literally speak to family continuity, the object also functions as a metaphor. However, following his emigration, Alexander started adding recipes of friends, who are themselves often acclaimed émigré journalists, artists and writers. When he cooks meals following their instructions, he says he feels he is "dining with them." Thus, upon emigration, the object is able both to acquire and to communicate new meanings abroad. Alexander adapted to his new cultural environment, but so did his family heirloom. This "singularized" (Appadurai 1986:17) object is reintroduced as a cultural commodity creating a tradition, "invented—and, in some cases, ritualized" (Berdahl 1999a:12), of dining with friends across long distances.

Alexander's strong identification with the "third wave" of emigration, as well as his insistence that he knew practically all its New York representatives, renders a disjunctive and dramatic experience of migration, which Alexander described as being "akin to death," not only comprehensible, but social as well. In the 1980s, in collaboration with Petr Vayl', Alexander

wrote *Russian Cuisine in Exile* (2001[1987]), a bestselling book translated into many different languages and composed almost entirely of culinary recipes. Referencing Danton's famous aphorism that one's homeland cannot be carried on the soles of one's boots, which I discuss at length in the next chapter, the authors write:

You can't take your motherland on the soles of your boots, but you can take Oriental crabs, savoury Tallin sprats, Praline waffle cakes, "Mishka of the North" chocolates, curative mineral water "Essentuki" (preferably Number Seventeen). With such a price-list (also, strong Russian mustard), life abroad (and hot pressed sunflower oil) appears better (lightly-marinated tomatoes) and more enjoyable (six-star cognac "Ararat"). (Genis and Vayl' 2001[1987]:30)

As a writer who can produce cultural texts that function to articulate his personal experiences as a migrant, Alexander's cultural production feeds into the articulation of a Russian migrant identity, in part, through objects that are vested with meanings of cultural heritage.

#### **4.5 Conclusion: (Re)discovered Objects**

*In organizing digital footage for inclusion in the installation, Still Life with a Suitcase, I generally considered myself to be a prudent, if amateur, archivist. It was, after all, a professional obligation to organize and safeguard my data. Then, I discovered a case full of hard drives with my previous film projects, their interfaces obsolete with my current computer; a shoebox of Mini-DV tapes that could no longer be read through my camera deck, as well as rolls and reels of Super-8 and 16mm film I never digitized. A box of VHS tapes lies in storage and a row of DVDs stand on my bookshelf. While maintaining this archive could be termed what Bill Nichols calls documentary epistophilia, "a pleasure in knowing, that marks out a distinctive form of social engagement" (Nichols 1991:178), these materials of film production have become*

“dead media” (Sterling 1995), *relegated to memories and tempered under lock and key of obsolescence.*

*Last winter, I bought a vintage photo camera and walked around Toronto, photographing familiar places, and making portraits of family and friends. I brought these photos with me to Berlin and pinned them around my apartment to deflect the nostalgia I felt for the city at the time. When I came back to Toronto this summer, I discovered an undeveloped roll of film I assumed remained from that batch. When I sent the roll to the lab, I was astonished when I recognized myself as an exuberant twenty-year-old; the roll was fourteen years old. As luck would have it, rediscovering a long-neglected medium produced a set of photographs that evoked new memories, an accidental approach to “making memory in the present.”*

In this chapter, I relied on a personal relationship with a biographical object—a family photograph, which became a mnemonic for a range of metaphorical, mediated, and narrativized memories—to examine wider narratives related to objects of migration. These narratives showed that while a biographic object “may have ‘personal’, ‘sentimental’ meaning,” this meaning “is not deemed intrinsic to the object” (Lury 1997:79). I argue that Russian intellectual migrants who participated in this research have similarly used objects to facilitate narrating their migration as a flexible, shifting, and negotiable process responsive to those aspects of their lives they wished to make manifest.

Tim Ingold suggests that people make objects similarly to the way birds weave their homes, in that no pre-existing “designs” exist in the mind of their makers: “the forms of objects are not imposed from above but grow from the mutual involvement of people and materials in

an environment” (2000:68). This is a process of *autopoiesis* (2000:61), whereby people “weave the world,” uniting their cultural imagination with the material surroundings (2000:68). During my interviews, such objects as an Armenian *cezve*, an artist’s wristwatch, and a recipe book, showed how “people have invented, and to some extent ritualized, cultural practices that both reflect and constitute profound identity negotiations and transformations” (Berdahl 1999a:229). As I have shown in the context of late Soviet and post-Soviet migration journeys, objects gain biographical value when they become interweaved with the biographies of their owners (Lury 1997:83). As these objects are prominently displayed in people’s homes, rearranged in their private collections, or forgotten and rediscovered many years later, meanings assigned to them become as flexible, diverse and complex, as the search for identity itself.

## Chapter 5: “And with Me, My Russia/I Bring Along in a Traveling Bag”:

### Narratives of Russian Emigration and Exile, Past and Present.

Born in Moscow. Never did I see  
Smoke billow from the Polish rooftops.  
An amulet with soil from my homeland,  
My father never did bequeath to me.

I’m Russia’s son; to Poland,  
I do not know who I am,  
But eight little volumes, no more,  
And in them, my entire homeland.

I howl under the yoke over my back,  
To live a life of exile, melancholy,  
And with me, my Russia,  
I bring along in a traveling bag.

—Vladislav Khodasevich, *Untitled* (1991[1923])

#### 5.1 Introduction

A much-circulated trope amongst post-Revolutionary refugees from Bolshevik Russia stated that upon emigration, “Russia” became reconstituted “outside Russia.” This narrative became central to how subsequent émigrés imagined their journeys abroad, simultaneously asserting historical continuity with other “waves” of Russian emigration and defining their own migration trajectory in opposition to them. In this chapter, I continue investigating transnational narratives of migration between Moscow, Paris, Berlin, and New York through ethnographic interviews and archival sources. I contend that tropes of a spiritual connection to Russia made popular by first-wave émigrés, continue to circulate amongst present-day Russian intellectuals. Simultaneously, beginning in the early 2000s, Russian state officials began to promote an irredentist, nationalist discourse. I argue that at least part of this ideology borrows from first-wave émigrés, since Russian state strategists have increasingly come to rely on a fragile and internally-contested set of diasporic identities for Russia’s own self-definition.

For a bar occupied by half a dozen regulars and filled to the brim with nostalgic Alpine kitsch, the air is disproportionately thick with cigarette smoke, the smell of stale beer, and an occasional outburst of laughter. It is three o'clock on a Thursday morning in a working-class Berlin neighbourhood of *Wedding* when Zhenya Oks wraps up his set. Originally from Odessa, thirty-two-year-old Zhenya has lived in Berlin for over two decades, but considers himself to be a Russian immigrant. Zhenya bases many of his songs on poems written by Russian émigrés—Vladislav Khodasevich, Marina Tsvetaeva and Vladimir Nabokov—poets who lived in, and wrote about, Berlin. He considers setting poetry to music, composing songs with ready-made lyrics, to be an act of translation across genres, cultures, and time. Sitting down to a tall lager and a cigarette, Zhenya tells me,

*Zhenya Oks:* For me, it's very contemporary. When I read those verses for the first time, I saw Berlin as it is today [...] There are people who bring their Russia over here with them. I don't know how it was in the 1920s, but I think it must have been similar. Yes, there is a Russian world abroad.

Zhenya proposes that *Russia itself* can be made mobile, carried over and reconstituted abroad. This parallels the sentiment expressed in Vladislav Khodasevich's poem quoted in the epigraph, written in transit between St. Petersburg and Berlin in 1921. The poem underscores the idea that Russian culture, represented by Alexander Pushkin's eight-volume set of collected works, can be transported abroad. While Zhenya acknowledges stark differences between post-Revolutionary mass emigration in the 1920s, and migration today, he articulates a common migration experience by reflecting on his own journey:

*Zhenya Oks*: Perhaps it sounds banal, but every immigrant has something in common.

Irrespective of the reasons they left, they moved to a new country, where, initially, everything is foreign [...] I've lived here for twenty years, and yet, something is still missing. At the same time, I realize that I can never live back there. It seems like I'm suspended somewhere in the middle; [...] I'm not an *Odessit*, rooted in Odessa, but neither am I a Berliner. Occasionally, this weighs on me.

Zhenya thus articulates cosmopolitan values that reveal “complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and multiple allegiances [...] that lie beyond the boundaries of [his] resident nation-state” (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:2). Such sentiments could be identified by what James Clifford calls “diasporic consciousness” (1994:312), highlighting the “experiences of loss, marginality, and exile” (1994:312) and coexisting with skills that amplify “strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal” (1994:312). Such formulations also provoked social scientists to suggest “postnational social formations” (Appadurai 1996:167), questioning stable affinities to single nation-states by proposing that diasporas are living in regimes of “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1993:747), in the case of overseas Chinese from Hong Kong in Britain, and “cultural hybridity” (Hall 2003:235), in the case of Afro-Caribbean diasporas. However, Zhenya’s penchant for seeing contemporary resonance in century-old poems written by Russian émigrés beckoned me to further explore the weight of such complex affiliations, which connect historical and present-day intellectual discourses abroad, both to self-identity and to nationhood.

Zhenya’s account makes evident that post-Revolutionary émigrés continue to influence present-day intellectual migrant narratives. Drawing comparisons between these historical and contemporary accounts, I evaluate how Russian intellectuals negotiate their identity abroad as a

“political struggle to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (Clifford 1994:308). Before I begin to do this, however, I provide a brief overview of my family’s connection to the Bolshevik Revolution as a means to analyze dominant tropes of the Russian migration that followed it, beginning with the intelligentsia’s exile on board the “Philosophers’ Ships,” as well as their reception by fellow émigrés abroad.

*My great-great-grandfather, who called himself a “consummate proletariat,” described becoming taken with revolutionary ideas in 1876, at the age of nineteen. As a country schoolteacher, he sought to bring “critical thought to the popular masses.” He wrote about hiding revolutionary terrorists in his school, and about experiencing harassment at the hands of the gendarmerie, which surveilled his family and repeatedly searched his home. In his memoirs, he details attending secret gatherings of revolutionaries in Kiev who sang Ukrainian folk songs and only called each other by their revolutionary nicknames. As a Marxist schoolteacher in the Russian Empire, he organized a “conspiratorial teachers’ library,” risking katorga, penal labour, and even the gallows, if he was ever caught. His obituary dated July 8, 1930, reads that he was a member of the “working-class intelligentsia.”*

Having facilitated a regime that eventually dispossessed them (Rivkin-Fish 2009:90), during the Soviet era, the intelligentsia had to contend with various contradictions of its new predicament. At the onset, Lenin “preached that only the intelligentsia could bring ‘revolutionary consciousness’ to the working class, but had always been suspicious and ill disposed toward them” (Heller and Nekrich 1986:56). However, especially following the Second World War, “educated groups enjoyed privileges that working-class people did not and

perceived an implicit societal recognition that their work had greater status and value” (Rivkin-Fish 2009:90). How does one begin to define the Soviet intelligentsia today, if the term evokes both an attitude of collaboration and opposition to the regime, enmity towards class-based distinctions and insistence upon them, and a discourse that highlights both privilege and dispossession at different moments of Soviet and post-Soviet history?

I consider a key event in the Soviet history of the intelligentsia to be the 1922-23 exile of intellectuals from Bolshevik Russia aboard the “Philosophers’ Ships”; events that triggered the dissemination of émigré narratives that sought to portray the intelligentsia’s spiritual connection with Russia, and which vindicated both its intellectual identity and its status abroad. I investigate how migrants from the late Soviet and early post-Soviet eras articulated their migration trajectory by selectively borrowing from this familiar trope. Finally, moving away from discussing migration narratives abroad, I make a symbolic return to Russia, examining how post-Revolutionary migrant discourses became co-opted by Russian state officials in enacting policy decisions that shaped both foreign and domestic state ideology. An implicit argument runs through the entire chapter, suggesting that what is at stake in analyzing migration discourses is not simply a range of ideas about Russian migration, but what defines Russia and Russian identity, questions that are as relevant today, as they were following the Russian Revolution.

## **5.2 Philosopher’s Ships**

Inna Kotchetkova (2004) traces two themes central to the historical self-definitions of the intelligentsia: “the first describes the complicated relationship between the intelligentsia

and power (the authorities)” (2004:2.8). Indeed, it was a radical Marxist faction of the intelligentsia that overthrew Alexander Kerensky’s provisional government in the revolutionary coup of 1917. The second theme “defines intelligentsia as a group responsible for its people and needed by them” (Kotchetkova 2004:2.8).

In the difficult years that followed the Revolution, and despite their disagreements with the Bolsheviks, a haphazard group of intellectuals—writers, philosophers and professors—felt united in the sacrifices they made living in post-Revolutionary Russia. Fyodor Stepun, a military officer during the First World War who adopted a moral and cosmopolitan philosophy of the Silver Age (Chamberlain 2006:42), described his life in Moscow at the time:

[A] little writer’s apartment; the iron chimney smokes. It’s cold. Some wear overcoats; others are in *fufaykakh* [overcoats], and most are in *valenki* [felt boots]. All of the philosophical and literary Moscow is in the room. Sometimes 30-40 people. Life is terrible, but the mood is enthusiastic, [...] and in many respects more significant and authentic than it was before, in the peaceful, crumbly pre-war years (Stepun quoted in Fleishman 2006:73).

Stepun reiterates one of the most persistent myths of the intelligentsia: the primacy of the ideational world over material well-being. The intelligentsia, “aristocratic in spirit and poor in means” (Boym 1994:67), continued linking its cultural identity with “the people,” romanticizing poverty and hunger over middle-class complacency, but also acting as a mouthpiece for “the people,” embodying values inculcated by good education, refined knowledge of Russian literature, and an acute sense of morality and spirituality (Boym 1994:68).

During the state-instituted Red Terror, the Bolsheviks increasingly targeted members of the intelligentsia, ceasing to make distinctions between those they considered political enemies and those they viewed merely as intellectual opponents (Finkel 2007:163). In a letter dated

May 19, 1922, Lenin urged Dzerzhinsky, the head of the *GPU*, the state secret police,<sup>22</sup> to prepare for deportations of “writers and professors helping the counterrevolution” (Lenin quoted in Heller and Nekrich 1986:142). In his response, Dzerzhinsky classified potential enemies into five subgroups: *belletristy* (writers), considered the most dangerous (Fleishman 2006:92), followed closely by *publitsisty* (journalists), economists, technical workers (engineers and doctors), and professors (Finkel 2007:175). The *GPU* arrested and interrogated suspects not for counterrevolutionary conspiracies, but for their *potential* as class enemies (Finkel 2007:188). Between the fall of 1922 and the winter of 1923, Bolsheviks exiled several hundred intellectuals on board trains and steamships; events that became known as the “Philosophers’ Ships.”<sup>23</sup>

At its root, the Philosophers’ Ships reflect an unequal antagonism between state power and an intelligentsia espousing divergent ideas on the future of Soviet society. Historian Stuart Finkel regards the deportations as “the unmaking of the old Russian intelligentsia” (Finkel 2007:2), a turning point in the Bolshevik consolidation of power that saw them shift their attention away from the immediate threats of Civil War, and toward ideological strategies that aimed to delimit a nascent Soviet state (Finkel 2007:2-3). Historians also focus on the exiled intelligentsia’s reception abroad, examining their contributions to émigré cultural and political life (Azarov 2005; Chamberlain 2006; Heller 1978; Makarov 2006). With an aim to synthesize

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<sup>22</sup> *Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoye Upravleniye*, or State Political Administration, was the Soviet secret police between 1922-1923.

<sup>23</sup> English-language historians propose competing translations—Chamberlain (2006), “The Philosophy Steamer”; Finkel (2007), “Philosopher’s Steamboat”—for what Russian historians such as Makarov (2006), Glavatskiy (2002) and Fleishman (2006) name “*filosofskiy parokhod*.” In keeping with my research participants’ tendency to pluralize these events, which disambiguates the multiple number of deportations, I chose to translate these events as “Philosopher’s Ships.”

these approaches, I argue that the Philosophers' Ships became a foundational myth for the Russian intelligentsia abroad, as well as an extreme example for the way such an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006[1983]:49) became co-opted into wider state strategies "at home."

Benedict Anderson's famous term, "imagined community" (Anderson 2006[1983]:49), highlights the mechanism that unites diverse members in their sense of belonging to a nation-state, "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006[1983]:49), and "*a community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (2006[1983]:50). In using the term, "community," I continue to build on Vered Amit's work, proposing that a community's membership may be open-ended (Amit 2010:362), conflictual (2010:360), and negotiable, especially in determining boundaries between "us and them" (2010:360). Thus, I speak about a diverse group of exiled intellectuals vying to legitimate their status abroad by offering *competing* ideas as to what constitutes a Russian "imagined community," and thus, what defines Russian nationhood.

In 1922, the Berlin émigré publication *Rul'* argued that those intellectuals who were under threat of deportation and who chose to retreat from public life and concentrate on their personal work, inevitably became "internal emigrants" (Fleishman 2006:97). This formulation was not new: as early as 1855, Alexander Herzen, who himself emigrated to Europe, described an "internal excursion" as a state of "concentrating on oneself, of tearing away from the umbilical cord connecting us with the motherland" (2017[1855]:130). What was new, was the

political force with which the term was now being used. Writing about “emigrants inside Russia” in *Posledniye Novosti*, B. Mirsky states that precisely this stratum will resuscitate the traditions of the intelligentsia in their pursuit of freedom (Fleishman 2006:97). In the span of half a century, the term “internal emigration” shifted in meaning from a journey of self-discovery, to a goal of collective liberation from state oppression.

During his interrogation by the *GPU* on September 22, 1922, Fyodor Stepun declared: “as a citizen of the Soviet Federative Republic, I am unwaveringly loyal to the government and all its parties; however, as a philosopher and writer, I consider Bolshevism to be a grave illness of the national soul” (Stepun quoted in Makarov 2006:70-71). When tasked to define his relationship to the Soviet regime, Stepun voices disagreement but does not call into question the legitimacy of the Soviet nation state itself. Following the interrogation, Stepun “asks for permission” for him and his wife to leave the country (Makarov 2006:73). From that day forward, Russia will exist for him mainly as an “imagined community.”

The first group of exiles comprising twenty-five families departed from St. Petersburg to Stettin on September 28, 1922, on board the German steamship *Oberbürgermeister Hakken*. They were followed by three more groups, traveling by trains and steamships heading to Berlin via Riga and Constantinople (Fleishman 2006:96). When the deportees arrived in Berlin, they were heartily greeted by extant emigrants as martyrs for the anti-Bolshevik cause. Fyodor Stepun describes meeting fellow émigrés upon his arrival at the Charlottenburg railway station: “As a newcomer from Russia, they greeted me with evident sympathy, and even love. Not only for me, but for Russia. I immediately felt that for those who did not dare return, these ‘wafts of the fatherland’ were even sweeter than for those who come back from long voyages” (Stepun

1990:299-300). However, tensions erupted when the exiles did not embrace their prescribed role. Stepun elaborates on his welcome:

This relationship toward me quickly fell apart somehow, with my first words uttered about Russia [...]. No, I unnerved and repulsed my interlocutors not by my completely uncharacteristic defence of Bolsheviks, but by my defence of my belief that despite the Bolsheviks, Russia remained in Russia and did not move inside emigrant hearts to Paris, Berlin, and Prague. (Stepun 1990:299-300)

Instead of denouncing Bolsheviks, many deportees chose to remain silent for fear of reprisals against colleagues back home. Furthermore, having lived through famine of the previous five years, the deportees considered émigrés who had previously settled in Europe unable to judge Russia fairly; in their eyes, the old guard were “economic migrants” (Fleishman 2006:97-99).

*Born in 1891, my great-uncle, Nikolay Vasil'yevich, became a professional revolutionary. Much like his father, he was active in the Kiev revolutionary movement and following the Russian Revolution, he moved to Moscow with his younger brother, Pavel Vasil'yevich, my great-grandfather. Nikolay went to University and eventually became head of a local branch of the State Planning Committee of the USSR. It can be surmised that he helped to plan industrialization and collectivization campaigns. It is also said that he served in the Soviet Embassy in Britain. He was arrested in 1937, in the year of the Great Purges, and sentenced to execution by shooting in 1938. With macabre irony, his death sentence was carried out on a communal farm outside Moscow. Researchers have surmised that the order of a Military Tribunal was signed by Stalin himself (Roginsky, online resource). My great-aunt remembers visiting his apartment on Metrostrovskaya Street and discovering it was sealed off. As was customary for those charged with “counterrevolutionary activities,” his immediate family was*

*sent to the hundred-and-first kilometre outside Moscow, into “internal exile.” Nikolay was rehabilitated posthumously, in 1956, following Nikita Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin.*

As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue, while “remembered places have often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people” (1992:11), borders and border crossings amplify the question of identity of migrants and exiles, underlining difference *within* localities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:7). Space becomes *reterritorialized* as a response to global phenomena, leading, paradoxically to new forms of cultural difference. Stepun’s discussion of Soviet Russia demonstrates how a “community” may be united by how Russia is remembered, but divided by how Russia is imagined, which leads to another characteristic response to migration amongst intellectual circles; the question of the main locus of Russian culture.

In the years immediately following the Revolution, émigrés anticipated a quick downfall of the Bolsheviks, waiting for news that signaled they could return to Russia. Demidova calls this period, “sitting on the suitcases” (Demidova 2010:23). Literary narratives from the time mirrored this uncertainty, underlining the pain of separation and the hope of a quick return. In 1922, Vladislav Khodasevich wrote: “more than anything, I wish to see [...] Russia: exhausting, deadly, repulsive, but as wonderful now, as it ever was” (1922:37). The ideal émigré scenario would have seen the past artificially transported into the future, this time freed from Soviet power (Demidova 2010:23). When it became apparent that émigrés would be unable to return, debates shifted from the idea of return, to the idea that *Russia itself* could be transported

abroad, on the “heels of one’s boots,”<sup>24</sup> or, “in a traveling bag” (Khodasevich 1923). Displaced, often destitute, and having suffered political defeat at the hands of the Bolsheviks, Russian émigrés attempted to reconstitute “Russia outside Russia,”<sup>25</sup> an “imagined community” that challenged Bolshevik hegemony over Russia’s intangible legacy; its culture, language, and spirituality.

Debates on the imaginary locus of Russian culture occurred on the pages of the same publications. In *Grani*, a literary collection of poetry and prose released in Berlin in 1922, N. Yakovlev characterizes émigré literature as “connected by the same foundation [...] This foundation is Russia. The Russia of the past” (1922:21), whereas S. Sumsky writes, “[i]t seems that there could be no other culture except for national culture, based on national experience and national involvement, and that is why Russian culture is created there, in Russia, and not outside of it” (1922:21). In 1923, a histrionic poet, writer and literary critic Andrey Bely wrote:

There is no debating it, it is hard to write in Russia—there is no paper, no ink, no typesetters—and yet, have there been no scientific discoveries in Russia? [...] and was it not in “Russian” Russia that talents were born? I will earnestly say that talented Russians were born and brought up there—[they] were not made in Berlin. (Bely 1923:8)

Bely’s immigration was short-lived. He left for Germany in 1921, but despite achieving

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<sup>24</sup> “*On n’emporte pas la patrie sous la semelle de ses souliers!*”, “One does not carry the homeland on the heels of one’s boots!” as Danton famously said about counter-revolutionaries fleeing France. The French Revolution became a powerful symbol for the Russian Revolution beginning in February 1917. As early as November 1917, Francesca Silano (2017) describes Revolutionary soldiers from the Moscow garrison gather at the Red Square to pay respects to their fallen comrades, while an orchestra played the anthem of the French Revolution, “*la Marseillaise*.”

<sup>25</sup> English-speaking historians favour the term “Russia Abroad”—Glad, *Russia Abroad* (1999); Raeff, *Russia Abroad* (1990)—translated literally from the Russian *ruskoye zarubezh'ye* as “Russian-beyond-the border”. However, I see this term as best applied to describe a political entity, in contrast to my use of “Russia outside Russia,” which I discuss as a discursive strategy in articulating identity.

professional and financial success abroad, he returned to Russia in the fall of 1923 (Spivak 2006:174).

These discourses reveal the precarity felt by post-Revolutionary émigrés as they attempted to comprehend their status as exiles of a hostile and repressive Bolshevik regime. Responding to a newly-created Soviet nation-state, émigrés formed an alternative “imagined community” based on a fragile set of allegiances; first, as “internal emigrants” who experienced material scarcity during the early years of the Revolution; then, as exiles, united in their yearning for Russia, but divided in their stance towards the Bolsheviks, and finally, as forming “Russia outside Russia,” the very existence of which was contested amongst émigrés who competed for recognition as representatives of Russian culture abroad. While these strategies largely failed to gain wider political traction, only further sub-dividing émigré communities, they were taken up by subsequent migration “waves,” and continue to persist as tropes of migration to this day. These “waves,” a term that I use as a “practical essentialism,” (Herzfeld 2005:26), are perhaps the most salient characteristic of group identity amongst Russian migrants, insofar as participants readily take ownership of migration experiences common to a certain “wave,” and thus, adapting Alexei Yurchak’s description “simultaneously reflect” (2006:31) migration waves, “but also contribute to their production” (2006:31).

### **5.3 “A Harbour of Capsized Ships”**

While the story of post-Revolutionary émigrés who found themselves on the losing side of history—as tragic figures “sitting on suitcases” (Demidova 2010:23) and wistful for a homeland that no longer exists—may have wide scholarly resonance, I argue that the narrative

itself had to be invented, disseminated, and reproduced. Following the Second World War, Russians held in German POW camps, refugees, and foreign nationals, fled the territory of the Soviet Union as *nevozvrashchentsy*, “non-returnees”. They became known as the “second wave” of Russian emigration (Glad 1999:328). Upon encountering this “wave” of migrants, the “first wave” “redoubled” its efforts to document their memories and experiences, feeling an urgency to preserve their legacy (Demidova 2010:24). The task to articulate these experiences fell on a cohort of migrants who believed themselves to be well-equipped to speak on behalf of “the people” (Kotchetkova 2004:2.8): the intelligentsia.

“First-wave” literary critic Georgy Adamovich dreamed of publishing a “Golden Book of Russian Emigration” (1961:7), which would document the weight of Russian emigration as a “child of Russian intelligentsia, as a historical phenomenon, which was in its essence, unified” (Adamovich 1961:7). Previously disparate cultural narratives of the “first wave” were now subsumed under a single historical discourse. Historian Nikita Struve contends that “emigration truly offered an image of Russia in miniature [...] All of Russia from before the Revolution found itself ‘outside the border’” (Struve 1996:15). In his memoir titled *I Carried Russia Away* (1989), journalist Roman Gul' writes,

What saves us—however banal it sounds—is the spiritual connection with Russia. Which Russia? With Soviet Russia? With the Soviet Union? With the other, that eternal Russia, which we—without realizing it—live daily, which ceaselessly lives inside us and with us—in our blood, in our psyche, in our spiritual makeup, in our worldview. (Gul' quoted in Pukhova 2014:174-176)

Émigré intellectuals continued to contest the legitimacy of the Soviet Union by claiming that the locus of Russian culture existed outside its geopolitical borders, accessed, paradoxically,

through exile.<sup>26</sup> But as a spiritual entity, Russia became replete with metaphysical, quasi-religious metaphors highlighting traditional nationalist tropes—blood, spiritual connection, transcendent worldview—an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006[1983]:49) par excellence.

During Brezhnev’s epoch of late socialism, when travel abroad remained severely restricted, life in *zagranița*, or “beyond the border,” represented a fantasy that resonated with many Soviet citizens, which I wrote about in Chapter Three. However, part of the appeal to leave the Soviet Union was provoked by a profound paradox that existed in the late Soviet epoch; that of insularity and worldliness (Yurchak 2006:158). At that time, dissident intellectuals began to self-identify as “internal emigrants,” a stance rooted in their political disagreement with the Soviet regime, although for most, this “spiritual exile” was neither forced, nor did it involve actual exile.

George Kiesewalter, a photographer who documented the Moscow avant-garde, and who emigrated to Canada in 1996, explains his initial decision to emigrate:

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<sup>26</sup> In the mid-1980s, during the epoch of glasnost that saw the discontinuation of state censorship in the Soviet Union, émigré literature also received a huge boost “at home.” Suddenly, publishers began to aggressively seek literature from “Russia abroad,” reflecting the demand of the Soviet public to read hitherto forbidden literature. Newly-published memoirs, biographies, and encyclopaedias began to appeal to new readership by legitimating their writing within the history of Russian emigration. For example, in a book titled *Let Us Not Curse Exile* (1990), Viacheslav Kostikov writes “Someday—and possibly in the not-so-distant future—a large, substantial book will be written about Russian emigration; the same ‘golden book’ of Russian emigration that Georgy Adamovich dreamed of...” (418). In 1997, precisely this type of book was published—a bibliographical dictionary in three volumes titled *The Russian Abroad: Golden Book of Emigration* (1997), edited by V. Shelohaev. Thus, literary strategies reflecting a growing demand for representing migration fed into cultural narratives about migration, creating new tropes for expressing migration experiences.

*George Kieseewalter*: In those years, there was an idealization of the West. The West seemed like absolute paradise, where bananas and dollars fell from the sky... Even before Canada, there were different periods of internal emigration when, [in the early 1980s,] I left for Siberia, Yakutia for three years. It was practically an attempt at emigration, because leaving the capital for three years, you virtually drop out and find yourself in a completely different space.

Following a decade in North America, George chose to return to Moscow. Nevertheless, in the account above, he reproduces the argument made famous by first-wave émigrés: outside the centers of intellectual life, Moscow or Leningrad, one had to “drop out,” to spiritually become an internal emigrant, which, in turn, facilitated physical emigration to the West.

James Clifford suggests that the essence of diasporic identity is to resist imperialist aspirations of the nation-state, because “nation-states cannot assimilate people who owe their allegiance elsewhere” (Clifford 1994:307). Russian émigré narratives about their relationship to their homeland were framed as a spiritual, or metaphysical connection and articulated, as I have argued above, as “a political struggle [...] in historical contexts of displacement” (Clifford 1994:308). Tracing historical narratives of exile amongst Yaqui labour migrants in Mexico, Kristin Erickson argues that the very act of biographical retelling of exile allows “Yaqui individuals [to] produce the meaningfulness of *their place* by tracing a history of deportation and return” (2003:142). Movement, “both as action and idiom, serves to circumscribe the homeland” (Erickson 2003:150), while its retelling generates the concept of “homeland” itself (Erickson 2003:148). Similarly, negotiating spiritual or physical displacement from Russia as internal emigration, or exile, or both, allowed Russian migrants to underscore historical

continuities with previous migration waves.

Beginning in 1971, Soviet Jews were reluctantly permitted to emigrate to Israel. Thus, the last Soviet generation (Yurchak 2006:36) to emigrate abroad, the “third wave,” was predominantly Jewish. As John Glad calculates, while “in 1971, 99.6 percent of emigrating Soviet Jews went to Israel, by 1981 that number had dropped to 19.4 percent” (1999:411), Soviet Jews began to reroute to America, which saw the arrival of 183,382 émigrés between 1970-1991 (Glad 1999:403). Around half of those migrants chose to live in greater New York City (Markowitz 1993:1), forming what Fran Markowitz called “a community in spite of itself,” or a “community without organizations” (1993:236). I have already discussed my preference to consider forms of association as necessarily open-ended (Amit 2010:362), rather than forced, or imposed by outside categories. However, while Soviet Jewish identity may very well have been “elastic and pragmatic” (Remennick 2007:25), it was also variously pressed upon Soviet Jews through pervasive anti-Semitism, at all levels of Soviet society, and across diverse eras of Soviet and post-Soviet history.

*My great-great-grandfather writes the following about his father:*

*“This is what my father told me about himself and his mother: He was a son of a musician, a Jew, born in the city of Pora, a former Podolian Governorate. In 1828, in early childhood, he was stolen on the street by the Tsarist government, given over to the Kherson Cantonist Battalion, and forcibly converted to Orthodoxy, which meant that his godfather had given him a new name [...]. Such theft of underage Jewish boys was being done by the thousands at the time, by order of that monster, Nikolai I. [...] It is easy to imagine the sea of*

*bitter tears that were spilled by the parents of these miserable youth, deprived of their motherly love. [...] Of the fate of my mother's parents, I do not have detailed information. They were Jews. This means that all of you, my children, are also pure-blooded Jews."*

*Growing up in a Russian Orthodox home, but made distinctly aware of his Jewish origins, my great-great-grandfather muses about Jewish identity in his memoirs: "Christians were of the firm belief that Christ was crucified by Jews. Was it not from this that there stems a zoological anti-Semitism that continues to exist into the present, and not only among the unlearned masses, but also amongst the so-called cultured community? An intolerance and even hostility of the latter towards Jews is confirmed by the outrageous and often unconcealed cynicism with which some social groups, despite their higher education, expressed their sympathy towards Jewish pogroms that occurred in 1881, 1905 and 1919."*

*Tsarist pogroms served as an impetus for Russian-Jewish intellectuals to call for mass migration (Cassedy 1994:129), which, on the cusp of the twentieth century, resulted in the resettlement of a million and a half Jews the United States. While the Soviet regime was to a large extent emancipatory for Jews under threat of pogroms, and while the scale of anti-Semitic campaigns was incommensurable with the mass extermination of European Jewry under the Third Reich, anti-Semitism pervaded all levels of Soviet society. Already after the Second World War, Jews were accused of "rootless cosmopolitanism," culminating in accusations of a conspiracy by Jewish doctors against Soviet leaders (Remennick 2007:28). Subsequently, following Stalin's death, Jews were paradoxically implicated in Stalin's crimes (2007:350). In the late Soviet epoch, state anti-Semitism took the form "tacit quotas for Jewish applicants to universities" (2007:37), limiting their access to education, professional vocation, and livelihood.*

*Scholars argue that institutional racism was a strong factor in provoking Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel (Isuring 2011:411), in the so-called “return migration” (Remennick 2007:2).*

When I visited Alexander Genis, a writer and journalist who emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1977 and who currently lives in New Jersey, wild parrots landed on a tree by his porch. “I wrote a lot about these parrots,” Alexander tells me before inviting me inside. The writer describes his decision to emigrate as follows:

*Alexander Genis:* Emigration, you know, it’s very simple. By that time, everyone tried to leave, because by 1977, there was no future for anyone in the Soviet Union. I just finished university. And I dreamt of doing what I wanted to do. There were no opportunities for this, so I left abroad with one single goal: to write and publish in Russian. Nothing could be more idiotic, because I was only 24 years old. But my life had already been firmly decided. [...] Of course, it seems far-fetched to leave your homeland for America to write in Russian. But there is also nothing incredible about it, since the entire “third wave” was composed of people like this. (see also *Installation video 3: Alexander Genis*)

Explained as a pursuit of one’s vocation, and expressed with the inevitability characteristic of post-Revolutionary narratives, Alexander’s description shares its tone with narratives of exile.

I have already written about Genis and Vayl’s bestselling book, *Russian Cuisine in Exile* (1987), a work replete with Soviet culinary recipes. During our conversation, Alexander suggests that “a recipe, or cuisine in general, is a hieroglyph that connects geography and history. It is here that we can understand people, culture, deep foundations: precisely in the kitchen.” Alexander considers that at the time of its publication, Russian cuisine, and consequently, Russian culture were more advanced in the United States than in the Soviet Union.

The book plays on the trope of exile, but there is strategic ambiguity in the title, which makes it unclear whether Russian cuisine is in exile, or the people preparing it. Alexander anticipates my question, indicating that it was precisely the “third wave” of Soviet intellectuals abroad who ensured the continuity of Russian literature: “At the end of the 1970s, early 80s, the best part of Russian culture was undoubtedly in emigration. Literature from that time was the most interesting. When freedom came to Russia, everything moved back to Russia.” This argument undoubtedly reinforces the idea that “Russia,” represented by Russian literature as the mainstay of the intelligentsia, existed “outside Russia.” In such a light, Alexander’s description can be understood as an effort to unite a diverse group of intellectuals abroad, as an “imagined community.”

In his description of the “third wave” in New York, poet and avant-garde publisher Igor Satanovsky describes emigration as follows: “you have probably noticed how haphazardly people ended up in New York. From different strata, different periods. It’s like a harbour of capsized ships, where people from different cultures came swimming ashore. They were grabbing onto each other, all the while espousing different attitudes, aesthetics, etc. And this is how they got used to existing here.” Igor argues that the narrative of a unified “third wave” emerged out of a set of common experiences related to displacement and rupture; however, this community was fashioned out of disparate cultural identities, not unlike earlier examples of migration. This narrative was replicated in my conversation with a Parisian artist, Yaroslav Gorbanevsky:

*Yaroslav Gorbanevsky*: Emigration is such a forced thing: it connects people through artificial links. I don't see in emigration something that can be generalized to say, "this is how things are." One can't generalize about Russian immigration. But waves can be defined, especially for us, representatives of the third [wave of] emigration. When we saw the first emigration, we said this is what they are. Maybe they did not even feel this way about themselves, but our presence allowed them to see themselves a certain way: "look at the third. Their speech is so Soviet."

Initially, Yaroslav is against generalizing narratives about emigration. However, by asserting group identity, Yaroslav voices belonging *against* another group. It is by contrasting themselves to the "first wave," that the "third wave" could define itself.

Born and raised in the Soviet Union, Vadim Fadin became a rocket scientist, developing a Soviet analogue to the American Space Shuttle. However, his dream was to become a writer. Because of rigid rules about who could write and publish in the Soviet Union, Vadim wrote "under the table." In the 1990s, helped by favourable immigration policy, Vadim moved to Berlin with his partner, hoping that he could finally pursue his writing career. Vadim says: "We traveled virtually as refugees. With two little suitcases. I left my library in Moscow! How could I have taken it with me? I took with me all of my working material: the Russian language" (see *Installation video 5: Vadim Fadin and Anna Perchenok*). Almost a century after Khodasevich published his famous lines about transporting "eight little volumes" of Pushkin's writings, Vadim borrows the same trope to frame Russian intellectual migration as a way of transporting Russian culture abroad. As I have written in Chapter Two, soon after moving to Berlin and inspired by the famous literary salons of the 1920s, the couple began hosting monthly literary gatherings inside their home, the stated aim of which was "the preservation of Russian culture" (Fadin 2017:8).

Eastern Europe is “that part of the world where serious literature and those who produce it have traditionally been overvalued,” argues Andrew Wachtel (2006:4). In the Soviet Union, intellectuals were given the status of enlightened members of society, and writers were “broadly believed to recapitulate the general truths of people’s experience” (Wachtel 2006:3). Ironically, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, cultural elites who embraced social change lost much of their moral and social authority precisely because ensuing transformations “undermin[ed] their formerly distinguished political role” (Wachtel 2006:75). Wachtel argues that writers sought to remain relevant in post-Soviet space by appealing to either nationalist, or internationalist discourses to “inscribe themselves as masters of a newly globalized world” (2006:136). However, for writers who chose to move away from their native language environment and who lost a large part of their audience, the desire to remain relevant was framed differently. Resuscitating the tradition of literary salons and underlining the primacy of ideational over material values characteristic of the intelligentsia, Vadim and Anna negotiate their migrant identity by asserting continuity with “first-wave” émigrés. Precisely in framing the modern-day salon as a means to “preserve Russian culture,” Vadim and Anna have “invented, and to some extent ritualized, cultural practices that both reflect and constitute profound identity negotiations and transformations” (Berdahl 1999a:229).

In Prague, I visited the offices of *Russkoye Slovo* [“Russian Word”], a journal with the tagline, “fidelity to the traditions of Russian emigration in Czechoslovakia” (Dobuševa 2003-2017). When I arrived, Marina Dobuševa, the journal’s chief editor, was sifting through century-old black and white photographs of White émigrés in cloche hats and frock coats. During our

interview, Marina discussed her motivations to migrate in the context of historical migration trajectories:

*Marina Dobuševa*: I left forever. In 1999, I already knew that I would never return [...]

Although I left in 1999, I united with the post-Revolutionary intelligentsia. Because I take their views to heart, and I continue the best traditions that they brought with them, not the traditions of the Soviet Union, which I left. I am reuniting with the White Emigration.

(see also *Installation video 6*: Marina Dobuševa)

Situating her migration narrative within an uninterrupted timeline with first-wave émigrés to Czechoslovakia, Marina also reproduces debates about the locus of Russian culture: “There is no Russia on the territory of the modern-day Russian Federation. [...] There are only destroyers of Russia. They founded their own society, with its own culture.” In Marina’s valuation, émigré culture has become the carrier of Russian traditions. Immigration no longer involves the loss of homeland, or the stigma of displacement; rather, Marina considers it a purification ritual:

*Marina Dobuševa*: Any Russian who lives a fulfilling life in the West undergoes a cleansing.

They are cleansed from a feeling of anxiety. From specific Soviet habits. But primarily, from slang. Russian language becomes clean, because we must communicate in it.

Russian slang does not develop in emigration. It is a truly good Russian literary language.

We really brought our motherland abroad. (see also *Installation video 6*: Marina Dobuševa)

Keith Basso argues that “one must acknowledge that local understandings of external realities are ineluctably fashioned from local cultural materials” (Basso 1998:100). Speaking about her present concerns using narratives that extend back almost a century, Marina argues that emigration is not only a positive lifestyle choice (“cleansed from a feeling of anxiety”), but a necessary step to “preserve Russian (language and) culture.” And language, like culture, can be

understood as “not what we live” (Fabian 2007:42), but as a system through which groups create their identities.

Challenges to group boundaries occur when narratives of continuity between post-Revolutionary and present-day migrants are tested against encounters with previous or subsequent migration “waves.” Indeed, as Vered Amit argues, these challenges may occur in “unusual or even extreme circumstances” (Amit 2010:360), and may be experienced as “heated organizational politics, factions and even ruptures” (2010:360). As Marina herself admits, “White Emigrants treated us, [post-Soviet] Russians, with scorn. They considered us all Soviet. To them, we were the *sausage emigration*. But I assure you, we had nothing in common with economic migrants. We were ready for everything [...], only to be in this society, and not that other one.” A dismissal of émigrés along economic lines is a repudiation of material over intellectual values, a central claim of the intelligentsia. Meanwhile, perceptions became inverted: in contrast to post-Revolutionary deportees who viewed previously-settled émigrés as economic migrants, it was now the new arrivals who were seen as economic opportunists.

“Third-wave” writers describe being rejected from participating in established émigré newspapers and journals. Alexander Genis tells me, “they were absolutely certain that on the one hand, we were primitives, and on the other, that we were the KGB. From the point of view of the “first,” the “third wave” were considered barbarians. We were even told this, ‘your Russian has as much to do with Bunin’s Russian, as Turkish has to do with Byzantine Greek’.” As a result of their antagonism with the “first wave,” “third wave” writers were provoked to create “their own journals, newspapers, and publishing houses” (Glad 1999:402). They developed an eponymous and widely known genre of émigré literature known as the “third wave,” which

“came to be the main repository of the Russian prose and poetry about New York from the early 1970s until late 1980s” (Klots 2011:44).

Masha Volodina, an artist and poet living in Paris, describes meeting representatives of previous migration waves in a now infamous artistic squat on “*rue Juliette Dodu*,” Juliette Dodu street. Founded in the early 1990s with the help of Alexei Khvostenko, the squat housed artists, musicians, and writers, with whom Masha came to live,

*Masha Volodina:* Initially, I had problems with them, because they were used to more classical forms of expression. They did not accept my language expression. I’d often say, “guys, you remained stuck at the museum-level! Shake off the dust! Things are no longer like this in Russia; language has changed.” These were the previous waves, the Mandelshtam-Ahmatova-Tsvetaeva [*Mandel'shtamsko-Akhmatovsko-Tsvetayevskoye*] interpretation of the word. It’s a gorgeous interpretation, but they remained unchanged inside it.

Each “wave” of Russian migration makes its own claims to language, and thus, to a set of cultural traditions that assert “authentic” forms of expressing or preserving Russian culture, while dismissing other migration “waves”—“the sausage emigration,” “KGB spies” and “museum fossils”—as inauthentic. An authentic relation to “Russia” is expressed by borrowing a set of mythologized discourses about the Russian intelligentsia, invoking terms such as “internal emigration,” “intellectual exile,” or “Russia outside Russia.” However, as these terms are adapted to changing political, social and cultural contexts, each new migrant community abroad finds a new set of definitions for itself. Recently, these self-definitions became increasingly important not only outside Russia, but in Russia as well. A Russian community located outside the territory of the Russian Federation challenges the monopoly of the nation-

state to define its national identity. Since the early 2000s, Russian state strategies *have shifted away from the immediate threat* of post-Soviet consolidation to *an ideological campaign aimed at delimiting a nascent state* of the Russian Federation. Paralleling early Bolshevik campaigns aimed at consolidating Soviet power (Finkel 2007:2), Russian state strategists evoke a spiritual, or transcendental connection to “Russia,” while seeking to assimilate alternative expressions of Russian identity into its political fold, considering them a threat.

#### **5.4 Return, Redemption and the Russian World**

One late evening in Paris, I came to meet avant-garde musician Kamil Tchalaev inside the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin. The church in the famous Montparnasse neighbourhood is tucked away behind an unassuming gate of a quiet residential street. Founded in France by the Russian Student Christian Movement in 1928, it is one among several churches in Paris affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR). The dimly lit, musky space was filled with hundreds of small icons lining wood-panelled walls. In the middle of the room, and conspicuously occupying much of the space of the church, there stood a large, wooden coffin. Kamil, who studied liturgical singing, pledged to stay up all night to read a burial service to his deceased friend, a hereditary baron. During our interview, Kamil tells me about his relationship to Russia: “The more time passes, the more I am concerned with my former homeland. It is constantly catching up with me!” His main point of reference is a Russian institution that has recently appeared on the banks of the Seine, virtually in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower—the Russian Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center—an ensemble that comprises a five-domed Orthodox cathedral, a seminary and a Russian-language school. Kamil continues:

“This event in the heart of Paris, right before my knees, a four-minute walk from my house where I have lived for seventeen years, this is where they built a cathedral! Moscow [came to Paris]! This is some kind of sign” (see *Installation video 9: Compilation: Bridges*). Kamil’s remarks convey a strange mix of wonder and melancholy, as if he has just learned about the building of the cathedral, but immediately resigned himself to the fact.

The cathedral has been recently consecrated by Patriarch Kirill of the Moscow Patriarchate. It is owned by the Russian state and has been granted diplomatic immunity. In 2010, Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Orlov described it as “a strong symbolic place” (Blua 2012), dismissing parishes that owe their allegiance to ROCOR as claiming to be Russian, but that “no longer belong to Russia,”<sup>27</sup> (Gréco 2016) despite official reconciliation between the two churches in 2007. Putin himself has elaborated on the role of the Center: “Preserving our language, literature and culture is a question of national security and of preserving our identity in a globalized world” (Heneghan 2016). In this formulation, the Russian Orthodox Centre becomes a material extension of Russian diasporic identity abroad, as defined by a centralized political, cultural, but above all, spiritual, authority.

*My great-great-grandfather writes that in the 1860s, holidays in the family were celebrated according to Russian Orthodox custom: “despite their Jewish origins, father and mother stood apart in their devout religiosity in the spirit of the Orthodox faith and strictly*

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<sup>27</sup> Referring to the Cathedral on Rue Daru, Orlov stated, “...cet edifice a été abandonné, et s’est tourné vers le patriarche de Constantinople. Cette église russe n’appartient plus à la Russie” (... this building was abandoned and turned to the Patriarch of Constantinople. This Russian church no longer belongs to Russia) (Gréco 2016).

*observed all the rites prescribed by it.” He describes having to reluctantly join his father in performing daily prayers, kissing his father’s and mother’s hands following meals and during the holidays, having to go to church to get holy water before being allowed to eat.*

*“I remember the big yearly holidays: Christmas, New Year’s, Baptism, Easter, and the Trinity. I recall them not only for their solemnity, but also because our family, despite our modest means, ate better than at any other time of the year.*

*Christmas Eve was called the first kut'ya.*

*By the evening, there were already dishes prepared: pot barley porridge, ‘kut'ya,’ and a kompot made from dry fruits, ‘uzvar.’ Both dishes were placed under the icon case, ‘na pokute,’ which was considered the most distinguished corner of the home.*

*In the evening, we lit a sanctuary lamp; father read prayers with burning incense, and then we began our holiday feast. It consisted of fried fish; kut'ya, flavoured with honey and poppy milk, and uzvar. We consumed these delicacies with uncanny speed, but our appetite was kindled by thoughts of tomorrow, when we could break the fast with sausages and meat dishes, [because] between November 14 and December 25, we observed the Filipov fast, ‘Pilipovku.’”*

*A part of the family still lives in my ancestral home in Chernigov. However, at the time of my fieldwork, I was risking arrest if I was to travel there, owing to the growing political tensions between two sovereign states, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.*

The ability of a nation-state to regulate membership enables people to legally reside within its boundaries. However, following the end of state socialism and throughout much of the 1990s, Russia faced strong out-migration as many skilled workers sought opportunities abroad.

Simultaneously, owing to shifting geopolitical boundaries, “25 million Russians have found themselves living outside their political homeland” (Smith 1999:500). This provoked one of my research participants, Dmitry Khmelnitsky, to argue that “following the collapse of the Soviet Union, everyone became emigrants. Some had left earlier. But for others, their political environment had left *them*.” Seeking both to curb the demographic decline and to legitimate its authority, the Russian state attempted to formalize its relationship with the Russian diaspora through state policy. In 1999, the State Duma adopted a law “On State Support for Compatriots Abroad,” defining “compatriots” as “all people who came from the Russian Empire, the RSFSR, the USSR, the Russian Federation, and their direct descendants” (Tishkov 2003[2002]:55). Strategically, this officially entitled the Russian Federation to legal succession from all the previous state entities, but in its very formulation, which defined “boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of “us” and “them” (Avtar Brah quoted in Smith 1999:503), the law used the “Russian diaspora [as] a central concept in defining Russian national identity” (Smith 1999:508).

Literary critic Dmitriy Merezhkovsky once asked, “What is emigration? Is it only a journey away from the homeland into exile? No, it is also return, a way back to the homeland” (Merezhkovsky quoted in Pivovarov 2008:409). As I have written earlier, parsing out historical definitions of the term “diaspora,” Martin Baumann had similarly argued that it denotes “a fourfold course of sin or disobedience, scattering and exile as punishment, repentance, and finally return and gathering” (2000:317). From the perspective of Russian migrants, the dissolution of the Soviet Union signaled the opportunity not only to *travel from*, but to *return to*

Russia. The redemptive dream of return amongst many “first-wave” émigrés became fulfilled.

Post-Soviet scholars celebrated the long-awaited reunion of Russian “cultures,” at home and abroad. John Glad writes that Russian émigrés “made a magnificent contribution, not only to Russian culture, but to world culture as well” (Glad 1999:489). According to the historian, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, “Russian literature has now truly been reunited—the two “streams” have finally flowed into one, as predicted, and the “mission” of the emigration [...] has been accomplished” (1999:489). Russian historian Efim Pivovarov argues that it was precisely the “Russian world abroad that insisted on the idea of unity of cultures between Russia abroad and Soviet Russia, or at least of their appearance as two branches growing from one root” (2008:409). Thus, a soteriological narrative of a spiritual return of the Russian diaspora to their “historic homeland” has been all-too-readily applied to Russian migrants abroad. In these discourses, the movement towards symbolic re-unification undermines the diaspora’s “political struggle” (Clifford 1994:308), as exemplified by clashes between various groups of intellectuals vying to articulate distinct diasporic identities. While a physical return to Russia is now possible, my interviews reveal that, rather than “insisting on unity” between “two streams” of Russian culture, Russian intellectuals abroad borrow from first-wave émigré discourses to create new tropes for expressing their experience of migration.

In 2005, on Vladimir Putin’s behest and on his personal budget, the remains of Ivan Ilyin—a theologian, Russian nationalist, and Slavophile exiled aboard one of the Philosophers’ Ships in 1922—were repatriated from Switzerland to Russia. Ilyin’s return to Russia followed a long list of reburials in postsocialist countries examined by Katherine Verdery (1999:3). Verdery discusses the importance of political symbolism in toppling statues and in reburying famous,

infamous, and anonymous people, because “their exit from one grave and descent into another mark a change in social visibilities and values, part of the larger process of postsocialist transformation” (1999:19). Susan Gal (1991) describes political motives accompanying the reburial of Bela Bartók from a cemetery in New York, to Budapest, Hungary. In the process, the composer was reimagined as a national hero, a symbol of Hungarian nationalism, because “[b]urials, and even reburials, are not uncommon in the symbolic armory of national identity, giving historical depth to ‘imagined communities’” (Gal 1991:441). As is the case with the repatriation of Bartók, Ilyin, and many others traveling between postsocialist countries and the West in life, and in death, reburials “signify a new era in East-West relations, one involving borders much more permeable than those of the communist period” (1999:16).

Ivan Ilyin’s return to Russia has symbolic importance for Vladimir Putin, who esteems the philosopher highly enough to quote him in official speeches (Snyder 2018:18), and whose work is mandatory reading for high-level officials in Putin’s cabinet (Margolina 2014). As a thinker who was firmly set against Bolshevism, which he called “left totalitarianism” (Margolina 2014), and inspired by examples from Italy and Germany, Ilyin developed a peculiarly Russian philosophy of fascism, going so far as to support Adolf Hitler’s rise to power (Snyder 2018:19). Ilyin wished for “the hour to come” for a “united and inseparable Russia,” in which “the Russian people would rebel from their imaginary coffin and declare their rights” (Margolina 2014). His philosophy reflected the values of the broader Eurasianist movement, which held that Russia was its own continent, distinct from both Europe and Asia. Owing to its uniqueness, both liberal and socialist ideas were considered foreign to Russia; rather, its future lay in traditional faith (Margolina 2014).

There is nothing novel in attempts to expand Russian “spiritual” influence beyond national borders. As Francesca Silano argues (2017), as early as in the 1870s and 1880s, Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) leaders drew on growing nationalist sentiments to develop a pan-Slavic “model of the Russian nation which was meant to strengthen both Russia itself and the influence of the Church, calling this model the “Holy Rus”” (Silano 2017:7). The enthronement of the Patriarch in November 1917 represented an image of Russia as rooted in the past, while simultaneously forecasting “a new future for Orthodoxy” (Silano 2017:29). While the influence of the ROC understandably waned during the Soviet epoch, it was nevertheless used by the state to exert influence over Orthodox émigrés.<sup>28</sup> Following Putin’s address to the Federal Assembly in 2007 (Tishkov 2007) during which he used the term *ruskiy mir*, “Russian world,” an eponymous foundation began funding various projects aimed at expanding Russian influence, and the influence of the ROC, abroad. Moscow Patriarch Kirill (2017) has repeatedly spoken at its assemblies, calling for *ruskiy mir* to be considered a common supra-national project:

It seems to me that if we will consider the Russian Federation with its current frontiers as the only center of *ruskiy mir*, we will sin against a historical truth and artificially cut ourselves off from the many millions of people that recognize their responsibility for the fates of *ruskiy mir*, considering its consolidation their main task in life. (Patriarch Kirill 2017)

The influence of the ROC in post-Soviet space has gained international ambitions, in close tandem with state foreign policy. State ideology, meanwhile, has acquired decidedly sermonic qualities, which borrow from ecclesiastic traditions.

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<sup>28</sup> In the most dramatic of cases, during the post-War years, Metropolitan Nikolay (Yarushevich), nicknamed “Stalin’s Metropolitan,” visited France attempting to persuade Russian émigrés to return to the Soviet Union. Those who were favourably convinced, returned only to be sent to Stalinist Gulags, where many of them perished.

In a speech given to the State Duma on April 14, 2014, Putin stated “Of course, we are less pragmatic than representatives of other people, but this is also the reason for the greatness of our country” (Margolina 2014). According to Putin, the Russian people have a higher moral purpose; their path is paved towards God, and they express readiness to give up their life for their country: “Deep roots of our patriotism are found in this—massive heroism during military conflicts and wars, and even self-sacrifice during peaceful times—the feeling of collective responsibility [*chuvstvo loktya*]; our family values” (Margolina 2014). Appealing to a deeply-rooted spirit of self-sacrifice, spiritual goals, and a sense of moral purpose, Putin borrows from an irredentist first-wave émigré discourse that also amplified Russia’s “spiritual” uniqueness, mythical in its past; quixotic in its present.

The political role of the diaspora thus became important for strengthening Russia’s nationalist goals. State ideology that amplified Russian identity as a spiritual entity coincided with Russia’s strong out-migration, as well as policies that encouraged émigré repatriation (Pivovarov 2008:355). Initiatives such as the “Program for the support of volunteer Russian resettlement of nationals living abroad” (Pivovarov 2008:355), Russia’s policies surrounding claims to citizenship in the Caucasus region,<sup>29</sup> as well as Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, exemplify the potency of bringing Russian “compatriots” into the political fold. By using tropes that underline a mythical past in close kin with first-wave ideas of traditional faith and pan-Slavism, the Russian state co-opts far-right ideology based on a Russian spiritual bond that seemingly transcends state boundaries. However, negotiating their diasporic identity, migrants

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<sup>29</sup> I refer here to policies that facilitate the dissemination of Russian passports to inhabitants of disputed border regions, including South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Pridnestrov'ye (Suchland 2011:844).

who see Russian “first-wave” institutions as examples of a fragile, diverse, and historically-constituted “imagined community” abroad, firmly embedded in the topography of cities such as Paris, Berlin and New York, consider the domineering presence of new Russian state symbols, such as the Russian Orthodox Centre, to be an unwelcome political intrusion into what they perceive to be a spiritual domain.

## **5.5 Conclusion: Literary and Ethnographic Narratives of Exile and Emigration**

In this chapter, I united *historiographic* and *ethnographic* analyses to argue that discourses of migration shape, and are in turn shaped by, diverse articulations of belonging: through cultural and literary tropes that delineate group identities, and in tandem with state policies, which strategically use these tropes as tools to advance political ideology. In combining ethnographic interview sources with archival research, I contend, following James Wertsch, that these narratives “do not exist in isolation [from each other] and do not serve as neutral interpretive instruments. Instead, they are embedded in concrete discourse characterized by dialogic and rhetorical processes” (2001:511). By studying, analyzing and writing about Russian migration, Russian intellectuals undoubtedly contribute to the production of new diasporic narratives, a process from which this dissertation is hopefully not immune.

My argument in this chapter focused on how post-Revolutionary migration discourses were selectively used by different actors to negotiate competing claims about Russian identity. Amongst “first-wave” émigrés, discourses that invented and mythologized a narrative about the intelligentsia in exile also created alternative ideas about the locus of the Russian nation-state. Appealing to a shared sense of belonging, subsequent migration groups attempted to establish

historical continuity with the “first wave” by borrowing from tropes of exile, internal emigration, and a spiritual connection with Russia. In turn, these groups were dismissed as “economic migrants,” foreign spies, and literary laggards, which provoked them to articulate their own identity by forming a distinct community abroad in tenuous relation to first-wave narratives that positioned the locus of Russian culture outside Russia. As John Glad argues, “Russia abroad” “is defined, after all, by what it is not: Russia abroad consists of Russians living outside Russia” (Glad 1999:489). While these discourses were used to negotiate diasporic identities, they were also co-opted by Russian state ideology, which increasingly used the Russian diaspora as a political tool to foment a reactionary Russian nationalism, both inside and outside Russia. It is to these Russian state strategies and their reverberations abroad that I turn to in my final chapter. Thus, as much as narratives advanced by post-Revolutionary émigrés have receded into a historical past, they continue to persist as discursive and political strategies in defining Russian migration and Russian identity, very much rooted in the present.

## Chapter 6: Burning Bridges: Ambivalent Metaphors of Russian State Power

### As Seen through the Symbolism of Bridges as Contentious Political Spaces

Stands Ivan at Kalinov Bridge, with the Russian lands behind him. As the clock strikes midnight, the river waters rouse, the eagles start calling from the oaks. Arrives *Zmey Gorynych*, *Chudo-Yudo* of twelve heads. Each head sings its own tune, flames fly from the nostrils, smoke billows from the mouth.

—Battle on Kalinov Bridge (Karnauhova 1991:14).

#### 6.1 Introduction: Ambivalent Metaphors of Russian State Power

In the Russian fairy tale, “*Boy na Kalinovom Mostu*,” Battle on Kalinov Bridge, (Karnauhova 1991), a variation of which was recorded by folklorist Aleksandr Afanasiev in the nineteenth century (1984[1855]), three strongmen are born—one to a Tsarevna, another to a bishop’s wife, and a third to a peasant woman—and are each called Ivan. By the time they are ten years old, their strength is unrivalled in all of Russia. Wandering through a garden, they discover a stock of weapons and arm themselves, each according to their rank: Tsarevna’s son takes a golden sword; the bishop’s son takes a silver spear, and the peasant boy takes a steel bat. Soon after, news arrives that Russia is under attack: beastly serpents of many heads have appeared at Russia’s border, on Kalinov Bridge, over the *Smorodinka* River. The three Ivans take turns holding watch at night. During the first night, Tsarevna’s son falls asleep, but Ivan the peasant-boy wakes up just in time to confront *Zmey Gorynych* as a six-headed serpent. He chops off its heads and throws the body in the river. The next night, the bishop’s son falls asleep, but Ivan wakes up and overcomes a nine-headed serpent. When he holds watch on the third night, he is confronted by a twelve-headed serpent breathing fire over Russia, but as soon as Ivan chops off the serpent’s heads, they grow right back. He wakes the other Ivans, and together they

kill *Zmey Gorynych* and throw its body into the fiery river, defending Kalinov Bridge and the Russian lands.

In his interpretation of the fairy tale, Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp proposed that the fiery river *Smorodinka* functions as a border (2000[1946]:186), while the fiery Kalinov Bridge, as a divide between the land of the living and the land of the dead (2000[1946]:198). The serpent, *Zmey Gorynych*, tests the hero's strength, intending to "knock [him] into the ground" (2000[1946]:186). However, the main threat to our hero is not to fall asleep like his peers; a true hero never loses vigilance. Therefore, Ivan, as defender of Russian lands, undergoes an initiation rite (2000[1946]:207), whereby his internal strength is tested against an external enemy whom he overcomes. The topography of the fiery bridge, the river, and the land that lies beyond it are not simply the setting of the fairy-tale, but personified entities. The serpent intends to scorch Russian lands with his fiery breath, but his main attack against Ivan is to "flatten" him, to turn him into part of the landscape. In the spatial logic of the fairy tale, the hero is Russia itself, which, upon encountering an external enemy, vanquishes it by virtue of its unrivalled strength.

Scholars have proposed that to examine political ideology of post-Soviet Russia, a "fresh set of associations [is needed], not mobilized by concepts of relating to liberal capitalism" (Verdery 1996:227). Writing in the mid-1990s, Katherine Verdery proposes to understand the transition to postsocialism not as a stepping stone to capitalism, but as one to feudalism, owing to "pervasive violence and localized protection against it" (1996:207), nonexclusive property rights (1996:213) and power consolidated amongst "suzerainties" (1996:219). While this metaphor was proposed as a reflection of political realities in the 1990s, when state assets

were re-nationalized and power was delegated to oligarchs, today, there remains no clear divide between state-owned and private sectors, and power has only been further centralized among state-approved oligarchs. However, the metaphor of “feudalism” no longer seems as “fresh” today, considering the system it describes ceased to exist over a century and a half ago, when serfdom was abolished in Imperial Russia in 1861.

Bruce Grant (2001) proposes another metaphor, explaining Russia’s political economy as a “state of innocence” (2001:335). In examining Moscow’s sculptures commissioned by the mayor’s office during economic upheavals of the post-Soviet period—an outsized statue of Peter the Great on the banks of the Moscow River, or naïve bronze statues of fairy-tale animals outside the Kremlin walls—Grant contends that these displays tranquilize or freeze time, deferring political accountability and standards of governance (2001:335). While this is an apt description for Moscow’s bronze monuments, I argue that recent political events no longer fit the model of “frozen time,” or a “state of innocence”; rather, Russian symbolic constructions that I discuss in this chapter reflect evolving political realities. They range from a rebuilt Christ the Saviour Cathedral commemorating Russian victories over Napoleon, and a statue of the Grand Prince Vladimir, ruler of Kievan *Rus'*, erected outside the Kremlin, to a nineteen-kilometre bridge connecting mainland Russia with newly-annexed Crimea. Staying true to the opening segment, I propose a new set of metaphors for understanding current state ideology as a “state of enchantment,” and the three Ivans, “Kalinov Bridge,” and “*Zmey Gorynych*” as allegories for understanding Russia’s ambivalent relationship to an outside Other.

In using the metaphor of a fairy tale about a fiery bridge, which creates binary categories demarcating “good” from “evil,” I contend that current state discourses strategically

amplify such oppositions between Russia and its political adversaries. As Vladimir Propp argues, the forms and meanings of fairy tales change according to the contemporary realities of its tellers (2000[1946]:207). However, like any political narrative, this metaphor reflects reality only insofar as it is acknowledged to be a “practical essentialism” (Herzfeld 2005:27), a stereotype used both by “powerful state entities,” and “the humblest of local social actors” (2005:33), which reveals strategies of vastly different reach and visibility used by different actors in their negotiations of power (2005:27). My hope for this examination is that an analysis of essentialisms is a first step in overcoming them in favour of more nuanced and equitable concepts, which may in turn inspire more nuanced and equitable forms of governance.

## **6.2 A State of Enchantment**

*My kindergarten was in a nondescript neighbourhood of Severnoye Tushino, North Tushino, in the northwest extremity of Moscow. Before leaving home through a maze of panel-home courtyards in the drab darkness of winter mornings, I ate hot buckwheat, semolina, or oatmeal porridge, dutifully prepared by my grandmother. Sometimes, she would grate an apple, adding a sprinkle of sugar, and I would watch crisp apple shavings transform into brown mush. I remember crying every morning before leaving home. One of my kindergarten teachers used to read books about Lenin to our class, telling us that he was good with children. We became members in Lenin’s Club of Clean Plates, meaning that we were not allowed to leave the lunch-table until we finished all our food. After leaving kindergarten, part out of rebellion and part because of an eating disorder, I stopped eating soup for the next fifteen years.*

*Once, when I saw a large portrait of Lenin hanging at the entrance of a doctor's clinic, I tugged at my mom's sleeve and blurted, "look mom, it's grandfather!" Mom smacked me on the back of the head in reproach, "don't you ever say that. You have a real grandfather!"*

*When I went to visit my kindergarten while conducting fieldwork in 2015, I was initially drawn to children's drawings hanging on the front gates. As I approached, I discovered that they commemorated "pobeda," the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Second World War. Children's drawings depicted Soviet tanks and airplanes in battle with the German army, showing air bombings, explosions and dismembered bodies. While it may be possible to say that at least a part of my early education fell on the twilight of the Cold War, replete with its own brand of Soviet propaganda, it is also evident that a new generation of children in Russia were growing up in a politicized space of their own: one that advanced its own set of discourses.*

Max Weber, in a famous dictum—"the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (Weber 1922[1919]:20)—suggests that in the twentieth century, scientific rationalism has replaced religious dogma. However, Joshua Landy and Michael Saler have criticized Weber's confidence in secular progress, proposing that a new set of social conditions provokes the opposite movement, towards re-enchantment (2009:2).

Symbolic re-enchantment followed the Russian Revolution of 1917, when Vladimir Lenin, espousing radical atheism based on Marxist precepts, nevertheless encouraged mythmaking strategies that would legitimate the new Bolshevik rule. As David Crowley and Susan Reid assert, the "socialist project was, after all, to make utopia real" (Crowley and Reid

2002:7). The authors suggest that artists, writers, and architects at the time, debated “[n]ew ways of organizing the home, the workplace or the street [that] would, in turn, produce a new consciousness” (2002:15). I have previously argued (Gan 2015) that these new forms of expression represented “a new relationship between man [*sic*] and the world, a new religion” (Petrova 2003:92). For example, Suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich, known for the infamous artwork, *The Black Square* (1915), wrote that both the church—a symbol of old Russia—and the factory—a symbol of proletarian revolution—represent a search for the divine: “The walls of both are decorated with countenances and portraits, also arranged according to merit or rank. Martyrs and heroes exist in both the former and the latter; their names are also listed as saints” (Malevich quoted in Petrova 2003:93). While Joseph Stalin abandoned such avant-garde paradigms in favour of monumental state-building projects, he nevertheless mythologized state power by building vertically-oriented, neo-classical skyscrapers, coupled with rapid industrialization during the Five-Year Plans, much like post-War Soviet society embraced a “third utopia,” represented by rational planning and bureaucracy (Ikonnikov 1995:8). Soviet discourses amplified the extraordinary progresses of Soviet society, anticipating utopia that never seemed to arrive.

Beginning with the perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev’s social and economic transformation of Soviet society that preceded and in many ways catalysed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new set of metaphors emerged that gave Soviet citizens tremendous optimism in newly-emerging institutions that simultaneously espoused democratic rights, and condemned all things Soviet. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin’s presidency of the newly-formed Russian Federation was met by liberal and democratically-minded citizens with a state of

enchantment. Participants describe the elation they felt reading about, discussing, and participating in the political changes of the country. The Wars in Chechnya, a constitutional crisis in 1993, and an economic one in 1998, as well as growing corruption and violent crime led to widespread disenchantment with state power, culminating in Yeltsin's resignation on December 31, 1999. In the new millennium, the appointment of Vladimir Putin, alternating between President and Prime Minister over nearly two decades and counting, signaled a new state of enchantment amongst the voting public, who, in their majority, approve Putin's mandate to govern Russia (Treisman 2011).

### **6.2.1 *The Three Ivans and the Ambivalence of State Narratives***

In present-day Russia, political ideology has steered towards mythologized narratives, a process that has accelerated since at least February 2012 (Gan 2015:169), when an anarcho-feminist punk band, Pussy Riot, was arrested, tried, and convicted for performing a "Punk Prayer against Putin" (Pussy Riot 2012) inside Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. As I have argued elsewhere (Gan 2015), their protest attempted to disentangle political and spiritual domains, reflected in the lyrics that criticize Putin's increasingly proselytizing rhetoric, coupled with repressive measures against the state's detractors:

The head of the KGB is their main Saint,  
He escorts protesters to pretrial detention,  
In order for his Holiness not to complain,  
Women should be giving birth and affection. (Pussy Riot 2012)

Inversely, in response to Moscow Patriarch Kirill's support of Putin in the run-up to the 2012 election, Pussy Riot members sang:

Patriarch Gundy believes in Putin,  
You bitch, better have God to believe in. (Pussy Riot 2012)

The lyrics call for the de-politicization of the church, invoked by using the Patriarch's secular nickname, *Gundy*, for Vladimir Gundyayev. The Patriarch responded to the performance in a predictable manner, stating that "the devil had mocked us all" (Interfax.ru 2012), thus re-claiming the sanctimonious authority of the church. However, during the trial, the judicial process became similarly "re-enchanted," when a panel of experts used fourth-century liturgical texts outlining penalties against heretics as evidence (Masyuk 2012:6). Anna Bernstein argues that the resulting verdict against the women—harsh sentences in penal colonies—came to embody the women's inadvertent sacrifice as martyrs (Bernstein 2013:228-229). Therefore, a mythmaking strategy in court had the effect of dismissing the political legitimacy of the group's protest.

In February 2014, two years after Pussy Riot's trial, a new mythmaking strategy was sought to legitimize Russia's annexation of Crimea.<sup>30</sup> The symbol chosen for the task was found in Vladimir of Kiev, a tenth-century Grand Prince who introduced Christianity to the Kievan *Rus'*, and who had supposedly created a "unified Russian nation" (Kuratsuba 2015). Initially, Vladimir was to be commemorated with a twenty-five-metre statue on the banks of the Moscow River, later changed to a height of sixteen metres and erected outside the Kremlin. The monument was opened to great fanfare, and involved Patriarch Kirill's blessing, as well as speeches by

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<sup>30</sup> I use the terms "annexation of Crimea" and "the Crimean conflict" interchangeably to refer to the Russian military intervention in the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014, the Crimean status referendum of March 2014—the legitimacy of which was not recognized by the UN General Assembly—and the subsequent declaration of Crimea's independence from Ukraine in March 2014.

Vladimir Putin and other state officials. As one of my participants, writer and political journalist Sonja Margolina states,

*Sonja Margolina:* Grand Prince Vladimir is total limitlessness. There was an attempt to erect a monument on Sparrow Hills, which was later abandoned. This was a symbolic expropriation of Vladimir standing above the Dnepr [in Ukraine]. But this was absurd. It was too obvious. Not to mention that the monument is hideous – total kitsch. It was supposed to stand four metres taller than Kiev’s Vladimir. The expropriation was meant to say that Kiev is not the mother of all the Russian cities, although this is also a myth [...] This is a form of a propagandistic warfare.

It becomes apparent that state officials are reinvigorating a narrative of Russia’s mythical past by reinforcing a binary opposition of Russia’s heroic status as a saviour of Russian lands against evil forces, a fairy tale adapted to modern times to reflect a contemporary conflict.

In July 2010, following a state visit by Moscow’s then-mayor Yuri Luzhkov, head of the Moscow Patriarchate Kirill, and then-Prime-Minister Vladimir Putin to Ukraine, Ukrainian political scientist Taras Berezovetz criticized Russian leaders for voicing their imperial ambitions towards Ukraine by comparing them to the heads of the three-headed serpent, *Zmey Gorynych* (obozrevatel.ua 2010). Of course, on the Russian side, the symbolic construction of the fairy tale flips the protagonist and the antagonist around; the three Ivans, the heroes of the fairy tale tasked with protecting Russian lands, have been replaced by three Vladimirs: Prince Vladimir, symbolizing national continuity with Kievan *Rus’* and extending Kremlin’s imperial ambitions outside Russia; Vladimir Gundayev, or Patriarch Kirill, symbolizing religious values represented by the Russian Orthodox Church, and Vladimir Putin, who proclaims he came from a “simple family” and lived most of his life like a “normal, ordinary person” (putin.kremlin.ru 2018).

### 6.2.2 Kalinov Most, *Mediascapes*, and the Imaginary West

One way of interpreting state mythmaking strategies is to understand them in the context of media practices that shape public discourse. These practices contribute to “the articulation of national and transnational with local processes and to the significance of ‘the imagination’ in the production of culture and identity in the contemporary world” (Ginsburg et al. 2002:5), imagined worlds that Arjun Appadurai calls *mediascapes* (1996:34). Through *mediascapes*, audiences construct “narratives of the Other and protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement” (1996:36). For media audiences, these narratives may also “[blur] the lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes” (1996:34), where “the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world” (1996:35). I use the metaphor of Kalinov Bridge, a fiery bridge that spans the river Smorodinka, to analyze how “imagined worlds” are created through both Soviet and Post-Soviet mythmaking strategies, which extend well beyond national borders.

Following the Second World War, the availability of short-wave radios amounted to a peculiar type of media exchange between the Soviet Union and the West. Because transistor radios could pick up faraway signals, radio stations such as *Radio Moscow* began broadcasting to the West. Simultaneously, newly-established stations such as *Radio Free Europe*, *Voice of America*, and *Radio Liberty* set up transmitters close to Soviet borders in order to broadcast into

Soviet territory. These were variously picked up by Soviet listeners or jammed by Soviet censors, creating a subculture that revolved around listening to “the West.” As Aleksei Yurchak notes, “the state’s simultaneous attempts to promote good cultural internationalism and to contain bad influences of the bourgeois culture enabled the emergence, in the 1950s and 1960s, of various imaginary worlds as part of the Soviet everyday” (Yurchak 2006:289). Whether in the 1960s, during Khrushchev’s Thaw, or in the early 1980s, during my childhood, Soviet state rhetoric reflected both the utopian ideals of state socialism, and the paranoia of the Cold War. On the one hand, it invested into the “communist consciousness and collective spirit” (Reid 2002:142) of young Soviet citizens; on the other, it saw itself surrounded by hostile capitalist forces. These “enemies” not only undermined the Soviet regime from the outside, but also from the inside.

Significant obstacles, such as the renunciation of Soviet citizenship, lack of access to foreign currency, and limited information flows, deliberately discouraged people from seeking to emigrate. Those who took steps to leave the Soviet Union were officially considered “traitors,” having turned their backs on the Soviet state. Simultaneously, emigrants from the Soviet Union, including Soviet Jews attempting to emigrate to Israel in the 1970s and ‘80s, were required to undergo a grueling bureaucratic process of securing an “exit visa.” If this visa was denied, the potential emigrant became an *otkaznik*, a “refusenik”, losing their job, and often becoming subject to KGB surveillance (Remmenick 2007:388). *Otkazniki* became active in the dissident movement, fighting the state’s refusal to issue exit visas as an example of the Soviet abuse of human rights.

Anyone issued permission to travel outside the Soviet Union, but who chose not to return, like film director Andrei Tarkovsky, or ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, was called a *nevozvrashchenets*, or a non-returnee. The Soviet state doubled down in their denunciations of *nevozvrashchentsy* not only for betraying the motherland, but also for cavorting with the enemy. This point was made clear by photographer Nina Alover, who moved to New York in 1977,

*Nina Alover:* We left... forever. We were the only emigration that left forever. The first emigration planned on returning. Subsequent emigrations went to see how they could set up their life abroad. We did not have an opportunity to return. This is very significant. For us, this was it. We were deprived of citizenship. We were betrayers.

According to Alexander Genis, the Soviets were justified in their fear of dissident intellectuals, because of their role in undermining the political regime:

*Alexander Genis:* The third wave was a steam valve of the perestroika. If we had not been pushed out, the perestroika would have started in the 1970s. All this ended, of course, in '68, after the [Soviet] invasion of Prague. This was what people started in the '60s, during the Thaw, but they were pushed abroad. If the Thaw continued, it would have brought the perestroika a generation earlier.

During the perestroika, cultural producers in Russia—journalists, writers and activists—played a significant role in acquainting the public with “the West” through “thick journals,” like *Novy Mir*, and weeklies, like *Ogoniok*. People living in Moscow describe lining up at newspaper kiosks at 5 o’clock in the morning to buy them before they sold out. At the time, the bridge became a powerful symbol in popular media. It was through various “*telemosty*,” tele-bridges,<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> These broadcasts were called “U.S.-Soviet Space Bridge” in the United States.

that Soviet audiences met Western audiences in televised dialogues between cities in the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>32</sup>

The connection to an “Imaginary West” (Yurchak 2006:289) became immediate when travel abroad became accessible through the issue of international passports. Early post-Soviet years allowed a broader demographic to travel abroad without significantly rupturing ties with Russia. Newly-available global information flows and travel networks permitted Russian migrants to share their experiences and resources with family and friends in Russia—through letters, telephone calls, remittances, or upon return visits—undoubtedly strengthening images, impressions and imagination about the West in Russia. Thus, Nina Aloverd also describes her return journey, reflecting on the perceptions of a changing geopolitical landscape:

*Nina Aloverd:* When I returned, the main joy was to destroy this “forever,” and to see people I did not think I would ever see again. When I arrived at the airport in Russia, I stood in line at the passport control. For a second, the doors to the arrivals gate opened, and I could see people waiting for me on the other side. A friend ran up to these doors and threw a chrysanthemum towards me, and it slid all the way across the customs line.

This image of a chrysanthemum representing the newfound mobility of Russian migrants after the fall of the Iron Curtain is certainly one made for fairy tales.

Following the logic of the fairy tale, present-day Russia is revivifying Cold War discourses on emigration, where anything proclaimed to be within Russia’s national purview is declared

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<sup>32</sup> It was during one of these famous broadcasts, the Leningrad-Boston “Space bridge” aired on July 17, 1986, that a woman famously declared that “there was no sex in the Soviet Union.” This quote became an unfair neologism—the woman was edited out before she had a chance to finish her sentence, critiquing how Western media exploits female sexuality; instead, the redaction fuelled popular narratives about sexual repression in the Soviet Union.

“good,” while anything threatening its sovereignty, “evil.” Much like in Soviet times, the threat of enemies is not exclusive to spaces beyond the border, because saboteurs could have already infiltrated within. In my fieldnotes from 2015, I quote Aleksandr Prokhanov, a writer who garnered critical acclaim in the Soviet era, but who became an extreme right-wing commentator in post-Soviet Russia. In the eyes of the author, “Putin’s grandiose victory was to unite the country,” while the opposition “struck at the heart of Russia, at the very Russian Renaissance.” This invisible threat of foreign infiltration was made manifest by a law passed in 2012, obliging non-profit organizations receiving funding from abroad to declare themselves “foreign agents” (minjust.ru 2017). Organizations such as *Memoriál*, which investigates political repressions in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, were similarly mandated to do this, in part because they accept international donations. *Memoriál* interpreted the law as a way of silencing oppositional voices, and has since appealed the decision in courts (memo.ru 2017).

An apparent difference exists between the way emigration is framed in Soviet, and post-Soviet discourses, reflecting the “priorities, social pressures and values” (2002:12) of a neoliberal economy. While during the Cold War, emigration was considered an ideological act against the Soviet Union, contemporary polemics dismiss Russian migrants predominantly in economic terms. In pro-government blogs, newspapers, and online media, present-day migrants who voiced oppositional ideas to state discourses, including participants of this research, were dismissed with the vulgar neologism, *grantosy*, “grant-suckers,” suggesting their views were financially manipulated by *zapad*, “the West.”

While the root causes of foreign policy are always political, Robert Nalbandov argues that at the time of the Crimean conflict in 2014, Russia's evolution of national discourse became centered on primordial memory rooted in a medieval past (Nalbandov 2016:187). Nalbandov calls this type of state strategy "soft primordialism" (2016:187), a term Sandra Joireman coined to describe "attachments as evolving from history and a myth of a common homeland rather than blood ties or cultural heritage" (Joireman 2003:28). As Nalbandov argues, the annexation provided Russia with a strong military foothold on the Black Sea, was widely supported by the Russian population, and demonstrated to international powers Vladimir Putin's ability to leverage conflict to his own benefit (2016:229). However, during his annual address on December 4, 2014, Putin presented quite a different line of reasoning to explain Crimea's annexation:

It was thanks to this spiritual unity [in Crimea] that our forefathers, for the first time and forevermore, saw themselves as a united nation. All of this allows us to say that Crimea, the ancient Korsun or Chersonesus, and Sevastopol have invaluable civilizational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism. And this is how we will always consider it. (Nalbandov 2016: 229-230)

Russia's symbolic power lies not only in its territorial expanse, but in its ability to adapt a narrative of a mythical, primordial past befitting a *velikoderzhavnaya*-, meaning a "grand-sovereign" power. Today, a nineteen-kilometre bridge is being built across Kerch Strait connecting Crimea to mainland Russia, slated to fully open in December 2018. It is already being heralded both as an engineering miracle (Samofalova 2015), and a harbinger of a true economic boom for Crimea, supplying tourist revenue not seen since Soviet times (Samofalova 2015). The talk of a miracle is overshadowed by cost overruns; the bridge has been downgraded in its ability to withstand seismic events, and its environmental assessments and

public hearings were done in haste, if done at all. Environmentalists and engineers agree, where a bridge is being built, a tunnel would have sufficed (themoscowtimes.com 2014).

In the epoch of high Soviet modernism, great construction projects carried a positivist, utopian narrative – they were projected into a glorified communist future (Crowley and Reid 2002:7). The Kerch Strait bridge also fulfills a utopian function, but one that projects Russian history into a mythical past; a past that re-unites the Grand Prince of Kiev with Soviet Crimea and Russian modernity. “A miracle came to pass!” (rg.ru 2015) stated Putin, proclaiming the opening of the car bridge a “historical event” (rg.ru 2015). However, history reveals that the first attempts to build a bridge across Kerch Strait were made by German armies during the Second World War. The Soviets blew up the German bridge and built their own, which was washed away by an ice debacle the following winter. Thus, the annexation of Crimea represents Kremlin’s turn to a new spatio-temporal ideology, which views history as an enterprise easily subjected to state policy. This is exemplified by statements made by the Minister of Education, Olga Vasilieva, who asserts that it is impossible to teach history without mythologizing it; people, after all, need their heroes (Baranov 2016). The Crimean conflict revealed that Russia’s economic interests and the well-being of its citizens were beholden to its nationalistic ambitions.

I began my fieldwork a year after Russia’s annexation of Crimea. At the time, economic sanctions imposed by “the West”—which plunged the price of the ruble and provoked a financial crisis—were met by Russian counter-sanctions. Both were somehow spun as positive events, an opportunity to support “Russian-made” consumer products. Anecdotally, a popular T-shirt in

2015 depicted the image of a sunglasses-clad Putin spinning a globe on his finger, captioned with a vulgar quote, “*vertel ya vashi sanktsii*” (literally, “I whirled your sanctions”). Such messages were similarly replicated in mass media. In a reality show on TV, *Sdelano v Rossii*, “Made in Russia,” sponsored by the Russian Ministry of Trade (360tv.ru 2018), participants were made to compete to discover how Russian consumer products were superior to their Western counterparts. In the trailer to the show, a participant picks out lipstick in the cosmetics aisle, and reads its label out loud: “made in Crimea, which means it’s made in Russia.”

For those who supported Crimea’s annexation to Russia, the economic crisis was blamed on “the West,” but it was also, ironically, used to justify Russia as a defender of its sovereign identity against foreign attack. As sociologist Boris Dubin suggests, “the West is practically a synonym for the limits of the world, the boundaries of one’s own identity, which, however paradoxically, are drawn from ‘outside’” (2006:312). As I have argued in the last chapter, it is the border, as well as people living beyond the border, which define “boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, or belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Avtar Brah quoted in Smith 1999:503). However, if, as I have also argued, political strategies aim to expand Russia’s national influence to include Russian citizens living outside its geopolitical territory, how could they simultaneously consider them enemies? I contend that the messages Russian state strategists send abroad are strategically ambivalent, evident in the discrepancies between state discourses about “the West” inside and outside Russia.

### **6.2.3 Zmey Gorynych, *The Fifth Column*, and the Constitution of Meaningful Subjects**

In 2015, another famed serpent overtook Russia's popular media discourse. Andrey Zvyagintsev's film, *Leviathan* (2014) debuted at Cannes in 2014, winning an award for best screenplay, and subsequently picked up a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film. However, the real surprise came when Russia's Oscar-nomination committee advanced it as Russia's 2015 Academy Award nominee for best foreign feature. Few post-Soviet films have had such international acclaim as *Leviathan*, and Vlad Strukov argues that in early 2015, "*Leviathan* and the political controversy around it became the most discussed culture-related topic in R[ussian] F[ederation] since Russia's independence in 1991" (Strukov 2016:40). It also had such a polarizing effect on audiences, that Nancy Condee argued the film has become an identity marker, "Tell me your view of *Leviathan* and I will tell you who you are" (2015:607).

Set in the picturesque Northern landscape of the Barents Sea, *Leviathan* (2014) tells the story of auto-mechanic Kolya and his family, whose ancestral home is set to be expropriated by the town Mayor, Vadim. On Vadim's behest, members of the government, the police, the judiciary and the church utilize increasingly coercive tactics against Kolya. His losses accumulate—futile court battles, his best friend's betrayal, and the loss of his wife and son, both real and symbolic—to reveal his life and faith tested against a corrupt and immoral power, reflected in the state and the clergy. Beckoning the audience's empathy, the heavy-drinking, smoking and violence-, and profanity-prone protagonist is sent into drunken despair, up against considerably-more-evil forces that conspire against him.

According to the director of the film, *Leviathan* was inspired by an American story of a rogue auto-mechanic who built a bulldozer and went on a demolition rampage, but told "from a

Russian perspective” (Strukov 2016:36). The title of the film references the Biblical Book of Job, the story of a family man beset by misfortunes, as well as Thomas Hobbes’ eponymously titled treatise on the nature of government (1929[1651]). The film surprised critics for offering such a candid portrayal of Russian corruption, while it was simultaneously promoted as Russia’s main cinematic cultural product in the West. As Josh Nadeau argues,

The unenviable task of the Russian Federation’s cultural gatekeepers is to promote a unifying national vision while giving directors enough slack to provide the motherland a masterpiece [...] but the fact that they exist at all and are eventually promoted by the government they critique for an award [...] speaks to an irony and an absurdity that is all too human (Nadeau 2018).

*Leviathan* was considered a bold political statement, and the filmmaker was compared to Andrei Tarkovsky (Bradshaw 2014), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Boris Pasternak (MacFarquhar 2015). However, according to Vlad Strukov, critics “significantly downplay[ed] the fact that the film had been made with money provided by the Russian Ministry of Culture” (Strukov 2016:41), even though it was later criticized by the Minister himself, Vladimir Medinsky. Strukov argues that amongst Western critics, the film was framed “in the style of the Cold War era, which still remains the anti-Russian ‘grand’ narrative in the West” (2016:41). This represented a winning strategy for Russian state officials: on the one hand, they could challenge “bias in western media coverage, [re-inforcing] the government’s narrative of a ‘western attack’ on Russia” (Strukov 2016:41). On the other, by reluctantly allowing *Leviathan* to play in Russian theatres, the government could “co-opt and disable grassroots debates” (2016:42). I argue that there are additional factors that made the film a resounding political success in Russia’s cultural confrontation with “the West.”

The natural setting of the film reveals a primordial landscape where actors compete for screen time with whale skeletons. As Nancy Condee argues, cinematographer Mikhail Krichman “frames the film with a matched series of ‘evolutionary’ sequences: the camera moves initially upward, from rocks and waves to shore and scrub grass, to land and fishing boats,” (Condee 2015:608) and backwards again, “as the film reaches its implacable, petroglyphic conclusion” (2015:608). The natural landscape is not simply a setting for the story, it is an essential element in a universal, Biblical tale of a person confronted by a higher power. Leading up to the climax of the film, Kolya’s son, Roma, runs away from home, collapsing at the foot of a whale skeleton, another large sea creature (Paromanov and Shariy 2015). Kolya’s home is similarly entangled in the development of the characters and the plot. The motif of the Russian landscape as an entity to be defended is borrowed from Russian folk mythology.

In a key scene of the film, Kolya meets the village priest, Father Vasily, a humble antithesis to the corrupt bishop colluding with the Mayor.

*Father Vasily:* Ever heard of a man named Job? [...] He was like you, asking questions about the meaning of life. Thinking, ‘Why am I being punished? [...] he couldn’t let it go; kept kicking up the dust, pulling out his hair. In the end, God took pity on him [...] Job resigned himself to his fate. Lived a hundred and forty years, got to see four generations of grandkids, and died from old age when he’d had enough.

*Nikolay [Kolya]:* Is that a fairy tale?

*Father Vasily:* No, it is from the Bible (Zvyagintsev and Negin 2013)

The scene ends when Kolya helps the country priest carry a sack on his back. As Nancy Condee argues, “the film is less anti-Orthodox than anticlerical” (607). Indeed, this apparent Biblical reference is the moral of the film: no matter how difficult life becomes for a true Orthodox believer, they must carry themselves with forbearance. The superficial message concerning the collusion between the church and the state is superseded by the film’s morality tale.

*While making my last film in 2010, a documentary titled The Theory of Happiness (2014), I worked on a farm in Ukraine with a group of people attempting to discover happiness through mathematical formulas. During that summer, I worked both with members of the sect, and with their farmhands, who tended after the pigs, horses, and a large herd of cows. In the last week of my stay, as I was preparing to film an interview, a farmhand ran into the mess room yelling for help; his colleague fell into a well. Our supervisor jolted and ran to the well to attempt to save him. We ran after him and saw him descend into the eight-metre-deep cylinder, but soon discovered that he was also in trouble. The air inside the well was poisonous, and he had trouble breathing. Tying ropes around ourselves and breathing through a garden hose, we took turns frantically and fruitlessly trying to rescue the men inside. When the rescuers arrived, I begged them to hurry, but they were painfully slow to gear up, threatening to abandon the rescue altogether. When they did, finally, descend into the well, they pulled out two lifeless bodies.*

*Sect members were widely derided by the locals who blamed them for the accidents. However, according to the mathematical philosophy of the group, people did not die from accidents; rather, they became “eternal” because of their “miscalculations.” It was thus forbidden to grieve. I promptly wrapped up my filming and returned to Moscow. Coping with the trauma of the deaths, I felt like a shell of a person, dazed and tormented by thoughts about what I could have done differently during the rescue. I remember having a candid conversation with my great-aunt, sitting by the lilac tree at the dacha. She proposed to imagine the well as a metaphor for everything that is evil, but to imagine myself going in the opposite trajectory, on a path paved with good, towards God. Ultimately, I rejected her metaphor.*

*On a personal level, the tragedy, and my encounter with local authorities who threatened me and held back their rescue, reminded me of the false sense of security I have cultivated living in an urban Western metropolis, where everyday life is regulated by routine inspections, expectations for professional conduct, and the overtly stated goal of the preservation of human life, even when this goal tests poorly in the real world. This type of violence-from-above is undoubtedly experienced in all parts of the world, whether it is administrative—regulated through fines, the court system, or prison—or physical—when, for example, protesters are attacked or humiliated by law enforcement—or both. When I arrived in Russia during my past trips, I often felt that my own feeling of safety diminished as soon as I stepped off the airplane. While I often rationalize my initial culture shock as a confrontation with myself and my own set of values, I am reminded that for several research participants, “not feeling safe” in Russia because of how they expressed their identity, became their main motivation to leave the country and to seldom, if ever, return.*

I argue that recent Russian state discourses mirror the moral message of the film, *Leviathan* (2014), advancing the idea that one must endure difficulties with forbearance. Thus, Tomas Matza examines how a host of a self-help radio show encouraged his call-in listeners who encountered difficulties because of wider, structural problems, to act as autonomous individuals, complying with market rationality and state authoritarianism (2009:495). To do otherwise is perceived as an oppositional tactic, a betrayal constituting an internal threat to the state. In 2014, during Vladimir Putin’s third term as president, he announced that “it is hard to give a scientific explanation where the opposition ends, and where the fifth column begins”

(meduza.io 2014). By comparing members of the opposition to internal enemies, Putin declared them *persona non grata*, both dismissing their political claims, and according to the logic of the fairy tale, recasting them as an invading, foreign body in the state body politic.

The strongest wave of dissent in Russia's recent history occurred in 2011-2012, when irregularities in State Duma elections, as well as Vladimir Putin's re-re-election campaign, drew strong rebukes from political opponents. On May 6, 2012, the so-called "march of millions" took place in Moscow, protesting Putin's inauguration to the presidency. The protest was sanctioned to take place on Bolotnaya Square, located on an island connected by bridges in central Moscow. However, when protesters reached the site, they found it cordoned off by police barriers. Leaders of the opposition, including Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov, staged a sitting demonstration on the bridge and were arrested shortly thereafter, along with many of their supporters (svoboda.org 2012). Subsequent protests rallying against these arrests took on many forms, including Occupy Abai, Occupy Movement's Moscow variation, and "A Control Stroll with Writers" [*Kontrol'naya Progulka s Pisatelyami*], an unsanctioned protest organized by promenading writers joined by thousands of supporters (bbc.com 2012). These protests signaled to a new geo-spatial relationship between dissenting Muscovites and the state – one that inverts the topography of power. Walter Benjamin famously discusses a stroll as a *flâneur's*, a "demonstration against the division of labour" (1999[1940]:427), but walking can also become "enunciative," in that the act itself appropriates topography and works against disciplinary measures (de Certeau 1984:96-97).

The modern use of a bridge as a site of resistance dates to the 1990s, when *Gorbatyy Most*, “The Hunchback Bridge,” facing the Russian Parliament, became the site of sitting protests by Russian miners deprived of salaries for months at a time. More recently, in 2010, members of the art-group *Voina* briskly painted graffiti on the Liteynyy drawbridge in St. Petersburg. When the bridge was drawn, it revealed a giant phallus that stood opposite the building of the Federal Security Service.

The most divisive event that put the topography of Moscow power on wide international display occurred on February 27, 2015, when Boris Nemtsov was gunned down on Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge, steps away from the Kremlin. The site of the assassination inadvertently became a site of resistance, when Nemtsov’s supporters flooded the bridge with flowers and candles, turning it into a makeshift memorial. Nemtsov’s depute, Mikhail Kasianov, proposed to change the name of the bridge to *Nemtsov Most* (ria.ru 2015), and musicians and social activists commemorated Nemtsov with an eponymously titled live broadcast. Over three years later, an around-the-clock vigil still stands on the site, where volunteers lobby for an official plaque to be placed on the bridge to commemorate the late politician.

### **6.3 “*Pora Valit’ Otsyuda*,” Burning Bridges, and Russian Discourses on Emigration.**

On the eve of German re-unification, John Borneman investigates social policies instituted by East Berlin in a dialectical relationship with West Berlin, and vice versa (1992). Correspondingly, Borneman considers the way inhabitants of each city constructed narratives about their life—in the way that they were either ready to assimilate or resist state strategies—to be an intensely political act (1992:203). Borneman does not view the opposition between

“people” and the “state” as analytically salient, but considers that nation-states “are successful in nation-building when they (re)create a unique group which retells its history in categories and periods congruent with those used by the state in its own accounts” (1992:32).

As I have demonstrated in the cases of the annexation of Crimea, the ensuing economic sanctions against Russia, and the conflicts surrounding the release of the film *Leviathan*, state strategies that appear to fail on a diplomatic, economic, or cultural level, nevertheless succeed in advancing Russia’s national vision. Drawing on Borneman’s analysis, I examine whether the Russian state is also successful in consolidating national feeling amongst a group of Russian intellectuals, if measured by the way dichotomies between “good” and “evil” are received and reproduced amongst transnational migrants. I analyze this by considering how research participants evaluated their personal life trajectories in correlation with recent political events.

A significant consequence of the Crimean conflict was the *polarization* of public opinion, which extended into many other spheres of social and political life in Russia and abroad. In some cases, disagreements concerning Ukraine divided family members and alienated friends, which only further reinforced an “us vs. them” mentality. These disagreements also occurred across state lines. Marina Dobuševa moved from Sebastopol to Prague in 1999. During our interview, she talked about how she clashes with her Russian-Ukrainian friends concerning events in Crimea:

*Marina Dobuševa:* In all these 16 years, none of my friends came to visit me in Prague. At first, they dreamed to vacation in Prague, to see how we lived here [...] And then Putin happened and they became very happy. Nobody wanted to leave. My contacts shrunk and I could no longer handle our correspondence. They were proud that Crimea became part of Russia! When I received a couple of letters like this: that Russia doubled their salaries, or that they're building new roads, I had to close my mail account. I lost faith that I could convince anyone and that my opinion mattered.

Political disagreements about Crimea's annexation have metamorphosed into a much wider conflict, dividing people along those who are "for," and those who are "against" Putin's administration, and delineating between those who had seemingly "abandoned" Russia, and those who stayed behind. The conflict had also amplified discussions about leaving Russia.

Current discourses on migration reflect polarized political views inside the country. In oppositional circles, an oft-heard phrase during my fieldwork was "*pora valit' otsyuda*," "it's time to jet from here." Several people who were not planning to leave Russia prior to events in Crimea, now openly talked about emigrating, or at least, about securing a second citizenship as a safeguard "in case something happens." One of my Moscow research participants is a father with a large family. As a professional trying to find work abroad, he shares his thoughts on the current political climate in Russia.

*Participant:* The intelligentsia, above everyone else, understands what is happening in the country. Mainly, we are witnessing a geared and deliberate destruction of culture. There is a pervasive feeling that you're in Germany in 1936. It did not feel this way until recently. Three years ago, it started. Two years ago, people felt it sharply. This scares me. Because the processes are similar. At that time, practically everyone that could, left Germany. I'm absolutely certain that what is happening now is a new wave.

Several participants have seconded the beginnings of a new “wave” of migration in response to political events in Russia. Thus, if migrant identities are to be conceived as hybrid, bi-cultural, multi-local, and so forth, political events in Russia have catalyzed some intellectuals inside Russia to strategically seek this identity, simultaneously reproducing “us vs. them” dichotomies.

The participant whom I quote above is a self-identified Orthodox intellectual, expressing his admiration for the architecture of Russian Orthodox Cathedrals and Northern Russian woodcrafts. Yet, when asked whether he considers himself a cosmopolitan, he responds as follows: “I feel myself exclusively a Western European person in my worldview, in my culture, in my mentality. I am closer to Western Europe than to Russia.” This example reveals that polarized discourses push participants in Russia to align their political views with outside ideologies. Indeed, attitudes about migration reveal a great deal about people’s Russian identities, especially when they begin to define themselves against binary state discourses. Following Borneman’s argument (1992:32), this would signal that the state has at least partially succeeded in convincing its citizens of its political narrative, even when this narrative has failed to fully win them over.

In the recent past, Western narratives about Russia have also shifted, leading to greater distrust towards Russians, both in Russia, and abroad. Aleksandr Morozov evaluates these narratives in the European historical context:

*Aleksandr Morozov*: Up until recently, before Crimea and Putin's latest turn in politics, Europeans had few suspicions about Russians. Russia was considered a big commune. It was obvious there was no terrorism there, no radical religious tendencies. But in some ways, it is not a commune at all, because it is weakly coordinated. They don't have a common philosophy in counterpoint to the rest of the world. I don't mean ever. I mean after 1990. Because those who had left earlier were leaving the Iron Curtain to enter the global world, which they wanted to be a part of. It is a new situation now, where the Russian-speaking community is under suspicion. Maybe they've started to develop some kind of new self-identity.

Aleksandr underlines a paradox concerning contemporary Russian migration: "people leaving for Europe, including cultural producers who do not support the current Russian administration, encounter previous émigrés who admire Putin, and who are negatively oriented towards European life. They like how Putin answers questions; how powerful he is – an independent leader." Aleksandr suspects that migrants who have lived in Europe or the United States for some time, but who continue to feel estranged from European and American cultures, are happy to see a return of a strong Russia: "They become *Putinverstehers*, as it is called here. People who understand Putin." Russian migrants living abroad thus replicate binary oppositions about external enemies as a threat to Russia; except that they may perceive these enemies to be all around them.

Early in 2016, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, a sleepy borough in the distant North-Eastern part of Berlin that a large community of Russian-German migrants has called home since the 1990s, was rocked by a diplomatic scandal. On January 16, Russian journalist Ivan Blagoy broadcast a disturbing news story about a thirteen-year-old girl Lisa, *devochka Liza*, as she came to be

known, kidnapped and sexually assaulted by recently-arrived refugees from the Middle East (Kuzmenkova 2016). The story aired on Russia's main newscast, Channel One's state-run program, *Vremya*, "Time," making its way back to the Russian-speaking community in Marzahn, the members of which receive Russian television via satellite—living proof that Appadurai's *mediascape* (1996:34) can serve in the "articulation of national and transnational with local processes" (Ginsburg et al. 2002:5).

The news report galvanized massive demonstrations numbering several thousand people, first in the neighbourhood, then in front of the German Chancellery, and then, in other communities around Germany. When it turned out that key parts of the story were false—Middle-Eastern migrants did not kidnap, nor sexually assault the girl, although an unrelated criminal case was launched by Berlin police—protests continued under the guise that German prosecutors were covering up the truth (Kuzmenkova 2016). Journalists reported that PEGIDA (an extremist anti-migrant organization; see also pp. 84, n. 11) helped organize the demonstrations, because the story supposedly proved the threat of an overly-liberal migration policy in Europe (McGuinness 2016). The case provoked a confrontation between Russia's foreign minister and Germany's minister of internal affairs and several lawsuits and human rights complaints were launched as a result (McGuinness 2016), in what appeared to be blatant political exploitation of a private family tragedy.

Several participants commented on this story in Russian media. Artist Dmitri Vrubel, who had permanently relocated to Berlin five years earlier, noted the irony that the very people

retaliating against Angela Merkel's policies of harbouring migrants were *Kontingentflüchtlinge*<sup>33</sup> who came from Russia in the 1990s, and who received favourable social and financial assistance from the state (Kuzmenkova 2016). In an online post recounting his encounters during the original demonstration, journalist and writer Dmitry Vachedin writes,

This story has nothing to do with '*russskiy Berlin*,' Russian Berlin, whose members were at a performance of As Astakhova in Neuköln's *Vater-Bar*; at the premiere of a film, *Zapliv*, Swimmers, and at the game "Sixty Seconds" (intellectual games are the hit of the season). The general opinion is that somewhere on the outskirts, in the snow, there was a meeting of the [Russian social media site] *Odnoklassniki*, Classmates, with cameras from Channel One pointed at them.

Both Dmitri Vruble and Dmitry Vachedin contrast the Marzahn residents with an "other," intellectual Berlin, asserting the historical continuity and discursive hegemony of Russian intellectual culture abroad. However, I suggest that such dichotomies mirror official discourses, inverting the protagonists and the antagonists of Russian state-run media.

The problem of reproducing binary discourses that seem to describe both how official state discourses and participants characterize Russian communities abroad is that they seldom reflect the diversity of migrant life experience. There is a desire to label recent migration from Russia as a "new wave," underscoring Vladimir Putin's failure to retain educated, highly trained professionals within Russia's borders. However, as Aleksandr Morozov suggests, such a narrative often reflects wishful thinking, rather than demographic realities:

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<sup>33</sup> Dmitry's classification is not entirely correct. While both groups received state support in the form of training programs and financial assistance, *Kontingentflüchtlinge*, or so-called "quota refugees," were mainly Jewish migrants who received permanent residence in Germany and could later apply for German citizenship, whereas Russian-Germans emigrated as *Spätaussiedler*, "late resettlers," according to the Federal Law on Refugees and Exiles and received German citizenship immediately upon arrival.

*Aleksandr Morozov*: It would be lovely to say that those who left in the last three years from “under Putin” had organized a kind of “new emigration.” That would be swell. But that has not happened yet. Rather, we know that Russians and Russian-speakers have organized a new and politically active community in Prague, or Berlin, for example. But the process of forming a Russian-speaking political environment in Europe is at the very beginning.

Aleksandr hints that the formation of a Russian community abroad has to overcome an “entirely differentiated Russian intellectual life.” The case can be made that a Russian-speaking, politically-active community has emerged as a response to a perceived injustice in the quiet Berlin suburb of Marzahn-Hellersdorf; a “community,” as Vered Amit argues, reflecting tensions and ambiguities in their association, and responding to an “unusual or even extreme circumstances” (2010:360). However, owing to my own research limitations, I examined this community mainly through journalistic reports and participants’ reflections. This is not to say that during my fieldwork, I did not encounter politically-active groups of Russian intellectuals; quite the contrary. Acknowledging various community crossovers between research participants, and attempting to avoid binary discourses that I myself critiqued earlier, I now turn to a brief discussion about how several such groups may become a foundation for a larger Russian community abroad.

### **6.3.1 *An Émigré Community? Or, in Search of a Dispersed, Pluralistic, Mobile Self.***

I began this dissertation questioning whether it was possible to speak about “historically significant places of Russian emigration.” Throughout this work, I have argued that such places are *made* significant owing to a wide range of discourses Russian intellectuals use in the global

cultural economy. At the onset of my fieldwork, I identified a problem of labeling Russian migrants as a “community,” because both in early conversations with research participants, and borrowing from my own experience, I explored the possibility that migration is not a finished process, but a continuous negotiation of personal identity and group boundaries. Yet, I first encountered research participants during public events that were evidently organized by a Russian “community”: a group of people gathered through a “joint commitment,” “common knowledge,” and bound by “affect and belonging” (Amit 2010:359-360). As my research progressed and I sought more refined ways to speak about what it means to identify as a transnational Russian migrant, I recognized that claiming membership in such “communities” already involved tremendously nuanced, flexible, and heterogeneous categories of belonging.

I first met architect, writer, and artist, Dmitry Khmel'nitsky at a protest in front of the Russian Consulate in Berlin. Approximately a hundred people were gathered on Unter den Linden Boulevard, waving banners and chanting slogans. When I reconnected with Dmitry and reminded him about how we had met several weeks later, he responded:

*Dmitry Khmel'nitsky:* This is fairly standard. I go to these events out of a sense of duty. To show the Russian government there are people who are against it is a holy endeavour. I'm not a big fan of these types of collective actions, demonstrations, or God forbid, speeches. I profoundly dislike when people get together and start chanting something.

*Gregory Gan:* But it seems you have a thriving social life and a community here.

*Dmitry Khmel'nitsky:* In short, yes. Because I publish. Owing to my journalistic connections and social networks. It is thriving, but virtual. I practically do not see anybody. I rarely leave the house.

Dmitry enunciates the difficulty of categorizing members of a Russian community by forms of association, political motivations, or sheer physical proximity: the event reflects his values, but he finds his community in the virtual, rather than physical space.

When I arrived in France in early 2016, I discovered that on February 27, a political organization, *Libertés Russes*, was hosting a memorial to Boris Nemtsov on the one-year anniversary of his murder. The event was held across the street from the Russian consulate in Paris. When I caught up with the small crowd, I discovered the audience to be evenly split between younger, Russian-speaking attendees, and a dozen grey-haired French activists wearing yellow Amnesty International jerseys. Participants brought bouquets of white flowers, inserting them into the latticework of a black cast-iron fence across the street from the consulate, which had turned completely white by the end of the event. It was also here that I recognized an acquaintance whom I met earlier in Berlin. As an actor living in Paris, he came to perform at the Panda Theatre, a Russian-speaking performance space and Dmitri Vrubel's art studio. This seemingly coincidental encounter complicated my definition of a "politically-active intellectual community," because it now spanned political, social, and artistic endeavours, and encompassed both physical and virtual transnational space.

Large-scale Russian cultural events, such as the *Ruberoid Festival* in Berlin, or *JetLag*, a three-day event in the Catskill Mountains outside New York, only further complicated categorizations of a Russian community abroad. These festivals featured international music, theatre, and art performances, and while they were predominantly attended by Russian-speaking audiences, they easily assimilated non-Russian visitors. These events were also widely marketed on Russian-speaking social networks, and their "transnational connection" was evident

in their very names (*Ruberoid* is a roofing material made from cardboard covered in a tar-like substance, which was ubiquitous in the Soviet Union). I was invited to *JetLag* having met some of its performers in a non-descript venue in a warehouse district of East Williamsburg, at an event titled *The Borsht Ball 2016*, “a non-stop multiple-genre party” featuring a night of Russian and Yiddish music. The headliners were a five-piece band from Germany, fusing klezmer, punk, lounge, and Soviet-era pop songs with jazz and doo-wop. It appears that the musicians were well ahead of me in asserting a flexible, heterogeneous transnational identity, characteristic of the Yiddish music revival embraced by American-, German-, and post-Soviet Russian Jews in New York. While Soviet pop-songs in East Williamsburg may seem like a sure-fire way of pulling at the nostalgic heartstrings of the large Russian crowd in attendance, the eclecticism and inventiveness of such performances undoubtedly reflects emergent styles, genres and ways of asserting contemporary Russian and Russian-Jewish identity.

When I visited places where I would meet future research participants, such as Russian art exhibitions,<sup>34</sup> film festivals, and book readings, I was undoubtedly another paying visitor, interlocutor, and participant in the consolidation of a Russian cultural community abroad. When I organized a screening of my previous film in Prague and Berlin, when I exhibited the installation in Paris, Berlin, and Cuba, and when I put to paper and video a PhD research project on the topic of Russian transnational migration, I also became a contributor to Russian transnational cultural production. I can only hope that such a contribution has provided a more nuanced and detailed

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<sup>34</sup> Such exhibitions included, for example, “The Third Wave and ‘Novy Amerikanetz’: Russian Culture in New York 1970-1990” which instigated a conversation with Vitaly Komar, a leader of the Sots Art movement, and “Nina Alovert: The Legends of the Russian Ballet,” hosted by the Russian American Foundation during the Fourteenth Annual Russian Heritage Month in New York, which allowed me to invite Nina Alovert to participate in the research.

look at the complex, diverse, and flexible identities of people who prefer to exist between, rather than within, generic binary conventions, or at least use them in subtle and creative ways.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: Existing Somewhere Between.**

In my conversations with Russian intellectual migrants across diverse cultural contexts, I discovered no discernible unified narrative that could explain the fluid, versatile and shifting migrant cultural identities across diverse spaces, times and ranges of personal experience. Just as there is no fairy-tale narrative that can singlehandedly explain the complexity of the emergence of nation-states, migrants do not espouse a single, linear narrative about their experience of transnationalism. While present-day Russian state discourses attempt to advance a national mythology that at once uses the Russian diaspora for its legitimation, and polarizes its membership, in my experience, research participants abroad did not accept this narrative in defining their relationship to Russia, nor did they accept it in defining their sense of belonging and identity. When participants did embrace a fairy tale narrative, it was for completely different reasons.

Genia Chef's oil paintings often surrealistically counterpose self-portraits with members of the Tsar family, world despots, female nudes, and fairy-tale creatures, all set against dreamy, pastel backgrounds. Genia prides himself on merging unlikely scenarios, both in his life and his art: "When I moved to Berlin, I paradoxically lived between *Prenzlauer Berg* and Manhattan. So, between East Berlin and New York. These kinds of combinations between incompatible spaces, very distant from one another, excite me. They make life richer. Many of my works are thus built

on irony.” In reflecting on connections between his art and the influence of fairy tales on his life, Genia says,

*Genia Chef:* A fairy tale I relate to the most is Sleeping Beauty [...] It’s a fairy tale of total eroticism, and erotic perception of the world is close to me. [...] [Psychiatrist Richard von] Krafft-Ebing, saw the uniqueness of the human psyche as a very special state. As valuable. And now, based on his phenomenology, we attempt to merge the incommensurable in our aesthetics, bridging the hybrid, the subversive, the ambivalent, in life and in social behaviour. Krafft-Ebing is a liminal figure who established the liminal state as a norm. And I think that fairy tales are the most direct way of expressing border or liminal states.

Genia’s ironic perception juxtaposes spaces, people, and psychological states in unlikely combinations. He perceives his migration not so much as a struggle between different ideological polarities, but as an existential journey through a liminal state, similar to an enchanted fairy-tale narrative.

Artist Yevgeniy Fiks left Moscow for New York with his parents in 1994, when he was in his early 20s. His artistic practice investigates post-Soviet ideological spaces in post-Soviet Russia and the United States, evident in such conceptual projects as *The Monument to Cold War Victory* (2014). In our conversation about his relationship to Russia, he shares the following:

*Yevgeniy Fiks:* Now I could tell you that I exist, culturally, in a space somewhere between Moscow and New York. For example, I flew to Moscow for two days last week, but before that, I hadn’t been in four years. I don’t know how long it will last, but for now, transit exists, especially if you live in New York. People come and go. There is no feeling of being cut off from Moscow in New York, which may have been felt by people coming here in the 1970s and 1980s.

As Yevgeniy remarks, migrant relationships with Russia have drastically changed over the last four decades. Moreover, the ease of mobility between Moscow and New York allows him to frame his own identity as existing “somewhere between”: as belonging to two places at once.

For Russian cultural producers who continue to make work about Russia and whose audiences are themselves transnational, the bridge metaphor that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter remains, but as an array of complex emotions, narratives, and life constructions (see *Installation video 9: Compilation: Bridges*). The bridge is no longer a “fiery bridge” to be defended against real or imaginary enemies, but one that narrows the gap in time and space, creating connections across a fragmentary, differentiated, and ever-shifting terrain.

*Whenever I stepped off a bus, or entered a café while visiting an industrial town a few hundred kilometres southwest of Moscow, strangers openly commented on what they perceived to be my unusual appearance. My long, curly hair, black-rim glasses, and an unkempt beard provoked protracted stares and children’s giggles, standing out against short-haired, clean-shaven, working class men who approached me with a mix of curiosity and contempt. I speak Russian without an accent, and initial awkwardness would usually subside once I opened my mouth; yet, this experience reminded me of the many ways that people do not—or are made to feel like they do not—belong. As a white male, I write this acknowledging the privilege of experiencing alterity in many parts of the Western world based mainly on appearance that I can fully control. And when at the end of the day, I retreated to Otel' Tourist, Hotel Tourist, with its Soviet-era mosaics, long, dark hallways, and pink, glittery wallpaper, I decompressed by turning to an entirely predictable and life-affirming narrative: I watched American superhero movies.*

*When I visited friends on a stopover in Brussels, we spent a long summer night at an outdoor café, drinking, laughing, and telling stories. On the way home, we stopped at a late-night food truck to order Belgian fries with extra-spicy “Samurai” sauce, served in a greasy paper cone. I really did feel at home in Brussels, but the feeling passed as soon as I boarded the bus in the morning. In Moscow, the only place I ever felt comfortable was the dacha. Coming there in the winter, alone, I would fire up the brick stove that would heat up my room, where childhood toys reminded me of careless summers of my past. This place did not just feel like home, it was home, albeit displaced by a few years and a few idyllic memories.*

*Having spent several months speaking Russian, when I came to renew my passport at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow, a consular official wearing plaid reminded me how easy it was to make conversation in English. I missed Canada, a “place of belonging of habitus and familiarity,” (1999:64) as British-Canadian anthropologist Catherine Knowles calls it. Now back in Toronto, I write these lines from the top floor of Robarts Library, another home, which I will leave again tomorrow, packing my bags and flying on a discount airline back to Berlin, where I live and work.*

Throughout the dissertation, my voice, italicized above, and interjected in the larger text, offered my personal ruminations and memories related to my research. This italicized text, inspired by autobiographical approaches, became part of the larger text insofar as it positioned me to acknowledge the intersubjective nature of a project such as this. In using the lighter-font text I currently write as auto-ethnography, I attempted to link it in dialogue with the italicized text, much as I have attempted to reflect on conversations with participants and introspect on

research questions using this same typeface. This auto-ethnographic voice served as a mediator between the “unabashedly subjective” (Narayan 1993:682) tone of autobiography and the empirical text that followed.

Autobiographic, auto-ethnographic, empirical, and multi-media approaches, each in their own way, highlight different “voices” (Fischer 2003:189) that anthropologists may use to write about their research as an “enactment of hybridity” (Narayan 1993:681), reflecting the fact that “every anthropologist carries both a personal and an ethnographic self” (1993:681).

*I have pieced together different voices, fragments of thoughts, memories, and imagination, recounted in interviews, recorded on film, or written in an “unabashedly subjective” (Narayan 1993:682) narrative in a research project on Russian transnational migration. In the stories I tell, in how I categorize the world, or in the way I try to integrate my identity across this fragmented world, I do not stand apart from other parts of the text. My academic pursuits have taken me to different places, cultures and language environments that have enriched my biography, while I use academic discourse to explain parts of myself to me, disentangling a messy, creative and always fragile sense of self. I differentiate these voices in the text,*

... but consider them placeholders, a “practical essentialism” (Herzfeld 2005:26), a Lévi-Straussian *bricolage*, “a compilation of materials, ideas, histories, and designs” (Markowitz 1993:7),

... as scaffolding to help compartmentalize different parts of this research, which must come down as soon as construction is complete,

*... and that all come together as one.*

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participants' Objects for the Installation *Still Life with a Suitcase*

Vadim Fadin's space shuttle



Nune Barsegian's Armenian cezve



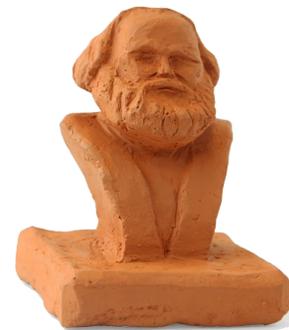
Ekaterina Etkind's  
Pushkin talisman



Dmitry Khmelnitsy's  
ritual knife



Phillip Schneider's wallet



Marina Dobuševa's  
Karl Marx stuatette

Alexander Genis' book of recipes



George Kieselwaller's  
teddy bear

Compilation: bridges



0 3cm



## Appendix B: Technical Measurements for the Installation Set-up

