

## Cultural Anthropology: The State of the Field

The 'Forum' section is central to our journal, and its purpose is to facilitate the exchange of ideas between members of different disciplines: anthropologists, historians, folklorists, linguists, and others. We intend to publish discussions relating to current topics of central interest in the humanities and social sciences.

The theme of this, first, 'Forum' is general developments in the study of culture during recent years. Over the last decades, social sciences and the humanities have undergone a range of significant changes, affecting the field of study, the methodologies used, the themes being addressed, and the analytical principles espoused. It is fair to say that these shifts of intellectual focus have been especially marked in Russia, where scholarship has been forced off the well-trodden path of 'the one true methodology'<sup>1</sup> and has ended up on open ground without a map. There is a widespread sense that this situation needs discussion, which has been expressed not just in casual conversations during the coffee-breaks of conferences, but in published work by S. Yu. Neklyudov, Konstantin Bogdanov, Sergei Sokolovsky, V. A. Tishkov, and others, addressing the whole question of the changes affecting the humanities and social sciences. Therefore, the editorial board of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* asked various different anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, specialists in cultural studies, and folklorists to respond to a short questionnaire about the recent changes in disciplinary paradigms. Their answers appear below.

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. Marxism-Leninism.

Over the last ten years, Russian research in the history of culture has undergone a number of significant changes. In particular, among anthropologists, a shift in focus, from 'core' phenomena to 'marginal' ones (in terms of the hierarchy formerly obtaining) has been evident. For example, a decade or two ago the focus of attention of research on rituals was on the 'main' rituals (i.e. those accompanying birth, marriage, burial). Today attention is paid less to these rituals, or indeed to rituals as such, than to ritualised practices and forms of behaviour. The same shift is even more evident in folklore studies, where less and less attention is paid to classic genres of rural folklore, such as folk epics\* or folk tales, and more and more to jokes, anecdotes, urban myths, children's horror stories\* and other 'marginal' genres.

- 1** *Do you think that this is a feature of Russian anthropology alone, or are there similar processes at work in other traditions as well? What are the reasons behind these new preferences in research?*

In fieldwork, the attention of anthropologists (ethnologists, folklorists...) is in the process of drifting from the country to the city. While in the past it was the common understanding that 'folk' [*narodnaya\**] culture signified first and foremost rural/traditional peasant culture, and that to study it one had to do fieldwork in rural areas, today much more attention is paid to urban tradition and urban folklore.

- 2** *What has changed: the actual balance between rural and urban culture (as manifested, say, in the accessibility of new media in the rural world, and other processes of globalisation), or our interpretation of this balance? What concepts of society (the community, the ethnic group, the nation state) are useful in the new interpretative tradition? Does the old concept of 'the people' ('the folk', *narod\**) still have any value in the current context?*

Another clear tendency is a shift of focus from archaic (old, 'traditional') forms of culture to contemporary ones. The principle 'the older the better', according to which the main goal of anthropological research was to determine the genesis, the origin of a phenomenon, has lost its power, both with regard to how the data are selected, and to the analytical procedures adopted.

- 3** *What is the cause of this shift? Is this, again, a 'new' feature only in contemporary Russian anthropology? When would you calculate that this shift of attention occurred in the area of anthropology/cultural studies where you yourself work?*

- 4** *Is it possible that the above three changes are interconnected and represent, in fact, different facets of the same process? Could this mean that not only the content of the term 'people' [*narod\**], but also the content of the term 'tradition' has changed? Are we now working with different concepts of 'authenticity' (or without such concepts at all)?*

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1 At first sight it might seem that cultural anthropologists have shifted their attention from ‘central’ phenomena to ‘peripheral’ ones because ‘central’ anthropological genres themselves are now in crisis. Certainly, it is becoming more and more difficult to find people who can recite folk epics and traditional stories, and the wedding ceremony, which for thousands of years played a pivotal role in human ritual life, is increasingly degenerating into a drinking and eating session like any other. Despite the historical inevitability of such a crisis (though maybe one shouldn’t rush to make a diagnosis, in the field of ethnography, at any rate), the loss of interest in ‘core’ ethnographic phenomena among contemporary researchers and their shift of focus towards ‘peripheral’ ones could also be the consequence of other processes, in particular the ‘peripheralisation’ of the researchers themselves.

2 The displacement of the anthropologist’s focus from the country to the city is to some extent connected with the fact that certain cities, such as contemporary Yerevan, for example, owe their current ethnographic identity to a rushed process of urbanisation. Consequently, anthropologists today don’t always seem to need to go out into the ‘field’ to collect data — the ‘field’

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itself sometimes comes to them. My friends used to joke about the fact that I was too lazy to go out and do fieldwork, and that the 'field' had landed on my own doorstep. When a refugee family was allocated shelter in my home after the 1988 earthquake, they said that I'd got so lazy the field had had no choice but to actually start living with me.

Here a non-anthropologist might perceive vestiges of urban arrogance towards the countryside. But anthropologists are themselves products of the city and bearers of the principles of civilisation, of the university and of the 'universal'; hence the singling out of rural culture as the principal object of study is linked to its traditional understanding first as 'the other', as something different from the self, as exotic and barbarian, and then as something that becomes one's own, though mainly in the form of an archaic survival (note the Latin adjective *paganus*, meaning not just 'of the country' but also 'pagan'), and often, too, in the form of an ideal one (note the etymological link between the Russian words *krestyanin* (peasant) and *khristianin* (Christian)).

**3** The understanding of rural culture as a relic from bygone times has predetermined its role as the principal tool for explaining the origins of our culture (and ideally of the culture of humankind as a whole). Consequently, the shift of attention from rural to urban culture signals a loss of interest in cultural roots and in the problem of origins itself — the question of methodology (i.e. the rejection of specific evolutionary, semiotic or other methods of reconstructing origins) is of a secondary order. It is noteworthy that the search for beginnings, which has always interested mankind, and, one could say, represents one of the key spiritual dimensions of man, no longer carries the same value. It is clear that the shift of attention from archaic to modern forms of culture is connected with this development.

What has caused this trend? Has mankind lost a share of its spirituality? In actual fact, it was the masters of rituals and myths who always directed man's attention towards the sacred beginning of times; in time they handed over this role to historians and anthropologists. The shift of attention away from cultural roots is a clear indication that contemporary anthropologists have renounced this 'legacy', and have willingly relinquished the function of looking backwards to historians, who cater, however, for just a limited share of the traditional hunger for origins. More or less the only people who are still fascinated by the origin of things are children and those who study the relevant genres of child folklore.

All this is part of the natural evolution of the science of man. But there is also an unnatural cause behind the changes, one linked to the totalitarian past of the former Soviet Union. And this more than

anything else lies behind all the issues raised above. My attention was drawn to this by Vardan Hayrapetyan in a conversation we had on the topic discussed here. The fact is that, in Soviet times, it was impossible, or at least dangerous, to study the ethnography of modern society because ethnographic reality did not correspond to state ideology. This was particularly the case with the ethnography of the city. The situation was rather different with rural areas, something that had to do with the innate conservatism of the peasantry (note what has been said about *paganus*). Hence also the Bolshevik destruction of the traditional peasantry in the first years of Soviet rule, and the subsequent creation of Soviet 'plantations' — the *kolkhozy* (collective farms) with farm labourers who had no legal rights, were tied to the land and, in contrast to city-dwelling citizens, did not even have identity papers. The ethnography of contemporary Soviet life was studied only by those who at best agreed not to describe the reality they were observing, and at worst described what they had not observed. Those researchers who were governed by nonconformist professional and moral principles consciously or unconsciously preferred to reconstruct the archaic past, because here they enjoyed comparatively greater creative freedom. This does not mean, of course, that the search for roots was an entirely danger-free, apolitical occupation: reconstructions of primeval society could be as fantastic as they liked, but they were not permitted to contradict the Marxist version of the beginnings of human history. Researchers also ran the risk of exposing the wrong sort of national roots or, conversely, of not exposing the right sort. But this is not the issue here. What is important to note is that Soviet researchers had a certain freedom in the middle of servitude; the search for it led them away from modernity, from the city and from *ethno-graphy*. In this sense, Soviet ethnography, contrary to the assertions of Western critics, was never really descriptive. Only after acquiring political and ideological freedom has the post-Soviet researcher been in a position properly to describe the modern city, not least because the 'liberated' ethnographer finds this easier than reconstruction.

Generally speaking, modern man, especially urban man, has become less of a unity and his everyday life resembles a mosaic. In order to create a complete picture of this man, one needs to study the multitude of systems into which his life is drawn. From the point of view of ethnography (folklore), these are precisely those 'peripheral' genres that are the topic of the present discussion. The construction of an integral picture of modern man requires considerable effort. Contemporary researchers seem happy to construct for themselves a complex system supporting the workings of a decidedly elementary 'peripheral' culture. Using the metaphor of 'the root', one could say that today preference is given not to a comparatively simple root-system that runs deep into the ground, but to a complex, postmod-

ernist system of intertwined roots — a rhizome laid out along the surface of the soil — a root-system so ‘superficial’ and yet so complex that it hardly produces a visible plant, let alone the Tree of Life.

The disdain for deep-seated roots may well have a banal cause: it’s easier to invent roots than to lay them bare. Hence perhaps the postmodernist irony towards ‘root-gazers’ expressed by some representatives of the new movement. The shift of interest from the archaic to the modern is therefore not derived from the fact that archaic culture is in short supply, but because postmodernism explicitly repudiates it. One can compare this with the (not always justified) rejection of ‘backward’ essentialism in favour of ‘progressive’ constructivism in discussions of national identity.

The shift of interest from the archaic to the modern also correlates with the shift from interpretation to description. The already mentioned view of Soviet ethnography as descriptive and non-analytical owes a lot to the discipline’s official title (‘ethnography’), which appears to invoke ‘description’. This is why the first ‘liberating’ action of Post-Soviet ethnography was the renaming of the Moscow Institute of Ethnography as the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology. In reality, though, this triumph of ethno-*logy* over ethno-*graphy* did not in itself lead to the devaluation of ‘central’ genres. The latter remained among the principal research topics of the Institute, despite the increased interest in the kinds of ethnography that are concerned with modernity. The kind of total reorientation of research interests that we are discussing here has to do with new conceptualisations of ethnographic description and is characteristic of academic centres that have only just emerged or have until recently been peripheral.

The increased interest in modern phenomena and ‘peripheral’ folkloric genres is also characteristic of anthropology in some countries that have not experienced the lack of freedom we had in the Soviet Union (one might cite the various studies of American urban folklore, for instance the ‘urban myth’,<sup>1</sup> a sort of children’s spine-chiller for adults, as reworked and developed also in the contemporary cinema). However, it could be argued that the switch to ‘peripheral’ culture is especially striking in recent Russian anthropology and folklore studies. Hence the animated interest that Russian researchers have taken in the above issues, as evidenced by the present discussion. It is possible that this is related to the revolutionary euphoria of some and the corresponding anxiety of others, for whom the postmodernist rejection of tradition is equated with revolutionary permissiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. see J. H. Brunvald. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*. New York / London, 1981.

Is it possible to speak of a correlation between the above developments, and concrete national contexts and models, bearing in mind, of course, that we are dealing with a general trend rather than any sort of simple national conditioning of research preferences? Possibly. For example, the concept of ethnogenesis is, generally speaking, unpopular among American anthropologists, but quite important in Eurasian anthropology. The reasons for this are clear: the origin of the American nation does not go back to prehistoric mythical times — it is quite transparent and is, for obvious reasons, not discussed unless strictly necessary. Elsewhere I have examined models through which different peoples conceptualise their national identity, and have focused on the interest that nations show towards different parts of their respective national histories, which histories I represented in terms of a tree diagram.<sup>1</sup> The Armenian model could be called a ‘root-focused’ one: the interest of both the founders and the bearers of the Armenian national identity is directed largely towards the roots of the nation’s genealogical tree. It is therefore unsurprising that ‘central’ genres and archaic culture continue to play a central role here. The Russian model is characterised by a greater flexibility in selecting significant parts of the national tree, but overall, it tends to be directed towards the tree’s upper parts rather than its roots. It is not impossible that the shift of attention towards modernity among contemporary Russian anthropologists that we are discussing here is to a certain degree a symptom of precisely this ‘upper-oriented’ tendency.

While the displacement of interest from the country to the city is inevitable, and apparently irreversible, bidding a hasty farewell to the study of the archaic is not always justified. The knowledge of archaic cultural forms can sometimes help detect the genuinely archaic basis of certain modern phenomena. During the mass rallies in Yerevan at the end of the 1980s I found myself as if in the midst of an archaic festival — a public event of the kind I had once endeavoured to reconstruct.<sup>2</sup> One could say that in such situations the anthropologist becomes a kind of shaman who sets off back to the origin of time, in order to be able, upon his return, to foretell the future.<sup>3</sup> This may be an exaggeration, but only a minor one: predicting the development of a typologically similar festivity is, in principle, an easy task, unlike making a political forecast, which is an act more

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<sup>1</sup> L. H. Abrahamian. ‘Mother Tongue: Linguistic Nationalism and the Cult of Translation in Postcommunist Armenia’ // *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. Working Paper Series*. Summer 1998. Pp. 5–9.

<sup>2</sup> L. A. Abramyan [=Levon H. Abrahamian]. *Pervobytnyi prazdnik i mifologiya* [The Primitive Festival and Mythology]. Yerevan, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> L. H. Abrahamian. ‘The Anthropologist As Shaman: Interpreting Recent Political Events in Armenia’ // *Beyond Boundaries: Understanding, Translation and Anthropological Discourse*. Ed. G. Pålsson. Oxford / Providence, 1993. Pp. 100–16.

akin to the genre of fortune-telling, as was proved by the eventual outcome of those same events in Yerevan.

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The fact that all three of the above shifts in contemporary anthropology are interconnected is clearly visible in the title and contents of the collection *Modern Urban Folklore* (Moscow: RGGU, 2003), which is devoted primarily to ‘peripheral’ genres. I can’t myself judge whether the understanding of the concepts such as ‘the people’ and ‘tradition’ has changed, but I can say that the ethnography of the modern city allows us to explore the emergence of modern urban traditions. Here anthropologists still find it difficult to firmly establish whether what they are observing will indeed become a tradition or if it will remain just an isolated phenomenon. Hripsime Pikichian and I were faced with this problem already in the 1980s when we began studying the ethnography of contemporary Yerevan. At the time we noted that ‘realities of modern urban ethnography are sprouting before our very eyes, but, like mayflies, they are condemned to an early death and fail to find protection in the rock of tradition. However, the task of the researcher is to record the realities of today, even if they will not necessarily survive until tomorrow. Even if they do not live the kind of full, sophisticated life that classical ethnography is used to dealing with, they still have a definite value, their own unique characteristics’.<sup>1</sup> And also: ‘We come across phenomena that may well acquire the status of a tradition, but may equally likely vanish forever, leaving just a light (and sometimes disappointing) trace in the memory of eyewitnesses. It is as if we are looking into a kaleidoscope where the patterns are constantly changing, but where, with sufficient patience and attention, one can grasp that what at first seemed to be totally separate intricate sequences are interconnected’.<sup>2</sup> This is still relevant today, now that our modest research group is not only continuing with the ethnographic study of modern Yerevan, but also striving to work out the principles of the study of the ethnography of modernity in general. What has led us to this is neither the crisis of ‘central’ genres nor the rejection of the archaic. As I have already mentioned, in observing another modern reality — popular street demonstrations — I was aided precisely by these archaic layers of culture. Here I used the structural

<sup>1</sup> L. A. Abramyan [=Levon H. Abrahamian] and R. [i.e. Hr.] V. Pikichian. ‘Zametki po etnografii sovremennogo goroda (na primere Erevana) I. Rabiz i izmenchivost gorodskoi sotsialnoi ierarkhii’ // *Etnicheskie gruppy v gorodakh Evropeiskoi chasti SSSR* [Ethnic groups in cities of the European Part of the USSR]. Moscow, 1987. P. 136. For the English version of this article see L. A. Abrahamian and R. [i.e. Hr.] V. Pikichian. ‘Observations on the Ethnography of a Modern City: the Example of Erevan. I. The rabiz and the variability of the urban social hierarchy’ // *Soviet Anthropology and Archaeology* 1990. Vol. 29. No. 2. Pp. 34–44.

<sup>2</sup> L. A. Abramyan [=Levon H. Abrahamian] and R. [i.e. Hr.] V. Pikichian. ‘Zametki po etnografii sovremennogo goroda (Notes on the Ethnography of a Modern City). II Avtomobilnaya kultura Erevana’ [The Car Culture of Yerevan] // *Etnokontaktnye zony v Evropeiskoi chasti SSSR* [Zones of Ethnic Contact in the European Part of the USSR]. Moscow, 1989. P. 159.



method of analysis, to the bewilderment of the poststructuralists who had hastily declared all such methods, including the Bakhtinian analysis of the medieval carnival, historically anachronistic. I note, though, that Bakhtin has, in the most remarkable way, turned out to be simultaneously a precursor of structuralism (in his analysis of the carnival) and post-structuralism (in his dialogic study of culture), because he studied each phenomenon by the method that suited it best. It would be wrong to renounce binary opposites categorically, in the way contemporary poststructuralists have done. These need to be studied where they are present (in the case of public festivities, for example). Similarly, the dialogic method allows us to study those situations where a phenomenon is not yet fully established; more than that, it is precisely describing the phenomenon dialogically that allows us to reveal it as a reality. This is where I see the main task of the ethnography of modernity — the description of everything that can be described (which criteria should be used in selecting objects of description and how semiotic ‘noise’ should be filtered out is a different issue). The historian (with whom, as I said earlier, the anthropologist shares the legacy of the ancient masters of rituals and myths — in this particular case the historian of modernity) abandons fieldwork to the anthropologist, finding it difficult to deal with what has not yet become historical fact.

In conclusion I would like to stress that with this kind of approach, the ethnography of modernity becomes not peripheral, but, in a new way, the central genre of the science of man. It grapples with an uncertain future, in order that this future should not turn into a preconceived present. Ethnography is thereby filled with a new spirituality, one that initially appeared lost in the shift from the ‘centre’ to the ‘periphery’, from ‘the archaic’ to ‘the modern’.

I began by reading the last rites over the ethnography of modernity; I seem to be finishing with a prayer for its safe recovery.

[AB]

#### ADELE BARKER

**1** I think there has definitely been a shift in how we study culture, not only among Russian specialists but among scholars in other fields as well. And I think if we are looking for the reasons behind these shifts, one of the keys to the change has been the appearance of cultural studies, first in England, then the US and gradually throughout Europe. I think it has been easier for cultural studies theorists to say what

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cultural studies is not, rather than what it is, but most would agree on the definition of cultural studies as a practice rather than a discipline. Theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Clifford, Henry Giroux, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and others have argued for a fresh look at traditional, and maybe stale, notions of what culture is and have asked if we shouldn't be defining it differently than we have. They look at the relationship between power and culture, and where the possibilities for resistance lie among those who consume mass and popular culture.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, in particular, has been used very effectively by cultural theorists in looking at how relations of domination and subordination are created and sustained in cultural life. Issues of taste (cf. also Bourdieu's *Distinction*) emerge as part of a system of power relations. For those of us trained in literature, we have had to ask ourselves whether the study of literature is confined just to canonical, elite works or whether it should incorporate genres that were formerly seen as non literary as well as popular literary productions. In the US we now study texts by people who have long lived in this society yet who were simultaneously marginalised from it. Texts by Native Americans, by Latinos, Chicanos, and blacks are now represented in literature courses, women's studies, cultural studies and history courses. American black women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and others, who were doubly marginalised by virtue of being both female and black are now regularly taught in literature courses, as are Native American writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko or Scott Momaday. For this much credit is due not only to feminist literary criticism but to cultural studies as well.

For folklorists and anthropologists this new cultural theory raises comparable questions about what the subject of study should now be. This includes the issues mentioned in the questionnaire, regarding whether culture should be defined as a set of explicit rituals associated with the main rites of passages and feast days or whether it should be broadened to include the culture of the everyday that contains its own very different ritualistic practices. As part of this new theory we read texts differently than we did; we look at anthropology differently. For me, some of the most compelling work done in the field of history in the past fifteen years has dealt with people and classes who were not considered proper topics for historical research as it was formerly practised or who had been written out of historical narratives altogether. I have in mind particularly Natalie Zemon Davis' work on *The Return of Martin Guerre*, or Carlo Ginzburg's fascinating study *The Cheese and The Worms* which, through a recounting of the life of a simple miller in sixteenth century Italy, examines the way culture travelled between classes at that time. Although I am not trained as a historian, I use texts written by

historians in my cultural studies and popular culture classes because increasingly, long-standing divisions between disciplines are breaking down. Insights from cultural anthropology are brought to bear on literary texts. I can't think of a department in my university right now, well, apart maybe from physics or lunar and planetary sciences, that doesn't use Bakhtin. I think in the field of Russian Studies, in particular, this new cultural theory has opened up the door for scholars to do amazingly creative work on the culture of the everyday, for example. My colleagues are doing cutting edge work on everything from communal apartment living, TV shows, pulp fiction to Soviet kitsch.

Some people might say 'Why does all this matter?' And I guess I would answer that I think that we are learning as much, if not more, about the fabric of Russian and Soviet society by looking at these phenomena than we did by looking at 'traditional' areas of research (literature, folklore, etc.) because they tell us about forms of resistance, about the response to the influx of western popular culture, about nostalgia, and about the shifting boundaries between high and low culture. One of the best examples of this kind of work was Svetlana Boym's *Commonplaces: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, in which she foregrounded how kitsch and art, high and low culture got reshuffled in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. I would even hazard a guess here and say that had we begun earlier to look at Soviet society in a way that incorporated the real texture of daily life and nonofficial (as opposed to dissident) culture, my sense is that we might have seen the fissures in Soviet society that eventually led to its break up earlier than we did.

I also want to add that I think these new theoretical approaches, while they have opened lots of doors in our thinking, can also be dangerous if they aren't combined with good hard hitting training in a discipline. Many of the scholars who rail against cultural studies are objecting to the blind application of theory without the disciplinary training that grounds that theory. And I think that those objections should be taken seriously.

2 My sense is that among folklorists, ethnographers, and anthropologists the focus is, indeed, shifting from rural to the city. I think that several things may be involved in what seems a clear shift to the urban. For one thing, the past 15 years, at least in the U.S, have witnessed a real collapsing of intellectual borders- between disciplines, between high and low forms of culture, and between dominant and marginalised groups and cultures. Barriers have also shifted in other ways. Certainly if we look at Russia which was and is predominantly a rural society, part of these shifting and vanishing borders has been due to the phenomena of globalisation and media accessibility. The end result is that a lot of urban and western culture

is making its way out into the rural areas. A student of mine is doing her M.A. thesis on the construction of identity among late Soviet and post-Soviet teenage girls. A lot of the glossy fashion magazines that are produced in Moscow, or sometimes printed in Eastern Europe, often have their broadest readership in the provinces, judging by the Letters to the Editor. And so it is not just the popular culture of Moscow and St. Petersburg that is drifting out to the provinces but the culture of the west as well. So I think that the traditional divide between urban and rural is definitely breaking down in terms of what is accessible through the mass media. But by the same token, I think there has perhaps been a tendency over the years among Russian specialists in the west to see too great a divide between the two cultures. For many years Russians liked to say that Moscow was 'the biggest little village in the world', referring to the perceived sense among many Russians of Moscow's provincialism and also to the basic demographic reality that there has long been a continuous influx of the *narod* from the villages into Moscow for food, for jobs, and for consumer items. If you look at cultural life and particularly at the culture of the everyday, there has always been a blending of the two cultures as well. Certain urban practices, the *progulki* for instance, originated as a rural practice in which groups of men or women strolled up and down the streets to flirt, sing or make friends. The practice gradually made its way into Russia's urban centres but with a difference, as city dwellers adopted the terminology to refer to going out someplace, whether it was to a park or elsewhere.

There is also something else at work here in this traditional urban/rural dichotomy and that is the gradual legitimisation over the past fifteen years of uniquely urban forms of cultural practices and popular culture. Suddenly the city is no longer merely the site one inhabits but has become an object of study in and of itself. In Europe, France in particular, the work of people such as Michel de Certeau and others has contributed enormously to how we think about cities and our relationship to them as we move about them. De Certeau has shown that those spaces become part of the daily, often unconscious, practice we engage in making our own culture. Urban life has become a valid subject of study, not just from an architectural or demographic point of view but from the point of view of how people negotiate these spaces, the subcultures that are contained within urban life, and how those spaces reflect the all-important concept of class. There is another thing we should factor in as well. Probably because so much contemporary cultural theory is based on Marxist theory, cultural phenomena are often studied from the point of view of production and consumption. How something is produced and how it is consumed by those for whom it is intended are often miles apart. And what better place to study consumption than in central Moscow that, in the eyes of some, has taken over as the consumption capital of the world!

I think at this particular point in post-Soviet history taking a fresh look at the traditional divide between urban and rural can yield much that is useful. If cultural studies approaches culture not as a static entity but as a set of practices that move and acquire different value depending on how they are used by different groups, then the whole study of the 'folk' and rural in Russia acquires a very different resonance.

3

For years what dominated in literary studies in both the US and Europe was the notion of the canon. And that canon was made up of works generally written by white males, with some notable exceptions such as the works of Jane Austen, the Brontë Sisters, George Eliot, Emily Dickinson. Apart from gender, age was definitely a factor in determining the worth of a cultural product. I remember in college a professor telling us that it wasn't clear whether Hemingway's works were going to enter the canon because Hemingway had not been dead long enough to enable critics to make a determination. But the relationship between age and cultural value was not consistent. The Babylonian *Gilgamesh* or the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* were part of the canon, but Native American creation stories, which are easily as old as *Beowulf*, were not. In this way, the boundary between 'literature' and 'folklore' began to be interrogated. At the same time, the idea that material was of interest simply because it was old also came into question. The shift in focus from past to present, from older traditional forms to newer ones, was a central part of the cultural studies movement. I'm not saying that popular culture critics have ignored the popular culture of earlier eras. I am thinking particularly here of Peter Burke's classic book on *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* which is a brilliant piece of work. But it is also true that in the past 15 years cultural critics have been looking more and more at contemporary culture partially because current theory now legitimises the study of the everyday and because definitions of what constitutes culture and cultural practice have changed.

I know I thought a lot about these issues when I was putting together my own collection *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev*. In the field of literature, I wanted the book to reflect the interest in popular fiction and in what that fiction could tell us about the current texture of Soviet and post-Soviet society, gender relations and the market and so we included a piece on Alexandra Marinina by my colleague Catharine Nepomnyashchy. We looked at a whole range of popular cultural phenomena—the MMM scandal, Russian rock music, popular children's culture, post-Soviet nightlife, the new Russian cinema, spectator sports, jokes, pets, representations of queer subjects, male ballet, pornography, tattooing (as opposed to Tatu who unfortunately was not on the scene yet), kitsch, the installation art of Ilya Kabakov, graffiti,

cults and postmodernism, and Christianity, anti-Semitism and nationalism—all in an effort to rethink culture and what this new understanding of culture as lived practice could tell us about late Soviet and post-Soviet life. Precisely because we redefined and expanded the concept of culture, there was also much that was left out. We could have looked at fashion, at food, at post-Soviet *byt*, at the ‘culture’ of the New Russians. But I also chose in this volume to focus almost exclusively on the city because while the practices of daily life in the countryside had long been studied by folklorists and anthropologists, the ongoing daily culture of the cities had not received the good critical attention that I thought they deserved.

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I think that the thread that links these various processes is undoubtedly the relatively new cultural theory that has made its way into almost every field of the social sciences and the humanities. It has connected different fields in a way rarely done before. It’s very much in vogue in cultural studies now to talk about identity and indeed tradition as constructs. The collection of essays edited by Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, calls into question the whole notion of a pure, untainted tradition within cultures. One of Hobsbawm’s points is that tradition is invented and re-invented at various times in a nation’s history when a particular kind of narrative calls for it. I think Russians are used to changing notions of what constitutes ‘tradition’ because of the sheer number of times their own history has had to be rewritten to conform to different political ideologies. I think they are much more sensitised to the ideological import of tradition and to the changing notions of what a tradition is in the first place than we are in the United States. And, yes, I do think the term tradition is valid, even in this day and age, but we must also remember that there are lots of competing narratives in a given culture, each with its own very different take on what that tradition ought to consist of.

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The problem that the editors of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* have identified could certainly be analysed in terms of an alteration in the subject matter of ethnography. But another view of things is also tenable, according to which the shift of the ‘centre of gravity’ from the past to the present could be seen as explained, rather, by the structure of ethnography itself as a discipline. And in fact the questions, as formulated by the editors, themselves reproduce this

structure very precisely: one where ‘contemporary/archaic culture’ and ‘urban/peasant culture’ are seen as parallel lines.

The point is that the phenomena placed on the right side of these sets of relations have full value only when seen in relation to their opposites (their ‘other’, in the Hegelian use of the word). Therefore one should take the questions set out in the preamble to our discussion as a single question (which, however, does not necessarily mean that scholarly concepts of ‘the *narod*’ and ‘tradition’ have changed). Along the way, it would seem important to mention that there is a degree of equivalence (or at least, association) between the concepts *narod* and ‘tradition’. When we use the word *narod*, we of course do not have in mind the statistical results adduced by the latest state census, but something quite different, something displaying a high degree of cultural unity, and this is also what we term ‘tradition’ or ‘ethnic behaviour stereotypes’ (‘tradition’ acting here in the function of an instrumental attribute of *narod*).

Two more explanations should be set out here. First, the concepts *ethnography*, *ethnology*, *social anthropology* and *cultural anthropology* are used by Russian specialists as synonyms. From this point of view, *ethnography* (*etnografiya*) becomes a Russian term for a discipline that goes under different names in other countries. At the same time, by employing the word *ethnography*, we consciously or unconsciously usurp or ‘distort’ the problem which the folklorists have identified. However, at the start of the argument it’s essential to adopt a single position, however restrictive this may be, in order to move towards the opposite position later on.

Thus, the opportunity to switch one’s attention to ‘peripheral’ areas of knowledge (to the contemporary world) was on the disciplinary agenda of ethnography right from the start. The binary opposition ‘primitive-civilised’ underpins all the most influential directions in twentieth-century anthropology: psychological anthropology (the problem of ‘culture and personality’), political and economic anthropology, and, of course, the anthropology of ethnic identity (I’m phrasing it this way for the sake of consistency), whose subject is ethnic processes in ‘small groups’. For example, in the definition of L. E. Kubbel, the focus of political anthropology (a discipline that emerged in the 1940s) is the assimilation of traditional power structures in the political system of developing countries [Kubbel 1986: 23]. During the 1970s and 1980s, the interest manifested by Soviet specialists in studying contemporary ‘developing societies’ was the source of official pride (‘unlike in many Western countries...’) and at the same time functioned as an objectively observable ‘tendency to widen the boundaries of social and cultural anthropology’ [Bromlei 1988: 7–8]. The question accordingly arises: why should the shift in researchers’ interests have been recorded in

Russian anthropological scholarship as an accomplished fact only during the last ten years?

Of course, one can only accept this simplified way of putting the problem if one also accepts my basic assumption: ethnography is an orientation in the study of culture that draws its information from orally transmitted (non-written) forms of storing and disseminating knowledge [Belkov 2003]. If one defines ethnography in this way, assertions about its unity and stability over time can be fairly straightforwardly demonstrated. My demonstration of this definition will serve as a sort of exoskeleton for the answers to the other questions, those concerned with the analysis of new tendencies in contemporary anthropological work.

In the heat of theoretical and methodological disputes, ethnographers (or, if you prefer, anthropologists) are given to insisting on the extremely varied nature of their discipline. But at the same time, a glance at the actual ways in which the subject is approached reveals a striking degree of consensus. Referring to the opinions of foreign (above all American) anthropologists, Yu. V. Bromlei emphasised that in practice anthropologists — and above all social anthropologists — give preference to ‘primitive societies’ and so-called smaller groups in larger ones [Bromlei 1988: 8–9].

In this vein, Lévi-Strauss once spoke at a round table of the way anthropology had grown out of ‘various left-overs and remains’ of other disciplines [*An Appraisal* 1953: 349], and in private he was serenely content to ‘take for granted the fact that our discipline is basically concerned with the study of “primitive” peoples’. [Lévi-Strauss 1994: 31].

I think that this diversity in the concepts of what the subject of ethnography is derives primarily from the confusion of two different issues: the question of the extent to which the subject of ethnography is unified, and the question of how the subject-matter of ethnography is to be divided into sub-categories. It’s hard to deny that ethnography has shown a tendency to a high degree of disorganisation in this respect, with no one overall governing principle of categorisation at work. The evolution of different branches of ethnography and of different theoretical orientations came about at a variety of different times, in a variety of different countries, and for a variety of different reasons. What is more, most of those who invented new terms were little concerned with relating their usages to existing theories (the analysis of these cannot be carried out in the language of one’s own theory: a metatheoretical approach is requisite). And it is precisely the unsystematic nature of the terminology in circulation that creates the impression that ethnography’s subject matter is heterogeneous. Now, a century later, we can see how accurate was the diagnosis of L. Ya. Shternberg, who wrote in the entry on *Etnografiya* that he



prepared for the Brockhaus-Efron encyclopaedia in 1904,<sup>1</sup> that chaos in the naming of a subject generates chaos in the understanding of that subject.

When a new term is introduced, or an old one given an ostensibly new meaning, the result is rarely originality in terms of conceptualisation. Much more frequently, an old concept is simply rephrased. There would seem to be three different ways of solving the problem of ethnography's scope in terms of subject. It is either seen as the study of peoples, or as the study of humanity, or as the study of culture. However, in studying 'peoples' or 'humanity', ethnographers, in the final analysis, are concerned with culture, and in practice they make this the sole subject of their analysis.

Without question, culture is also the subject of a whole range of other disciplines — among them archaeology, cultural studies, cultural history, and so on. But the specific character of every 'science of culture' lies in its particular way of identifying culture as the subject of analysis. Within ethnography, it is concern with the primal or the primitive, and with orality, that acts as the defining feature of the discipline. And here it becomes evident that the reality of the ethnic group as a theoretical object is reducible to the concept of the 'ethnic unit' (to employ S. M. Shirokogorov's term) [Shirokogorov 1923: 13] or to the manner in which the culture is fragmented 'along the contours of assimilation by expected knowledge' (M. K. Petrov's term) [Petrov 1991: 31]. A diametrically opposed but also rather artificial way according to which the corpus of ethnographical knowledge is fragmented consists in the emergence of scholarly cliques devoted to the study of particular levels of culture, which have the habit of behaving like religious sects or like 'tribes'.

Any fact of culture has to be selected and to be 'created' as the object of ethnographic knowledge. This means that one of the established variants of the opposition 'traditional-modern' has to be selected, or that the fact in question has to be assigned (in however limited a sense) an 'archaic' role with reference to the role adopted by the researcher him- or herself. Let me cite a few concepts, both ones that are still in use, and ones that have fallen out of use, that have been employed to define the object of ethnographic knowledge: primitive peoples ('savages'), non-European nations ('those from other lands'),<sup>2</sup> non-state ('tribal') societies, 'non-historic peoples', 'natural peoples' (*Naturvölker*), 'savage races', 'colonial peoples', and

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<sup>1</sup> The Brockhaus-Efron encyclopaedia, which began publishing in 1890, was the most scholarly and authoritative of pre-revolutionary Russian encyclopaedias (cf. the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). It includes many valuable articles on the nature of scholarly disciplines (literary history, history, child psychology, etc.). [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> *Tuzemtsy*: a term applied to non-Russian ethnic minorities in the Urals and Siberia. [Editor].

also *narod*, 'the common people' (*prostoi narod*), 'the peasantry', and so on.

All of these represent one side only of paired relationships in which the binary opposition 'modern-primitive civilisation' has paradigmatic status. All the other oppositions are less strongly marked equivalents of this opposition, and also act to shore it up. The oppositions set out can be boiled down to the simplest categories of 'high-low', 'near-far', 'one's own-foreign', 'large-small', 'centre-periphery', and so on. By means of such structures, the reality of modern society as a subject of study is easily transformed into a manifestation of primitive, which is to say 'ethnographical', society. Hence, the primitive society is to be understood not only as the subject of ethnographical work, but as its model and its analytical lever.

According to this manner of thinking, the researcher is always placed 'above' the reality that he studies. Now we can test out the observation according to which anthropologists are said to prefer two incompatible things: 'primitive' societies and 'small groups' in modern ones. In fact, small ethnic groups occupy a position that is, taxonomically speaking, 'lower' than that of the researcher, they are located on the 'peripheries' of large societies, they are 'other' so far as the researcher is concerned, because *he* (or she) doesn't belong with them, their culture is idiosyncratic, 'distant' from him or her, etc. These governing conventions mean that the small group (the ethnic minority) becomes the primary object of ethnography.

The 'primitivist' model of ethnography, in essence, was always based on an underlying 'double-yolked' understanding of the subject. Within the framework of an opposition between urban and peasant culture, the latter adopted the role of something primary, exemplary, i.e. of a 'primal' or 'primitive' culture. A more radical method of addressing the problem of the 'double-yolk' lies in the absorption of both 'primitive' and 'peasant' culture under the category of unwritten culture as a particular system of information exchange.

The 'double-yolk' of ethnography co-exists with an understanding of two separate sub-disciplines, *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde* ('the study of one's own people' and 'the study of other peoples') — which in turn generated the canonical formula in the Russian tradition, *folklor* versus *etnografiya*.

V. Ya. Propp, addressing the situation in the 1920s, observed that Western European scholars, particularly French and German ones, but to a lesser extent British and American ones too, were inclined to interpret the term *folklore* (*Volkskunde*) too broadly, including in it not just the creative side of folk life, but also ritual and material culture [Propp 1976: 17]. *Folklore* generally meant the peasant

culture of one people, usually that of which the researcher was himself (or herself) a member. The culture of a single people was the subject of folklore studies (Volkskunde), the culture of all other peoples, including primitive ones, the object of ethnography, or Völkerkunde, to use the German term [Propp 1986: 18–19].

Propp himself opposed this categorisation vehemently, for the following reasons. To begin with, the study of folklore should include the spiritual culture of all peoples [Propp 1986: 19]. In addition, ‘folklore’ should not apply itself to the ‘primitive forms’ of material culture and social organisation, because this was the subject of ethnography in any case [Propp 1986: 17]. As a result, folklore studies were to be understood as the study of spiritual culture, and ethnography as the study of material culture and social organisation. This categorisation is unshakeable in Russian studies of folklore (and ethnography) right up to the present. The rigidity of the schema means that peasant material culture and the practices of everyday life are totally elided, while folklore studies do not extend to the sphere of primitive culture. Folklore is associated only with peasant spiritual culture, and ethnography with primitive culture in the broad sense, with a kind of amorphous residuum of peasant everyday life thrown in. These days, this curious division of labour seems to be perpetuated more by the deficiencies in the way ethnographers and folklorists are educated than by the logic of intellectual evolution within the discipline itself. The underlying cause of the situation is the fact that when folklore studies are defined, the modality of actuality (what is in fact being studied) is effaced by the modality of the moral imperative (what *ought* to be studied).

Against this background, the Western approach to the subject seems preferable. According to this, what falls to ethnography’s lot is exclusively the culture of primitive peoples, since peasant culture is carved up between the folklorists of various (let’s be honest) European countries according to birthright, as it were. This has its good side and its bad side, but it generates a clear-cut relationship, without logical contradictions, between Volkskunde and Völkerkunde, on the one hand, and ‘folklore’ and ‘ethnography’ on the other. It follows that it makes more sense to adopt a methodology where the term ‘folklore’ (‘popular tradition’) is understood to include not only the sphere of poetic creativity, but also buildings, household utensils, dress, etc.

If we begin from this viewpoint, we can more easily understand why folklorists and ethnographers behave as they do in certain situations. In the early 1980s, Albert Baiburin and Georgy Levinton called into question the thesis according to which folklore was always seen as the secondary phenomenon, and ethnography the primary one, insisting that the relationship between the two phenomena could not

be seen as a one-way street, and that, if anything, to assume the primacy of verbal systems in traditional culture seemed more logical [Baiburin, Levinton 1984]. As an ethnographer, I find this analysis convincing and not in the least wounding to my disciplinary amour-propre. Ethnographers don't come to be ethnographers because they are convinced of the primacy of social institutions over works of folklore. And folklore studies, from the moment it was born (which happened a lot earlier than did the emergence of the term 'folklore') adopted an analytical perspective on peasant culture that assigned the primary place to verbal structures, and where culture generally was interpreted as a 'text'. For this reason, I don't think that semiotics has anything to add to the concept of folklore studies as it stands.

On the other hand, studies of material culture never seem to have occupied too much space in ethnography (or should one say folklore studies?) — take S. A. Tokarev's well-known stipulation that the ethnographic study should not confine itself to the straightforward chronicling of material culture [Tokarev 1970: 3]. But here one should not forget about the other side of the question. Studies of folklore are impossible without synchronic analysis of the symbolic and material aspects of culture, given that it is not things as such that have the function of signs, but the thing in a reduced sense — certain properties of things — that are semiotised. As a result, folklore studies inevitably becomes the ethnography of 'one's own people', and vice versa.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, all of what I have said only works to describe a tendency, and not to explain it. Let us assume that this tendency is ingrained in peasant culture as an object of study from the beginning. In peasant culture, social organisation is absorbed into ritual life, as a result of the fact that socially constitutive forces are suppressed by the constraints of the class society. By comparison we can say, that in primitive society social organisation oppresses and swallows up mythical (verbal) systems. There is one other distinction that explains a great deal — including how to interpret the thesis of the unity of folkloric and ethnographical facts [Baiburin 2003: 16–17]. Folklore in general is the result of a 'semantic shift' that has overtaken primal mythology.

It is not difficult to identify a relationship between the opposition 'ethnography and folklore studies' in Russia and the opposition 'social anthropology-cultural anthropology' in the West [Belkov 2000: 51]. Cultural anthropology first developed from studies of the traditional culture of North American Indians, which means that

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. both the study of folklore and ethnography are in the end concerned with the 'informational aspects of culture'.

models derived from folklore studies are relevant there: such Indians are regarded by researchers as 'their own people'. In the day-to-day practice of American anthropologists, this identification may not be made explicitly, but it is precisely what directs their sense of difference from British social anthropology, which from the beginning (because of its European location) was always directed towards the study of 'other peoples'.

It is clear that the fact that the problem of the 'marginalisation of the material object dimension' tends to be discussed alongside the problem of the division between 'folklore and ethnography' is not fortuitous [Baiburin 2003]. The inter-relationship of the opposition 'primitive-peasant culture' and the opposition 'folklore-ethnography' not only divides 'folklorists' from 'ethnographers', but also allows one to understand why the shift of interests from 'centre' to 'periphery' is taking place. For an ethnographer, this shift essentially means being transformed into a 'folklorist', rather than a 'sociologist' — the analysis that is usually made when the topic of the 'disappearance of ethnography' is discussed. In the words of Lévi-Strauss, the vanishing of the material base of primitive societies has made their 'inner life' the subject of anthropology [Lévi-Strauss 1994: 36].

We are working up to the point that the subject studied by ethnographers and folklorists, tradition itself, or the culture founded on the personal-nominal sociocode, has not in fact changed at all. The attitude to this has changed, and hence the boundaries of fieldwork. The emphasis on visible ('tangible') results persists, but the culture of the inheritors of the primitive peoples of the nineteenth century is no longer seen as superior, in terms of empirical discoveries, to the non-written culture of the inheritors of the civilised peoples of the nineteenth century. The same can be said about peasant versus urban culture. The sense of their different potential as providers of non-written information has been exhausted. They now exist as two dimensions of a global urbanised culture (though one must allow for the fact that the speed of the process of assimilation differs in different countries). But the immediate stimulus for the rapid switch of attention to urban non-written culture was its previous status as *terra incognita*.

It is not just folklorists who have been seized by a thirst for 'new discoveries' in terms of subject matter at the present time. In the equally specialised area of studies of social organisation and kinship systems, very similar processes are taking place, and for similar reasons: interest in 'classic' phenomena is being replaced by interest in 'marginal' ones. A significant early sign of new tendencies in this respect was T. B. Shchepanskaya's *The Symbolism of Youth Culture* [Shchepanskaya 1993]. This study of urban culture was a landmark

in at least two senses. First, it pioneered a new type of 'quasi-ethnographical' methodology, which consisted in concentrating attention on peripheral phenomena (with social strata represented as 'ethnic minorities', so to speak). Second, it adopted a perspective that blurred the boundaries between cultural and social anthropology. This brought into focus a very interesting development; the regeneration of material culture and social organisation on the basis of folklore (along the lines of the re-growth of a lizard's tail).

However, let us return to a question that I posed at the start: why should all this have come to the surface just now? After all, in studies of the traditional culture of Australian aborigines, the 'natural reserves' of primitiveness were exhausted fifty years and more ago. The answer may be as follows. The two centuries of ethnography's history have seen not only the growing accumulation of material, but the steady improvement of the subject's intellectual resources. The point is not, or not just, that ethnography has now exhausted the empirical possibilities formerly available, but also that these intellectual resources have now reached the requisite level of intellectual maturity, acquired a sufficiently exact and indeed sophisticated conceptual apparatus to allow a shift to the analysis of urban culture.

And let us not forget that those who initiated discussion of this problem are precisely the folklorists, i.e. specialists in studying folklore in 'a narrow sense' [Baiburin, Levinton 1984: 230]. Peasant culture, which was always seen as opposed to urban written culture, was *a priori* always the sphere for the testing out of different concepts that, as it were, anticipated the present situation and that have proved extremely valuable in the study of unwritten urban culture.

It would appear that the 'chaos of naming patterns' in our subject will probably never be fully overcome (even supposing we considered that a desirable end). Therefore, forming our response to the problem under discussion in a completely clear and non-contradictory way is of course impossible. A more sensible task is to set out the areas where we might try to work towards an answer. For instance, one of the key moments revolves around the opposition 'written-unwritten culture'. It is also very important to underline the inter-relationship identified by other researchers between the problem of the 'move towards the margins' in ethnographical work, and the problem of the relationship between folklore and ethnography. Finally, the shift of the inner boundary of empirical studies can be related not just to the disappearance of the ethnographic 'field' in its traditional sense, but also to the creation of 'high accuracy' analytical skills, understanding this to mean the ability to transform 'straightforward facts' into the subject of ethnographic or folkloric research.

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[CK]

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I would say that all three tendencies are reflections of a single, underlying, tendency, and one that is far from new. After Boas's classic article 'On the Limitations of the Comparative Method in Anthropology' (1896) the conviction grew that ethnographical materials could not be used directly and unproblematically in the reconstruction of the distant past. However, this perfectly rational point of view in turn gave way to another, more controversial and limiting, viewpoint: that ethnologists and anthropologists should not comment on phenomena and processes about which they had no direct information, and which extended beyond the bounds of a single culture or a group of closely-allied cultures. From this followed a loss of interest in archaic forms of culture (which became less and less accessible as the twentieth century wore on), and in cross-cultural and generalising studies of all kinds — in all forms of analysis not directly rooted in the author's own field work.

If anthropology is to concern itself with the present, rather than the past, then it is logical that urban culture — which at present offers particularly rich possibilities — should be the centre of attention. It is equally logical that attention should shift to urban genres of folklore — jokes, urban myths, horror stories, etc. 'Core' 'Van Gennep'<sup>1</sup> rituals have a subsidiary place in cultures that have undergone modernisation (as family and neighbourly ties weaken, the numbers of participants in such rituals decline, their forms and structures become destabilised, and the issue of how far such rituals express a particular world-view becomes problematic). On the other hand, ritualised forms of everyday behaviour — smoking, sneezing, etc. — provide abundant material for study, and material, what is more, that has been all but neglected in the past.

The tendency for attention to shift from recon-

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. the *rites de passage* studied by Arnold Van Gennep in the early twentieth century. [Editor].



structions of the past to the description and interpretation of the present, to the attempt to record the smallest details of the present before it vanishes into the past in its turn, can be seen in the study of Amerindian folklore, where — in contradistinction to the situation in most of Europe — recording archaic cultural phenomena is still possible. Here, the changes of scholarly practice worked in the following ways: from literary paraphrases of texts to recordings of specific performances of texts by concrete informants (complete with pauses, coughing fits, etc.); from the description of an ethnic tradition as a whole to the description of the tradition in a single village, or indeed of the world-view of a single individual. This, in a nutshell, is how scholarly norms altered from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s.

The given tendencies are unlikely to fade away in the foreseeable future, given that the potential material for study is not just enormous, but is growing more rapidly than the intensity with which it is being studied (the globalisation of culture is linked with the birth of a multitude of new cultural forms and the development of new fusions of elements that were never, and could not have been, previously combined). Anthropologists have plenty of material to deal with, you'd think, but as a matter of fact, there are particular dangers in this new situation. The conversion of anthropology into a combination of more and more localised and particularised research programmes undermines the intellectual unity of the discipline. The concentration of energy on ever-finer detail calls into question the whole *raison d'être* of anthropology in the eyes of non-anthropologists, including those responsible for financing the subject. The task of recording every detail of the present is, in a final sense, impossible — some hierarchy of priorities is inevitable.

One might contrast the situation in archaeology. Here, too, something of the same process is evident — the unearthing in abundance of new, but not exactly sensational, facts, the growth of interest in reconstructions of a more and more narrow and particular kind, the widening hiatus between the significance of analytical problems and the methods that are used to approach them. But there is an important distinction. The results of archaeological investigations of any kind may quite easily be incorporated in generalising analyses adopting more or less any spatial or temporal framework (such an approach is regularly given space in central journals in the field, for instance *The Journal of World Prehistory*). All archaeologists to a greater or lesser extent take each others' work into consideration, since in the end they are all dealing with one problem.

This problem — explaining how the world came to be as we know it — is also at the centre of attention of many of the natural sciences. And anthropology also has an aetiological strand, a neo-evolutionary

school based on cross-cultural work, and aiming, in the first place, to lay bare functional links between evolutionary factors, and on the other, to reconstruct particular evolutionary patterns. The criticism of evolutionism and diffusionism voiced a century ago was well-founded. But new contemporary methods of research, the alteration in the conceptual horizons of the subject, and the ubiquity of enormous databases, have taken cross-cultural research to a quite different level. Only a tiny proportion of anthropologists are now doing work in a neo-evolutionary direction. Given the abundance of problems that only lack interested (in some cases, financially interested) specialists to investigate them, this direction may in future move into a stronger position, but hardly at the expense of the anthropological mainstream, given that high staffing levels are in any case not required to sustain it.

[CK]

### KONSTANTIN BOGDANOV

I don't think that the division of folklore into 'central' and 'peripheral' phenomena is especially productive. If one casts a glance back over the history of folklore studies, the idea that there is some kind of hierarchy of folklore genres emerges as completely artificial; it is explained, I think, not by the greater or lesser prominence of these genres in reality, but by the tempting opportunity of appropriating an 'ownerless' thematic resource and extracting from it symbolic and socio-political capital. The modern preference of jokes to folk epics and of urban myths to historical songs is entirely analogous to what is happening in other branches of the humanities, some of a kind that one might think were thoroughly traditional and remote from topical issues. For instance, study of the Greek and Latin classics has also undergone a significant shift in thematic and methodological preferences. It would be rash to claim that the relative lack of interest among modern folklorists in the genres of folk epic, folk tale, and historical song was entirely unconnected with the disappearance of these genres from live circulation; on the other hand, it's evident that scholarly interest in cultural phenomena is not directly dependent on the issue of whether that phenomenon is 'modern' or not. More ger-

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mane, I think, is the question of the institutional (and by extension, heuristic and epistemological) relevance of a phenomenon at a given time. It's indicative that the 'discoveries' of modern folklore studies include not just, say, jokes and urban stories, but the Russian popular print, which was studiously ignored by the Romantically-inclined populist folklore specialists of the nineteenth century. I wouldn't rule out the possibility of the folk epic once more turning out to be of more 'contemporary interest' than the most up-to-date urban myth or joke. But at the moment that's not the case. The thematic resources of folklore study, as it was carried out yesterday, are exhausted — for the meantime.

2 I'm not sure that the concept of the *narod* was ever a unified phenomenon. The term 'narodnaya kultura', as used by folklorists, was always swimming round somewhere in the realm of the imaginary, which in turn was formed under the influence of ideological forces. I think the preference among the researchers going by the name of folklorists for peasant and rural life was, until very recently, dictated by the need to distance oneself from the object of study. The need to distance oneself in this way has not disappeared, but now one can achieve this by other means than by evoking the binary opposition between town and countryside: for example, by appeal to different kinds of symbolically freighted subcultures (the 'folklore' of adolescents, gays, fireman, whatever you will). Whether folkloric material is recorded in the town or in the country, the central situation doesn't change: the informant/bearer of folklore is always different from the researcher, who in turn invokes the Imaginary and thus, in one way or another, represents what he or she wishes were real as what is real.

3 The principle 'the more ancient, the more valuable' in folklore studies is evaluative by definition, and in this respect is fundamentally different from the reconstructive methods used in history as such. It seems that these days the explicit 'emphasis on the ancient' in folklore studies has become less relevant (or — to put it more accurately — less fashionable), but I don't think that it's therefore lost its emotional and heuristic force. In my view, the concept has simply been resemioticised: the diachronic orientation marks that were formerly used in the search for the fundamentals of culture have been replaced by synchronic ones. Without doubt, the devaluation of existing methodologies in folklore studies, according to which the archaic status of the material under analysis was assumed a priori, giving rise to generalisations that were both unverifiable and, still more importantly, unfalsifiable, has played some role in this process. At the same time, despite the esoteric and mythologising character of these generalisations (evoking the misty past of the World Tree and of the Founder Myths), their heuristic force, to my mind, lies less in their contribution to depiction of the past than in their

contribution to depiction of the present. And the task of describing that is eternally relevant. The present requires its justification — if not with reference to a more or less virtual archaisation of the past, then by means of various auto-referential (one could add — dialectical and ambivalent) metaphorical structures: as in terms such as ‘discourse’, ‘communication’, social psychology’ and so on.

4

The problems mentioned above are definitely interlinked. The general ideological background to the crisis currently besetting Russian folklore studies is clear at first glance: it boils down to hopes and fears in the anticipation of a post-industrial future. For many folklorists, who’ve got used to discussing the kind of texts that they once read in their school text-books as ‘folklore’, and getting paid good money for doing it too, the situation is nothing less than traumatic: no wonder it provokes polemical attacks on modern folklore studies. What’s more, the kind of texts printed as ‘folklore’ in textbooks and anthologies of the Soviet era are still taken by many to be the bulwark of national spirituality and a panacea against social ills (try reading A. A. Gorelov’s absurdly high-flown introduction to the recently issued first volume of the *Codex of Russian Folklore*).<sup>1</sup> Can one really assert, in this context, that the core concepts of the ‘people’ and of ‘tradition’ have changed? Well, yes and no. Post-structuralism and deconstruction have shown us that no researcher can do without overarching conceptual structures, no matter how much he or she assaults those structures. These days there’s simply a greater variety of such overarching conceptual structures around, working to transform the concepts of ‘the people’, ‘tradition’, etc., that were formerly asserted without question. And praise Allah for that.

[CK]

<sup>1</sup> ‘There is no more difficult time for cultural phenomena of fundamental significance than an era when the institutions of state are collapsing. Yet one must still hold fast to a consciousness of the fact that it is precisely national culture, its huge resources, its genetic store, that constitute the great riches and the strength of Russia; that these things have the power to exercise a miraculous effect on the rebirth of the Fatherland [...] to cement together a unity that has been broken apart, and to reunite brother nations that have been rent asunder in a process that is tragic for all those involved in it. All life-giving forces must be brought into action at this hour, among them the classic texts of Russian folklore, created by the artistic genius of our people, which attest to the laws of creativity underlying national existence, and fix and record its traditions for posterity.’ (*Byliny Pechory* [The Folk Epics of Pechora]. *Svod russkogo folkloru. Byliny v 25 tomakh* [Codex of Russian Folklore. Folk Epics in 25 Volumes]. Vol. 1. Ed. A. A. Gorelov. St Petersburg, 2001. P. 7.)

## SEVIR CHERNETSOV

I would be sure that all the phenomena noted in the questionnaire are indeed connected and represent the final phase of the changes that have come about in the subject-matter of ethnography as a discipline over the last two centuries. The French Revolution gave birth to, and brought into broad circulation, the concept of the nation as a subject of history (in a pretty vague sense, it has to be said). The effects of the Napoleonic regime across Europe, with its constant and irresponsible alterations to state frontiers, gave birth not so much to a concept, as to a dream, of the nation-state as the most organic form in which nationhood could be expressed, to a dream of the fatherland. From those times onwards many wars in Europe were interpreted by their participants as wars for the fatherland, including, for instance, the Franco-Prussian War. But it was not just wars, but cultural construction, that was carried out under the banner of nationhood. As a result, the task of ethnography came to be understood as the reconstruction of the time-honoured glorious past of the nation, of its magnificent essence, which was supposed to become the unshakable foundation of its radiant future. And it was inevitable that ethnographers, when they were engaged in that mission of reconstruction, should especially turn their attention to archaic forms and to the 'central rituals' that cemented together the inhabitants of the village, those 'pillars of the nation'.

For its part, the radiant future was also imagined in terms of the nation-state. And the process of forming such states did indeed take place all over Europe: however, unfortunately it brought us 'not peace, but the sword'. There's a well-known tag that the Franco-Prussian War's real victor was the schoolteacher imbuing his pupils with nationalist ideas. But the ethnographers added their mite as well, and the part they played in boosting ideas about national greatness should not be underestimated. This political direction led in the end to the First World War, or the Great War, as it was then named

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with a shudder, the result of which was in turn the emergence of new nation-states. But another result of it (though in Russia now this is not much remembered) was a huge cultural upheaval, and the emergence of social tension on a scale hitherto unseen.

The effects of this last were to give birth to twin forms of state organisation of a fundamentally new kind: fascism and communism. Fascist ideology was characterised by deep attention to everything archaic, collective and national. Communist ideology, on the other hand, was concerned with the attempt to efface the national in favour of the international, but the interests of state construction did not always allow these priorities to emerge in practice. The creation of the USSR demanded the creation of new national republics, 'national in form and socialist in content', which was carried out in a systematic, thorough way. The extent to which they could actually be described as 'socialist in content' would need separate discussion, but the part about 'national in form' proved accurate down to the last whisker — with regard to state structure, cultural politics, educational systems, press and media, propaganda, national theatres, the academic establishment, and so on and so on. The Second World War served only to emphasise yet one more time the importance of these national republics as a reserve of patriotic and bellicose energies, and the construction of these dependent, but thoroughly national, states continued apace after the war as well.

The shock that ran through Europe with the Second World War effaced the memory of the First in many places, and implanted deep disgust with 'great ideas of nationhood' and everything connected with them. Things reached such a pitch that in today's Germany the Gothic typeface is associated exclusively with Fascism and inspires repulsion as a result. Europeans began to value less their membership of this or that nation, great or small, than their membership of a worldwide community where everyone was supposed to be equal (or that was the ideal). This change in values, the shift from a psychology of collective self-sacrifice in the name of a great ideal to an ideology of individual consumerism was absolutely natural, and the value of the individual started to be seen as equal in terms of rights and dignity to the collective everywhere, including in ethnography. This was the background for the move away from the study of ritual as such to the study of ritualised forms of behaviour in individuals that then took place in the West. To be sure, it was a marginal tendency at first, not even a tendency, maybe, as compared with the huge authority exercised by such figures as Lévi-Strauss. I think, indeed, the best word was maybe a sort of *jeu d'esprit*, a joke, a paper dart thrown by students at the retreating rear of their esteemed professor.

In Russia, this new fashion (as opposed to Western ethnographical work of a more serious and profound kind) arrived at a late stage,

after the collapse of the USSR, and like every form of youth cult, it soon spread everywhere. In today's Russia the study of ritual forms of behaviour has the character of the bastard love child of qualitative sociology and 'exotic' ethnology; like everything new and shiny, it is to the taste of yuppie scholars, whose hearts are warmed by the thought of their participation in the international scholarly scene. What's more, it's not exactly rocket science, so you can easily make it your passport into a brave new world of learning.

But the new world that has emerged in the territories of the former Soviet Union mostly doesn't have a population of yuppies, and what's going on here is a tortuous and painful process of the reorganisation of nation states, where ideological efforts have to be made to mask and compensate for economic weakness. Such efforts may sometimes appear absurd (as in the case of the Kazakh scholars' efforts to declare Genghis Khan a Kazakh, or Nazarbaev the successor to Genghis), but they are in reality no laughing matter. We can also observe efforts to invoke time-honoured national values in Russia, and what's more not just in extremist circles, though these are trying to actively involve scholars in their propaganda drives. The phantom of 'the great collective ideal' is stalking the expanses of the former USSR and is hardly likely to leave academia in peace. I'm afraid that the shift in attention from 'central' to 'peripheral' phenomena will soon be a thing of the past, to be followed by a sharp move in exactly the opposite direction.

[CK]

### SUSAN GAL

Thank you for including me in this stimulating discussion. It will be clear from my responses that I speak as an anthropologist trained and working in the United States. But I should add that since I have been doing fieldwork in Eastern Europe for the last thirty years, I am familiar with various versions of the tradition of ethnography and history of culture that animate the questions. I agree that the four questions are closely related, so I have answered them together.

There have been major shifts in the problems studied by cultural anthropologists in the United States in the last few decades. They do not match exactly the shifts in Russian research mentioned in the forum questions. However, I see several abstract parallels.

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As readers doubtless know, American anthro-

pology continues two scholarly traditions, one usually credited to Franz Boas and his followers, and based in the study of American Indians at the end of the nineteenth century, the other linked to Bronislaw Malinowski and his followers, and based in the British colonial project of the nineteenth century. For the early generations, working in the first decades of the twentieth century, the major issues were kinship, ritual, subsistence, and exchange. These were the features that identified and distinguished what anthropologists considered to be separate cultures. As the British colonies and the entire colonial world demanded and achieved independence after the Second World War, and the economic and political influence of the US increased during the subsequent Cold War, American political interests turned away from questions internal to the US to a relatively new concern with the world outside. American Indian studies became less important and gained less financial support. Money for research was increasingly available for areas of the world that were considered to be 'strategically' important to the US. These included Eastern Europe and the postcolonial 'new states'.

Topics of research interest shifted accordingly. Colonial administrations had encouraged studying those aspects of other cultures that showed them to be self-contained and differentiated from their neighbours. Early ethnographies assumed the same general categories for each culture, but with different 'content'. By contrast, ethnographies of the 1960s and 1970s increasingly addressed questions that related to 'modernisation' and 'nation-building'. That is, anthropologists investigated how local populations did or did not come together into stable political systems, how they established forms of 'belonging' such as ethnicity or nationalism, how they responded to capitalist investment.

Thus, in the US, the switch in interest was not so much between 'core' and 'peripheral' rituals and practices, but rather from an idea of cultures as unified wholes that were understood to have a core, to a study of cultural processes that were not always seen to be unified, but rather studied in relation to states and a world economy.

One important conceptual tool in these studies was the notion of progress or 'development'. Industrial development and urbanisation resulted in the migration of potential workers to cities, and urban populations engaged in this process became just as interesting as rural ones. The cultural questions being asked were less about kinship and ritual and more about the motivations for migration and the modes of 'belonging' to a new polity. Nevertheless, these forms of belonging often involved principles of kinship, but also religion and increasingly a self-conscious and politicised idea of 'culture'. This politicised notion of 'culture' often allowed populations to become politically mobilised for their own independence. And it led anthro-



pologists to theorise culture as an element of 'tribalism' or 'ethnicity'. Both of these latter processes were seen as problems for the formation of stable nation-states. Anxiety about political stability animated American research into what was then called the Third World. There was a great upsurge in studies of ethnicity in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in US anthropology.

Another aspect of these decades was a turn to the study of the United States and Europe, in addition or instead of the tribal or underdeveloped world. This was in part because American anthropologists sometimes had difficulty gaining access to postcolonial populations. But it was also a self-critical political move within American anthropology during the Vietnam era. Anthropology in the US had always studied the US to some extent, and not only American Indians. But in the 1970s and 1980s anthropologists embarked on numerous studies of working class neighbourhoods in American cities and new migrants to the US. Notice that both of these populations — ethnic enclaves and new migrants — were relatively low-status groups, compared to the intellectuals studying them. And they were the groups implicitly thought to be 'exotic' within the US itself. Therefore, they were assumed to be appropriate for anthropologists to study, since anthropology had long been the discipline that dealt with the exotic 'others' of the world.

The study of US immigrant populations and working class enclaves in American cities was also called the study of 'ethnicity' and co-existed with the study of ethnic groups in the 'new states'. It also co-existed with a parallel study of 'nationalism' and 'ethnicity' in Eastern Europe, where nationalism continued to be seen as a problem largely because it was linked in many cases to Nazi Germany's use of national images and rhetoric. Although American migrants, tribal/ethnic groups in the Third World, and Eastern European nationalisms and minorities were historically separate developments, anthropologists united them, understanding all these phenomena as — broadly — examples of the political uses and implications of culture.

In my view, then, the turn to new topics and to the study of urban populations was a part of post-war social changes, especially the rise of the US to the status of a great power. There were also motivations for these changes within the discipline of anthropology. For example, comparative studies of supposedly unified cultures reached a dead-end. What was religion in one place did not seem commensurable to what seemed like religion elsewhere. What, then, was to be the theoretical point of comparison and how was it methodologically possible? It seems that these shifts in interest show some similarity to the ones you have mentioned for post-Soviet anthropology in Russia.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about ‘archaic’ and ‘contemporary’ issues. Such a shift can be traced in American anthropology too, over the long term. The turn towards contemporary issues was also demanded by the new global position of the US. But it was encouraged as well by the arrival of structuralist analysis within the discipline. Deriving from the Swiss linguist Saussure, through the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, structuralism as applied not only to language but also to cultural phenomena was a powerful theoretical innovation. And it stood firmly against historical reconstruction, indeed against any kind of historicism. Although the earlier conceptualisation of social evolutionism was definitively rejected by the 1970s, there was still an assumption (closely related to evolutionism, but differently phrased) of modernisation and development as the driving forces of social change. Structuralism did not present an alternative to this, but rather put the question of social change in the background. Instead, contemporary culture, indeed all aspects of social life, were now seen not as a set of features or customs, but as organised into powerful underlying structural patterns.

The analysis of other cultures in terms of structural patterns led — in American anthropology — to yet another self-critical and reflexive turn, roughly in the 1980s. It was argued that if the objects of our analysis have structural patterns underlying their practices and thinking, then even the scholarly disciplines themselves must have such patterns. Rather than studying only or mainly the disadvantaged, the poor, or distant ‘others’, anthropologists have started to study themselves, other high-status populations (e.g. financial traders, other intellectuals, journalists, scientists, international organisations such as the UN and NGOs, the making of mass media, and the making of knowledge itself.) These most recent changes of the 1980s and 1990s, like the earlier ones I discussed, have also been inspired by factors external to the discipline of anthropology. Some influential current social changes are: the rise of transnational corporations and humanitarian agencies; the migration of technically skilled intellectuals around the world; the internationalisation of mass media; demands for recognition by indigenous populations in all parts of the world; the creation of social theory in postcolonial settings by intellectuals who see Europe from the outside; the end of the Cold War and loss of faith in a socialist utopia as a counterbalance to capitalism.

For these internal and external reasons, current anthropological studies in the US are very much concerned with what is best called ‘meta-analysis’. Scholars are unwilling to use terms like ‘folk’, ‘traditional’, ‘authentic’ or, on the other hand, terms like ‘popular’, ‘modern’, ‘rational’, or ‘developed’ without first investigating the

*sources* and historical context out of which concepts such as ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ emerged in the scholarly and historical world of (usually) European politics. Like historians in France and England, anthropologists in the US these days are much more likely to study the ‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger’s term) than ‘tradition’ itself; and more likely to investigate the invention of the notion of ‘modern’ (Bruno Latour), than modernisation. Thus, and perhaps ironically, history in many forms is now back on the agenda for anthropologists. I think it is fair to say that in the US anthropologists are now trying to simultaneously understand their own scholarly practice (its embeddedness in academic institutions, its relation to commodification of knowledge) while also trying to see how their own concepts (e.g. the notion of ‘culture’ itself) as well as systems of knowledge from elsewhere (e.g. Islam, systems of witchcraft) circulate and affect the cultural practices and political organising of social groups around the globe.

#### BRUCE GRANT

1 Perhaps it is best to begin by remembering how exceptional Russian ethnography’s interest in ‘core’ Russian culture has been. In his book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Fredrik Barth long ago made the point that most societies are much better at policing their borders than defining what is actually inside them. Politicians everywhere stoke anxiety over invasions by immigrants and threats to ‘national integrity’, but few trouble themselves to suggest what the ingredients of that integrity are. Even in the most ideologically fraught stages of Soviet ethnography, the tracking of Russian culture and history stood out. Not since the heyday of the Culture and Personality school in the United States in the 1930s and 40s (Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict among its leaders) has any scholarly tradition perhaps served one cultural ideal so faithfully. So, how best to think of the recent move described in the question above? Is it really a shift, or is it simply an effort to catalogue Russian culture more fully? Accepted topics have widened, certainly. It is hard to imagine any number of books reaching the shelves of bookstores twenty years ago, almanacs such as

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Plutser-Sarno's *Bolshoi slovar mata*;<sup>1</sup> studies of niche cultures such as Belousov's *Russkii shkolnyi folklor*;<sup>2</sup> essays on 'the contemporary everyday' [*sovremennaya povsednevnost*] (Boym's *Common Places*); or archaeologies of socialism (Utekhin's *Ocherki kommunalnogo byta*).<sup>3</sup> But it also hard to imagine a dissertation being defended on some of these topics at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow today.

My own sense is that this 'move' is not so much a product of postmodernism (in the sense of the critical movement that strove to understand the widespread collapse of belief in totalising solutions to human problems, but a term that few use any more after the legions of regrettably loose studies done under its banner!), but a form of 'higher modernism' (a fuller, more complete cataloguing of Russian life now that the last of Soviet-era restrictions on scholarship have been lifted).

The theoretical tastes of each author vary, but my own acquaintance with the works described above would suggest that Tylor's famous definition of culture as a compendium of artefacts and practices operating in bounded spaces is only now being taken to its apex in the fresh context of the last fifteen years. This makes for exciting new work and new debates, but it has not necessarily challenged the dominant culture concept. We could also take this question in a rather different direction. If we shift the inquiry from content to form, as the question posed here infers, from 'the history of Russian culture' (Russians studying Russians), to the practice of anthropology in Russia more generally (Russian ethnographers and their research subjects), concepts of 'core' and 'margin' take on different meanings. Marxist thought may have distinguished itself by favouring proletariat over bourgeoisie, and the development of peripheries long neglected over metropolises. But the history of anthropological scholarship around the world has been little different, with a well-worn tradition of studying 'marginal peoples', borderlands, and colonised subjects. The British, for example, were masters of the African kinship systems, Indian caste nomenclature, and Melanesian microeconomics. But how many British anthropologists built careers by their scholarship on the United Kingdom before the heyday of cultural studies in the 1970s?

To give a different example of centres and margins: I spent the first ten years of my research career studying the Sovietisation of an indigenous people of the Russian Far East, Nivkhi living on Sakhalin

<sup>1</sup> Dictionary of Russian swearwords or obscenities. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> Folklore of the Russian School (including obscene parodies of texts customarily set for learning by heart, extracts from sentimental albums, glossaries of school slang, and so on). [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> *Studies of Communal Life*, an ethnographical examination of the Russian communal flat. [Editor].

Island. The combination of Siberia and exile ethnography made, of course, for a heady political mix at the outset of the 20th century, and Nivkhi are among the peoples most masterfully portrayed on the pages of Russian ethnography. The exile ethnographers Shternberg, Bogoraz, and Iokhelson rightfully all became classics for their studies of lives at the margins of empire. In 1999, spurred by an interest in comparative Sovietisation, I moved from the Far East to the Caucasus, to rural Azerbaijan in particular, in order to look at questions of Soviet culture as they unfolded in one mountain village. I assumed that in moving from the study of a ‘small people’ [*malochislennyi narod*] of some 5000 to a former Soviet republic of some 8 million, the available ethnographic literatures would be greater. Yet this has not been the case. With notable exceptions, the ethnography of the Caucasus has seen far fewer enduring ‘great books’ than, for example, Siberia and the Russian Far East. The Caucasus had its political exiles too—but were they all poets and novelists, as library card catalogues would seem to suggest? One wants to ask: Where are the established classics of Georgian hill country life, ethnographies of Armenian religious traditions, or studies of the legacies of Zoroastrian thought in Azeri cosmological systems? One can speculate on how and why the study of Azerbaijan, in particular — a Muslim republic with cosmopolitan ties to a Turkic diaspora and 16 million kinsmen in northern Iran — might have been played down in Soviet ethnography (notwithstanding the excellent labours of ethnographers in Moscow and Baku). But my knowledge of anthropology in other parts of the world would suggest a familiar pattern in which Russia has participated also, where the study of smaller societies such as the Nivkhi have presented far more comfortable paradigms than the contentious religious histories of Georgians and Armenians in a socialist state. Simply put: not all margins are the same.

2

I would like to sidestep this question momentarily to stress something that seems more pre-emptive. Country or city, the more pressing paradox in contemporary Russian ethnography is that so little fieldwork is being done. At the very historical juncture when Russian research communities are in the best position to revive the famous Russian fieldwork tradition—what Shternberg called the *statsionarnyi metod*<sup>1</sup>—research funds have never been in shorter supply. No reader of this journal needs to be reminded that the pursuit of *kandidatskie* and *doktorskie*<sup>2</sup> degrees in the social sciences in Russia today seems to require superhuman dedication on little or no support. The time involved in language training and the resources

<sup>1</sup> Literally the ‘stationary method’. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> A *kandidatskaya* is the normal thesis-based higher degree, roughly equivalent to a PhD; a *doktorskaya* is a senior thesis-based degree, comparable with the German *Habilitation* or French *doctorat du troisième cycle*. [Editor].

to spend one or two complete years in a given field setting are elusive commodities in post-Soviet space. Yet these also make up anthropology's one true hallmark. I am not concerned by traditionalist notions that ethnographic research done in cities disqualifies the ethnographic tradition. In many cases, it has reinvigorated the perceived relevance of anthropological thought across the disciplines. Consider some of the best work being done by anthropologists today and the locations vary widely: Adriana Petryna's work on 'biological citizenship' after Chernobyl in her new book, *Life Exposed*; Kim Fortun's studies of the patterned tactics of transnational environmental activists in India and the United States in *Advocacy after Bhopal*; Julie Taylor's work on the symbolic violence in Buenos Aires dance halls in *Paper Tangos*; or Arjun Appadurai's essay on cultural formations behind Indian cricket in *Modernity at Large*. But in each case these studies also came from several years of dedicated engagement with these subjects on location, rather than in periodic summer trips, work with questionnaires, or single interviews. Fieldwork is what makes these studies rise above the logic of econometric thought, what takes us past the pronouncements of politicians, and beyond the archival data marshalled by the historian.

It would be overly convenient, however, to suggest that economic privations are the only causes for a downturn in the 'art of the field'. However one configures it, ethnographic fieldwork is hard, and not all programs require it of all students. Across graduate programs in the US and Western Europe, fewer and fewer degree candidates take up extended fieldwork projects. It recalls, by analogy, the terrain of cultural studies in the early 1980s, when among conservative scholars, it became the vogue to insist that because gender was constructed, one somehow no longer needed to study it! Teaching anthropology to students today, I continually encounter the stereotype that ethnography as a very category is colonial, and that the life of the text is the only dignified route to knowledge. My rejoinder is to ask students how social science can be social without this crucial sociality. The problem is: Without the hallmark of anchoring patterns and structures of belief and action in the lived experience of actual persons — a surprisingly modest requirement that only anthropology, nonetheless, has always stood behind — our discipline risks vitiating its very ability to think and reason.

**3** Looking back, of course, the reign of history in the Soviet ethnographical sciences was sometimes a tyrannical one. Attention to questions of ethnogenesis, surely, was a boon to the study of prehistory, but its unnatural concern for origins, and the very political subtext that drove that concern — the doctrine of firstness in determining rights to sovereign rule centuries later — will likely be missed by few. Soviet ethnography's historical reach took on further guises that could seem, at times, confounding to the unini-

tiated. When I first began work in the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s, it seemed that at least half of the books in anthropology had titles that ended with ‘do nachala XX v’.<sup>1</sup> Few may miss those carefully watched historical limits. Yet Soviet ethnography’s location in the historical sciences has also left a rich legacy. (Consider, by contrast, the Russian imperial ethnographers who made their home elsewhere among naturalists and geographers, or American anthropology’s longer-standing dialogues in the humanities.)

Whatever one may think of the ideological motives, the Soviet academy made history a keystone of its consciousness in ways that Western anthropology only came to much later in its development (perhaps best embodied in the works of Marshall Sahlins, Bernard Cohn, or Jean and John Comaroff). Historical consciousness has perhaps now reached a peak across British, American, German, and French anthropologies. Is Russian scholarship poised to relinquish these longer held strengths? To give one example from my own work: On the Russian Pacific coast, scholars and activists now regularly turn to Nivkhi for help in redressing the worst excesses of runaway oil development on the Sakhalin shelf. But it is not to Nivkh historical records that most turn, but rather, to political conventions of the rights of indigenous peoples. This is a politically intelligent strategy and a useful one. But it is also the case that in such a context culture becomes a vacant category rather than a guide for, or explanation of practice. Anthropology works at its best, I would say, when the logic of cultural practice is rooted in the kinds of experience and precedent that historical consciousness invites. Soviet anthropology demonstrated this quite well, and post-Soviet anthropology is well positioned to advance what it achieved.

**4** *Narod, natsiya, kulturnaya tselostnost* — contemporary ethnological scholarship challenges the probity of these terms and necessarily so. Some of the best recent work in anthropology questions the spatial hierarchies that are inherent in terms such as *narod* and culture, advocating instead for work that disconnects culture from territory (Gupta and Ferguson’s *Anthropological Locations*; or Marcus’ attention to ‘multi-sited’ research that recognises the complex constitution of perspective in any social science paradigm). Scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu have reminded us how concepts such as ‘people’, ‘tradition’, and ‘authenticity’ have been political terms first and foremost, rather than purely analytical categories. But in this context, classic anthropology competes with the work of journalists, nationalist historians (and for that matter, nationalist ethnographers) for readerships, both scholarly and popular, who tend to be far more comfortable with the imagined sagas of bounded, sovereign

<sup>1</sup> Pre-1900. To terminate discussion at this point meant avoiding having to confront the delicate issue of how to describe the impact of the Russian revolution on popular culture. [Editor].

cultural units, rather than the pluralist and often chaotic mix of tradings, battlings, border crossings, and uneventful cohabitations that make up most human history. Looking back, many have maligned Bromlei for his renovated theory of *ethnos* that strained to explain ‘core cultural formations’ in the context of changing political economies. Maybe it is time to excise the political campaigns inherent in the idea of *ethnos* — what contemporary scholarship might call its ‘primordial sentiments’ and ‘essentialisms’ — but retain the historical energies and contingencies. We have perhaps never been more in need of attention to how changing political economies produce certain kinds of knowledges. Cultures of course do exist: as structures and patterns in shared beliefs, habits, and practices. But they have been in far greater flux for a much longer period than the current fashion for globalisation and ‘rapid social change’ allows us to appreciate. Cultures have always been unstable, moving targets. That is what makes anthropology so difficult to do, or at least to do well.

#### NICHOLAS HARNEY

The changes over the last decade in Russian research with respect to culture observed by the editors raise two issues for me. First, how are national projects, and hence efforts to articulate a national culture, disrupted and decentred by the massive technological advances in communications and transportation in the late twentieth century that reduce the dimensions of space and time and challenge state-centred agendas and activities? In particular, I will comment on the role of migration and its implications for ideas about culture and authenticity. Second, what do these changes imply for how anthropologists frame their objects of study? These changes, of course, cannot be separated from the challenges faced within academia, which range from the legacy of the discipline’s self-examination in the 1980s and early 1990s (which attempted to respond to feminist and post-structuralist theory and the related amorphous ideas grouped together as postmodernism), to the present-day ‘rationalisations’ (if one can call them that) occurring in the neo-liberal university. Each of these would require extensive comment for which there is not the space here;

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instead, after briefly situating myself in the field I will turn to a discussion of migration, and an example from my own work which I think speaks to the similar issues facing Russian specialists of culture.

I should emphasise that my research expertise is not Russia but necessarily falls at the margins of several national traditions since it focuses on Italian migration across the globe. In terms of general migration studies, this research inhabits a marginal space within the three 'national' anthropology traditions within which I have worked or researched in my career — Canada, Australia and Italy. I hope the reader might see some irony in this, in that Canada and Australia, the countries within which I have held academic positions, were settler colonies, and are immigrant nations with discourses about nationhood that incorporate in various ways mythopoeic migrant pasts. Italy, one of my research sites, sent nearly 26 million migrants overseas between 1876 and 1976 and is now struggling to come to terms with its status as an immigrant receiving country. Nevertheless, while there are scholars working on migration issues, the field does not figure prominently within the 'national' anthropology traditions in any of these three countries.

The Italian study of culture has been split between three streams of research: ethnology, folklore and cultural anthropology. Italian anthropologists, folklorists and ethnologists conduct fieldwork all over the world. Nevertheless, the dominant current of work continues to be in popular religion and rituals within Italy and folkloristic studies of southern peasant and rural traditions.<sup>1</sup> The 'southern question' — or borrowing from the cleverly entitled book edited by Jane Schneider, the 'orientalism in one country' — certainly encourages this focus 'at home', as does the persistence of ethnic and linguistic minorities in various regions, and the incomplete process of nationalisation from the centre.<sup>2</sup> Some intriguing work examining the dual aspects of localism and cosmopolitanism in Calabrian village migration projects has been especially insightful and aware of the global dimension of village life.<sup>3</sup> Even so, I would argue, a more sustained and textured analysis of the migration tradition and its

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<sup>1</sup> Although somewhat dated, George Sanders's review is still very useful: 'Contemporary Italian Cultural Anthropology' // *Annual Review of Anthropology* 1984. No. 13. Pp. 447–66. For a more contemporary overview of key themes in Italian anthropology, and the connections with more global issues in anthropology, written by some of its most prominent scholars see A. Colaianni et al. (eds.), *Gli Argonauti. L'antropologia e la società italiana*. Rome, 1994. There are, of course, many anthropologists, in the classic anthropological tradition, who are doing fieldwork outside of Italy. For the work on Calabria I have in mind C. Pitto (ed.), *La Calabria dei Paese*. Pisa, 1990; Idem. *Rapsodia calabrese tra emigrazione e reintro*. Rende, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> J. Schneider, *Italy's 'Southern Question'. Orientalism in One Country*. Oxford, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> For the work on Calabria I have in mind Pitto (ed.), *La Calabria dei Paese*; Pitto (ed.) *Rapsodia calabrese tra emigrazione e reintro*.

implications for the emigrant sending areas in the north such as Treviso in the Veneto, the south, subaltern groups and the formation of Italian national identity might be productive.

Migration as a movement out of homelands and a movement into new places with imagined communities directly challenges one of the key features of any nationalist project — the necessary imagined synchronicity between territory, culture and peoplehood. Migrants leaving may be seen as an embarrassment, or as Mussolini put it, a ‘haemorrhage’ from the body of the nation. Alternately, if minorities within nation-states are the focus of movement abroad, migration may be encouraged, with various degrees of coercion, by hegemonic groups to ‘purify’ or homogenise the nation. Equally, as demonstrated by the politics of migration in the last decade, receiving countries, even immigrant ones such as Australia and the United States, employ discourses and practices that play with their national imaginings, and on putative degrees of difference from the imagined community, to limit migration to those who might be more easily ‘absorbed’ or ‘integrated’ (an imprecise term). The concept and word at play here, explicitly or implicitly, is *culture*, seen as an immutable ‘thing’ rather than a process. Culture operates within a discursive field that includes, among others, the following related terms: nation, people, community, ethnicity, essentialism, and authenticity.

The culture concept and its uses both within and outside the academy have received considerable attention in the last decade within anthropology.<sup>1</sup> While anthropologists were questioning the concept’s analytic utility and/or were opting for an anti-essentialist and dynamic meaning for it, popular usage and state-sponsored discourse and practice, whether multiculturalist or romantic nationalist, have placed culture forcefully into our research agendas. It is here that I think fieldwork and analysis of migration and attendant settlement processes can offer some insight into the way concepts such as culture and authenticity have been animated in the last decade or so. The use of such terms as deterritorialisation, homelessness and displacement to critique, interpret and analyse migration experiences both reaffirms and serves to destabilise the centrality of the synchronicity between territory, culture and people in our thinking. Some of the same literature emphasises mobility’s liberating effects with respect to the repressive or hegemonic tendencies in nation-states. It is this interstitial space in which migrants are all at once transnational, diasporic, ethnic and co-national that gener-

<sup>1</sup> For useful examples see R. D. Grillo, ‘Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety’ // *Anthropological Theory* 2003. No. 3 (2). Pp. 157–73. M. Sahlins, ‘Two or three things that I know about culture’ // *JRAI incorporating Man* 1999. No. 5 (3). Pp. 399–421. U. Hannerz, ‘Reflections on Varieties of Culturespeak’ // *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 1999. No. 2(3). Pp. 393–407.

ates a rich terrain for research about the changing, dynamic qualities and contested meanings of culture and authenticity.

Anyone who has done even the most preliminary research among Italian migrant communities around the globe quickly realises that the social space of Italy stretches beyond the borders of the Italian state to encompass the places of migration that Italians have worked in, helped shape and through which their own identities, and the nationalist projects of Italy and these settler societies have been moulded. The many terms used by Italian officials and ordinary migrants over the last century reinforce this expanded space of the nation: *gli italiani nel mondo* (the Italians of the world), *Italia fuori d'Italia* (Italians outside Italy), *Italiano all'estero* or *lavoratore all'estero*, *apaesamento* (Italians abroad, workers abroad, workers settled abroad). Each of these terms emphasises the enduring project of the 'homeland' to define, control and manage, by naming and actions, not only the emigration of Italians overseas but also the settlement process. These terms not only deny the nationalising processes that occur in the host countries among Italian immigrants, but also erase the temporal dimension of settlement — generational change — and the implications of that for identity formation, culture and a sense of peoplehood. The centre represents Italians overseas as timeless members of the national community. What is at issue here are the problems associated with the collective representation of the group. Control over representation becomes entwined with discourses about authenticity, essentialising, objectification and reification.<sup>1</sup>

The speakers competing for hegemony in the discourse are multiple and transnational, emanating both from various levels of government on the Italian peninsula and the spaces of the 'diaspora' around the globe, which includes the representation of Italianness in media and Hollywood to the state-centred ways of promoting Italian heritage in multicultural societies such as Australia and Canada. Moreover, within each fieldsite, people of Italian heritage, migrants and their descendants, compete for ascendancy in the discourse not only with these global representations and state-sponsored ones but also internally within communities. The increasing aestheticisation and commodification of culture in the contemporary world, which in this case, leads to the marketing of things Italian, becomes enmeshed with the issues of representation, authenticity and identity with the potential for the profitability of one's cultural heritage. Aestheticisation and spectacularisation encourage this essentialism by reducing the complexity of social life and cultural practice to

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<sup>1</sup> I have found P. Werbner's article on essentialising thought-provoking: 'Essentialising Essentialism, Essentialising Silence: Ambivalence and Multiplicity in the Constructions of Racism and Ethnicity' // P. Werbner and T. Modood (eds.). *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. London, 1997.

specific products, goods and styles. The competition in the discourse becomes who offers the most 'authentic' access to Italianness?

A brief example from Toronto, Canada, a significant destination for Italian migration in the post-war period (1951–1967) and home to more than 400,000 Italians, as a result, should indicate the way culture and authenticity are at play here.<sup>1</sup> Given the age of the migration cohort, most Italians living in Toronto now belong to the second and third generations. Until the 1990s, institutionally, the community was still dominated by the first generation that controlled the Italian-language media and dominated the business and professional sector, articulating a masculinist image of hard-working, self-sacrificing immigrants. The dominant aesthetic community was also composed of the immigrant generation organised around social, cultural and community institutions that offered more immediate and specific linkages to migrant hometowns in Italy, controlled access to cultural facilities, media, and organised social club events, dinner-dances, saints' days feasts and the like. There was also an intra-ethnic schism, though good-natured, between migrants from Veneto, Calabria, Abruzzo, Sicily and Friuli. There existed a smaller but significant aesthetic community of young first-generation artists, writers, filmmakers who arrived from Italy to Canada as adolescents or young adults and articulated a much more explicit transnational vision, a deeper sense of loss, nostalgia and questioning of place and an explicit confrontation over which language or languages their work should employ. This community becomes more varied when one considers the Quebecois Italian Canadian intellectual coterie that moved to Ontario in reaction to Quebecois nationalist activities.

Intersecting with these internal differences were external actors attempting to represent Italianness to Italians and the wider community. Italian government and tourism agencies working within the community characterised Italians in Canada as simply those Italians 'living overseas' and had little interest in the way in which Italianness was shaped and constituted in the urban North American setting. Flashy magazines, marketing efforts by the diplomatic service and private corporations each had a specific Italy-centred vision of Italians and hoped to use the Italian settlement to sell Italy abroad. Coupled with this is Canada's version of multiculturalism, articulated differently by each level of government, which encouraged cultural retention through the sponsorship of language programs, arts activities and picnics. These institutional actors operated within the swirl of images generated by the media and Hollywood about Italians, mostly Italian Americans, and their purported connections

<sup>1</sup> N. Harney, 'Intimacy and Objectification: the Chronopolitics of Italian Diaspora Identity' unpublished manuscript; Idem, *Eh, Paesan! Being Italian in Toronto*. 2nd edition; Toronto, 1999.

to organise crime, and more local stock images of Italian labourers in construction, at the weekends making tomato sauce or homemade wine, indulgent Italian mothers, grandmothers oppressed by Italian Catholicism and dressed in black perpetually mourning the death of a relative, and putatively emotional adolescents concerned with the presentation of self.

Into these competing interests and images emerged a second-generation group of Italians who published a magazine, the *Eyetalian*, and sponsored events throughout the cityscape, that sought to challenge the images of Italians as put forth both by the immigrant generation, the media and governments, but also to become the indispensable resource for Italian Canadians and the wider society to learn about Italianness. The name itself, mimicking and reclaiming the derogatory pronunciation of the word 'Italian' commonly heard by Italian immigrants from the mouths of host society employers and hostile politicians, anticipated the irreverence to old images that would mark the magazine's content. The magazine published in English, and articulated an Italianness that at the same time was proud of the migrant tradition but engaged with contemporary urban identity issues about hip lifestyles, aesthetics, sexuality, and gender, and aggressively critiqued the nationalising projects of both Canada and Italy as experienced by Italian Canadians. By entering this tangle of competing interests and claims, the group contested the right to objectify Italianness and to profit from the cultural cache of the lifestyle, aesthetic forms and commodities linked with that identity. They sought to create a cultural space for the 'second generation' eager to engage with 'things Italian' but blocked by traditional expressive avenues for collective representation either through traditional Italian community media and institutions, Italian institutions or Canadian mainstream institutions and media. The *Eyetalian* created a space to organise business, create contacts and establish social networks. It provided a forum for young writers, designers and artists to practice, hone and develop their skills and portfolios. It became a conduit for those first and second generation entrepreneurs involved in design, food and wine, travel as well as artists, writers, musicians to speak to each other, make contacts and develop business arrangements. As an aesthetic community based on Italian heritage but raised in Toronto, children of immigrants, educated in English, its members shared common idioms that reflected this complex transnational and multicultural reality, and undermined essentialist notions of Italianness as they reaffirmed and re-imagined the aesthetic underpinnings of solidarity.

A discussion of the *Eyetalian* raises several issues about how anthropology delimits its object of study. A reading of an aesthetic form to represent a larger set of social realities, cultural practices and fields of power needs to be enhanced by more varied forms of social

analysis that situate the ‘marginal’ in larger networks of relationships. If the strength of migration studies is its explicit challenge to the researcher to engage the subject matter outside the blinkered framework of nationalist discourse, there are also attendant risks. An excessive emphasis on the fluid, transnational quality of migrant identity and social group formation may underestimate the enduring power of states and nationalising ideologies. This enduring power of nationalist ideology is evident in the plethora of work that now takes ‘diaspora’ as its key concept of analysis. While there is no doubt that the term has offered analytic insight and taken on new meanings and usages in the popular imagination, we should also be mindful that it is also a methodological sleight of hand that attempts to frame an object of study in a globalised world. As we framed our unit of study as ‘peoples’, ‘communities’ and ‘nations’ and realised the limitations of these boundaries, it might be useful to be cautious about our new attempts to frame our objects and consider what set of power relationships motivates these choices.

## TIM INGOLD

**1** This is not exclusive to Russian anthropology. However UK social anthropology is different in that (i) there never was a great tradition of research in rural folklore, and (ii) there was already a major debate in the 1960s about whether ritual was a special sphere of human action or an aspect of all human action — with Edmund Leach as influential proponent of the latter view.

**2** There is a long tradition of urban anthropology in the UK, so the change is not so evident. As long ago as the 1960s, social anthropologists (especially of the so-called Manchester School under Max Gluckman) were writing about rural-urban migration, and pointing out that there is no clear-cut division between town and country in the lives and experience of those who move between them. So it is not so much that there has been a shift from the rural to the urban. Rather, it is the opposition itself that has collapsed.

**3** The shift from understanding the origins of cultural phenomena to their contemporary significance actually marked the foundation of the

British tradition of functionalist social anthropology by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in the 1920s and 1930s. It was linked to a strong modernist agenda. Nowadays, with the collapse of modernism, there has not been a shift back to 'origins' research. Instead, cultural phenomena have themselves become much less determinate: in place of clear-cut forms we get multiple competing discourses.

4 Undoubtedly, the idea that the world is made up of identifiable, bounded cultures, each with its own distinct tradition and inhabiting a delimited (usually rural) area, has been blown apart. It is not just that this is no longer the case today; it was never the case in the past either. However the point is not a new one — it was already being made by leading American cultural anthropologists like Boas, Lowie, Kroeber and Kluckhohn in the 1920s and 1930s. Interestingly enough, however, the anthropologists most accused by contemporary commentators of having a 'mosaic' view of culture (one culture, one territory, one tradition) are precisely those — such as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown — who first led the campaign against 'origins' research.

#### VYACHESLAV IVANOV<sup>1</sup>

1 One can probably say that interest is not just shifting from what used to be treated as primary to what would formerly have been considered peripheral. The very relationship between the primary and the peripheral is changing. Jokes attract more than just anthropological researchers: they are becoming one of the most important means of expression of mass consciousness. Whole epochs in the life of a society can be defined by their most characteristic jokes (e.g. the Armenian Radio jokes, or those about the Chukchi or Chapaev; the influence of jokes on popular works of literature can be illustrated by the novelist Victor Pelevin's book on Chapaev; Dostoevsky's *A Nasty Story* stands on the threshold of the modern literature of the absurd, which Alov and Naumov skilfully captured in their film, which was forbidden in its day precisely because it was so keenly topical — Soviet bureaucrats saw it as a satire on them-

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<sup>1</sup> The author did not respond to an invitation to comment on the English translation of this piece. [Editor].

selves.)<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of jokes about a famous person, or the non-existence of these, may say more about the real role of this personality than sociological data about his or her ratings, whose validity in statistical terms is suspect. Manuilsky<sup>2</sup> used to tell a story about how Stalin ordered him to stop making jokes about him, threatening that if he didn't, Stalin himself would tell the kind of joke about Manuilsky that would make sure the latter never got the chance to tell any jokes again. Interrogations of every prisoner in the Butyrki prison in the mid-1940s included a question about any 'anti-Soviet jokes' they might have told. Back in the early 1960s, when I was working on contemporary Bamileke folklore, thanks to the cooperation of A. Zumafo, a Cameroonian student, I encountered a type of joke whose subject matter was based on the sharp contrast of new European habits and ancient traditional customs.

Black humour, which entered the system of popular means of communication in Russia from the early 1950s onwards, is associated with more than the strictly literary forms that were to gain particular significance later (the semi-parodic or grotesque forms of contemporary poetry that have clearly become prevalent in recent years are similar to the examples of presurrealist black humour once included in Breton's anthology, by the way). Such black humour also served as a model for real-life situations. This insight is relevant to the genre of the thriller, and more broadly to the various ways of portraying violence that now dominate the mass media (and especially television): these are not so much taken from reality and simply projected on the screen (as in documentaries, for example), as they themselves are the scenarios for real events.

Another area in which the description of forms would once have been considered marginal is essential to the investigation of modern society (particularly youth culture) relates to the various new types of popular music and song, and to the widespread appearance of accompanying forms of ecstatic mass behaviour, which, up to a point, have now become ritualised. Among existing anthropological studies of links between arts and ritual which need to be developed are Victor Turner's two last books, written when this distinguished

<sup>1</sup> Armenian jokes (also known as 'Radio Yerevan' jokes) refer to a popular type of humorous riddle in a kind of pastiche 'folk wisdom' style, taking the form, 'Radio Yerevan is asked: How is Communism different from Capitalism? Radio Yerevan answers, Capitalism is the exploitation of man by man; Communism is the reverse.' The Chukchi is the hero of jokes rather like 'Irish jokes' in English, poking fun at the naivety of a new arrival from the ethnic margins and cultural backwoods. Chapaev, Civil War hero, celebrated in a novel by Dmitry Furmanov, and in a hugely popular 1934 film made by G. N. and S. D. Vasiliev, is the hero of narrative jokes celebrating his brusque and decisive personality. Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov's film *A Nasty Story* dates from 1966. The forms of joke mentioned were especially productive in late Soviet society, and have mostly disappeared since. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> Dmitry Zakharovich Manuilsky (1883–1959), who held various top posts in the administration of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in the 1930s and 1940s. [Editor].



researcher of the ceremonial was creating his experimental theatre — Artaud's aesthetic experiment pointed in the same direction, and came close to his essay on Balinese theatre, seen from an anthropological point of view.

If one follows the established path of including those things necessary for modern society to function in the field of anthropology, then one has to begin with a description of commercial organisations (including their system of advertising), shops and especially supermarkets, post offices, scientific laboratories and educational institutions (particularly of higher education; it might be possible to involve students from the relevant faculties in the discussion of this question), libraries, museums, theatres, film and television studios, computer centres, hospitals, courts, police stations and the administration of secular and religious institutions. Any one of these units could be characterised in terms of its structure and of how its function relates to this. These methods of research could be verified and tested by applying the established methods of structural anthropology to show how the corresponding mechanisms of management and control, and the processing of information, function, and how ritual and spontaneous improvisation inter-relate within the framework of a given system of restrictions.<sup>1</sup> This in turn would allow one to approach the question of defining the boundaries of anthropology itself, as a discipline lying at the heart of the human sciences, and thus acquiring an ever greater significance both in theoretical and applied terms, and likewise the boundaries of each of the separate, neighbouring scientific disciplines that are concerned with the study of the above-named social institutions and of others. For example, an anthropologist describing a film studio might be concerned with the hierarchy of decision-making and the corresponding structure of rank in the whole organisation, the nature of the distribution of resources and technical equipment, the role of the producers and the relations between them, as of the script writers, directors, cameramen, stars and ordinary actors, while the expert in film as such would concentrate on the artistic structure of the film, the set-up of shots and the use of montage or scenes. A specialist in computer technology in libraries is interested in the structure of their databases, whereas an anthropologist is concerned with the system of communication with readers and the organisation of the reading rooms.

**2**

The shift of interest of anthropological research from the country to the town corresponds to the concentration of populations into towns

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this work, of course, is going on already: cf. the emergence, in recent years, of 'industrial anthropology', 'business anthropology', 'retail anthropology' and other such sub-branches of the discipline. For an over-view of such material, see S. M. Low (ed.) *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*. New Brunswick, 1999. A recent popular success is Paco Underhill. *The Call of the Mall*. New York, 2004. [Editor].

and cities all over the world (this is happening particularly fast in developing countries; the catastrophic destruction of the Russian countryside which preceded this has striking analogues in other societies and can be recognised as a part of a worldwide development). The interaction of various independent ethnic groups is coming to be a characteristic feature of major cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. In each of these cities they number several hundred (in Los Angeles, which I have been studying from this point of view for the past twelve years, there are more than 220 of them). Any hope that a melting pot might arise, in which the various traditions of different groups would be united by the English language to form a single universal American culture, have proved to be illusory. Although certain traditionally related cultures have been able to unite with one another ('Little Saigon' to the south of Los Angeles, for example, includes Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese and various other émigrés from the Far East and South-East Asia), among isolated groups a tendency to emphasise their separateness from others can be observed (e.g. the relatively large Hmong population in California, who use a special script for this purpose). The relationship between the constantly-arising tendency towards unification (supported by many factors, principally economic ones) and globalisation, and the opposing aspirations of small ethnic groups for cultural and administrative devolution, a fundamental factor in the current global situation, can be seen most clearly in major cities, in which context this relationship may therefore be most easily studied. (See, for example, the recently published jointly-produced monographs on New York and other large cities; as early as the 1920s in Leningrad, Larin<sup>1</sup> worked on one of the first classifications of the language of the city.)

The existence of an ethnic mosaic was a feature of many cities even in ancient times, of which evidence can be adduced in the Hattusas (now Boğazköy) archives, where texts in at least eight languages from the second century BC have been found. These reflect the diversity of religious cults and the corresponding diversity of hymns and ritual texts in Ugarit (now Ras Sharma). Strabonos tells of the dozens of nationalities who inhabited the city of Dioscuria (now Sukhumi, called Akua in Abkhazian) in ancient times. Cities which were distinguished by relatively homogeneous populations, such as Athens at the time of Pericles, were at the same time characterised by an exceptional variety in the creation and use of semiotic systems. Subsequently, these two forms of urban diversity have on the whole co-existed, for example in Vienna before the *Anschluss*, in which Schoenberg's atonal music, the Freudian school of psychoanalysis,

<sup>1</sup> Boris Aleksandrovich Larin (1893–1964) was one of the most prominent dialectologists and sociolinguists of the Soviet period. [Editor].

the logical-analytical philosophy of the Vienna circle (Carnap and Reichenbach, like Schoenberg, had to move to America at the same time as Wittgenstein left for England) and Prince N. S. Trubetzkoj's phonology<sup>1</sup> all flourished together.

The situation in Vienna and in many other large European cities which had notably diverse populations at the beginning of the last century, fundamentally changed after the catastrophe of the first half of the twentieth century, and after the Holocaust, when the major part of Central and Eastern Europe's Jewish population was exterminated. Prague, which might have served as a model for the mutual enrichment of several co-existing cultural traditions when Kafka and Meyrink<sup>2</sup> were at the height of their powers, lost the two most important of these — the Jewish and the German. Similar changes occurred in Vilnius, Miłosz constantly returning to the former multi-ethnic culture as if it were a lost paradise in his prose and poetry. In the past Vilnius was part of the multi-ethnic system formed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which has now become a focus of research for scholars from many countries. The latter was the westernmost union of different ethnic groups of the kind which had previously existed further East, in the Khazar kingdom, Central Asia and the Sing Kiang region prior to the expansion of Islam. In his recently-published book on the history of Serindia, Xavier Tremblay describes thirty different traditions represented in its territories by written sources of the first century BC.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, multi-ethnic cities in the present-day Far East, such as Singapore, are of particular interest from the point of view of studying the location of the cerebral functions of inhabitants who communicate with a variety of different linguistic groups. According to data generated by stimulation of the neurones of the speech zone in the left hemisphere using the Penfield method,<sup>4</sup> naming the same object in the two main languages of the city — Chinese and English — is strictly localised in a single zone of the cerebral cortex. Another possible distribution of two languages — in this case Russian and Turkmen — was demonstrated using inhabitants of Leningrad in the Sechenov Institute laboratory, which was then led by L. Y. Balonov. The subject, who was being treated with one-sided

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetzkoj (his preferred transliteration) (1890–1938), theoretical linguist, and leading philosopher of the Eurasian movement. After his emigration, he held a chair in Slavonic philology at the University of Vienna. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), dramatist and short story writer, best known for *Der Golem* (1915). [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> X. Tremblay, *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde: le manichéisme parmi les peuples et religions d'Asie Centrale d'après les sources primaires*. Vienna, 2001. [Editor].

<sup>4</sup> A method of neurophysiological investigation whereby the surgically exposed cortex is stimulated electrically, and the subject then reports sensations or involuntary movements, depending on the location of the stimulation. [Editor].

ECT, displayed a transfer to the right hemisphere when speaking Turkmen, which he had used mainly in his childhood in the village (and still used when talking to his brother, with whom he lived in Leningrad), while Russian, which he used at work, was allied with the left hemisphere. The left hemisphere also carried out metalinguistic processes (grammatical analysis) with Turkmen, the grammar of which the subject had been taught through the medium of Russian while attending school. Similar data showing the location of the main language of communication — Russian or English — to be in the left hemisphere, and the local language in the right, were gathered by Arshavsky in his study of the peoples of the North of Siberia and the Russian Far East and by American researchers studying the Navajo Indians. Data for Israelis whose brain functions have been damaged by war wounds and who have lived in Israel for a fairly long time indicate that Hebrew is a left-hemisphere language, and the main language of the country from which they emigrated is likewise connected with the right. In all cases the left (and dominant) hemisphere controls the main language of communication; if there are two such languages, as in Singapore, both are located in the left hemisphere.

The newly-positated psychological theory that every person has two neural substrata of consciousness is important for ethnic psychology. The data cited with regard to the man from Leningrad are indicative inasmuch as they show that each of his hemispheres aggressively refused to speak in the language of the other. In such situations the boundary between inter-ethnic commonalities runs through a single person's brain.

A sharp reduction in ethnic diversity has affected Asian cities, particularly in the Far East. When I went to Japan in 1991, I could not find a single Ain in Sapporo, which is on the island of Hokkaido, although the Ains once formed the majority of the population of Northern Japan and its adjacent islands.

It seems possible to link the changes which have taken pace both in Europe (including Russia, where the composition of the population of Moscow and Leningrad was altered by force)<sup>1</sup> and Asia (though this population transformation occurred here only in part) with the vulgarised concepts of nationhood that began to be formed in Romantic works at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The assumption, based on (pseudo-)scientific hypotheses, that state and ethnic borders could coincide, became a political maxim for Bismarck and his successors. In spite of the sudden revival of the tendency towards separatism in certain ethnic groups (such as the Basques), the current situation in large cities and the world generally

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. by the mass exile and purging of 'class enemies' during the late 1920s and 1930s. [Editor].

shows that diasporas constitute an ever more widely spreading form of distribution of individual cultures, and that interaction with other groups is an inevitable part of the dispersal of such cultures round the world. For example, describing the Armenian ethnic group in Glendale (a part of Greater Los Angeles with a predominantly Armenian population) requires an explanation of the extent to which it is integrated into the American English-speaking milieu and an investigation of its relations with other ethnic groups in the same city: on the one hand, with Latin Americans, who are now statistically the largest group in the population of Los Angeles, and likewise with Russian speakers, to whom Russian-speaking Armenian specialists provide technical and medical services; and on the other hand, with other groups from the Armenian diaspora itself, both the Western Armenian group (having its centre in Lebanon) and the Eastern Armenian group, whose places of origin include Armenia itself, from where Armenians have continued to emigrate in ever-increasing numbers in recent years — one reason why the problem of the diaspora is now so acute.

I can imagine that serious work in this field in connection with a transition in the whole cycle of research on the modern urban environment, as carried out worldwide, would fundamentally alter the direction of anthropological studies. Work would no longer concentrate on single ethnic groups, however much they want to retain their independence or to impose their peculiarities on others on a nationwide scale, or across a whole group of countries, but would focus on their relations with other similar groups within the same territorial unit (e.g. a major city, a country or a union of countries, for example a united Europe).<sup>1</sup> From the latter point of view, Schmidt's concept of cultural circles remains helpful; it has been developed in Russia by Vladimir Tan-Bogoraz's research on the worldwide spread of culture.

As the relatively rich and well-fed North has not attempted to provide material help to the poorer and starving South, in spite of the recommendations of the most perceptive thinkers of the latter part of the twentieth century, the latter has begun to physically move to the North. This can be seen from the numbers of immigrants (mainly illegal) from Mexico and other Latin American countries in the USA (where, according to the data of the last census, this is the fastest growing category among the populations of large cities), and from North Africa in France and Italy (certain differences notwithstanding, the situations of Turks in Germany, those from the Caucasus in Central Russian cities, and of Chinese immigrants in

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of such work going on at present, see the contribution by Nicholas Harney to the present discussion. [Editor].

the Russian Far East, also belong in this category). This situation, in many ways similar to that of the period prior to the fall of the Roman Empire, demands that anthropologists change direction.

The fundamental questions raised by these tendencies in contemporary development are close to the problems long since identified by the anthropological philosophy of thinkers such as Feuerbach, Kogen, Bakhtin and Buber. These authors paid particular attention to the question of 'I' and 'You'. The dialogic principle they propounded allows the role of the 'Other' in anthropology to be evaluated (Buber even proposed the classification of the institutions of society by their dialogicity, which would have allowed the traditional Rousseauan problems of the social contract to be re-evaluated). The problem of the 'animation of the Other', put forward by Buddhist logic is perpetuated in modern existentialist philosophy. (The best introduction to this problem is surely the chapters on 'The Existence of the Other' in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*.) This problem can be developed further by being applied to other ethnic, religious and social groups. Moral systems which prevent one doing to others what one would not wish to have done to oneself can be transferred from one's own group to 'alien' groups (other peoples, other agglomerations of peoples).

**3** The shift from studying ancient structures to modern ones in Russian anthropology is a continuation of a tendency remarked on by Roman Jakobson during the First World War: at this point he and his associates produced a comprehensive survey of the customs and folklore of the Vereisk district. P. G. Bogatyrev, who took part in this pioneering experiment along with Jakobson and N. F. Yakovlev, later expanded and developed this circle of ideas in a cycle of semiotic-orientated works, which he completed in Czechoslovakia, and where he emphasised the role of synchronic investigation as opposed to traditional diachronic methods. As in all subject areas bordering on anthropology, and particularly in linguistics, the essential task is no longer separating the synchronic and the diachronic, which was perfectly appropriate and permissible in the first stages of research. The most important thing is to understand how modern society and its separate parts are connected with its previous history, a move which in theory would also allow one to speak with more certainty about the contribution that could be made by anthropological research to understanding the future. A clear demonstration of the way things are going is the increasingly important research connecting the anthropological approach with the biological. The suicide rate for the peoples speaking Finno-Ugric languages is significantly higher than that for other ethnic groups across Europe; in this context, notable also is the fact that in certain Hungarian villages the number of suicides has remained constant over the centuries. Similar research, in which cultural anthropology is organically linked with sociobiology, is essential in or-

der to explain the causes of the spread of alcoholism and drug abuse among the peoples — including Shamanist cults — of Northern Eurasia and Northern and Central America.

The study of the correlation between the social and cultural functioning of drugs and natural stimulants of brain function. — endorphins (similar to morphine in their chemical structure) and encephalins — could be of particular interest both for the solution of purely practical problems to do with drug addiction, and as a basis for the harmonisation of collaborative work by anthropologists and neuroscientists. Enkephalins are normally used by the brain in overcoming the consequences of serious physical and psychological traumas. The brain's production of these stimulants (which, unlike drugs, are endogenous) promotes various forms of rhythmic activity, as experiments have shown. Some of these, such as running, rhythmic singing, dance and music have assumed an essential role in parts of modern society, particularly for its younger members. For a diachronic analysis, it would be important to explain whether the high status of art (in the early syncretic stage of whose development rhythmic forms played a vital part) and of sport in states such as those of Ancient Greece might be connected with the relatively low use of artificial stimulants. A positive answer to this question would enable the biological (evolutionary) sources of art and the causes of the specialisation of particular parts of the brain for this, such as the musical zones parietal of the right hemisphere, to be explained.

At the same time, alongside the discovery of the likely genetic preconditions for the subject in hand, the cultural factors causing the expansion or contraction and disappearance of the corresponding forms of behaviour retain their importance for the anthropologist. The problem of the development of the biosphere into the noosphere, identified by Teilhard de Chardin and Vernadsky, can be appreciated on an evolutionary level by linking the shift from the animal to the human with the further development of culture, the latter being understood as a system of restrictions on the biological functioning of the individual. The simplest example of this might be the dietary laws retained by most traditions. Recent salient discoveries by primatologists lead to the conclusion that cultural differences between localised groups of anthropoids exist not only among chimpanzees but also orang-utans, thus allowing one to presume that the prehistory of the culture of human ancestors stretches back more than ten thousand years. Phenomena which have traditionally been considered archaic in anthropology are close to our own times when seen on such a timescale. Furthermore, one might suppose that the structure of the brain of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the basic biological prerequisites for rational action, and the use of a system of signs may have gone largely unchanged over the past two hundred thousand years. The significant similarities between so-called prim-

itive and modern cultures are now of primary concern, rather than their mostly insignificant differences. The anthropologist must now concentrate on discovering which of such similarities can be considered universal; this would enable the question of the existence of a genetic explanation for this reconstructed archetype to be put to geneticists. Such a procedure now seems possible after a recent study on an English family suffering from a congenital defect of the recently-discovered gene enabling the acquisition of the native language. The most recent observations confirm the far-sightedness of the Russian geneticist Efroimson, underrated in his own time, who claimed the existence of a hereditary source of altruistic morals, which, like many other behavioural patterns, was likely to be innate. (Kropotkin comes to similar conclusions in his monograph on 'mutual aid' in groups of animals and people.)<sup>1</sup> The future development of morals, ethics and religious philosophy is of fundamental evolutionary significance. The question as to whether the gods have died as a result of this evolution, raised by Nietzsche and Dostoevsky in their different ways, is not at all academic or irrelevant: the problem is to do with the permissiveness brought about by the denial (or recognition only in word) of a higher, super-human authority. Consideration of this remains essential when describing human behaviour in modern society, where religion is preserved only in the form of ritualised vestiges. Describing and juxtaposing these phenomena with the behaviour of members of the corresponding traditional religious communities and of the newly-formed groups claiming to revive an ancient religion according to new principles, or to create a new religion, facilitates a synthesis of historical research on religion, on the one hand, and of the synchronic description of its functioning, on the other. In this respect, data on the recent revival of religions among the people of Siberia (e.g. the Kets) such as Shamanism, which have emerged from secret underground stagnation and have achieved a new social significance, is most valuable.

For other present-day social institutions, it is again most productive to seek a synchronic analysis of these, which would reflect both their typological universality and their status as derivatives of evolutionary processes. The origins and development of social and legal structures are of particular interest to the anthropological criticism of these, which was begun, once again, by Rousseau. In this respect, the intellectual strategies of Olga Freidenberg's<sup>2</sup> posthumously pub-

<sup>1</sup> Richard Dawkins's work, of course, argues in exactly the opposite direction (see esp. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford, 1976). [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> Olga Freidenberg (1890–1955), prominent classical philologist, best-known for her doctoral dissertation *The Poetics of Plot and Genre* (1935). Much under assault from enemies in the Stalin era (cf. the article by Kirill Chistov about D. K. Zelenin in the present issue), she taught at Leningrad University until 1951, when her association with the controversial linguist N. Ya. Marr led to premature retirement. [Editor].



lished lectures, formulated during the siege of Leningrad, retain significance. Freidenberg required historical reconstructions in order to justify her rejection of regimes which, like Stalin's and Hitler's, themselves relied on such traditional — but, from the point of view of the rational observer, fundamentally meaningless — institutions such as courts, prisons, concentration camps, the party and the medal and honours system.

A few years later, the brilliant Leningrad anthropologist Yu. V. Knorozov, then a young man, and the organiser of an underground seminar, worked out a typology of political parties, comparing these with monastic orders and other similar organisations (including the Mormons, which group, along with the Bolsheviks, he found to be the best organised). His achievements in the field of decoding (including that of Maya literature), now recognised worldwide, were based on his original semiotic theory of communication. Hocart, an ethnologist of genius, aimed at a general scheme of classification applicable to modern societies in his research on reigns, castes and dual structures. His posthumously published book on the Northern Islands of Fiji<sup>1</sup> contains the first attempt at a formal exposition of anthropology as a collection of theorems, in the spirit of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Regarding the tsar as head of state (as opposed to the almost universally purely symbolic function of a sacred tsar), Hocart came to the conclusion that this institution did not exist in the overwhelming majority of societies. This conclusion is unquestionably important, both for its relation to anthropological typology in a broad sense, and as a correlation to the eminent animal psychologist Wagner's hypothesis that the leadership instinct had been overcome in the higher primates; Wagner's ideas were developed by the primatologist Tiejch in the latter's excellent research on the prehistory of society.<sup>2</sup> A secondary return to a strictly hierarchical structure may have been provoked by the peculiarities of technology and economics obtaining in later societies such as the Ancient Eastern 'hydraulic' societies, the ecological reasons for their appearance in the basins of large rivers having been remarked on by Lechnikov and thoroughly investigated by Witvogel.

Among the problems addressed by Hocart, that of the prevalence (if not universality) of binary opposition and of binary structures founded on it is of the widest general scientific interest. This subject, developed in Russia by A. M. Zolotarev and in the West by Niedheim and many other authors of concrete synchronic descriptions of binary organisations, gained popularity at a time of enthusiasm for

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. *The Northern States of Fiji*. London, 1952, by Arthur Maurice Hocart (1884–1939). [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> I.e. I. A. Tikh [Tiejch], *Predistoriya obshchestva* [The Pre-History of Society]. Leningrad, 1970. [Editor].

binary oppositions in structural linguistics. Anthropologists still remain interested in this problem, as the collection of articles dedicated to it edited by [David] Maybury-Lewis and [Uri] Almagor shows.<sup>1</sup> As specialised mathematical works show, and as textbooks of discrete mathematics explain, in this field precise methods can be used — one might cite in particular formal descriptions of marriage patterns, such as those found in Australia. Even more interesting, however, is that what is at stake here is the application of a general scientific concept of symmetry, which plays a fundamental role in post-Einsteinian physics. In this field it is possible to see the parallels in the formal apparatus used by both anthropology and the natural sciences. A similar tendency can be seen in social physics, e.g. in the attempt to apply the hydrodynamic principle of equalisation to describe the process of the appearance of cities.

**4** The changes in human sciences mentioned above form part of the reorganisation of anthropology, which is taking place as it approaches the current state of the subjects of its research.

The main subject of modern anthropology remains human beings in all their different forms and functions within particular states, ethnic groups and traditions, but not just within those bounds: modern humanity is getting ready to conquer the Moon and Mars, and after an extended period of residence there or on other planets, questionnaire data from a single person on Earth will hardly matter any more. An ever greater number of urgent questions which need immediate answers sets one thinking about the need to create a global system for the solution of vitally important questions in the near future: Andrei Sakharov spoke of the imminent creation of a ‘world government’. In this sense, the anthropological explanation of the unifying principles of various institutions of human societies, and of the common parentage and development of present-day races and peoples, as confirmed by underlying genetic structures, is a task of more than theoretical importance.

Anthropology must occupy a central place among the sciences in the new century, and not just because, as Lévi-Strauss famously said, the twenty-first century must be the century of human sciences or it will never exist. Apart from the practical demands of removing the threat of self-destruction of humanity and enabling it to organise itself into a single unit, the advancement of human sciences to the foreground is dictated by the logic of contemporary knowledge itself. The place of human sciences is determined by the place of man in space: this presupposes the anthropic principle, which many — although by no means all — physicists now accept. According to this, the basic

<sup>1</sup> D. Maybury-Lewis and U. Almagor (eds.), *The Attraction of Opposites: Thought and Society in the Dualistic Mode*. Ann Arbor, 1989. [Editor].

parameters of the Universe, (cf. the Six Numbers of Rees),<sup>1</sup> which were formed after the Big Bang, made evolution towards humanity possible. But only the development of human culture has made the perception, recognition and creative reproduction of the Universe possible — in the consciousness, that is to say, of the thinking and perceiving observer. Space implies the existence of a human observer, for whom space appears as the observed (the connection between observer and observed is also asserted by modern physics). Different philosophical conceptions as held by different eastern and western thinkers vary according to the extent to which the reality of the perceivable world is accorded importance (perhaps the most striking comparison of the different attitudes to this is that set out by Shcherbatsky at the end of the first volume of his *Buddhist Logic*). But whichever way, this reality is seen and judged relative to consciousness of the observer. In the final analysis, the scientific study of the perceivable world demands that the role of the bearer of consciousness — human beings — be understood.

[AF]

### CATRIONA KELLY

I agree that the last decades of the twentieth century did indeed see extensive concentration, among cultural historians, anthropologists, and commentators on culture generally, on subjects that would formerly have been considered marginal, for a variety of reasons. The first was the process of setting at a distance explanatory paradigms which had formerly shaped the direction of empirical research, such as ‘modernisation’ or ‘the rise of the nation-state’; these came to be understood as constructs, expressions of symbolic reality, as much as (or more than) definitions of socio-economic processes.<sup>2</sup> A second reason for change was the interest — going in tandem with liberationist politics — in groups that were in one way or another ‘alternative’, which led not only to a revival of established orientations such

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Rees. *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces that Shape the Universe*. London, 1999 (an introduction to astronomy). [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of ‘modernisation’ as a concept, see Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (2002); for national histories emphasising the instrumentality of national myths, see e.g. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992), Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (1994); Stefan Collini, *English Past* (1999); Pierre Nora, *Les lieux du mémoire* (1984–1992).

as women's history, labour history, and peasant history, but also to new work in areas such as the history of ethnic and sexual minorities, and the history of youth and childhood, and of old age, followed, in due course, by 'masculinity studies', which one might term a 'marginalisation' of the social group formerly seen as the centre or norm of historical experience. A third was the strong move towards interdisciplinary investigation, which included not only the borrowing of ethnographical methodology by historians, but also the move towards literary sociology and cultural history among scholars working in literary scholarship, and the rise of interest among anthropologists in questions such as the relationship between investigator and informant and the nature of ethnographic authority, which was increasingly seen as ideally 'dialogic' à la Bakhtin, rather than as distanced and compartmentalised, as required by the 'objectivity' of classical nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarly discourse. Convergence in terms of methodology was accompanied by convergence in terms of subjects of interest, encouraged by the move towards broad thematic studies. Participants at a conference on everyday life that I attended in Chicago recently included people who had originally trained as historians, as literary historians, as art historians, and as anthropologists, but the general direction of work was strikingly similar, and an uninformed observer would, I think, have found it difficult to pin down which faculties the different contributors were in fact formally attached to (had it not been for the fact that they all kept anxiously reminding their audience of this — but that's a different story).

In many respects, these changes fostered interest in traditional culture, rather than otherwise. As non-elite groups were rescued from what E. P. Thompson, in an influential phrase from *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), called 'the enormous condescension of posterity', so non-elite beliefs, practices, and self-expression got written in to cultural history much more extensively than previously. To be sure, in the 1970s and early 1980s, labour and gender historians, and those working on minorities, often adopted a progressivist standpoint, emphasising the move away from popular belief as both inevitable and welcome — a striking example of this sort of explication was Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971). But later phases of cultural history have placed a good deal more emphasis on the integrity and autonomy of minority belief, often precisely where it most deviated from mainstream belief — an example from the Russian field was Laura Engelstein's book on the *skoptsy* (self-castrators), *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (1999), which not only delineated the prejudice and repression this group suffered under Tsarist and Soviet regimes, but also set out the sect's traditions as an integral system, embracing, alongside the sexual renunciation for which it was most notorious, community solidarity and efficient husbandry.

A further reason for the interest in subjects earlier seen as marginal, though, worked in the reverse direction from the move away from governing interpretative paradigms or 'grand narratives'. Increasingly, cultural phenomena were seen in terms of a post-industrial explicatory schema that inverted the earlier concern with labour and production in favour of a preoccupation with what had formerly been seen as ancillary phenomena — consumption and leisure. Spending money and 'free time' were now understood not only as crucial economic activities, but also as key instruments for the expression of identity. An intriguing snapshot of the shift in preoccupations is offered by the Mass Observation Project in Britain. This project, which has been proceeding (with interruptions) since 1937, solicits material from the general public that can be used as the source of sociological, ethnographical, or historical commentary: personal diaries and reminiscences, photographs, mementos and personal possessions. Sending of material is co-ordinated by directives that invite submissions according to particular themes. During the first phase of the project, themes included the following: 'adult education, anti-semitism, astrology and spiritualism, capital punishment, conscientious objection and pacifism, co-operative stores survey, dogs in wartime, dreams, drinking habits, war topics (air raid shelters, evacuation, etc.), live entertainment, music, dancing, and jazz, newspaper reading, sexual behaviour, smoking habits, voting attitudes, wall chalkings'. Consumption is represented only through the theme of the 'co-operative stores', i.e. through in the context of *resistance* to the demands of the capitalist marketplace. During the second phase of the project, from 1981, on the other hand, themes included the following: 'abortion, accents, agriculture, AIDS, alternative medicine, bereavement, birthdays, British Rail, business premises, Buying British, censorship, charities, cheque books, close relationships, clothes, collecting things, comedy, consumerism, contraception, cremation, education, electronic mail (jokes by email), environment, films, foreigners, gender roles, general elections, ghosts, health, holidays, home, homosexuality, honeymoons, housework, income, industrial relations, leisure, medical experiments, menstruation, millennium, mothers, murder, old age, pace of life, paedophilia, personal appearance, pets, political opinions, present-giving, sexuality, shopping, spending £250,000, sport, supernatural, superstition, tattoos, teenagers, television, tourism, transport, unemployment, unsolicited mail, weddings, women, work, (former) Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup> The list of themes here is partial, but the prominence of consumption is evident in the complete list as well. One equally notes an emphasis on the link between consumption and identity ('Buying British'), and on identity as performance (as e.g. in 'accents' as a

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs/topic\\_collections\\_1937-50s.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs/topic_collections_1937-50s.html)

topic). The earlier emphasis on interiority (a subjectivity which, though entitled to freedom of expression, may often prefer withdrawal from private life) has come under challenge from a view of the self as quintessentially expressed in the public domain. Evident also is a striking depoliticisation of commentary: the 1960s and 1970s slogan, 'the personal is political', has no force in a context where 'politics' is essentially just one among many other sets of practices. One might indeed reverse it and say, 'the political is personal'. In other words, what much cultural commentary is now preoccupied with is a celebration of consumption and performance, and consumption as performance, often without much relation to broader socio-economic factors. An example would be a recent essay on Italian shopping by Victoria de Grazia which sees the shift from patronage of small shops to patronage of supermarkets in consumer-centred and largely uncritical terms. The essay devotes little attention to the impact of altered practices on the local economy (as cash-flow is diverted from local businesses to national or indeed 'global' ones), or indeed to the actual preferences of Italian consumers — which are extrapolated from a general assumption that 'consumers' (as an abstraction) prefer the supposedly greater range and superior quality on offer in supermarkets, and are admiring of the supermarkets' function as a 'leisure experience'.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of cultural commentary — with its emphasis on the superiority of the global to the local, of flexibility and novelty to stability and inherited values, of ephemerality and 'hybridity' to homogeneity, and its substitution of 'customers' or 'clients' for 'citizens' — is not so much hostile towards traditional culture as disbelieving of its very existence. One might take James Clifford's enormously influential (and, it should be said, immensely stimulating) *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), in which (to simplify), 'authenticity' (as expressed particularly in the distinction between 'tribal art' and 'tourist art') was seen as a construct of the Western market-place, and where the capacity of so-called 'traditional' culture for constant dynamic re-invention of itself was expressed precisely in its joyful absorption of consumer goods — as in the central image of a 'tribal' dancer exultantly waving a blue plastic carrier bag. In many respects, work such as Clifford's was, I think, liberating, because it made it possible to see diversity beyond a teleological context — the practices described by Clifford were not 'modernising' or 'degenerating', but engaged in a kind of perpetually fluctuating interaction. Many cultural artefacts produced in non-Western societies during the late twentieth century and early twenty

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<sup>1</sup> V. de Grazia, *American Supermarkets Versus European Small Shops. Or How Transnational Capitalism Crossed Paths with Moral Economy in Italy During the 1960s*. Trondheim Studies in East European Cultures and Societies. March 2002. No. 7. 'Approaches to Globality subseries'.

first century are best understood in precisely this way: one might take the following bit of wonderfully hybrid junk email that I received not long ago, with its mixture of traditional patronage formulae and businesslike command of twenty-first century communication methods (email, DHL) and of medical jargon:

Message 288/334

hello brethren

Date: **Tue, 3 Feb 2004 03:19:19 -0800 (PST)**

To: **Andreaah@zoetic.com**

From: **Godspower Nganga <godsnganga@yahoo.com>**

my dear brethren in christ compliments of the day.  
first and foremost how are you today?  
please sorry for any embarrasment oran  
inconvenience this request may have caused you.  
i got your contact through the internet. i am a  
good christian that worship god both in truth and  
spirit. i was sick for sometime now,i went for a  
culture test in the hospital and the doctor told me  
that i have a yielded growth of typhoid fever. he  
recommended medicines for me to buy. the most  
important one are.

1,CIPROXIN TABLET (500 MILLIGRAM)to be taken at six  
hours interval daily for ten days. this is an  
antibiotic medicine.

2,SUPRADYN(two tablets daily for ten days).this is  
a multi vitamin tablet and he said that any multi  
vitamin can as well replace the supradin if  
neccsary. the doctor said that i should do  
everything possible to get these drugs before it  
develops higher. so my dear,the little money i  
haD,i used it to buy the lesser medicines. for now  
i am too poor to afford this medicine. the doctor  
told me that this medicine can be found in  
pharmaceutical shops in the whole world.this was  
why i could not respond to your mail because i am  
sick my dear ,kindly please buy these medicines for  
me overthere and send it to me so that i can live.  
i am no longer myself now.things are very difficult  
here for now. the cost of these medicine is  
equivalent of eighty american dollars.

please you can send the medicine to me through the  
courier service with this name.

POSSIBLY UPS OR DHL. NAME.....EMEKA PATRICK  
DESTINATION...ABIDJAN COTE D,IVOIRE)west africa.  
ADDRESS...12 BP 520 ABIDJAN 12 YOU MAY CONTACT ME  
ON MY NEIGHBOURS TELEPHONE NUMBER..  
+225 05 68 72 34.

PLEASE IF YOU DO THIS TO ME,I SHALL BE THE HAPPIEST  
MAN ON EARTH. I HAVE NO SILVER NOR GOLD TO OFFER  
YOU BUT THE ALMIGHTY GOD ABOVE...

OMNIPOTENT, OMNISCIENCE AND OMNI PRESENCE SHALL  
 REWARD YOU IN ABUNDANCE. PLEASE MY LIFE IS AT  
 STAKE.  
 LOOKING FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.  
 WISHING YOU GODS RICHEST BLESSING  
 BEST REGARDS  
 godspower

The Internet is a rich resource of ‘hybrid’ material of this kind — indeed, the whole institution is to my mind less interesting because it projects the ‘virtual’ as the ‘real’ (the line of argument in many commentaries),<sup>1</sup> than because it has led to a dehierarchisation of written information, of a far more extensive kind than in such artificial exercises as the ‘reader’s letter’ to a newspaper as existed before. But all of this raises issues of academic de-skilling: it’s easy for cultural commentary to be reduced to the level of enthusiastic bricolage, rather like those assemblies of entertaining trivia to be found in late eighteenth-century magazines.<sup>2</sup> This in turn, potentially, has impact on academic prestige: the projection of a strong disciplinary identity has historically been associated, for academic subjects, with institutional power.<sup>3</sup> This does not necessarily mean that inter-disciplinary activities mean weakness (particularly not in folklore studies in the United Kingdom, which barely had an institutional presence in any case, and whose most prominent exponents, throughout the twentieth century, were often independent scholars — as in the case of Peter and Iona Opie, internationally known for their work on children’s culture, or George Speaight, author of leading studies of the popular theatre and music hall). But academic discourse does require the authority of articulation that can only emanate from methodological rigour. And the paradox is that while methodological rigour is particularly hard to achieve in interdisciplinary work, it is exactly here where it is most required.

Additionally, entirely abandoning discussion of ‘traditional culture’ and ‘authenticity’ imposes a new kind of Western-centred hierarchy, ignoring the continuing existence of groups that for geographical, political, social and economic reasons are still beyond the reach of globalisation, and the stresses caused by external forces on traditional communities, which may not necessarily regard change in the sort

<sup>1</sup> E.g. S. Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> As e.g. in Žižek’s comments in *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 4, about three different national types of lavatory, German, French, and Anglo-American, and how ‘it is clear that none of these versions can be accounted for in purely utilitarian terms: a certain ideological perception of how the subject should relate to the unpleasant excrement that comes from within our body is clearly discernible.’ Here the analysis stops: do the rest of the thinking yourself, dear reader.

<sup>3</sup> See esp. A. Byford, ‘Literary Academia in Late Imperial Russia, 1870s–1910s’ (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 2004).



of delightedly quiescent way that Clifford suggests. It also ignores the fact that the last two decades have seen a move *back* towards traditional culture in certain significant ways. This involves not just anti-Westernism of a conscious kind (such as is expressed, for example, in Islamic fundamentalism), but an enforced return to traditional ways at the level of the everyday as a result of economic crisis. Both of these directions are being accompanied — in some places at least — by a reassertion of the pre-modern types of authority (for instance, of traditional healers, as medical infrastructure retreats), and by a re-ritualisation of daily life, so that there is *more* material for those studying traditional culture — rather than less — as time goes past. Certainly, the pressure for change in traditional communities should not be ignored — according to a news report that I was reading yesterday, Inuit groups in Alaska are among the most vociferous campaigners for *expansion* of oil production.<sup>1</sup> But it is sometimes resisted — as was the case with a recent successful fight in the highly traditional area of North Mayo, in the West of Ireland, where community representatives were able to lobby for a planning ban on natural gas exploitation.

There is hence no reason why study of traditional culture should disappear, or why it should necessarily itself be concerned exclusively with disappearance. Ideologically, too, there are some signs of a shift *back* towards an emphasis on the reality behind representations: an early sign was Jean Baudrillard's famous essay 'The Gulf War Did Not Take Place' (1994), which identified, and satirically assailed, the 'hyperrealist logic of the deterrence of the real by the virtual'. With this has gone a growing emphasis on the resilience of traditional culture: an example is Hugh Brody's *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World* (2000), though this book is somewhat sentimental in its representation of Canadian hunter-gatherer communities as a kind of utopian alternative to the grasping, warlike, ferocious practices of societies based on subsistence agriculture. As the anti-globalisation movement takes hold at a political level, and a movement towards 'neo-communitarianism' establishes itself in some American small towns, a widespread challenge to 'consumerist' explications at the level of academic discourse is likely to follow.<sup>2</sup>

But how relevant is all this Western-generated and Western-centred theory to the study of Russian culture? The answer, I think, is not clear-cut. On the one hand, phenomena such as shifts in media preferences — the spread of genres such as the gossip column or the

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Guardian*, 14 February 2004. 'Weekend' section. Pp. 22–8 (an extract from Mark Lynas, *High Tide: News from a Warming World* (2004)).

<sup>2</sup> As identified, from a hostile point of view, in the first chapter of Jameson's *A Singular Modernity*, which brands, for example, the revival of ethics as a 'regression'.

astrology page — and the revival of beliefs in the supernatural, from popular Christianity onwards, are expanding the material available for folklorists and cultural anthropologists, but such material is definitely of a ‘hybrid’ kind. On the other, there remain (to judge by publications based on fieldwork) areas of rural Russia where folk belief of the sort recorded by ethnographers in the nineteenth century continues to flourish. Indeed, there has been a trend towards ‘de-globalisation’ in some places, as city-made clothing, diet, and equipment wears out and has to be replaced by home-made alternatives.<sup>1</sup> The economic policies operated by the European Union (as it is now known), in particular the provision of funding for improvement of infrastructure (through road-building programmes etc.) and the payment of ‘headage grants’ to small farmers, have made huge changes to the profile of some areas of Western Europe, for example parts of the West of Ireland. Out-migration has been arrested, but the concomitant effect has been the near-abandonment of subsistence farming (as opposed to keeping a few animals to help the family budget along, which are often now herded in the car), and with it of many traditional farming practices and agrarian rituals, since payment of grants increasingly requires conformity to centrally-imposed husbandry standards. As expansion of the European Union takes this process further across Europe, parts of Russia seem likely to end up as ‘reserves’ for a rural culture going out of existence elsewhere.

I accordingly don’t think there is any particular need for specialists in Russian traditional culture to worry that their subject is about to vanish, or their approach to become redundant. But what do seem to require reflection are the larger explicatory paradigms according to which folklore is interpreted. I don’t think that Soviet ethnography’s preoccupation with the primal simply resulted from intellectual inertia: rather, I think this compartmentalisation of the ‘traditional’ was a necessary protective strategy, allowing a space for ‘alternative’ material in a society that manifested, in particularly aggressive form, the crusading universalism of the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> The ‘traditional’ was on the one hand condemned as ‘backward’, yet

<sup>1</sup> An interesting example of this is the Mansi in Sverdlovsk Region, who are now returning to reindeer-drawn sledges rather than snowmobiles, as petrol and spare parts become unavailable — my thanks to E. M. Glavatskaya for this information.

<sup>2</sup> I wouldn’t want to be misunderstood: relativism is a child of the Enlightenment too. One could take Wieland’s essay on truth (1778): ‘Who has a right to invade his neighbour’s sacred enclosure and to disturb the peace of his house gods? Suppose his Melusine has a fish-tail under her skirt: why should that bother anyone else?’ But as Wieland’s phrasing suggests, alterity tended to be tolerated where it could be seen as ‘exotic’, and difference among groups *within* a given society was a different matter. For a modern example, one could take the case of France, where cultural anthropology has a far greater influence on intellectual discourse than in Britain, but where there is official intolerance for the wearing of traditional attire (headscarves by Muslim girls, turbans by Sikhs) in the schoolroom.

also assigned a privileged place in nationalist aetiology, that is, where it created a model of a picturesque and (very important, this) non-Christian Russian past. The most egregious example of the combination was the wholesale promotion of an aestheticised and ‘Soviatised’ version of rural culture that followed the collectivisation campaign of 1929–1933, whose primary intention had been to root out and destroy the actual traditions of the Russian village. But there are other examples as well: for example, anti-‘superstition’ hygiene guidance in 1920s and 1930s schools programmes was accompanied by inclusion of folk tales (and literary versions thereof, such as Pushkin’s) in the same programmes. This binary attitude can be traced back before 1917 too. E. A. Pokrovsky, in his pamphlets addressed to lower-class readers, addressed to them with the unmistakable authority of ‘chief doctor of the Moscow Children’s Hospital’, was unequivocal about the evils of traditional child-care: ‘*The bread dummy has killed more Russians than plague, cholera, and every other kind of illness combined*’ (‘*Soska ubila na Rusi lyudei bolshe, chem chuma i kholera i vse bolezni*’).<sup>1</sup> However, his compendious ethnographical investigation of traditional child-care practices, published in 1884, was remarkable for the neutrality with which such practices (with the exception of those obtaining among certain ethnic minorities, such as Jews) were described.<sup>2</sup> A less famous figure with a comparable combination of interests was Nikolai Aleksandrovich Russkikh (1857–1916), a local *zemstvo* doctor (*uchastkovyi zemskii vrach*) from Ekaterinburg who did much to publicise infant welfare issues at conferences of the Pirogov Society (*Pirogovskie sezdy*) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and who founded both the Union for the Struggle with Infant Mortality (*Soyuz dlya borby s detskoi smertnostyu*) and the Ethnographical Museum in Ekaterinburg.<sup>3</sup>

To some extent, this situation still persists in post-Soviet Russia. On the one hand, there is a marked indifference, at the highest political

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Pokrovsky. *Ob ukhode za malymi detmi. Sostavleno glavnym doktorom Moskovskoi detskoi bolnitsy*. [On the Care of Small Children. Compiled by the Chief Doctor of Moscow Children’s Hospital]. Moscow, 1889. Pp. 45–6. Emphasis original.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Pokrovsky. *Fizicheskoe vospitanie detei u raznykh narodov, preimushchestvenno Rossii. Materialy dlya mediko-antropologicheskogo issledovaniya*. [The Physical Education of Children Among Various Peoples, Particularly of the Russian Empire]. Moscow, 1884. See e.g. p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> S. A. Ostrogorsky. ‘Deyatelnost K. A. Raukhfusa po okhrane materinstva i mladenchestva’ [The Activities of K. A. Raukhfus in the Sphere of Mother and Child Protection] // *Okhrana materinstva i mladenchestva* 1916. No. 1. P. 28. ‘Nikolai Aleksandrovich Russkikh: nekrolog’ [N. A. Russkikh: An Obituary] // *Ibid.* 1916. No. 2. P. 11. Russkikh was also founding editor of the journal *Okhrana materinstva i mladenchestva*, which he launched with an attack on traditional child care: ‘Millions of Russian women, living far from civilisation and deprived of any of its gifts, ignorant often to the point of deep superstition, without rights, often reduced to the level of slavery in their domestic conditions, cry out in sickness, in degradation, deprived of any help in the trying days of their motherhood and go to an early grave as a result of the dreadful conditions of village life.’ (*Ibid.* 1916. No. 1. P. 17.)

levels, to sustaining rural culture at the economic level, combined with enthusiastic talk about ‘modernisation’. On the other, the perpetuation of a monolithic view of rural culture from the past continues: a case in point is the ground-floor display in the Russian Museum of Ethnography in St Petersburg, which is well-laid out, well-annotated, and (thanks to Western designer lighting) well-lit, but manages to give the impression that the whole of rural life was about feasting and festivities, with perhaps occasionally a little work of a decorative kind now and then. (The untouched Soviet-era displays of non-Russian culture on the upper floor, where ‘class struggle’ still rules the explanatory narrative, provide a jarring contrast to the new displays.) In a situation where ‘the culture of the *narod*’ is regularly invoked by nationalist groups, the task of cultural anthropologists and ethnographers is surely to interrogate the nature of that culture, rather than take it for granted.

Indeed, I suspect that the very term *narod* is so overloaded with resonances from nineteenth-century Russian and Soviet nationalism — imposing a misleading homogeneity on peasant culture, and inhibiting discussion of social conflict as well as of change across time — that it may no longer be useful as an analytical category. It may come, like the German ‘Volk’ or English ‘folk’, to be used by scholarly commentators exclusively in quotation marks, and to be the subject of specialist historical surveys concerned precisely with the link between folklore and nationalism, along the lines of those already carried out in relation to other European countries.<sup>1</sup> So far as research on ‘traditional culture’ itself goes, it is perhaps time for more attention to regionally specific analyses, emphasising local distinctiveness rather than pan-Slavic similarities. The ‘microhistorical’ model, which concentrates on a single family or community, but where traditional belief is seen holistically, as part of a whole pattern of life, alongside work practices, family relationships, religious observance, material culture, diet, and so on,<sup>2</sup> might aid in addressing the vital issues of context — do morphologically similar belief and practices actually mean the same in the twenty-first century as they did in the late nineteenth? One hopes also for more attention to the individual circumstances of informants’ lives — so that they become not only the mouthpieces of texts, but historical subjects in a broader sense (encouraged to contribute to academic discourse on ‘traditional culture’, as has

<sup>1</sup> See J. R. Dow and H. Lixfeld (eds.), *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich*. Bloomington, 1994. Folklore was also used to nationalist effect in early nineteenth-century Britain: see e.g. the articles on the cult of the Scottish Highlands (stags at bay, kilts, tartan, etc.) and Wales in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. London, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> See David Ransel’s article on the culture of a provincial eighteenth-century Russian merchant family in J. Burbank and D. Ransel (eds.) *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*. Bloomington, 1998.

been the practice in work with indigenous ethnic groups in North America, particularly Canada).

Yet the representation of traditional culture as beyond context, idiosyncrasy, and historical events (peasant life without serfdom, without migrancy, without wars and revolutions, as well as without collectivisation) was also in a way faithful to the attitudes of peasant communities themselves. And rescuing 'folk belief' from Marxist-Leninist historical teleology was a way of asserting its right to existence. Emphasis on the traditional was not just a way of creating a free space for academics, but also a way of conferring imaginative liberty on the 'backward'. That moral appreciation ought not to be lost in studies concerned with a different phase of modernism, one more tolerant of diversity, but equally insistent on the inevitability of change. But an advantage (perhaps the only advantage) of the 'market anarchy' that has overcome Russian society in recent years may well be precisely to generate a more sceptical and scrupulous attitude towards consumer culture than has characterised some academic commentators from more prosperous late capitalist societies, such as Britain and the United States.

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On the first point: I think these changes have a more varied character than suggested here. So, for instance, the questionnaire puts forward the following sketch of the way scholarship has evolved: 'A decade or two ago the focus of attention in research on rituals was on the "main" rituals (i.e. those accompanying birth, marriage, burial). Today attention is paid less to these rituals, or indeed to rituals as such, than to ritualised practices and forms of behaviour.' One can add to this that within study of 'family' or 'life' rituals, more and more attention is being paid to birth rituals (or birth alongside christening) — both to the rituals themselves and to their non-ritual context. The transition seems to have occurred along the following lines: in the nineteenth century this material (unlike wedding and funeral rites) was not exactly avoided altogether, but enjoyed little popularity, it tended to be addressed only in the context of voluminous but locally-focused collections (*An Ethnographical Miscellany of Smolensk Province*, and the like), or of

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general ethnographical descriptions (though the genre, or at least the title 'From the cradle to the grave', doesn't seem to have enjoyed much popularity in Russia). The only exception was specialist work by physicians, which in any case tended to focus on the non-Russian ('exotic') population of the Empire. In the 1900s, a few essays about childbirth did start appearing,<sup>1</sup> first with reference to 'exotic' material, but later describing Russian folk life, and by the 1920s the genre had taken hold, but entire collections or books on this theme started appearing only in the 1990s (a delay that was caused by the peculiarities of Soviet scholarly development).<sup>2</sup>

What is more, the first question can be interpreted in more than one way: are we dealing primarily with a shift in favour of peripheral factors, or in favour of modern, urban etc. folklore, and away from rural material? Of course, one might argue that, in the context of Russian ethnography the second shift is in any case a shift towards the 'peripheral', but it does have its own character, and it's hard to say which of the two tendencies is dominant. For instance, the attention given to obscene folklore and ethnographic material should, I think, be classed as a 'centrifugal' phenomenon, though it has also been associated with increased attention to urban folklore, e.g. schoolchildren's folklore (Ladomir publishing house in Moscow has over the past decade issued several collections of more or less traditional folklore materials, whose only novelty lies in the fact that they are obscene, and alongside these, a collection of school folklore, which incidentally also contained quite a number of obscene texts, though this particular characteristic wasn't the main criterion for the selection, as it was in the first group.)

Proceeding from this, I'd respond to the fourth question in the affirmative (though not without some qualification): of course this is all part of a single process, but it has various different causes, and the existence of these sets up some essential differences. On the one hand, the field of study is still expanding continuously as a result of the disappearance or loosening of censorship constraints, above all those relating to obscene and political folklore, and to 'physiological' material, both of a folkloric and of an ethnographical kind (one need only think how much trouble I. S. Kon had getting his 'ethnosexological' work published in the past).<sup>3</sup> It should be emphasised that

<sup>1</sup> There were also some publications of a borderline character, including both medical and ethnographical material, for instance, *Das Weib in der Natur- und Völkerkunde*, by H. Ploss, translated into Russian from German in the 1900s — a substantially revised and expanded English edition (as *Woman: An Historical, Gynaecological, and Anthropological Compendium*) came out in 1935.

<sup>2</sup> That said, a Ukrainian collection of such material, *Ditina v zvychayakh i viruvaniyakh ukrainskogo naroda* came out as early as 1906 (see the bibliography in [Toporkov 1991]).

<sup>3</sup> Igor S. Kon: sociologist and social psychologist with many publications on ethical issues: see e.g. *Sex and Russian Society* (co-written with J. Riordan). London, 1993. [Editor].

we're not just talking about externally imposed, institutionalised censorship. Even in 1991, a literary historian of the standing of V. E. Vatsuro felt able to condemn the 'erotic' number of *Literaturnoe obozrenie* on the grounds that material of that sort should only be published in special editions with a print-run of 100 copies, for bona fide scholarly use only.<sup>1</sup> And Western journals in Slavic studies (specialist journals in linguistics aside) weren't inclined to publish obscene materials in the 1970s either (though one should bear in mind that a journal dealing with folklore of this kind — international rather than simply Slavic — did exist (*Maledicta*), and that, in fact, journals publishing obscene material started appearing as long ago as the 1880s — see the bibliography in [Toporkov 1991]. What is more, when *Slavica Hierosolymitana*, not long after it first began appearing, published (in an issue dedicated to Slavic linguistics) the so-called *Letter of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to the Turkish Sultan*, this attracted adverse comment from some American Slavists. And the boundary between what was considered fit and unfit to print in English (I'm not qualified to comment on other European languages) was adjusting in much the same way as that relating to Russian material, though everything happened a few decades earlier. This affected not just publications of literature (though the changes here were of central importance), but also publications of genres such as the limerick.<sup>2</sup> To a large extent, the interest in urban, contemporary folklore and so on was facilitated by the opportunity to study this material in full, without censorship restrictions, though the rise of 'methodological permissiveness' — according to which contemporary folklore stopped being treated as 'not-quite-folklore', a sort of bastard phenomenon, which could be studied only according to the principles of teratology, or as something necessarily inferior (the traditional attitude among ethnologists, to Baudouin de Courtenay's indignation)<sup>3</sup> — also helped.

<sup>1</sup> V. E. Vatsuro (1936–2000): author of many studies of Pushkin and his era and of numerous edited volumes; see e.g. his posthumously-published study of the Russian Gothic novel (Moscow, 2002). The 'erotic' number of *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (Literary Review), which created a sensation when it came out, included pioneering publications of works attributed to Ivan Barkov, the most famous 'brand name' for smut in recent Russian literary history, and of erotic folklore etc. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> The watershed event in the literary world in Britain is usually taken to be the trial of the publishers at Penguin Books for publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 (see *The Trial of Lady Chatterley*. London 1961; reissued 1990). So far as publication of swearwords is concerned, a famous case is Philip Larkin's poem 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad...' (1971). A particularly well-known early publication of obscene limericks is that by the writer, gastronome, and connoisseur of erotic matters, N. Douglas. *Some Limericks, Collected for the Use of Students, and Ensplendour'd with Introduction, Geographical Index, and with Notes Explanatory and Critical*. Privately printed, 1929; reprinted London, 1969. It is a matter of some historical interest that the first edition was classified by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, under the shelfmark 'phi' (for obscene, or in the bookseller's euphemism, 'curious', books), while the second edition had a standard classification. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> 'The vast majority of "literary works", despite their huge influence on the public at large, are generally wholly ignored by scholars.' [Baudouin de Courtenay 1909: 237].

However, I don't think that the shift in interests among researchers is so directly connected with the concept *narod*, or the ways in which this has been rethought; a much more probable explanation is that it has been caused by the drastic dissociation of the very notion of folklore from the idea of *Folk* in its various interpretations (something along the lines of what Potok-Bogatyr says in Alexei Tolstoy's ballad: 'I'm part of the people as well, / So why leave me out?') In some ideological systems and among certain political groups, of course, the word *narod* is still used with incantatory force and is placed in implicit opposition to the mundane notion *naselenie* — as in the usage of Pavel Rusanov [the anti-hero of Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*].<sup>1</sup>

Things don't end with the fact that it's now possible to study new texts. One also needs to bear in mind the influence of Western, and above all American, folklore studies. For the latter the preoccupation with urban and/or recent materials and so on is not at all new; what's more, it's conditioned by the specific circumstances of life in the US (and the Americas more generally), where folkloric and ethnographic material (Native American texts aside) goes back a maximum of three to five centuries. On the other hand, this fact in itself might give European folklorists pause for thought: should they really be appropriating their methodologies from American colleagues? We may well accept that American influence itself could be beneficial, but methodology is surely a special case: should we really be taking tutorials in vision from the one-eyed? American folklorists may well be finding interesting ways of studying the material available to them, and that's wonderful, but if we have a longer tradition and hence more interesting material (from my point of view, at least), should we really ignore it? Isn't aspiring to being half-blind a bit odd?

The issue of the material that we use gives rise to new problems, ones bearing directly on the answers to questions 2 and 3. I have in mind particularly the relationship between field records taken over the last few years and those taken in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At one time the functionalists used to assert, in all seriousness, that any ethnographical records dating from before the 1920s had no value. That opinion might make us smile today, but we might — for the opposite set of reasons — need to exercise caution about some of the fieldwork materials recorded over the last few years. The current tendency is to make recordings in the form of

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<sup>1</sup> In essence my observation here endorses the ideas of G. S. Pomerants, a consistent critic of the ideology expressed by the author of *Cancer Ward*. See particularly his essay — published in various different places — 'Man without Adjectives' [in the sense of without adjectives relating to nationality — Editor]. Pomerants has pointed out that *narod* is an archaism along the lines of the English word *folk* (as opposed to *population*).



interviews, which are constructed as dialogues, rather than as monologues on the part of the informant. This means that it's not always clear what the informant actually thinks and knows, and what he or she has been prompted to say by the interviewer. This affects not only the information exchanged itself, but the terminology that is used by both sides, both in areas where interviewing is the established method of collecting information (for instance, the construction of tools and implements and the way these are named, or biographical data about the informant, as in the extended interviews collected by Parry and Lord), and in areas where one might assume that discrete, fixed texts are in circulation (here one tends to wish that the interviewer knew when to shut up: one gets to the point of expecting a question slap bang in the middle of a song). Whichever way, the material that gets recorded by this method is hard to describe as 'folklore'. The situation is not explained by the fact that today's folklore collectors lack competence or patience, nor does it come from the fact that some information is hard to collect by any other methods. Rather, we're dealing with the incursion of methodologies where the text as such is accorded less and less importance, and is on the verge of being forced out altogether. The folkloric text (and I do recognise that this term can only be used conditionally), however we choose to think of it, exists *before* the moment when we perceive it and when it is recorded. Even the most relativistic treatment of the notion of *text* in folklore studies (by Sergei Neklyudov), adopted a term — *avant-texte* [literally 'pre-text'] that implied something *preceding* a given performance (so much is clear, whatever one's attitude to this theory as such and to the choice of the term. Even in the 'Oral Theory', which emphasises that every performance is also a creation of the text, this song performed 'here and now' is still understood as a version of *the* Song.<sup>1</sup> But now the concept of a traditional text, which performers themselves believe they have inherited, is increasingly being forced out by the idea of an 'illocutive strategy', something existing exclusively in the here and now. This shift in accent inevitably leads to dialogue between the collector and the informant, who in extreme cases function as equals. I think one can see a relationship of this phenomenon to the ousting of the author or the in-text author by the interpreter or the critic (the term 'scholar' hardly seems appropriate).

This isn't the end of it, of course: the new materials are also in many ways different from the old in themselves. There's no doubt that this is partly explained by the poor quality of the old recordings, right up

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<sup>1</sup> Lord, of course, overcomplicated his discussion by refusing to use the term 'invariant', on the grounds that 'variant' was to be understood exclusively in diachronic terms, but he still retained the concept of a single 'Song' existing in many different versions. On the other hand, see the arguments in favour of 'tale-type' in [Georges 1983].

to the point of editorial interference.<sup>1</sup> But one should bear in mind that some of the differences come down to defects in the *new* methods of transcription and in the methodologies that underlie these. And there's one last point to bear in mind as well: are we really sure that the published transcripts of nineteenth-century texts and the records being made in the field today are evidence of one continuous tradition? It seems quite possible that the tradition existing now is a different one, or at least represents a different (decayed) state of the same tradition. In the case of some genres, particularly, this seems highly likely, and maybe even in the case of some of the ones that seem most productive: the historical legend and the *bylichka*, for instance.

While I've set out these issues more or less *in abstracto*, without reference to concrete examples, there is reason to think that the latter could be found, in other words that that some cases would have to be interpreted as I have just set out; equally there could also be cases where the opposite is true, for example, where the new records are more reliable than the old ones, etc.

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[CK]

<sup>1</sup> Not that the issue of editorial reshaping is quite as simple as it seems at first glance. For instance, the various publications of narrative jokes over the last few years, particularly those by non-professionals, have shown that verbatim transcriptions give a misleading impression; they don't have remotely the same effect as the oral texts themselves. For obvious reasons: a good number of the essential features of the narrative joke text as performed don't come through in a verbatim transcription, In a 'good' (i.e. skilful) transcription such features are conveyed by other means. For instance, the use of a different word order can be used to compensate for the absence of the narrator's intonation, etc. This raises a pressing question: which kind of transcription is more faithful? Is a sound recording really a perfect record?

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1 I don't think there's too much difficulty in answering this question. The processes we're discussing could be observed in Western (particularly American) academic analysis thirty and more years ago. We have to recognise that Russia has fallen behind the West not only in science and technology, but also in many branches of the humanities. One reason for this backwardness is obvious — the cultural politics of the totalitarian state, which placed severe restrictions on scholarly freedom. But there are other reasons too, connected with the underlying characteristics of Russian history and culture.

But first I should address the actual terms of the question. The point that strikes me is that these directly reflect the methodological crisis that Russian anthropology has now reached. After all, who has the right to divide cultural phenomena into 'central' and 'peripheral', 'main' and 'marginal', 'classical' and 'decadent'? Fair enough, an individual ethnologist or folklorist can perfectly well consider that birth, marriage and funeral rites are 'of central importance'. We can perfectly well try to explain the cultural processes and ideological mechanisms that make him or her hold such an opinion. But among the actual participants in rituals, all kinds of different rituals may be considered 'of central importance', depending on the broader cultural context.

There's no doubt that this hierarchical approach is connected with a particular type of scholarly tradition, with a kind of 'canon of acceptable subjects' within the humanities, whose authority, for its part, rests on specific value systems which have no immediate foundation in logic. Value systems of this kind are formed at specific eras and under specific circumstances. They then lose their functional significance, alter in various ways, die out and get revived, and so on. Something along these lines (i.e. a shift in value systems) is currently to be observed in Russian culture. I should emphasise that this

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Academy of Sciences

applies not just in ethnology and folklore studies, but also in most branches of the humanities, with the exception of purely technical ones such as quantitative metrics, palaeography, etc. If culture is *what exists*, and not *what ought to exist*, then it's really not clear why Solzhenitsyn merits more space in the history of culture than, say, Aleksandra Marinina.<sup>1</sup> The same thing applies in folklore studies: why should folk epics be more important than children's horror stories or jokes? Because they somehow seem more 'sophisticated' and 'complete' in an aesthetic sense? That can hardly be considered a serious foundation for judgements. Some people like Tolstoy and some like Samuel Beckett, some like both, and others again don't like either of them. When it comes down to it, scholarly activity is about expert knowledge and (so far as this may be possible) impartial analysis, and not the construction and maintenance of value systems and ideologies.

In theory, that is. In practice, things look rather different. The twentieth century was characterised not only by the rise to dominance of a cluster of absolutely monstrous political dictatorships, but also by the exploitation — to levels never before seen — of the humanities for political ends. The example most germane to us here — one that happens to illustrate the situation rather well — is the so-called classic genres of Russian folklore, and above all the folk epic. The view — in force to the present day in Russian folklore studies — that the epic is the most significant genre of Russian folklore can only be explained with reference to the ideological projects of the Stalin era. After all, why should it be the epic, in the end, and not the folk tale, say? As a matter of fact, I suspect the celebration of the epic by Russian folklorists derives directly from the campaigns to create a 'Soviet folklore' in the 1930s. At that point, the 'Soviet folk epic' (Soviet *bylina*, *novina*, *poema-skazka*) hymning Lenin, Kirov, Chapaev, collectivisation, polar heroes, the Eighteenth Party Congress... you name it, was set down as the central genre of 'folk poetic' creativity. Of course, a considerable role in the promotion of the folk epic as the chief jewel in the treasure house of Russian folklore was also played by the Brezhnev-era ideology of imperial nationalism, but we still have to recognise the primacy of the Stalin era in all this.

In short, we have to recognise that many characteristic of the 'canonical structure' of recent Russian ethnology and folklore studies go back to this or that era of Soviet (and for that matter anti-Soviet) ideology. The future of Russian scholarship, for this perspective, doesn't look too encouraging. One can easily imagine that

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<sup>1</sup> The author of detective stories featuring a woman police officer, hugely popular among post-Soviet Russian readers, and also adapted for television. [Editor].

fairly soon the 'social command'<sup>1</sup> addressed to ethnologists and folklorists will be framed according to the ideologies of Russian nationalism and Orthodox fundamentalism. One way or another, I think that the shift of attitude among folklorists and ethnologists from 'central' to 'peripheral' phenomena is explained not just by the liberalisation of Russian scholarship, but also by the collapse of the Soviet symbolic system, with its strongly universalising drive. One other very important circumstance, this time of a methodological sort, has to be borne in mind. The fact is that pre-revolutionary and Soviet researchers of the so-called 'central forms' of folklore and of 'traditional culture' weren't usually particularly concerned with the analysis of the character of what they studied in recent times. As a rule, atomised ethnographic observations and records of folklore were used to shore up scholarly constructs ('the poetic views of nature among the Slavs', 'primal Indo-European myths', 'the genre system of Russian folklore', etc.) In this way, the researchers and propagandists of 'folklore aesthetics' paid practically no attention to the problem of the reception of the texts they studied among the Russian peasants themselves. And so we'll probably never know what the average nineteenth-century peasant found strange or comical about the *skazka*,\* the *starina*,\* the work song, and so on. It would be a shame to repeat these mistakes with reference to contemporary culture, which is now, almost everywhere, of an urbanised, rather than traditional rural, kind. And it's precisely the so-called 'marginal' cultural phenomena that Russian scholars started looking at only in the 1990s that presently represent the 'living', 'topical' reality of common ('folkloric') culture. It is precisely the study of such forms that allows one to understand how folklore 'works', what social and psychological functions it fulfils, what its role in community life is. (One might note that the whole complex of issues to do with folklore and sociology was discussed long before the well-known works by Richard Dorson, William Bascom, and Alan Dundes, way back before the Second World War in fact, by Albert Marinus, a scholar working in Brussels<sup>2</sup>). Apart from anything else, the study of the 'folkloric reality' of modern society allows one to avoid talking about 'other' cultures and social groups, and to address the 'other' within oneself, the 'shadow side' of one's own existence. The result of this process is not so much schizophrenia as self-knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'social command': a phrase that came into use in 1920s Soviet Russia (its originator seems to have been the critic Osip Brik) to suggest the socio-political pressures that caused artists and cultural commentators to produce certain kinds of work, articulate certain ideas, etc. The original usage took for granted that this process was beneficial. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, A. Marinus. *Etnographie, Folklore, et Sociologie*. Bruxelles, 1931; A. Marinus. *Essais sur la Tradition*. Bruxelles, 1958.

2 I've partly answered this question already. I would like to emphasise once again, that we're not inventing anything new here: all these questions started to be discussed in the West in the 1930s. The classic work relating to the concepts of 'the folk' and 'folklore' is Alan Dundes's 'Who are the Folk?', published in the collection *Frontiers of Folklore* way back in 1977. And that's without going into the later debates relating to the deconstruction of 'folklore' and 'authenticity' as such.

The Russian situation, of course, is complicated by the fact that we went through modernisation at a very late stage, and in fact the process is still incomplete and has taken particularly uncongenial forms. Until very recently, there was an absolute majority of population in the countryside. The natural process of transformation of Russian (or more accurately, Eastern Slav) folk culture was impeded by two factors: serfdom and communal land tenure. Alexander II put an end to serfdom, and Stolypin to communal land tenure. But collectivisation brought them both back. (I would argue, incidentally, that these peculiarities of our history lie behind many of the social problems of contemporary Russia.)

Whichever way, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (with the exception of a short period), the Russian peasantry was forcibly deprived of social mobility and of internal stimuli for economic and social development. I don't intend to repeat at length my views on the colonial character of Russian ethnology and folklore studies. After all, Western anthropology was also, in its origins, a colonial discipline. But what is specific about the Russian situation is that colonisation was turned inwards — it was our own fellow countrymen who got colonised. From this point of view, the history of the concept *narod* in Russian nineteenth and twentieth century culture is extremely interesting and deserves detailed study in its own right. On the one hand, it's interesting what symbolic means and discursive strategies were employed by politicians, writers, scholars and publicists in order to construct a virtual image of the people, popular wisdom, popular traditions, and so on. Equally interesting is what one could term the 'socio-psychoanalytic' aspect of the problem: often those who liked ruminating on the nature of 'the people' let slip entertaining provisos, which allow one to glimpse the real nature of their attitudes to the culture of the exploited peasantry. So, for instance, one of the moving spirits behind the publication of the *Codex of Russian Folklore*, A. N. Tolstoy, when making a speech to present the project in 1940, expressed himself as follows: 'We are finally returning to the people its riches in the shape of this wonderful publication, this Codex of Russian Folklore.' This of course provokes the question: why was it ever necessary to 'return' the 'riches of folklore' to the people? Had they been stolen or snatched away, or what? It's clear that a formulation of this kind directly indicates

the character of folklore studies as a means of appropriating and exploiting the immanent meanings of peasant culture.

But I've slightly slipped away from answering the question. I'd like to stress that the very concept of the 'people' and 'folk culture' in folklore studies has a colonial character and impedes impartial analysis of the material under discussion. So far as the shift in attention among Russian anthropologists from village culture to urban culture is concerned, it's perfectly obvious that the processes of urbanisation play a not insignificant role as such. In the second half of the twentieth century, East Slavonic peasant culture experienced a phase of what one might term transformation in its essence, if not of total decline. This was expressed above all in the disappearance of a large proportion of the 'classic' genres of folklore and rituals (folk tales, folk epic, historical songs, wedding rituals etc.) As a result of this process, Russian anthropology was faced with a choice: either to transform itself into a kind of antiquarian discipline, concerned only with dead cultural forms, or to broaden the sphere of its research dramatically, including in this the 'living', actually functional, phenomena of mass culture.

To be sure, problems of a different kind arise here too. Although peasant culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not isolated from urban culture, the 'informational model' of the village community was all the same a great deal simpler than the system of communications in the modern urbanised milieu. In essence, contemporary folklore (or 'post-folklore', as S. Yu. Neklyudov prefers to term it), represents an eminently complex and demanding subject for interpretation, where a whole variety of different discourses collide and interact, and where many different forms of transmitting information are in action. Therefore the study of contemporary mass culture demands from researchers new and more flexible, interdisciplinary, methods. I think that Russian anthropologists will either need to learn how to work with such methods of this kind as already exist, or to evolve their own such methods independently.

**3** I've already touched on some aspects of these problems in my answers to the first two questions. All I'd like to add is this: As a matter of fact, we don't have many means at our disposal to define how ancient this or that phenomenon of mass culture is (the problem is particularly acute when it comes to oral culture). The 'archaism' of many cultural forms, as studied by Russian anthropologists and folklorists, is only a scholarly illusion. Phenomena once defined as characteristic of 'pagan culture' have often turned out to have developed at a relatively late stage, well after Christianity was already established. And, of course, anthropologists' own love of the 'ancient' is not exactly a logical phenomenon, in fact it's close to being irrational. I think that the fascination with the archaic is yet another

way in which anthropologists emphasise the ‘otherness’ of their ‘obscure object of desire’. In my opinion, we need to study the genesis of any phenomenon — if only in order to try and define its exact age. But the real problem lies elsewhere. I don’t really think that there are cultural processes that can be defined as unambiguously regressive or progressive; equally, historical shifts in cultural forms don’t seem to conform to strict universal laws. Sure, in some situations we really can prove that we’re dealing with a ‘survival’ or a case of *Gesunkenes Kulturgut*. But much more often we simply don’t know which factors, where, and in what circumstances, influenced this or that cultural change. The result is that the ‘problem of age’ is simply not particularly relevant to a strictly scholarly approach to the study of folklore and mass culture.

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I think it’s obvious that all three points are in fact interconnected. We’re dealing with a crisis in colonial discourse and with the formation of a new set of analytical paradigms, which is brought about by the completion of the process of modernisation and the emergence of a post-industrial society. As for ‘tradition’, that concept now all the more requires analysis in its own right, and a degree of self-consciousness on the part of the investigator who uses the term. Remember that contemporary sociologists and social historians (I’ve no need to mention their names) have invented the phrases *invention of tradition* and *imagined community*. There’s no doubt that Russian ethnologists and folklorists (like their Western colleagues, for that matter) have spent a good deal of time and energy on inventing and constructing a whole lot of traditions. I don’t think that we have the right to generalise about any culture as ‘traditional’: every culture has both conservative and innovative tendencies within it. But the problem of tradition does still require further study. The concept of ‘the people’, on the other hand, is rather easier to deal with: it’s without doubt an ‘imagined community’. But not all traditions can be considered ‘invented’, if by ‘tradition’ we understand the conservative tendencies that I referred to earlier, or the characteristic means of communicating information across time. In his book *Everyday Life and Mythology*, K. A. Bogdanov deals mainly with ideologised, evaluative meanings behind the concept of ‘tradition’. From his point of view, the construct-shaping drives in folklore studies have the function of regulating the ‘existential angst of society’. And this approach can also be applied to the cultures under study by folklorists themselves: a certain poetic or prose text acquires popularity and is transmitted from generation to generation because it’s considered a marker of social stability, because it directly or indirectly appeals to collective values, helps to sustain individual or collective identities. But the question has technical implications as well: it would be good to understand why partial or complete conservation of cultural forms comes about, what happens to them



while they are being transmitted over time, why cultural production is innovative in some cases, and in others not. I don't think there's any final answer to these questions: in different cultural and historical contexts we will observe different kinds of conservation and innovation. But it is essential at least to raise such questions when dealing with our materials.

[CK]

### STEVE SMITH

1 I think this concern with the 'marginal' is characteristic of postmodern approaches in all disciplines, reflecting that 'incredulity toward grand narratives' that Lyotard suggests lies at the heart of our present age. I am a historian, not an anthropologist or folklorist, but I can see the same shift at work in my own discipline. The period from the 1960s into the 1980s was one of confidence on the part of historians. Eric Hobsbawm talked of transforming 'social history' — understood as a specialised sub-discipline — into the 'history of society'. Since then, there has been a collapse of confidence in the big theoretical narratives — Marxist, Weberian, structural-functionalist — that might underpin such a history of society. Within western historiography there has been a wholesale retreat from social-scientific, nomothetic approaches, concerned with structure, determination and explanation, to hermeneutic, ideographic approaches concerned with culture, meaning and interpretation. This has not entailed the eschewal of theory, but the turn on the part of historians has been toward postmodern theory, with its characteristic concern with epistemology and the discursive construction of reality. True, some of today's most outstanding (and commercially successful) historians continue to write big, 'centralised' narrative histories, but historiography as a field has splintered into many different specialisms and within those specialisms can be remarked the concern with the 'marginal' alluded to. Personally, I think a reflexive, self-conscious turn to the 'marginal' — as distinct from a retreat into narrow

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specialism — has proved productive. Historians in the west, and increasingly historians in post-Soviet Russia, have turned their attention to topics that some of their professional colleagues would still consider of minor significance, even trivial — e.g. hooliganism, alcohol consumption, homosexuality, rumours — and demonstrated how the apparently marginal, when set in relation to other phenomena, can lay bare the unacknowledged workings of larger systems of power. That is not, of course, bound to be the result, and an obsession with the ‘marginal’ can simply reinforce the tendency to fragmentation and ever narrower specialization.

One element that encouraged the shift toward the ‘marginal’ was historians’ encounter with anthropology as a discipline — especially, with symbolic anthropology, as practised by Clifford Geertz. This has been a hugely productive encounter, enabling historians to think about particular ritualised forms of social behaviour: the *locus classicus* is perhaps the pioneering (if now outdated) analysis of a ‘cat massacre’ in eighteenth-century France by Robert Darnton. But there has been an explosion of studies of semiotically rich bits of human behaviour in past societies, particularly by historians of medieval and early European history and of the non-European world in general. In aspiring to the kind of ‘thick description’, advocated by Geertz, such studies may be said to focus on ‘marginal’ phenomena or, perhaps more accurately, to seek to understand the whole through the part, rather than seek directly to engage with the history of a whole society.

It must be admitted that the number of ethnographers whose work historians actually read may be counted on one hand. And in contrast to the rather open frontier between the disciplines of history and ethnography, western historians have, regrettably, paid little attention to folklore. The only example that immediately springs to mind in western historiography of Russia is Maureen Perrie’s study of the image of Ivan the Terrible. It would be tempting, but not completely true, I think, to suggest that this is because folklorists have traditionally not been very interested in the kinds of issues — the driving forces of change over time, the inter-relations between power and society, the relationship between expressive culture and social relations, a concern with context as opposed to text — that historians see as central. But as already indicated, there has been a shift of interest away from such ‘central’ questions among historians over the past couple of decades. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that folklorists have tended to specialise in the classification and analysis of texts — often texts of a fictional character — and historians still experience methodological anxiety when trying to make use of fiction and complex literary texts more generally in their work.

**2** I think there is a real historical basis to this shift in scholarly focus. I know predictions of the demise of the peasantry regularly proved pre-

mature from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, but I think we can state with a reasonable degree of confidence that the twentieth century did indeed witness the slow, albeit uneven demise of a global peasantry (subject to bouts of 'repeasantisation' in response to shifts in global demand for primary products). So I think the balance between rural and urban culture has certainly shifted in favour of the latter. People around the world want to live in cities, however desperate the conditions. In today's *New York Times* (18 January 2004) I have just read an article about the sprawling wretched slum of Estrutural outside Brazilia, in which a woman, asked why she has left her village, answers: 'My children, and the children of others, have the right to live in the city.' However, I'm not sure even when dealing with the largely agrarian societies of the past — which historians, of course, continue to do — that the concept of the 'people' is straightforward. Who constitutes the 'folk' — villagers, townspeople, the uneducated, the subordinate classes? Is the 'people' a stable category over time? The answer, I think, is not to try to jettison the concept which (like the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity') has a habit of sneaking back into our discourse in an other guise. Rather, a key methodological starting point may be to define the concept of the 'people' or 'folk' discursively, i.e. to establish its place in a larger, historically specific field of concepts, in terms of the way the concept functions in relation to notions of 'elite', 'official', 'educated'. I think the 'people' is still a concept that has pertinence in advanced capitalist societies, although I'm doubtful that this is true of the cognate concept of 'popular culture', since culture has become thoroughly commodified. Moreover, even when applied to the past, I think again that it is fruitful to construe 'popular culture', not as the culture of a definable group, but rather, to do as Roger Chartier does, and look at the distinctive ways in which groups, represented as 'popular', use particular cultural forms (over which they may not have exclusive 'ownership').

- 3 The concern with the pagan origins of rituals, legends, popular beliefs was a peculiar hallmark of Soviet folklore studies that reflected the extent to which it had preserved in aspic the concerns of nineteenth-century folklorists. But the concern with the archaic was certainly also shared by western practitioners of the discipline. Since the 1980s, however, western folklore studies increasingly turned their attention away from traditional 'core' concerns towards urban and contemporary narratives — urban legends (the 'vanishing hitchhiker' etc), the pervasive obsession, especially in the USA, with government cover-ups of activity by extra-terrestrial aliens (Roswell, New Mexico, 1947; the X-Files TV series). This has caused many western folklorists to feel that their discipline is in crisis. In her acknowledgements to her book, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2001, p. vii), the veteran

Hungarian-American folklorist, Linda Dégh writes of one her PhD students 'She might be among the very few who can rescue the subject from oblivion'. Since I'm not a folklorist, I perhaps contemplate its demise as a discipline with undue equanimity. From a historical perspective, it is clear that academic disciplines come and go. It doesn't seem to me any bad thing that folklore studies have had to engage more with ethnography, sociology and communications studies (there was always a certain engagement in western folklore studies with psychoanalysis). Certainly, the Soviet delimitation of folklore from ethnography does seem destined to oblivion. At the same time, it must be hoped that the traditional activities of folklorists with collecting and classifying forms of oral culture are not themselves forgotten or marginalised, even though they may be directed less at 'folk' culture than at what Dégh calls the 'irrationality explosion' that she sees as characteristic of our age. (Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 21). It must be hoped, too, that any merging of folklore studies and ethnography does not come at the expense of the traditional folklorist's concern with the structural properties of the text and with related philological and aesthetic issues. I am presently researching the revitalisation of certain kinds of 'folk' narratives concerned with the supernatural in the period of high Stalinism; and I have found folklore studies of immense value (even though it was axiomatic for folklorists working during the Soviet that such narratives had vanished following the October Revolution or, at least, were in sharp decline.) Historians have much to learn, for example, from folklorists' concern with narrative genre. For example, Lynne Viola's insightful and pioneering work on rumours as a vehicle of resistance to mass collectivisation of agriculture might have benefited from the folklorist's concern to typologise genres. It is arguable that in collapsing rumours, legends, *bylichki* and so forth in the way she does, she tends to overpoliticise the significance of the apocalyptic narratives that are her particular focus of concern.

## SERGEI SOKOLOVSKY

### **The Principle of Heraclitus: Three Hypotheses Regarding the Reasons behind Recent Changes in the Traditions of Russian Anthropological Research**

It's tempting to point out that the opposition between 'the established' (traditional, classic, customary) and 'the new' is itself nothing new. Let me concentrate here on folklore studies, since this is the area to which the organisers of the present discussion have called attention.

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When Soviet folklore studies began (which happened at a period analogous in many respects to the one forming the background to the crisis in Soviet social sciences and humanities at the end of the twentieth century), its rallying call was as follows: 'The folklorist should take an interest not only in traditional forms, but also in new phenomena, though these have in part, of course, developed out of tradition.'<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the dynamics of Soviet folklore studies have ensured that it continually incorporates new genres, subjects and themes (from rural folklore to urban folklore, from fairy tales and folk epics to songs and *chastushki*\*, from 'traditional' themes to themes reflecting 'a new life and a new way of life').

However, it is vital to resist temptation to trivialise the problem, since many observers from diverse fields within the humanities have, independently of one another, defined the (post-)modern situation as one of novelty on a scale hitherto unknown. These observations are to be trusted, the more so because most people working in cultural studies can easily confirm them on the basis of personal experience. What I will go on to do here, therefore, is to try and find the reasons for these tectonic shifts, these ruptures in the fabric of disciplinary knowledge. Three hypotheses are suggested.

*Hypothesis 1: a decline in the discipline?*

Research in folklore studies will serve as an illustration — though I do acknowledge the difficulty of extrapolating from observations made about this material to all the other fields of ethnographic studies. Although allowance should be made for conventions of thematic classification, it is striking that in the twenty-six year period from 1975 to 2000 the journal *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* (formerly *Sovetskaya etnografiya*) published just 65 articles on the subject, book reviews excluded. By contrast, in the ten-year period from 1946 to 1955, when conditions for academic research can hardly be said to have been ideal, the same journal published 280 articles and other contributions which the compilers of the index to those years classified as folklore studies.<sup>2</sup> Even if reviews of books about folklore (91), reports on conferences and thesis examinations (10), and articles whose thematic orientation is debatable (11) are excluded from this figure, fully 79 articles published between 1946 and 1955 still fell into the field of folklore studies — almost three times more than in the later period, if allowances are made for the number of years involved in each case. To be sure, the reasons for this decrease in the number of articles on folklore themes might include a growth

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<sup>1</sup> Yu. M. Sokolov. 'Ocherednye zadachi izucheniya russkogo folklor'a' [The Essential Problems in the Study of Russian Folklore] // *Khudozhestvennyi folklor* 1926. No. 1. P. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Sovetskaya etnografiya. Ukazatel statei i materialov, opublikovannykh v 1946–1955 gg.* Moscow, 1956. P. 38.

in the number of other new publications devoted to folklore studies, and even (though less plausibly) certain changes in the journal's editorial policy. But all the same the hypothesis regarding a decline in the popularity of research on folklore *amongst ethnographers* (after all, it is their professional journal which is under discussion here) is sustainable. What is more, the relative number of publications about rituals and festivals in the two periods considered bears out the trend: there was a progressive decline in the number of studies devoted to these subjects as well (see Appendix). At the same time, to associate this decrease in work done in the 'classic fields' of anthropology with a decline in the discipline would be to identify the discipline too strongly, perhaps, with the classic definition of its objects of research, which, in the Russian ethnographic tradition, too, has patently undergone fundamental transformations.

I would hypothesise here that the decline in publications with a 'classic' thematic orientation can be interpreted both with reference to the history of the discipline, and with reference to the sociology and psychology of academia. According to the general principles by which themes develop and are then exhausted, the accumulation of substantial amounts of work on classic ethnographic topics over one and a half centuries should of itself lead to a radical reorientation. It is not simply a matter of *ennui* among new generations of researchers ('all the islands in this sea have already been discovered'), nor of information fatigue induced by seeing and hearing the same things many times over, nor even of the triumph of the so-called *regressive principle* in Soviet theorisation of folklore ('all the classic genres of folklore have been degraded'), but rather of the finality inherent in the logical development of any theoretical construct. It's inevitable that any thesis will turn, if not into its antithesis, then into 'its other' (*svoe inoe*), as it surreptitiously changes its content by incorporating new kinds of conceptualisation.

*Hypothesis 2: a change of perspective?*

The starting point for this hypothesis is *the evolution of perspective*: just as at one time art went through a transition from reverse to linear perspective, so in Russian cultural studies, unnoticed by researchers themselves, the former monocentric focus within the discipline of ethnography has begun to become blurred and to give way to a hitherto unknown polycentricity (and in extreme cases to a complete rejection, along post-modernist lines, of binary oppositions like the one between 'monocentric' and 'polycentric'). In this context, the division of observed phenomena into 'central' and 'peripheral' ('classic' and 'marginal') becomes questionable. The shift in attitudes becomes obvious if one takes a look at the methodological approach adopted in works written approximately 20–30 years ago. At that point, nobody (in the Soviet tradition, I mean) took issue

with the validity of assertions about ethnographers' 'discoveries' that could be as easily considered mere observations. What was meant by 'discovery' at that time was not making something *public* (since frequently the phenomena and events observed were in the public domain to start with), but simply making something *known to academics* (ethnographers, folklorists, sociologists etc.). It was precisely this mode of 'discovery' that slipped unnoticeably into the past, and thus changed prevailing attitudes to what the ethnographer's subject-area should be. In other words, it changed the analytical perspective, which in turn led to a crisis of legitimacy for the 'classic', 'central' themes and concerns of the discipline.

The very imperceptibility of this transition to a new, not yet fully established perspective makes it difficult to demonstrate. But let me cite a few phrases from an overview of the field by a folklorist whose work I respect and value very much that I believe well illustrate the scholar-centricity and observer-centricity of traditional ethnography. 'N. N. Veletskaya *discovered* and studied the origin of folk theatre in the Gorky [Nizhny Novgorod] region. Various folk dramas have been *discovered* in Moldavia...'<sup>1</sup>

It will not have escaped the attention of readers that my argument here is developing into a well-rehearsed critique of *objectivisation* — a procedure which not only objectifies all the representatives of the communities studied by ethnographers, but which also carefully conceals traces of the author's presence in the narrative. The portrayal of social processes as natural, scientifically verifiable, processes and phenomena, the *naturalisation* (so to speak) of the ethnographer's observations in the field, long since came under suspicion of being mere stylistic strategies aimed at establishing scholarly legitimacy. Criticism of 'naturalisation' of this kind, and the devising of alternative strategies for academic writing, have been underway in international anthropology for more than quarter of a century already. And the new genres of scholarly representation and narrative that are emerging in the course of the search themselves form new viewpoints from which to consider the subject-matter of the discipline. The new perspectives created by concrete genres in their turn produce *theoretical reductions* of a fundamentally new kind.

### *Hypothesis 3: a change in theoretical orientations?*

This hypothesis is perhaps the most interesting because it links changes in the social sciences in general and in anthropology in particular with the turbulent changes that humanity as a whole is experiencing.

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<sup>1</sup> V. K. Sokolova. 'Sovetskaya folkloristika k 50-letiyu Oktyabrya' [Soviet Folklore on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the October Revolution] // *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 1967. No. 5. P. 57. Italics added by me [S. S.].

At issue are the acceleration of history and the triumph of Heraclitus' principle, according to which substance dissolves in flux. In the social sciences and humanities of the last quarter of a century we have witnessed the gradual replacement of the basic concepts or observed units (societies, cultures and ethnic groups, in the British, American and Soviet traditions of anthropology/ethnography) with new concepts whose principle attribute is changeability and fluidity: for example, sociality, alterity or otherness, ethnicity. In this connection, the proceedings of the annual debates of British anthropologists are instructive. (Among the many themes connected with the issues under discussion here are, 'The concept of society is theoretically obsolete' and 'The past is a foreign country', to name but two.<sup>1</sup>)

In the same context, it is pertinent to ask what transformations the *Volk* of folklore studies is undergoing if the basic parameters of the fundamental observed unit (separateness, atomisation, identity, stability, autonomy, integrity, distinction from similar things, delimitation from them, etc.) are being replaced by fluidity, mobility, changeable boundaries, etc.

The radical newness of our time (and the new situation in which researchers therefore find themselves) is no longer connected with the modernist issue of alienation (the problem that I've mentioned already, of the so-called regression of the subjects of ethnography and folklore studies, might be brought up in this connection), but rather with the disappearance of reality itself and the triumph of various forms of simulacrum. As a certain philosopher said, late twentieth-century postmodernism dispenses with the issue of alienation by dispensing with the issue of reality itself.<sup>2</sup> The acceleration of history, technological revolutions, the colossal growth in information flows — which means that, even within individual disciplines, more books are published in one man's lifetime than ten successive generations would be able to assimilate — all force scholars to direct their attention away from 'things' and on to 'processes', away from subjects that are amenable to theoretical reduction, delimitation and isolation, and on to subjects which are spatially distributed, and processes which tend to resist localisation (viz. the development of multi-sited anthropology), processes that are the focus of transformations and, not infrequently, the cause of such transformations, too. In this context, it becomes easier to see why anthropologists have redirected their attention to the inhabitants of cities, where the density of interaction itself accelerates the rate of transformations.

<sup>1</sup> T. Ingold (ed.). *Key Debates in Anthropology*. London, 2001. Pp. 55–98; 199–248.

<sup>2</sup> M. Epstein. 'Informatsionnyi vzryv i travma postmoderna' [The Information Explosion and the Trauma of the Postmodern] (<http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET>).



These are all well-known themes that have quickly become established in the history of thought. But surely the situation in itself also calls attention to the acceleration of history (including the history of academic disciplines), and in turn to the impression of a *truncated past* ('The past is a foreign country') that this creates? The psychological past draws ever nearer (books published ten years ago are now considered ancient history, a bygone stage in the development of disciplinary thought), and thus narrows the time period upon which the researcher focuses. In this condensed time-frame, the eye of the ethnographer and folklorist, like the eye of a physicist who observes the emergence of new particles in a particle accelerator, detects new subjects which are transitory compared with the 'classic' ones: horror stories instead of myths, anecdotes instead of parables, day-to-day stories instead of folk epics, ephemeral habits instead of rituals.

[ST]

## ALBERT BAIBURIN

### Afterword

I am extremely anxious that the comments appearing here should not be interpreted as a conclusion in a formal sense. Such a conclusion would be an impossibility, just as the proclamation of a single authoritative opinion would be. The questionnaire was certainly not meant to generate the expression of such an opinion. What we intended, rather, was to represent a broad spectrum of possible views of, and reactions to, the questions we had raised, allowing readers to form their own ideas about the positions expressed. What I propose to do now is to draw out some points of agreement and divergence in the various answers our contributors have given to the questions, and to emphasise a number of particular ideas and formulations.

The first striking point is that all our respondents agree that the intellectual configuration in the humanities and the social sciences has indeed shifted significantly in recent years. Naturally, there is some disagreement about how historically specific that situation is, and how radical the changes involved are, but their im-

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portance (especially for scholarship in Russia) is not open to question.

The different participants give considerable attention to the precise nature of the changes in scholarly perspective we are witnessing. And the spectrum of opinions expressed is so wide that one sometimes has the sense that our contributors are addressing a whole range of different questionnaires. As it turned out, the questions we circulated prompted our authors to make diversions into a variety of different areas, something that has added to the interest of the discussion. Participants invoke the anthropology of shopping malls and court-rooms (Vyacheslav Ivanov), the new genres of self-expression circulating on the Internet and by email (Catriona Kelly), inter-ethnic relations in major North American cities (Vyacheslav Ivanov, Nicholas Harney), the problems of producing 'adequate' transcriptions of folklore (Georgy Levinton), post-Soviet popular culture (Alexander Panchenko, Adele Barker), the 're-ritualisation' of behaviour that accompanied the collapse of Soviet power in the 1980s (Levon Abrahamian), and so on. Here, though, I shall stick, for reasons of space, to a discussion of the issues actually raised by the questionnaire.

The first question, about the shift of attention from 'central' to 'peripheral' phenomena, provoked a fair degree of surprise or even indignation from some participants. 'After all, who has the right to divide cultural phenomena into "central" and "peripheral", "main" and "marginal", "classical" and "decadent"?' Alexander Panchenko writes. He goes on: 'If culture is *what exists*, and not *what ought to exist*, then it's really not clear why Solzhenitsyn merits more space in the history of culture than, say, Alexandra Marinina.' While acknowledging the force of this argument, I would also add that any intellectual tradition, whether or not for ideological reasons, inevitably forms its own concepts of what is of 'primary' and 'secondary' interest. The formation of such a hierarchy is no doubt inevitable, since otherwise everything in view would have to be pursued with equal enthusiasm. As Yuri Berezkin writes: 'The task of recording every detail of the present is, in a final sense, impossible — some hierarchy of priorities is inevitable.'

As a matter of fact, though, even this first part of the discussion has attracted some different opinions, according to which the effort to escape contrasts between 'the central' and 'the peripheral' is linked with a discussion of the shift in perspectives in Russian studies of culture, as in Sergei Sokolovsky's formulation: 'The former monocentric focus within the discipline of ethnography has begun to become blurred and to give way to a hitherto unknown polycentricity [...] In this context, the division of observed phenomena into "central" and "peripheral" ("classic" and "marginal") becomes questionable.'

None of our participants disputes the fact that there has been a shift of the centre of gravity to the study of phenomena that would formerly have been considered marginal. However, there are different opinions of the reasons behind this shift. For Russian scholars, the main factor has been liberation from the artificial schemas and ideologically-coloured positions of the Soviet era. Westerners place more emphasis on the departure from totalising theories that seek to explain the whole of life. Despite the obvious and essential differences, however, the two positions are similar in that they both derive from a crisis of 'grand theories' (Marxism, structuralism, etc.), which has in turn provoked the emergence of 'single-use' explanatory schemas, which can be applied only to some discrete and specific subject. Relevant here too would seem to be an 'analytical crisis', which some of our contributors see as being linked with the spread of post-modernist attitudes (see e.g. Steve Smith), and others with a heightened awareness of phenomena demanding description (see e.g. Bruce Grant). To put it another way: interpretive practices have been replaced by descriptive practices. And once emphasis has shifted to description, then the range of objects in view expands (a fuller cataloguing of cultural phenomena begins). In this connection, one could cite Bruce Grant's comment that 'Tylor's famous definition of culture as a compendium of artefacts and practices operating in bounded spaces is only now being taken to its apex in the fresh context of the last fifteen years.'

The broadening of the field of subjects under study (and by extension, of themes) has taken rather different forms in Russia and in the West. In Russia (and the post-Soviet world more generally) this process coincided with a dramatic relaxation of print censorship; hence, new themes have included obscene folklore and the ethnography of sexual practices (cf. Georgy Levinton's contribution), politics, religion, school folklore, children's folklore, and a broad range of subcultural material. In the West, other impulses were in view: apart from the reaction against 'grand theories', an important part was played by political liberalisation in a broad sense and the interest in 'marginal' groups that went with this, and the growth of interdisciplinary approaches; also of significance was the increased interest in phenomena such as leisure, consumption, etc. (cf. Catriona Kelly's remarks).

The 'atomisation' of the field, combined with the new stress on form, rather than content, provides grounds for suspicion that the tendencies just mentioned will in due course themselves reach the point of exhaustion. As Yuri Berezkin points out: 'The transformation of anthropology into a collection of more and more localised and particularised research programmes is destroying the intellectual unity of the discipline. The concentration of energy on to ever finer detail calls into question the whole *raison d'être* of anthropology...'

But the point is maybe less that one should feel anxiety over the fate of anthropology as a unified discipline (its unity was highly disputable even in the past) than the fact that periods when concrete descriptions are accumulated in large quantities are always followed by periods when such descriptions are subjected to analysis, and when synthesising concepts are created.

Answers to the second question (about the shift of attention from rural to urban culture) are less divided. All the Western contributors agree that this shift of attention is a long accomplished fact. In Tim Ingold's opinion, the whole 'town-country' opposition has vanished in Britain, for instance. But for Russian scholars, the emphasis on urban culture is still something relatively novel. The reasons for the re-orientation are traced by the participants to the parallel processes of urbanisation now making themselves felt in Russia, and in the reduction of the specificity of rural/peasant culture, if not its complete extinction. As a result, in Alexander Panchenko's words, 'Russian anthropology was faced with a choice: either to transform itself into a kind of antiquarian discipline, concerned only with dead cultural forms, or to broaden the sphere of its research dramatically, including in this the "living", actually functional, phenomena of mass culture.' The fact that Russian anthropology had got so 'stuck on' the analysis of rural culture is linked not only with the continuing significant differences between urban and rural life in the post-Soviet world, but with the intellectual inertia of the governing Russian ethnographical tradition, where 'the peasantry' had the role of 'the folk/das Volk', i.e. had much the significance of subject peoples in colonial British analysis. The Soviet period if anything increased the gulf between city and village life, and accordingly reinforced the perception of peasant culture as something *other*, distinctive, at once pre-modern and 'authentic'. Rural life was perceived and depicted as a nexus of archaic traditions, study of which was a great deal more appropriate than the study of contemporary reality, and most particularly of Soviet urban culture (cf. Levon Abrahamian's comments). It is no wonder that post-Soviet anthropologists have taken a particular interest in city life.

But in Western scholarship, the movement towards the city has not been a once-and-for-all phenomenon. A shift in the opposite direction — away from urban culture — has also been evident. Catriona Kelly argues for a revival of interest in pre-industrial practices, which in different parts of the world has different motivations (the anti-globalist movement, the crisis that has overtaken old-style industrial economies, etc.) At the same time, more and more attention is being devoted to phenomena that are, rather than stable, 'preserved in aspic', are characterised by progression, a capacity for rapid transformation (cf. Susan Gal and Sergei Sokolovsky's contributions). Here, urban culture provides ideal

material for study. Vyacheslav V. Ivanov argues in this direction too: 'I can imagine that serious work in this field in connection with a transition in the whole cycle of research on the modern urban environment, as carried out worldwide, would fundamentally alter the direction of anthropological studies. Work would no longer concentrate on single ethnic groups, however much they want to retain their independence or to impose their peculiarities on others on a nationwide scale, or across a whole group of countries, but would focus on their relations with other similar groups within the same territorial unit (e.g. a major city, a country or a union of countries, for example a united Europe).' Nicholas Harney, in turn, reminds us that, in the era of globalisation, deciding which 'ethnos' a person belongs to is not at all straightforward: Italians who have lived in Canada for two or three generations cannot be described as 'émigrés', and their sense of self is defined in the first instance not in relation to their 'original' homeland, but in relation to Canadian urban society generally.

Given that, since the Romantic era, rural culture has been seen in many European countries, including Russia,<sup>1</sup> as the well-spring of national culture in an overall sense, then the very fact of a shift of focus towards the city is suggestive. As Levon Abrahamian argues: this shift 'signals a loss of interest in cultural roots and in the problem of origins itself — the question of methodology (i.e. the rejection of specific evolutionary, semiotic or other methods of reconstructing origins) is of a secondary order.' And here the issues addressed by the third question come into force. The move away from the principle 'the older the better' is particularly significant in Russian anthropology and ethnography, since these disciplines were traditionally deemed to have a historical approach, not only in terms of methodology, but in terms of the subject material under address. To be sure, there was a short and highly creative period in the 1920s when contemporary phenomena did come under scrutiny — notable exercises in this area included, as Vyacheslav V. Ivanov reminds us, the work of Roman Jakobson, P. G. Bogatyryov, and N. F. Yakovlev on a multi-layered close study of the Vereisk district. And interest did not die out later on. However, as Levon Abrahamian rightly observes, studying the Soviet city was more or less impossible for an honest ethnographer: 'The ethnography of contemporary Soviet life was studied only by those who at best agreed not to describe the reality they were observing, and at worst described what they had not observed. Those researchers who were governed by nonconformist professional and moral principles consciously or unconsciously preferred to reconstruct the archaic past, because here they enjoyed comparatively greater

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<sup>1</sup> But not just Russia: other examples would include Ireland, Finland, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, etc.

creative freedom.’ (Cf. Catriona Kelly’s comments on interest in the pre-modern as a defensive strategy among Soviet scholars.)

Most of the Western participants in the debate are Russian specialists, and they are well aware of this context. Not for nothing does Bruce Grant write: ‘Looking back, of course, the reign of history in the Soviet ethnographical sciences was sometimes a tyrannical one. Attention to questions of ethnogenesis, surely, was a boon to the study of prehistory, but its unnatural concern for origins, and the very political subtext that drove that concern — the doctrine of firstness in determining rights to sovereign rule centuries later — will likely be missed by few.’

On the other hand, the exaggerated attention to archaic phenomena in Soviet anthropology, ethnography and folklore studies can probably not be explained solely by cultural politics. It is also related to the nature and history of anthropology as a discipline. As Alexander Panchenko writes, ‘I think that the fascination with the archaic is yet another way in which anthropologists emphasise the “otherness” of their “obscure object of desire”.’ As Pavel Belkov argues, British anthropology also was from its beginnings concerned with ‘other peoples’. At the same time, we should not forget that often anthropology has been primarily concerned with depicting the lived situation of the academic observer as well. In the words of Konstantin Bogdanov: ‘Without doubt, the devaluation of existing methodologies in folklore studies, according to which the archaic status of the material under analysis was assumed a priori, gave rise to generalisations that were both unverifiable and, still more importantly, unfalsifiable. At the same time, despite the esoteric and mythologising character of these generalisations (evoking the misty past of the World Tree and of the Founder Myths), their heuristic force, to my mind, lies less in their contribution to the depiction of the past than in their contribution to the depiction of the present. And the task of describing that is eternally relevant.’

The shift from the study of archaic phenomena to the study of the contemporary world happened in rather a different way in the Western scholarly tradition. As Tim Ingold writes: ‘The shift from understanding the origins of cultural phenomena to their contemporary significance actually marked the foundation of the British tradition of functionalist social anthropology by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in the 1920s and 30s. It was linked to a strong modernist agenda. Nowadays, with the collapse of modernism, there has not been a shift back to “origins” research.’ At present, in American anthropology (and in British and French just as much), history is once again becoming topical, but this time history of a different order — the study of how anthropological concepts themselves evolved. In this connection some comments by Bruce Grant

seem timely (especially given the negative attitude to diachronic studies among Russian anthropologists). ‘Whatever one may think of the ideological motives, the Soviet academy made history a keystone of its consciousness in ways that Western anthropology only came to much later in its development (perhaps best embodied in the works of Marshall Sahlins, Bernard Cohn, or Jean and John Comaroff). Historical consciousness has perhaps now reached a peak across British, American, German, and French anthropologies. Is Russian scholarship poised to relinquish these longer held strengths?’

The answer to the first part of the final question (‘Is it possible that the above three changes are interconnected and represent, in fact, different facets of the same process?’) seems obvious to many of the participants in the *Forum*: we are talking about a global process of change in scholarly orientation. The second part of the question, however (‘Could this mean that not only the content of the term “people”, but also the content of the term “tradition” has changed?’) seems to have hit a sore spot with many contributors. After the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Bruce Grant contends, these terms have lost their innocence. Several of our other contributors also point out the importance of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s 1983 collection, *The Invention of Tradition*, which emphasised that much of what was seen in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as ‘folklore’ was actually of very recent date. The ‘terminological crisis’ is recognised to affect particularly the concept *narod* [‘the folk’], which is overburdened by political connotations. This circumstance causes some of our contributors to renounce the term altogether (along with *natsiya*, *kultura*, etc.), others to deny the existence of the phenomena named in these terms, and others again to ponder whether analytical categories of this kind are essential, so that they will be created whatever happens, if only to be undermined and rejected.

So are such categories in fact necessary? This is no idle question for ethnographers and anthropologists from the newly-formed states in the post-Soviet world, as Sevir Chernetsov rightly points out. Of course, the analytical usefulness of each of these concepts does differ. The thoroughly compromised terms *narod* and *etnos* have now been abandoned to the journalists.<sup>1</sup> The word ‘culture’ is only a notch or two up the academic scale of values. ‘Tradition’, on the other hand, despite the fact that anthropologists and ethnographers recognise their own part in creating numerous concrete ‘traditions’, has a considerably higher standing in scholarly discourse (probably be-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the revealing title of V. A. Tishkov’s recently-published book, *Rekviem po etnosu* [A Requiem for ‘Ethnos’]. Moscow, 2003.

cause it is now seen as a process, rather than a state). But the way things stand, none of these terms is much use to anyone in a real sense — as analytical instruments. They are employed in a quite different way, as concepts which, when subjected to analysis, reveal their politically engaged nature. As Susan Gal points out, anthropologists and other students of culture in the US are now ‘unwilling to use terms such as “folk”, “traditional”, “authentic” or, on the other hand, terms like “popular”, “modern”, “rational”, or “developed”, without first investigating the *sources* and historical context out of which concepts such as “modern” and “traditional” emerged in the scholarly and historical world of (usually) European politics.’ This leaves three main concerns on the agenda: the history of anthropology itself as a discipline; the history of analytical concepts; and the study of ‘how [anthropologists’] own concepts (e.g. the notion of “culture” itself) as well as systems of knowledge from elsewhere (e.g. Islam, systems of witchcraft) circulate and affect the cultural practices and political organising of social groups around the globe.’

These concerns among US — and other Western — anthropologists are very worthy in their own right. And some post-Soviet scholars are moving in this direction too — cf. Pavel Belkov’s comments on the links between *etnografiya/folklor* and *Völkerkunde/Volkskunde*. However, one might in the end doubt how much future there is in an exclusive preoccupation with what one might term ‘historicised anthropological discourse analysis’, especially given the situation affecting Russia and other post-Soviet states. Here, much empirical material still awaits in-depth analysis — as Bruce Grant points out, this includes the contemporary anthropology of entire geographical regions formerly neglected in favour of ‘traditional’ milieux such as the Russian North and eastern Siberia. In addition — as Georgy Levinton, for example, emphasises — traditional genres of ‘folklore’ remain productive, raising the question of whether study of these has to be abandoned because material of this kind has all but disappeared in some parts of America and Western Europe. And there might also be a problem — in a situation where ‘folk culture’ remains an issue of widespread political interest — in a scholastic preoccupation with the history of ethnography and anthropology as disciplines, unless this is attached to a sense of how this history ought to affect the concepts and practices of the discipline in the here and now, its heuristic everyday, so to speak. Several contributors draw attention to the distinguished intellectual traditions of anthropology (the practice of field work, for instance), which have been extensively copied in other disciplines: is all this to disappear in anthropology itself?

If nothing else, the discussion here has shown that there are many issues of burning interest to all our participants. We have traced a



move from the study of immanent phenomena ('ritual', 'the people', 'culture') to the study of process and states (ritual behaviour, identity formation, sociality); a shift in the relations between the academic commentator and the object of study; a growing sense of reflexivity in relation to scholarly practice itself. It is clear that the changes in hand are affecting not only the conceptual foundations of anthropology and the study of culture (and more broadly, of the social sciences and the humanities), but also the understanding of how academic research and analysis is located, and ought to be located, in society more broadly. In future numbers of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, we will be continuing with these debates.

[CK]