President's Report

I am writing this from the Aleksanteri Institute in a rather chilly Helsinki, where I have brought my current ERC grant (see p.2). Perhaps the overcast weather has affected my mood, but I struggle to find anything positive in the BBC Radio 4 news briefing when I tune in at 5.30am UK time.

The UK news has been unremittingly dismal for the last month, contradicting on an almost daily basis the comforting aphorism that “things can’t get any worse”. Apart from the looming horrors associated with Brexit, I am reminded that on numerous occasions since I became BASEES President, I have had to write letters of protest of behalf of our Association about the assault on academic freedom in Eastern and Central Europe and in Russia. The continuing attack on the Central European University in Budapest has forced the Board of Governors to decide to move the bulk of its activities to Vienna. BASEES members who wrote to support the CEU will have received a letter from its President, Michael Ignatieff, setting out his reasons for the move. I recommend this video of Professor Ignatieff speaking in September at the Vienna Humanities Festival about academic freedoms in general and the CEU in particular. Also troubling was the Russian government’s revocation of accreditation from the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (the “Shaninka”). There is some good news, though, including the return of the European University at St Petersburg’s teaching license, albeit accompanied by a forced move and disruptive personnel changes. At home, in the UK, scholarship in our area continues to be menaced by the absence of strategically planned support for university posts and researchers. A Russian post abolished here, or the failure to replace an Eastern Europe specialist there, are both markers of a dangerous lack of interest, at any level, in providing sufficient area specialists despite international crises demonstrating the need for them.

Amid such gloom, it is good to remember the joy and optimism accompanying the events of 1989. The 2019 annual BASEES Conference will do exactly this. The conference is scheduled slightly later than usual in mid-April and we already have an abundance of excellent paper and panel proposals. The Friday and Saturday keynote sessions will revisit the fall of the Berlin Wall and the events preceding this breakthrough. At the opening round table, the role of the arts and philosophy in chipping away at the Wall’s foundations will be discussed by a philosopher who participated in the controversial Oxford-Prague seminars from 1979 to 1989; and by specialists in the alternative art, film and literature movements which flourished in Eastern Europe and the USSR during the 1980s. On the Saturday evening keynote roundtable, we have invited three witnesses of the fall of the Wall to recall those days around 9th November 1989. They are Bridget Kendall, the distinguished BBC reporter and Russia expert who was with President Gorbachev in Berlin for the 40th anniversary of the GDR a month before; Jens Reich (a key figure in the GDR’s civil rights movement in the 1980s), and Timothy Garton Ash (essayist and academic who reported on the events of November 9th). Our third plenary session will feature Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Mark Galeotti (an expert on Russian and international security and politics, and author of The Vory, Russia’s Super Mafia) discussing crime and corruption in post-communist Russia.

Less momentous than the Wall coming down, but still (I hope) a stirring development for many BASEES members, is the news that the 2019 conference is relocating to Robinson College, Cambridge. The new venue has excellent modern facilities, good food, comfortable pillows, and well-appointed meeting rooms and lecture theatres. The BASEES conference >>
Professional News

Two BASEES Committee members have received major European Research Council grants

BASEES President, Professor Judith Pallot (University of Oxford), has been awarded an ERC Horizon 2020 Advanced Grant which Professor Pallot will hold at the Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki. The award, worth £2.5 million, is entitled “Gulag Echoes in the Multicultural Prison: the historical and geographical influences on the identity and politics of ethnic and racial minority prisoners in the Russian Federation and other communist successor states of Europe” (EU project no: 788448). It will run for five years from November 1st, 2018.

BASEES Information Officer and Newsletter Editor, Dr Muireann Maguire, Senior Lecturer in Russian at the University of Exeter, has been awarded a European Research Council Starting Grant of over €1.3 million for her project “The Dark Side of Translation: 20th and 21st Century Translation from Russian as a Political Phenomenon in the UK, Ireland, and the USA” (EU project no: 802437). The project aims to demonstrate links between translation and national identity at key points over the last century and in the present day. It will run for five years from January 1st, 2019.

New book announcement

Dr Connor Doak (University of Bristol) has co-edited with Dr Katherine Bowers and Professor Kate Holland A Dostoevskii Companion: Texts and Contexts, a new anthology of Dostoevsky criticism from Academic Studies Press.

Jason C. Vaughn’s new monograph The Russian “House”: An Examination of Post-Soviet Russian Culture in the Times of Putin has just been published by Hamilton Books/ Rowman & Littlefield.

Report on UK participation in the XVI International Congress of Slavists (Belgrade, August 2018)

The XVI International Congress of Slavists was held in Belgrade on 20-27 August 2018, with approximately 1,000 participants from 42 countries. There were 115 sessions consisting of individual papers on linguistics (58), literature and culture (52), and the history of Slavonic studies (5). The number of thematic panels was increased to 33, again dealing with linguistic topics (20), aspects of literature and cultural studies (11), and the history of Slavonic studies (2). In addition to six round tables on the special themes of the Congress, six more were held on a range of interdisciplinary subjects. As an innovation, this Congress included poster presentations, which were evenly divided between linguistics (13) and literature (14). Most of the commissions which operate under the aegis of the International Committee of Slavists held meetings (31 in all) to report on their activities. There were also a number of book launches. The programme of the Congress and the abstracts of papers are currently still available at: http://mks2018.fil.bg.ac.rs/program-kongresa/.

As on previous occasions, the UK was assigned a quota of 15 delegates. However the number of papers offered was less than this, eight in total, and two delegates were unable to attend. Hence the UK’s contribution consisted of 5 individual papers, one paper for a thematic panel, and one contribution to a round table. Hard copies of the UK papers have been deposited in the ICS archive at the Slovanská knihovna, Klementinum 190, 110 00 Praha, CZ.

The XVI International Congress of Slavists is to be held in Paris in 2023, in connexion with the centenary of the Institut des études slaves. At that point I shall stand down from representing the UK on the International Committee of Slavists. Any member of BASEES who is interested in taking over this role should get in touch with me for information: catherine.macrobert@lmh.ox.ac.uk

Professor C. M. MacRobert
University of Oxford

>> will stay in Robinson for 2020, but thereafter it will travel to other UK cities. We have already booked Glasgow for 2021 and will subsequently alternate bi-annually between Cambridge and other locations. This revolutionary plan is intended to make it easier for colleagues located farther from London and south-east England to participate more actively in the conference. We will select well-connected locations that are easy for our European and other overseas participants to access and which offer a range of affordable accommodation. The committee is already developing expertise in organising peripatetic conferences. On p.3, you can read Melanie Ilic’s report on the very successful conference BASEES held in conjunction with the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies in Uppsala in September 2018.

The Uppsala conference is just one of many new initiatives the BASEES Committee has recently embarked upon, including launching the Women’s Forum, new book and article prizes, expanding the number of study groups, increasing the allocation of R&D funds for post-graduates and early career researchers (see page 4), and adding a European representative in the person of Professor Libora Oates-Indruchova (University of Graz) to the committee. These initiatives have come at a time when, like other professional organisations, BASEES has been challenged by increasing costs and changing contractual requirements for conferences, including the need to pay deposits two years in advance. We have made headway with obtaining sponsorship and identifying other sources of income. Despite our continuing efforts, we have been forced to raise the membership fee; otherwise we could not be able to maintain our current level of activity, let alone launch new initiatives. Following the decision of the 2018 AGM, as of 1st January 2019 the annual membership fee will be raised as follows: for Full Members, from £35 to £45; and for Associate Members, from £25 to £30. We continue to encourage all members to pay by direct debit.

I should like to reassure all members that the BASEES Committee is made up of volunteers who receive no remuneration for all that they do. Our association relies on the enthusiasm of colleagues, who willingly combine full-time research, teaching and administrative jobs with working for BASEES. The committee is regularly renewed by electing new ordinary members and office holders. So I call on members to join us on the committee. If you have a pet project you would like to see BASEES develop or would just like to offer your help by serving on the committee, please do contact me at my BASEES email address: president@basees.org.

Professor Judith Pallot
The conference theme was ‘Regimes and Societies in Conflict: Eastern Europe and Russia since 1956’. Papers were delivered in 34 panels over 6 sessions. Panels themes included: gendering post-socialism, nationalities policies, public policy, the legacies of communism, repression and dissent, conflict in Ukraine, social and economic change, farming, Russian culture, biopolitics, childcare and education, conflict and integration, civil society, forging identities, security studies, structures of power, the Caucasus, media studies, and environmental politics.

The conference was a huge success. It attracted 119 formal registrations (81 academics, 37 postgrads and 1 publisher) by delegates from 26 different countries. Local scholars were invited to drop in to sessions without prior registration, and student volunteers were on hand to help out. Unsurprisingly, the largest contingent of participants came from the UK and Sweden, with a significant number of scholars from the Russian Federation. The conference attracted substantial numbers of delegates from the Baltic States as well as from East, Central and Southern Europe. Beyond Europe, delegates attended from Argentina, Canada and the US, from Armenia and Japan, and even from the UAE. Financial support, including fee waivers and assistance with travel costs, was offered to 45 delegates.

On the BASEES side, the organising committee was led by Matthias Neumann and included Peter Waldron and Melanie Ilic. At the University of Uppsala, the lead was taken by Claes Levinsson, Head of IRES, and BASEES owes a debt of gratitude to the Uppsala administrative support team: Jevgenija Gehsbarga and Stella Marceta.

The conference keynote speaker was Dr Tom Casier, Jean Monnet Chair and Reader in International Relations at the Brussels School of International Relations. Dr Casier spoke on ‘Russia and Europe: Back To Where We Began, Or A New Order In The Making?’ The talk questioned the apparent crisis in the current relationship between Russia and the European Union. Behind the façade of conflict, bilateral agreements continue to be made, and, on the whole, European countries take a pragmatic approach to Russia in terms of energy supplies. Dr Casier suggested that it is not appropriate to talk of a renewed Cold War.

New Books in the BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies

The BASEES/Routledge Series on Russia and East European Studies comprises original, high-quality, research-level work by both new and established scholars on all aspects of Russian, Soviet, post-Soviet and East European Studies in humanities and social science subjects.

New Titles in this Series:

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Russian Culture in the Age of Globalization by Vlad Strukov and Sarah Hudspith

Published earlier this year:
Belarus - Alternative Visions: Nation, Memory, and Cosmopolitanism by Simon Lewis

Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields by Marlene Laruelle

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The FIFA 2018 World Cup was arguably contemporary Russia’s largest soft power project, upstaging the recent Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics in terms of both numbers of international guests and global media audiences reached. The tournament—hosted in Russia for the first time in its history—was a perfect opportunity to gather information about how foreigners and Russians perceive Russia today, amidst multiple controversial developments concerning international relations, domestic policies, and sports. I outlined some of these issues before the tournament even began in this article.

The BASEES PGR research fund enabled me to visit Russia during the World Cup and gather data relevant to my PhD thesis work, which focuses on the Sochi 2014 Olympics. At the 2018 tournament, I visited three of the 11 host cities—Yekaterinburg, Kazan, and Moscow—where I conducted in-depth interviews with members of local and international media personnel covering the World Cup; professionals working in the sports industry; and domestic and international fans. I was curious to learn about their perceptions of Russia as host of the biggest sporting event in the conditions of geopolitical crises and international information rivalry. I also asked my interviewees about their understanding of the legacy of the Sochi Games and whether they thought that hosting the World Cup would change Russia’s reputation on the international stage. I learned about local experience of this mega-event from both domestic and foreign visitors; I even experienced it first-hand.

The information I gathered through interviews complements a large-scale tweet archive—both in English and Russian—which I created during the tournament, in order to illustrate how the wider public viewed, interpreted, and contributed to shaping Russia’s image as a World Cup host. The data I collected in Russia with BASEES support is invaluable to my research career. Some of it informs the last chapter of my PhD thesis, on the legacy and memory of the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics four years on (as a precursor of the 2018 World Cup). This data will also inform my future publications about media and public interpretations of the World Cup, as well as my post-doctoral project application. I shared some early insights based this material at the OWRI-funded World Cup workshop at Durham University in October 2018. I also hope to reflect on my findings at the April 2019 BASEES Annual Conference, in a panel provisionally called “Mediation, Reception, and Memory of Sports Mega-Events in Russia and Beyond: From Cold War to ‘Information War’.”

I am very grateful to BASEES for supporting my project. I welcome any ideas for collaboration from fellow researchers on related topics: please contact me at vitaly.kazakov@manchester.ac.uk.

Mary Buckley’s book is very topical. The Global Slavery Index currently estimates that, in 2016, there were almost 800 000 victims of human trafficking in Russia. Very often victims of slavery are migrants from Central Asia, but there are also big flows of unfree labour from Russia to destinations outside and within the country. Three migration trends are explored in Mary Buckley’s book – ‘migration out for work but trafficked’, ‘migration in for work, freely or trafficked’ and ‘migrating within, but trapped in forced labour’. Her study is based on extensive fieldwork in Russia between 2007 and early 2017, including interviews with experts, advocates, focus groups, public surveys, and mass-media analysis. Buckley provides an interdisciplinary case study of the politics in Russia regarding human trafficking, migration and labour exploitation as well as their associated narratives, expert assessments, and public appraisals. She explores a range of contributory factors: history, socio-economics, legislation, politics, law enforcement, demography, gender, and attitudes. The book provides interesting historic parallels between modern human traffic and the historical exploitation of serfs, prisoners, and kolkhozniki. It analyses the politics of placing human trafficking on political agendas after this issue escalated between 1990 and the early 2000s, and how the adoption of anti-trafficking legislation in Russia in 2003 changed the situation. Importantly, as Buckley argues, efforts to combat human trafficking in Russia face many challenges, principally insufficient public awareness of relevant legislation, and the weakness of the rule of law, which is vulnerable to bribes and corruption. Even today, people underestimate the scale of human trafficking: female victims of sex trafficking are often blamed. Buckley shows how xenophobia affects policies regarding migrants trafficked from Central Asia. The Politics of Unfree Labour shows that much must still be done to prevent human trafficking in Russia, both practically and ethically.

Irina Kuznetsova
University of Birmingham


This Critical Reader is a pioneering achievement, not least because it brings together, for the first time, important English-language essays on Russian and Soviet science fiction. The editor, Professor Anindita Banerjee, has deliberately defined the genre very broadly, to include utopian, dystopian and fantastic literature and depictions of space travel as well as selected films. The volume contains fifteen articles first published between 1971 and 2014, reprinted completely unchanged (a somewhat unfortunate consequence is that various titles or names are translated, or transliterated, differently at each mention). The articles, which are arranged in four parts in a roughly thematic-chronological order, vary in quality: excellent case studies – such as those by Yvonne Howell on Mikhail Bulgakov or Andrew J. Horton on Protazanov’s Aelita – appear beside rather superficial overviews by other scholars which lack consistent academic sources. Since there is no critical commentary or contextualization of the contributions (apart from the outline provided in the editor’s introduction), this Reader requires a competent reader or lecturer who can signpost students to the most useful texts. Certain selection decisions surprise, such as why Elena Gomel’s essential 1995 SF article on ‘The Poetics of Censorship’ was not included (her 2013 essay on Viktor Pelevin, which is included, is undoubtedly excellent, but not an obvious choice on Pelevin), or why a journalistic BFI article on Tarkovsky found its way into the book (with a superficial bibliography which omits almost all Tarkovsky scholarship). On the whole, however, the Reader does achieve Banerjee’s stated goal, to ‘highlight the treasure trove’ of Russian SF and its critical literature. Let’s hope this volume will stimulate many further studies in this still largely unexplored field of research.

Matthias Schwartz
Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin


The late Margarita Khemlin (1960-2015) is a marvellous discovery for the Anglophone reader: a truly funny, acerbically observant Jewish-Ukrainian writer, whose novels and vignettes about Jewish, Ukrainian, and Jewish-Ukrainian life are witty and vivid. Her prizewinning 2012 novel The Investigator, which opens in provincial Ukraine a few years after the end of World War II with the death of a glamorous Jewish redhead, is published in English by the independent Glagoslav Press. Melanie Moore’s faintly Chanderequesque translation picks up the would-be flinty and dispassionate style of the eponymous investigator (doznavatel’), whose pursuit of the murder case leads him far beyond the call of duty into a murky world of favours in kind, forbidden desire, and deception. The denouement is worthy of Agatha Christie. More Khemlin can be found in Slav Sisters, an all-female anthology of 20th- and 21st-century fiction from Dedalus Press and edited by Natasha Perova, an indefatigable crusader for contemporary Russian prose. In her brief introduction, Perova notes the recent success of Russian women authors in both commercial and literary fiction, and the importance of acknowledging women’s ‘slightly different perspective’ on the world. Besides featuring writers already well-known abroad (Svetlana Alexievich, Ludmila Ulitskaya, Ludmila Petrushevskaya), the anthology includes fiction by important female authors just beginning to be known in translation: Nadezhda Teffi, Lydia Ginzburg, and Olga Slavnikova. Galina Scherbakova’s soothing modern twists on Chekhov’s ‘Lady with a Little Dog’ and on Gogol’s distressed clerks were another discovery for me. The (not exclusively female) translators are notable for skill and experience, including Boris Dralyuk, Arch Tait, Marian Schwartz, Robert Chandler, Joanne Turnbull, and Jamey Gambrell. Both Glagoslav and Dedalus are small-press champions of Russian literary fiction in translation; these two books are splendid examples of their kind.

Muireann Maguire
University of Exeter