Editors’ Introduction

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Attempts to create space of an original Slavic postmodernism have, on occasion, seemed to privilege that space over the texts for which such space is made. This issue of *Studies in Slavic Cultures* offers, not a definitive alternative theory of postmodernism in Slavic cultures, but a selection of closer readings of texts that offer themselves to postmodernist readings and address the significance of regionally or culturally bounded postmodernisms.

If postmodernism is taken to be a set of characteristic devices—like the mésalliance of high and low art, or low degrees of subjective stability—then one must understand it as a global phenomenon, in that it is found in metropolitan galleries and museums worldwide, with an international authorship. The specific place of Slavic postmodernism as a subject of inquiry within this late-twentieth-century conceptual arena has tended to occur within two overlapping discourses.

One discourse addresses the relationship of postmodernist texts specifically to the materials of modernism in Slavic culture, with concomitant questions of what exactly constitutes modernist culture—the craft and difficulty of reading the work of, for example, Constructivism, or the mass-oriented works of Socialist Realism that obscured (or, in the framework of Boris Groys, fully realized) those avant-garde impulses.

Another discourse expands the scope of this question of origins beyond cultural texts, and regards the relationship of Slavic postmodernist practices—which should then be understood as reflecting second-world structures of distribution and consumption of resources—to the postmodernism that originated in France and the United States. This has become a site of interrogation particularly given the time lag between the first and second world in producing a recognizable postmodernist aesthetic and the language to describe the processes at work.

One way of interpreting the chronology and implicit directionality has been to suggest that, in the second world no less than anywhere else, postmodernist art is merely another tool of colonization in the age of global capital, a centripetal tendency out of New York and Paris disguised by its chameleon-like ability to consume and regurgitate local materials and symbolic systems for the consumption of metropolitan critics and circulation on the global art market. Scholars of Slavic culture tend to complicate or divert this
relationship that relegates Slavic postmodernism to a second-order cultural phenomenon by seeking alternative genealogies for Slavic, second-world postmodernisms. This endeavor perhaps reached its most ambitious scope in Mikhail Epstein’s assertion that, even if Baudrillard had named the simulacrum, Russians had invented constructed realities.

Ljudmila Bilkić opens the issue with “Indebted to Rupture—Mediating between Eastern and Western [Post]Modernism.” In her rereading of key philosophical and postmodernist theoretical works, she proposes an alternative position from which to read, synthesize, and challenge regionally bound concepts of postmodernity, a position that arises specifically from the clash of such boundaries.

Vadim Shneyder examines a very different peripheral space in his article, “The Problem of Postmodernism in Russian Literary History: A Comparative Reading of Summer in Baden-Baden and Moscow to the End of the Line.” Here, he contextualizes Leonid Tsypkin’s novel against the samizdat circles in which Erofeev circulates, finding similarities that, in light of Tsypkin’s isolation from the cosmopolitan circles of Moscow, provoke new questions about the provenance of Soviet postmodernism.

In her article, “Anti-Soviet Kitsch in Perestroika Melodrama: Sergei Solov’ev’s Aiza,” Olga Klimova addresses the relationship between kitsch in the context of Baudrillard’s simulacrum and in the context of late Soviet culture. She reveals the potential within the melodrama and sentimentality to empty and play with the sign, in as conscious a fashion as in the explicitly playful and arch practices of Sots Art.

Irina Anisimova, in “From Consumption to Objectification in Viktor Pelevin’s ‘Akiko,’” offers a close reading of a short story that returns this issue to the greater problems of consumption and subjectivity, here in the totalitarian virtual space of the internet. The story’s rejection of any liberative potential for subjective decentralization echoes once again a certain general sense of apprehension in the face of tensions between regional and global postmodernist discourses.

The final article, Daria Kabanova’s “Mourning the Mimesis: Aleksei Fedorchenko’s First on the Moon and the Post-Soviet Practice of Writing History,” examines the genre of the post-Soviet mockumentary. The emergent importance and insecurity of the reader vis-à-vis the narratives of the film, as well as the oscillation in scale between that of celebratory narratives of the Space Race to the exaggerated jerry-rigging of “reality,” recall, in a very practical way, that Soviet and post-Soviet postmodernism responded specifically to the hermetic and highly normative nature of Soviet society, perhaps far more than to globalizing imperatives.
EVERYDAY LIFE is the theme of SISC’s eleventh issue.
The editors welcome submissions of graduate-student work investigating drama, film, linguistics, music, or any other aspect of the topic in relation to Slavic culture.