

INTRODUCTION

THREADING THE NEEDLE

The Soviet Order between Exceptionalism and Shared Modernity

Revolutionaries, whatever else they may believe, are predisposed to think that they are turning an entirely new page in history. As revolutionary rulers consolidate their new order, they become even more heavily invested in touting its unprecedented nature. The Bolshevik Revolution in fact triggered decades of far-reaching transformation; it was marked by an initial wave of iconoclasm, violence, and utopianism that fueled the idea of Soviet exceptionalism, both at home and abroad. Even after Stalin's "second revolution" accentuated a hybrid combination of radical change and what might be called statist-conservative elements, the notion that communism was unique and *sui generis* was constantly trumpeted in Soviet ideology, assuming a prominent place in propaganda aimed at domestic and foreign audiences. It was given additional weight by a range of factors: the distance of Stalin's USSR from the "capitalist" world, the novelty of the five-year plans and the abolition of private property, the political system and the party-state, and a thoroughly altered culture and society. These features of the Soviet order could easily be perceived even by those who could see beyond endless talk of the "new world" and the new historical epoch that the world's first socialist country had begun.

Acceptance of communist novelty, however, was shaped not just by the nature of the revolutionary enterprise. It was furthered inside the country and without by the layering of Soviet claims onto the great debates about Russian national identity in the nineteenth century, which had already placed enormous stress on Russian difference. These claims themselves were made in response to weighty European traditions categorizing Russia as backward and barbarous.¹

Before the dust had even settled from the initial revolutionary upheaval, there began a long-standing, countervailing attempt to deflate or refute revolutionary claims to uniqueness. Indeed, the precedent for such an attempt had already been made prominent long before revolution came to Russia. As Alexis de Tocqueville exclaimed in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856): "Now, was the Revolution, in

reality, as extraordinary as it seemed to its contemporaries? Was it as unexampled, as deeply subversive as they supposed?" In drawing his famous conclusion that the French administrative system survived the fall of the despot and had only achieved an even greater centralization, Tocqueville remarked about the new regime: "The enterprise seemed incredibly bold and incredibly successful, because people only thought of what they saw before them, and forgot the past."²

In the Soviet case, however, as opposed to Tocqueville's claim about eighteenth-century France, few critics at home or abroad simply forgot about the Russian past. A common way of disputing Bolshevik boasting about the dawn of a new epoch was to invoke continuities with Russian autocracy. This was the case both among the early political rivals of Bolshevism at home and among contemporary and later Western observers versed in the discourse of Russian backwardness. The Stalin Revolution at the end of the 1920s vastly expanded the scale of change and combined it with repressive social engineering, terror, and "developmental violence."³ At the same time, it resurrected some of the heroes of the prerevolutionary Russian past, rejected early Soviet egalitarianism as "leveling," and, in the aesthetic and cultural orientation that developed especially after the mid-1930s, seemed to a number of radical and intelligentsia critics as hopelessly petty-bourgeois.⁴ All this greatly raised the stakes of the debate over revolutionary novelty. One explanation for the attractiveness of the concept of totalitarianism as applied to communism after the 1930s was that it challenged the regime's self-presentation not through continuities with the past but by placing the communist regime in the same camp as its mortal enemy, Nazi Germany.⁵

The scholarly study of Soviet history, especially in the United States but also in European countries, emerged in the transition from the interwar to the postwar period out of contemporaries' debates and Russian émigré politics. So it is hardly surprising that debates in the field have from the start faced the same fundamental dilemma of grappling with Soviet novelty and uniqueness, on the one hand, and their opposites—historical continuity, universalistic processes, and international comparability—on the other. When scholarship must address in new and altered terms the same issues raised by historical actors and observers, especially in a highly politicized context, it always creates additional complications and barriers to self-awareness on the part of its practitioners.

Each generation in Russian and Soviet studies has navigated its own path between the poles of Soviet exceptionalism and a stance minimizing or rejecting the thesis of fundamental difference. The binary opposite of uniqueness was the equation of the Soviet order with other societies, which for convenience I refer to here as generic or "shared" modernity. Of course, the comparison of Soviet communism to broader processes at play elsewhere can be made in different ways. In some cases, the rejection of exceptionalism might be labeled normalization, in that it downplayed or minimized the distinctiveness especially of the Stalin period, including the scale of violence. In other cases, the Soviet Union could be compared either to the West or to the developing world. As modern Russian and

Soviet studies developed in the postwar decades, however, the most sophisticated practitioners recognized elements of both exceptionalism and commonality.

For example, the foundational postwar generation of historians, social scientists, and social theorists were not just adherents of communist or totalitarian uniqueness. They also advanced influential theories of Soviet modernization and industrial society.⁶ Later, revisionists and a generation of social historians were inclined by their disciplinary outlook—and a mission to seek social input rather than the unfolding of a totalitarian idea—to revel in the complexity of historical particularity. But they often deployed social science concepts, reinforced by their Sovietological cousins in other disciplines, that pointed in a more universalistic or comparative direction.⁷ The seeming entrenchment of the Soviet order and the end of mass terror after Stalin posed questions about the fate of radical utopianism and convergence with the developed West. These concerns are starkly revealed by deliberately paradoxical concepts found in book titles: “ordinary Stalinism” and “normal totalitarianism.”⁸

The end of communism produced no consensus, and in certain ways it accentuated the starkness of the ongoing split between exceptionalism and shared modernity. Martin Malia, whose major works appeared in the 1990s but were prepared for decades before then, followed the liberal Russian émigrés who founded the field in an eloquent, updated scholarly form. He placed imperial Russia squarely on a European continuum that was wrecked by the surreal ideocracy of communism.⁹ The shift that Malia posited from shared Europeanness to Soviet ideological uniqueness garnered criticism from Richard Pipes, who over many decades argued for a fundamental continuity between tsarist patrimonialism and the late imperial and Soviet police states.¹⁰ But the split has not involved only Malia and Pipes—or, more broadly, the tendency to blame either Marxism or Russian tradition for the cataclysm of revolutionary violence.¹¹ In the field of Soviet history, a debate about the concept of Soviet modernity also began in the 1990s. It, too, centered on the issue of Soviet connections to the Russian past and the degree of Soviet difference from liberal and modern industrial powers.¹²

Since the collapse of communism, much heat has been generated over the issue of Soviet exceptionalism versus shared modernity in the discussion of the revolutionary and interwar periods. The burgeoning literature on the post-Stalin period has not found the idea of Soviet modernity nearly as controversial, at least not in explicit terms.¹³ Yet if the rapidly expanding field of postwar Soviet history is to grapple in a serious way with 1991, these scholars, too, will have to confront this question. In sum, this bundle of issues centering on exceptionalism—the binary oppositions between continuity and discontinuity, particularism and universalism, uniqueness and relativism—must be recognized as defining the terrain in which interpretations of Russian and Soviet history have revolved until the present day. Although the centrality of this issue over time does appear to be a distinguishing mark of Russian history, academic and political debates about the German *Sonderweg* (special path) or American exceptionalism suggest the Russian field is not

unique. Almost all non-European national histories have had to confront similar theoretical problems when they come to the age of Westernization and modernization. In this sense, Russia's early Europeanization starting with Peter the Great and its attempt to find an alternative path after 1917 make it unusual but also bring out paradigmatic issues with great force.

"Crossing Borders" offers a third way—a *via media* or a move to the radical center—past the dueling binary oppositions that have shaped modern Russian studies. It presents theoretical and empirical methods for combining the investigation of particularism with the pursuit of comparability. The vehicle is a collection of essays that integrates work on topics that have preoccupied me for the better part of two decades.¹⁴ This book has three components that overlap with but are not identical to its three sections. The first component is theory and the conceptualization of major problems of the Russian/Soviet historical trajectory, including the problems of modernity and ideology; the second is archival and primary research on the culture and politics of the early Soviet order; and the third is historiography and the broader history of the field. Although these three components are present simultaneously in many of the chapters, the book is also divided into three sections addressing questions of modernity, the early Soviet order and Stalinism, and transnational history. All the chapters can be read as self-standing works, but they also refer to and follow one another. This introduction highlights the concerns raised by successive chapters and integrates the book's disparate elements.

The theoretical essays on Russian and Soviet modernity engage with particular force the central question of particularity and universalism in an attempt to chart the key dilemmas of the debate and to lay out my own *via media*. The chapters based on archival and primary research, in contrast, explore key features of Soviet distinctiveness: ideology, culture, and the institutional structures of the party-state. These in-depth excursions into the crystallization and evolution of the Soviet system—that is, its particularism—are crucial to steering a middle course between the Scylla of exceptionalism and the Charybdis of shared modernity.

In the third section on transnational history, two chapters center on the perspectives and reactions of foreign contemporaries across cultural and political borders. As I see it, transnational history in the Soviet context can open up a new and intriguing dimension to any consideration of Soviet particularity and introduce new approaches to "national" (in this case Soviet) history. International borrowing and the circulation of ideas were fundamental to every stage of modern ideas and practices (an especially intriguing line of inquiry that would benefit from fuller analysis than is possible here). In addition, cross-border travel and interaction, which engage the lived experience of individual actors, allow a fine-grained exploration of what outside observers found different, projected as universal, or misunderstood. Furthermore, the large dash of historiography in this book indicates how the core issues have resurfaced and evolved over time as Russian studies have matured.

Why is the idea of Soviet modernity controversial? Why has the concept of Soviet modernity emerged as one of the major issues confronted by the field in the post-Soviet decades?

On the first, most superficial level—looking at the major features of the Soviet Union—the USSR did engage in processes long associated with modernization, such as urbanization, industrialization, campaigns for mass literacy and education, and the development of science and technology. These efforts proceeded further in the postwar period, which is perhaps why the question of modernity has seemed less subject to dispute and investigation for people studying late socialism.¹⁵ The USSR had a space and nuclear program. It carried out repressive operations with a level of centralization that its tsarist predecessor could not even aspire to match. Elements often seen to connect it to the tsarist past, such as the Stalin cult's association with the veneration of the tsar, had a broader history in modern politics and propaganda.¹⁶ James C. Scott dubbed the “sweeping, rational engineering” of society and nature by a strong, centralized state “high modernism,” a phenomenon that transcended any one ideology or political system.¹⁷ Stalin's Soviet Union, with its state ownership of the economy, ban on private property, takeover of autonomous organizations, and massive and relentless, if rampantly inefficient and bumbling, bureaucracy developed perhaps the most intrusive state and authoritarian “high modernist” ideology of all. Although it is certainly possible to overstate Stalinism's efficacy and reach, it became what Moshe Lewin called a “superstate.”¹⁸

But these observations do not close the case. Not only did all those features of the modern state develop in highly idiosyncratic, often unique ways, but the Soviet Union displayed the absence of major features of modern industrial powers in Europe and the West, the area that was historically the pacesetter for the modern. To be sure, the concept of multiple modernities is important for shifting the lens from the hoary Russian-European comparison to other parts of the world, and the study of the many important Soviet interactions with the developing world is an increasingly important avenue of inquiry.¹⁹ It is also important to keep in mind that influence did not go only one way, and that Russia and the USSR also helped shape the modern world.²⁰ However, the fact remains that a number of phenomena first closely associated with modernity in Western countries and then exported elsewhere, such as market economies and mass consumerism, were not present in Soviet civilization, at least in fully recognizable form.²¹ Features often associated with premodern or tsarist society, such as highly hierarchical social relations and personalistic ties, seem to have become more prominent in the 1930s, as many have pointed out.²² My own view is that these personalistic features were intertwined with the Soviet system even as the state bureaucracy grew in its size and capability for radical interventionism, but that this fact should not discount the prominent role of either institutions or ideology.²³ The fact remains that under Stalin a significant chunk of the all-union economy was run by the secret police brutally managing what was essentially slave labor in the Gulag. Those who vigorously contest any notion of Soviet modernity, such as Alexander Etkind, can point to a

large portion of the economy consisting of millions of people forced to wield shovels and other primitive tools in “corrective-labor” camps that never forged New Men—“perhaps,” in Etkind’s words, “not even a single one.”²⁴ The rural population was tied to collective farms (*kolkhozy*) and signaled the connection to the past by using the initials of the All-Union Communist Party, VKP, to signify “second serfdom” (*Vtoroe krepostnoe pravo*). Communist economic disparities with advanced industrial powers, the social hierarchies that accrued under Stalinism, and a political dictatorship reliant on large-scale violence have all been seen as both nonmodern and antimodern. These challenges to the idea of Soviet modernity are important to keep in mind, as is the need to interrogate the concept of tradition.

Another noteworthy objection is that the Soviets themselves did not really have a concept of modernity. The Russian words for “contemporary” (*sovremennyi*) or “contemporaneity” (*sovremennost’*) can have similar connotations, but without the conceptual and social scientific weight that the imported neologism *modernost’* does in the post-Soviet age. Even the “modern period” in Russian is *novaiia istoriia* (new history). Instead of talking about the modern, Soviet historical actors spoke about socialism as the next historical stage. Frederick Cooper’s critique of the modernity concept, which joins others in emphasizing the “conceptual confusion” that “bedevils” it, argues that scholars “should not try for a slightly better definition so that they can talk about modernity more clearly.” Instead, he writes: “They should instead listen to what is being said in the world. If modernity is what they hear, they should ask how it is being used and why; otherwise, shoehorning a political discourse into modern, antimodern, or postmodern discourses, or into ‘their’ modernity or ‘ours,’ is more distorting than revealing.”²⁵

This is a useful injunction, but if we as historians do not “hear” a Soviet concept of modernity as such, should we refrain from considering it? I would argue that the concepts behind what Soviet actors did articulate (about “socialism” as the world’s next, more advanced historical stage) have in fact been discussed at length. Shifting the lens of analysis can be productive. It is also important to recall that we as scholars can hardly restrict ourselves to the conceptual toolkit of our historical subjects, even if we wanted to do so.

The questions remain: Were all the elements of the Soviet system discussed above features of modernity or a lack thereof? Should they be discussed without resorting to the notoriously vague notion of modernity at all? Or can they be incorporated into an exploration of an alternative, and ultimately failed, form of Soviet or communist modernity? These are all legitimate and useful questions to pose and well worth discussing.

The disparities in the rather superficial balance sheet sketched out above are intended to pose the problem of Soviet modernity in stark form. They have sometimes been resolved with the thesis that the modern programs, agendas, or ideologies were incompletely realized or became something else in practice. In the oft-cited words of Terry Martin, “Modernization is the theory of Soviet intentions; neo-traditionalism, the theory of their unintended consequences.”²⁶ But the

conceptual problems become compounded when one considers that the concept of modernity (more flexible than modernization) is one of the most elusive and capacious in the human sciences. The gold standard of modernity, furthermore, developed in Europe and North America over a long period of time, with many significant national variations; it too was incompletely realized, especially in its earlier stages. The discussion of modernity, again as opposed to the earlier social science literature on modernization, is rife not with measurable processes but with metaphysical shifts, such as new conceptions of time, the ability to conceive various kinds of transformation, or reflexivity in the relationship between knowledge and the sociopolitical order. Given that the problem is conceptual and cannot be resolved by measurable metrics, it is clear that any balance-sheet approach to Russia and the USSR will come up with a mixed and confusing analysis.

One easy solution is to jettison or avoid the issue of modernity in this context, criticize its premises or difficulties, or focus on other questions. Indeed, many practitioners in the field have embraced just such a resolution to the problem of Russian/Soviet modernity—perhaps in response to the form the debate over Russian and Soviet modernity took in the 1990s. I have also taken a critical stance toward the discussion of modernity versus neo-traditionalism that brought the discussion to a peak but also something of a dead end in the early 2000s yet has had traceable aftereffects in the field. At the same time, this major question is the latest twist in the more fundamental split between exceptionalism and shared modernity. One shunts it under the rug at one's peril, only to find it still present in hidden or implicit forms. A key conceptual move, in my view, is to take modernity as a lens, a heuristic device rather than a problem that can be solved with some sort of aggressively formulated thesis or empirical breakthrough. It is hardly the only such lens that can be used at the present time, but it acquires importance from its stature as a core concept in the many disciplines of the human sciences and for the many fields of the historical discipline. As Russian studies continues its post-Soviet push to make itself relevant and to connect to other fields, an engagement with the debate over modernity becomes a significant bridge to a more comparatively and internationally informed discussion with other fields and disciplines.

This is the spirit in which I present chapter 1, which analyzes the scholarly disputes over Russian and Soviet modernism and modernity in the post-Soviet years. It argues that the “first generation” in the debate over Soviet modernity in the 1990s and early 2000s was limited by the moment and conceptual framework in which it crystallized. But despite and in part because of these limitations, this debate has had a long history, up to and including the most recent voices that reject notions of Soviet modernity in favor of archaic holdovers from the Russian past.²⁷ These disputes are put under the microscope not merely to clarify the issues at stake but also to propose that the Russian field would benefit from grappling more directly with the concept of multiple modernities.²⁸ To be sure, this different framework raises other conceptual problems. The notion of multiple modernities

and alternative modernities, just as with many other concepts, can become a fig leaf for different intellectual and political agendas; for example, the idea of a distinctive, say, French modernity can be used as a rallying cry against Americanization. In a 2013 commentary Stefan Plaggenborg, after finding it highly significant that sociological modernity theory is “silent” on Eastern Europe and especially Soviet communism, nonetheless dismisses S. N. Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities as “trivial” and somehow “extra-scientific,” although it was a sociological theory that explicitly labeled communism as a modern form. For Plaggenborg, Eisenstadt’s call to recognize difference is a fashionably multicultural and hence politicized gesture that obscures a precise classification of what modernity is; the theory of multiple modernities demands recognition of many “trees,” but together they form no identifiable “forest.”²⁹ It is entirely right that the notion of multiple modernities is indeed incompatible with a single, concrete definition of the modern. It is also true that plurality in and of itself is no answer. Yet Plaggenborg offers no solution to the problem he raises, except a less-than-rousing call to historicize the discussion of modernity.³⁰

Precisely from a historical point of view, however, the notion of multiple modernities is valuable because it postulates that there is no single road to the modern. Modernity is centrally engaged with processes and ideas of this-worldly transformation. Western Europe may have forged many modern processes that later were domesticated or elaborated on an international scale, but at the core of the notion of multiple modernities is the realization that modernity is not exclusively a Western phenomenon.³¹ It also underscores that there is no single “West.” From this it follows that interpreting the cultural or civilizational patterns of countries outside Western Europe becomes particularly significant in order to come to any understanding of their particular variants of modernity. Otherwise, we would be reduced to simply searching for how Western models were copied. Finally, the question of commonalities and differences both become crucial in any grappling with Soviet communism as an alternative form. In the end, my own goal in clarifying the contours, limitations, and afterlife of the post-Soviet scholarly debate over modernity is to clear the way for a renewed discussion.

However, it is easy to issue proposals and critiques while not really sketching out how an alternative construct would look. Chapter 2, therefore, shifts from analytical critique to an attempt at historical synthesis. In the process, I propose the notion of intelligentsia-statist modernity to capture some—not all—of the persistent yet historically evolving particularities of the Russian/Soviet variation on modernity. It is a premise here that there were formidable differences between tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, and that the Russian Revolution and Soviet order introduced a whole array of novel agendas and practices. But no analysis limited to the period after 1917 can capture the broader cultural foundations and trajectory necessary to account for deeper patterns of evolution, and Soviet historians today engage far less than they might both with late imperial complexities and the *longue durée*. Despite the heated debates and controversies that have punc-

tuated Russian and Soviet history, especially in the revolutionary and early Soviet period, a simple opposition between continuity and discontinuity is a red herring. There are always continuities and there are always breaks; the question is how to locate and conceive them and the balance between them. Attentiveness to underlying continuities across the 1917 divide can heighten historians' understanding of breaks and ruptures by revealing what persists even as some paths are closed off.³² Crossing the border of 1917 here represents an attempt to provide a framework for thinking about the trajectory of Russian/Soviet modernity on both sides of the revolutionary divide. This attempt takes on special significance because those most critical of the concept of Soviet modernity have most often justified their position by pointing to "traditional" Russian continuities persisting after 1917 or, to put it bluntly, Russian/Soviet backwardness.³³

The key to my own approach to the problem of modernity in the Russian and Soviet context, furthermore, is the conclusion that the binary opposition between exceptionalism and shared modernity is a false one; time and again, it has led the debate astray. If we accept that Russian/Soviet modernity is not identical to others, we must devote special attention to its own set of particularities, but the very step of considering it modern invites comparison of commonalities. Understanding Soviet communism as an alternative modernity informed by Russian legacies makes it possible to pursue particularities and commonalities at the same time within one coherent scholarly agenda. Treating the Soviet Union as very different from other states does not mean it was utterly exceptional; treating it as connected to modernity does not make it "normal."

But threading this needle raises other thorny issues. If Soviet communism was an alternative modernity, then it was also a modern project that failed as an alternative. Although scholars disagree about how "alternative" the Soviet model was and when and how it failed, the fact remains: Soviet communism in the long run was not able to resolve its deepest problems and perpetuate itself during its seven-decade life cycle, and it ultimately vanished as an alternative. It is in this sense that I call it a failed modernity. Our reading of the profound problems the Soviet system confronted, created, and could not resolve must, however, be balanced with the dangers of reading history backward from 1991.

Chapter 3 addresses the problem of Soviet exceptionalism in a more indirect but more targeted way by grappling with the definition and role of ideology in the Soviet context. The content of a specific ideology (as opposed to its motivating or legitimizing role) has a history of being downplayed or dismissed: for example, in structuralist interpretations of comparative revolutions.³⁴ Ideas as such were also sometimes set aside in discussions of totalitarianism, which looked at the role or underlying functions of ideologies rather than their content. That said, most interpretations of totalitarianism in the Russian/Soviet field, stretching from its early years to what might be called the neo-totalitarian orientation of the late Martin Malia, stressed the extraordinary importance of ideology in the Soviet case and ratified a model of causality that deduced historical outcomes from the postulates

of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. For half a century practicing historians have been running away from this understanding of ideology, thus jeopardizing ideology itself as a category of historical analysis. The explosion of cultural approaches in the Russian field has, however, brought with it a renewed attention to ideas and ideologies as a part of the causal, explanatory mix. Examination of the content of communist ideology and the implications of political ideas in specific contexts, rather than just in terms of the historical grand narrative, has also received great attention. This is attested by the state of the art in the Stalinism-Nazism comparison, where it is reiterated that the specific nature of ideology in each individual case had profound consequences, ones that encompassed matters of life and death.³⁵

Deep investigations of the content and implications of a single ideology in a single setting tend to highlight particularity. In the Soviet case such distinctions include the sheer pervasiveness of the dissemination of an official ideology, the extent of the ideological establishment devoted to its elaboration, and its role in building the very fabric of the Soviet system, which was based on core principles such as anticapitalism. Not surprisingly, ideology has loomed large in discussions of Soviet uniqueness. Thus at the opposite pole from the structuralist dismissal of ideology (or minimization of it by subordinating or folding it into other parts of the historical explanatory framework) stand prominent observers who argue that ideology was a driving force of Soviet history. The *nec plus ultra* of this position was again taken by Martin Malia, who viewed ideology as the element making communism “fantastic and surreal”—the very opposite of shared modernity.³⁶ A variation on this interpretation has been reinforced by a major political theorist of ideology, Michael Freeden. The founding editor of the *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Freeden has pursued an overriding mission to depathologize the notion of ideology and understand it as a normal part of modern society and politics. In service of these desiderata, however, Freeden has found it necessary to argue that “totalitarian” ideologies are “exceptional.”³⁷ Between the extremes of crowning and dethroning ideology as the key to the history of Soviet communism have stood many other practicing historians who are reluctant to reduce explanations of historical developments to ideological postulates, but who in so doing run the risk of not giving the ideological arena its full due.

The interpretation of ideology as sketched out in chapter 3 occupies a key part of the middle ground between exceptionalism and shared modernity. The role of ideology is very distinctive in the Soviet context, I maintain; at the same time, many important features of the Soviet ideological arena (not to mention the history of our understandings of it) do connect this unusual case to other times and places. As with the case of multiple modernities, the approach laid out in chapter 3 is theoretically pluralistic: it argues for the validity of multiple understandings of ideology and abstains from according definitive primacy to one or another. Those dimensions of ideology in the Soviet context explored in the chapter include ideology as doctrine, as worldview, as discourse, as performance, as belief, and, last but not least, as a historical concept in the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist lexicon. Some

of these “six faces of ideology” point to major dimensions of Soviet distinctiveness; engaging others uncovers parallels and commonalities with other times and places, linking historical analysis in this field to others. Once again, therefore, my stance eschews some sort of definitive choice between universalism and particularism; it seeks not only to point to the direction of the middle ground but to describe that terrain explicitly. Ultimately, given the centrality of the problem of ideology in the Soviet field, it is truly surprising that so few practicing historians have meditated on how to define ideology and its role. It has been my aim to make this chapter accessible to students and graduate students entering the field and to hope that the multiple ways of understanding ideology will be taken into account by future generations of Soviet historians.

Chapter 4 is a rare Soviet-era excursion into the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) that is coupled with an interpretation of the cultural dimension to revolution in its early decades.³⁸ In its original incarnation (1998), this piece formed part of an exchange with Sheila Fitzpatrick, who in the late 1970s defined the concept of cultural revolution in modern Russian studies. When I first wrote, Fitzpatrick’s classic usage of “the cultural revolution” had morphed into a synonym for the period of the First Five-Year Plan in Soviet history and, to Fitzpatrick’s own dissatisfaction, had become something of an unstated orthodoxy that did not require any reference at all. I was concerned with replacing that received wisdom with an understanding of cultural revolution as an evolving concept, key during two decades of Bolshevik and Soviet attempts at cultural transformation.³⁹ Even today, there are many scholars who still employ “the cultural revolution” as essentially a synonym for the 1928–1931 period, or at least the militant cultural campaigns of the First Five-Year Plan period alone, while others, including myself, prefer for reasons central to the chapter to follow the post-Soviet Russian practice of referring to this period as Stalin’s Great Break (*velikii perelom*). In this revision, I expand the investigation to include a constellation of concepts surrounding *kul’turnaia revoliutsiia* (cultural revolution)—in particular, socialist *byt* (everyday life) and *kul’turnost’* (culturedness).

As I undertook the challenge of linking my conceptual history of cultural revolution more integrally into the broader arc of Soviet cultural transformation, I began engaging in an unusual and, for me, hitherto unique form of scholarly dialogue. As I was aware, a range of scholars had reacted to my 1998 article in a series of major monographs that were published for almost a decade afterwards. These works engaged the article’s central point of understanding cultural revolution as less restrictively bound to the Great Break alone; they also conceived of a more expansive understanding of cultural revolution in various ways, through the prism of their own original research. This was particularly the case in the booming literature connected to the “imperial turn” in Russian and Soviet history—the study of non-Russian cultures, nationalities policy, Sovietization, and cultural politics in the union republics. As I learned from their work, I then incorporated it into this new and expanded version of the piece.

The history of communist cultural transformation, centering on an ideological concept in early Soviet culture and politics, again elaborates on one major aspect of Soviet particularism. However, chapter 4 also uses cultural revolution to open up comparisons—in this case between Soviet and Chinese communism. The two communist revolutions were directly interconnected, of course, and Maoism can be seen as a variation on as well as a departure from Stalinism. Yet the two second-world giants experienced, in this reading, a consequentially different unfolding of revolutionary phases that is brought out powerfully through the prism of their experiences with cultural revolution—both the concept and the phenomenon it signifies.⁴⁰

Chapter 5 is included in this volume because it deals with a major dimension of my work—the history of institutions. It analyzes, moreover, the history of not one but two institutions: one of the oldest ones, the Academy of Sciences founded by Peter the Great, and its revolutionary rival in the 1920s, the Socialist (after 1924, Communist) Academy. The parallel existence of the Academy of Sciences and its communist rival after 1918 led up to the fateful 1929 “Bolshevization” of the old academy, which involved the takeover and transformation of the linchpin of the Soviet science system and its eventual merger with the party institution in 1936. By focusing on how the two academies were intertwined, we confront the unusual fusion of two very different types of institutions, one a prerevolutionary Russian institution subordinated to the state and the other its revolutionary challenger subordinated to the party. For me, this is more than a key episode in the history of Soviet science and intellectual life. It forms part of another pillar of Soviet particularism, the institutional history of the party-state.

The great Sovietologist Robert C. Tucker addressed the nature of the party-state by dubbing the young Soviet Union a “movement-regime,” a revolutionary party in charge of a state. In his hands, this was designed to open up new comparisons; it derived from his early (1960) challenge to the concept of totalitarianism and his attempt to juxtapose the Soviet case with other authoritarian, one-party regimes such as Kemalist Turkey.⁴¹ At the same time, the mass-movement party in power led to one of the most singular features of the Soviet system (which was replicated, however, in other communist countries): the systematic and pervasive dualism in which the party both infiltrated and shadowed the entire state apparatus. In institutional terms, for example, it is indisputable that the place of the Nazi Party in the Third Reich was far more haphazard and far more modest. As Stephen Kotkin explained through his concept of Stalinism as a theocracy—and as Tucker had before him, by speaking of the growing resemblance of the party-state to a church-state—one of the justifying roles for the Party in shadowing the state was as the keeper of the revolutionary ideology.⁴² In the 1920s, one of the classic divisions created by the New Economic Policy (NEP) was that between “reds” and experts, or, in other words, between party personnel and the “bourgeois specialists” who remained to work under the auspices of the new regime. In industry, for example, the nonparty experts and specialists would need to be verified by reds,

that is, by party managers; their equivalent in cultural and scientific fields was the party intelligentsia attempting to create a new red intelligentsia. The ultimate arbiters, however, were those who increasingly arrogated to themselves the role of new red specialists in social engineering and political violence: the party leadership.

As this statement suggests, the division between party and state, reds and experts, was not just crucial for the emerging political system and the institutional arrangements of the entire Soviet order, especially during its heyday in the 1920s. It was also a foundational divide in the history of Soviet science, education, and culture.⁴³ In this sense, cultural revolution had an important institutional dimension. If the NEP period witnessed a forced compromise between the nonparty institutions (such as the Academy of Sciences) and new party institutions and cadres, then the Great Break was a period of assault and upheaval, followed by Stalin's rehabilitation of the old specialists in 1932. What ensued was a synthesis, but this synthesis also had a long history in which successive cohorts or generations of figures in the now theoretically unified Soviet intelligentsia negotiated the lingering divisions of the early Soviet split between reds and experts. The Academy of Sciences was singular—for its distinctive prerevolutionary history, for its unusually protected status in the 1920s, and because these splits played themselves out differently in different cultural fields and branches of knowledge. But studying it does allow for insight into the broader processes in other areas.

Although the Academy of Sciences was a state institution, founded by Peter the Great and shaped by two centuries of interaction with both the tsarist and Soviet governments, in the 1920s it was just as fundamentally a bastion of the highest levels of the scientific intelligentsia, which under the NEP-era rules of the game were the most useful and protected. The story of its communist rival, the aspirations of the first communist academicians, the old academy's forcible reorganization, and the final incorporation of the rump Communist Academy into a dominant new Soviet powerhouse is thus also a synecdoche for the tangled and tumultuous clash of the nonparty and Bolshevik wings of the intelligentsia in successive phases of the revolution.

In one of her most incisive, far-reaching essays, Sheila Fitzpatrick portrayed the intelligentsia and the Party after the revolution as two surviving elites, "resentfully interdependent, jealously jockeying for position, and withal the only possible claimants for leadership in a fragmented and unsettled postrevolutionary society." Both had more in common than either side cared to admit: a well-honed sense of historical mission and moral superiority, along with "an idea of culture as something that (like revolution) an enlightened minority brought to the masses in order to uplift them."⁴⁴ Chapter 5 builds on these powerful insights in one high-profile context, but it comes to somewhat different conclusions about the ultimate outcome. The intelligentsia and the Party were neither static nor monolithic, but even portraying them as such as a heuristic device can simplify the outcome. In Fitzpatrick's words, "the intelligentsia had lost freedom and self-respect along the way, though it had won the battle of culture, while the Communists had lost con-

fidence in the relevance of Communism to culture, although it had won the battle of power.³⁵ The exploration here, in the context of the two academies, suggests a less clear-cut resolution. It implies that their “symbiosis” in the 1920s made for a high degree of interpenetration between the camps.

Furthermore, successive generational cohorts must be factored into the interpretation of what the two “sides” represented over the course of the dramatic twists and turns of the Soviet period.⁴⁶ From the point of view of the protagonists of the 1920s generation, one can plausibly say that both sides lost, but one might also conclude that a synthesis unfolded in a way that no one could have planned or expected. The implications of this line of reasoning—that in certain unexpected, even hidden ways the Communist Academy transferred some of its ethos and mission to the bolshevized Academy of Sciences—is worth pondering. It means that the Soviet Academy of Sciences, one of the major pillars of Stalin-era compromise with the past, conservatism, or “retreat,” is, when the history of “Bolshevization” is probed more deeply, a synthesis of a major revolutionary innovation of the 1920s with the transformed old academic establishment. This, in turn, provides further historical substance to the notion of intelligentsia-statist modernity.

The concluding, transnational section of the book interrogates foreign visitors and their perceptions of the Soviet Union, shaped by Soviet intermediaries and practices of reception as well as their own ideologies and interests. The three figures at the center of chapters 6 and 7, however, could not be more different: the fellow-traveler Romain Rolland, perhaps the most prominent Western intellectual to defend Stalinism in the 1930s; his wife, Marie Rolland, or Mariia Kudasheva, a classic nonparty literary intellectual in the early Soviet years who became the “mediator” between the great French writer and Soviet politics and culture; and Ernst Niekisch, a far-right opponent of Hitler in the “national revolutionary” camp of the late Weimar period, who constructed a hybrid doctrine and movement that combined elements of Social Democracy and fascism and fantasized about a Prussian-Russian geopolitical “community of fate.” The three figures under consideration thus represented radically different political experiences and views; Kudasheva, moreover, was a Soviet “insider,” whereas the other two foreigners were very much “outsiders” looking in, each fascinated in vastly different ways.

In one sense, both Rolland and Niekisch in different ways serve to historicize the great axis of universalism versus particularism in the Soviet order. The key to Rolland’s vision of the Soviet Union and Stalinism were projections about the universality of the Russian Revolution, which he understood through the prism of its French counterpart; about pan-European antifascism, in which the Soviet Union was allied with progressive Europe; and about the didactic, enlightening monumentalism of Stalinist culture, which he personally favored far more than the avant-garde. But Rolland, seeing universalism everywhere when he looked east, soon ran up against the horrors of the Great Terror and the formidable particularities of Stalinist political culture. By contrast, Niekisch, in keeping with his ultrana-

tionalist “Prussian Bolshevism,” invented a two-camp affinity between the young and vital East and a totalizing Prussian tradition of militarism and statism that it could supposedly invigorate. In part, his views of Soviet communism were a projection of a fierce and overriding ideological and geopolitical hatred of the West.

Kudasheva’s political and ideological views, which in the sources are pro-Soviet in the 1920s and ardently antifascist in her years with Rolland in the 1930s, are far more fragmentary and difficult to establish. In the context of Stalinism, she was clearly quite constrained in numerous ways. It is in her activities as an intermediary—as Rolland’s secretary, his translator, and the manager of his extensive interactions with the Soviet leadership, press, and cultural institutions—that she emerges as an important historical figure in her own right. Kudasheva was one of many whose role in brokering relationships between Western visitors and observers and the Soviets became increasingly important in the 1930s. But she belonged to a smaller club of what I call intimate mediators—lovers or spouses who developed emotional ties with figures important to the Soviets and who exerted on them special and sustained influence. Kudasheva, for example, quickly came to personify the “new Russia” to Rolland and played a key role in his conversion to a leading Western intellectual “friend of the Soviet Union.”

Both Niekisch and Rolland traveled to the USSR—in 1932 and 1935, respectively. But to understand even these brief experiences inside the Soviet Union, we must bring into the analysis an entire range of biographical, personal, and broader contextual factors. In the case of Rolland’s tour and Kremlin meeting with Stalin, the role played by Kudasheva was not the least of these factors. In the case of Niekisch, his Soviet experiences are interpreted and embedded within a long-term ideological odyssey, one that involved conversions from revolutionary Social Democracy to a far-right nationalism enamored with certain aspects of Leninism and Stalinism (something commonly known in the German conservative revolution as National Bolshevism). In 1945, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), he returned to communism. My effort here has been to see this unusual, indeed extraordinary trajectory, if not as paradigmatic, then at least in certain ways as exemplary. This holds, first, for the far-left/far-right interactions of intellectuals and their political ideologies in the twentieth century. In this sense Niekisch is an applied case in how to interpret ideology along with numerous other factors in a particular historical setting. It holds, second, for the philo-Soviet (or National Bolshevik) strains within the so-called national revolutionary camp in Weimar as they were interacting both with a rising National Socialism and with the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). This complex Weimar terrain was also internationalized by Soviet policies and operations attempting to convert National Bolsheviks from the far right. Finally, images and perceptions first attached to these three figures by contemporaries and persisting into their treatment as historical figures became important to address when untangling their biographies. These include the persistent rumors implicating Kudasheva as an agent of the People’s Commissariat of

Internal Affairs (NKVD); Rolland as a European icon within Stalinist culture; and Niekisch as an anti-Hitler resister, a topic rediscovered much later by post-1968 German rebels attracted once again to national themes.

At first glance, the transnational chapters in this book may seem less engaged with the central question with which the theoretical chapters began, the great debate over exceptionalism and shared modernity in Russian studies and the alternative position staked out in this book. But I argue that they also relate to this book's overarching theme. The exploration of cross-cultural and trans-ideological interactions opens up a set of desiderata for Soviet history: that it must be attuned to its international and transnational dimensions; that it must be comparatively informed, if only implicitly so; and that it must engage and situate itself in relationship with other countries, cultures, and political traditions.⁴⁷ These goals can be attained regardless of the type of history pursued—political, social, cultural, or intellectual. At the same time, these excursions into transnational history also pull us back toward those features of the Soviet order, such as the institutional arrangements of the party-state, that were both unusual and struck contemporary outside observers as such. This section of the book thus fleshes out the alternative space between exceptionalism and shared modernity.

The title of this volume, "Crossing Borders," has several layers of significance. The first, and most obvious, has to do with the international framework that discussions of modernity bring and the historical traveling across borders involved in explorations of transnational history. The second has to do with the different modes of inquiry—theoretical, historical, and historiographical—that I cross. These boundaries are not often traversed, and I hope that readers will find the results thought-provoking. In particular, the historiographical element, often taken to mean a dry "literature review" suitable only for dissertations, is incorporated into the essays as an exercise in intellectual history, to bring the central issues alive, and as a reminder to avoid reinventing the wheel. Third, "crossing borders" has implications for the handling of historical spheres—political, social, cultural, ideological, and economic—a problem that often comes up in discussions of causality and in the history of Russian and Soviet studies. Throughout the book I come out against reductionism, maintaining that processes in each arena can be given their own historical weight without shoehorning them into another, and call attention to how claims for the primacy of one have shaped the contours of Russian and Soviet studies. I do not argue that all explanations are equal but urge that we extend the pluralistic stance taken toward multiple modernities and understandings of ideology to the question of the key pillars of historical investigation and explanation. Statements that ideology has shaped all of Soviet history, that political power is the cause of causes, that social factors were more fundamental, or that everything revolves around culture or discourse exemplify ways that causal and explanatory frameworks have been made and remade in a drawn-out battle of reductionisms. There are numerous heuristic and methodological grounds for

giving each arena, or “sphere,” its own due and perceiving its own dynamics, but crossing these conceptual and disciplinary borders in the history of the emerging Soviet order permits us to uncover and investigate how different areas interact within an expansive ecosystem.

Last, crossing borders assumes significance in the overarching attempt to find a middle ground between the binary oppositions entrenched in this field, most notably the one between exceptionalism and shared modernity. This middle ground is marked by webs of meaning, multicausal explanations, and pluralistic rather than exclusionary interpretive frameworks. Exploring its contours may well result in less stark—more nuanced and, in comparative perspective, more “normal”—claims. For the history of Soviet communism that is a more challenging and, for Russian studies, a more pressing goal.