Contents

Acknowledgments

A number of people were instrumental in making this volume a reality. Generous support from Katherine Carl, curator of the James Gallery and deputy director of the Center for the Humanities at the Graduate Center of City University of New York, helped get this project off the ground and provided the funds necessary to compensate the translators, Aleksei Grinenko, Ryan Green, and Innokenty Grekov, who played such a crucial role in this project. A warm thank you to Vitaliy Chernetsky, who made the initial introduction to Oleh Kotsyuba, the acquisitions editor at Academic Studies Press, who then enthusiastically supported the project, and to Tim McCarthy, without whose generosity and solidarity Yevgeniy Fiks's contribution to this volume, "Soviet Union, July 1991," would not have been possible. We are also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this project, whose detailed comments and suggestions contributed greatly to the final product. Last, but definitely not least, we owe an incredible debt of gratitude to Helena Goscilo whose meticulous copyediting and encyclopedic knowledge of Russian visual arts (and not just Russian) were invaluable as we finalized the introduction. That being said, any remaining errors or infelicities are ours alone.

Note on Transliteration

With Russian-language sources, the Library of Congress transliteration system was used without diacritical marks to render proper names, titles, and quoted passages. Where there is an established English spelling of a name, however, that established spelling was used, e.g., Eisenstein, instead of Eizenshtein, Tchaikovsky, instead of Chaikovskii, Meyerhold, instead of Meierkhol'd, and Walter Nouvel, instead of Val'ter Nouvel'.

Introduction

Brian James Baer and Yevgeniy Fiks

While the topic of queer sexuality in Russia has been investigated for decades now by scholars working in the fields of sociology, history, literary studies, and musicology, it has yet to be studied in any comprehensive or systematic way by those working in the visual arts.[1] In fact, with the notable exception of a cluster of articles on Neoacademism published in the journal *Russian Review* in 2019 and Allison Leigh's *Picturing Russia's Men: Masculinity and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (2020), it has been largely ignored.[2] *Queer(ing) Russian Art: Realism, Revolution, Performance* is meant to fill this lacuna by providing a platform for new scholarship that connects Russian art with queerness in a variety of ways. Working from different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, the contributors expose and explore the queer imagery and sensibilities in works of Russian visual art and beneath the surface of conventional histories of Russian art.

In its approach, the volume stands at the intersection of Visual Studies and Queer Studies. In regard to Visual Studies, we follow Valerie A. Kivelson and Joan Neuberger (2008, 2), who differentiate the field from art history "in its emphasis on seeing as an embedded social practice," while aligning it with Cultural Studies "in its attention to the shifting, fragmentary, culturally and individually specific responses to visual objects." From Queer Studies, we take queer to mean "the post-structuralist figure of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (Jagose 1996, 3), or, as conceived by Richard Meyer (2019, 7), "a site of sexual meaning and symbolic investment under continual negotiation both by those who name themselves as gay or lesbian and by those who do not." The act of queering therefore constitutes for us an analytical mode that "dramatize[s] incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire" (Jagose 1996, 3).

That being said, we do not wish to suggest that queerness exists *only* in the eye of the beholder—that *there is no there there*—as doing so risks playing into the hands of those who would render queer individuals invisible. Validating a queer approach to art, often critiqued as biased or minoritarian, therefore entails exposing the traditional reluctance of art historians, curators, and dealers to "see"

queerness in art and artists as itself highly subjective. That reluctance is by no means only evident in Russian art history or in studies of art before the twentieth century.[3] Andy Warhol, for example, was advised in the 1980s to be less "swish" in order to appeal to a broader market of art buyers, and his sexuality was not discussed in any serious way by art historians until the early 1990s (see Doyle, Flatley and Munoz 1993). Even today, popular representations of Leonardo da Vinci focus on possible romantic relationships with women.[4] As Jonathan Jones remarks in *The Guardian* (March 26, 2021): "It's as if Leonardo's homosexuality is incompatible with the universality of his art."[5]

Thanks to the work of historical recovery by scholars such as Dan Healey (2001), Francesca Stella (2015), and Ira Roldugina (2016a and 2016b), no one today can deny that there were queers and queer subcultures throughout Russia—in Russian cities and Soviet prisons, but also in Russia's rural communities. The publication of the diaries of the queer writer Mikhail Kuzmin (1998, 2000, and 2009) and, more recently, of the artist Konstantin Somov (2017), in complete, unexpurgated, and annotated editions, attests to this fact, as does Andrei Poznanskii's scrupulously researched two-volume biography of the composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky (2009). These works challenge traditional stereotypes of artistic homosexuals as "tortured," in the case of Tchaikovsky or as "very gentle and modest," in the case of Somov (Nina Berbereva qtd. in El'shevskaia 2003, 13). At the same time, this volume is not in the business of "outing" Russian artists; its interest lies in the conditions that allow for the production, circulation, and reception of queer art above and beyond the sexual orientation of the artist, although not excluding it. Our dual task therefore involves acknowledging both the ontological status of queers in Russia and the epistemological power of queering.

To that end, our volume adopts a very broad understanding of queer as including any experience or performance of nonnormative gender and sexuality, and of queering as any intervention that exposes, challenges, or subverts dominant heteronormative assumptions, beliefs, and practices. The relative nature of the designation nonnormative is especially important when studying gender and sexuality across languages and cultures because it acknowledges that what is considered queer today may not have been considered queer in another time and place, and vice versa. Accordingly, we hope to avoid imposing a Western minoritarian model of homosexuality as well as Western models of queerness onto other cultures in ways that would erase the distinct contexts of queer representation there, on the one hand, or limit our study to gay-identified artists, on the other.

And so, the volume's focus on queerness seeks to offer an alternative to the exclusive and discriminatory identitarian politics of ethno-nationalists while also avoiding a minoritarian discourse of tolerance. To that end, we posit queerness as residing both in objects and in ways of seeing and in the unpredictable relationship between the two, celebrating "the polymorphous and polyvocal notability of the homoerotic in visual production" (Smalls 1996, 26). This also opens up a dual reading of the title, as not only queering art per se, but also queering what it means to frame art as Russian, given the complex multicultural reality of imperial Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russian culture.

That being said, the volume is informed by critical perspectives on culture that arose in the multicultural imperial space of "Russian" culture, specifically Lotmanian semiotics, with its view of the unpredictability of cultural change that results from the constant repurposing and reaccentuating of material from that culture's semiotic reservoir—a model that overlaps in interesting ways with Judith Butler's notion of performativity—and of Bakhtinian views on language, which stress the historicity and social embeddedness of words and other linguistic and cultural forms, imbuing the practice of artistic citation with queer, polyglossic potential. In adopting analytical approaches associated both with Russian/Soviet culture and the West and by bringing together a group of scholars working both in Russia and abroad, the volume hopes to avoid the persistent postcolonial dynamic by which enlightened Western scholars "explain" Russian culture to Russians. (Indeed, we should not ignore the fact that market censorship in the West has exerted significant constraints on queer artists, as discussed above). The past thirty years, since the fall of communism, have seen increasing international exchange and cooperation across the Humanities so that new generations of researchers now regularly reference and critically engage with a shared body of theoretical works, archival material, and empirical studies on the subjects of gender and queer sexuality, which lends this volume a coherence of approach and terminology despite the fact that more than half of the authors wrote their chapters in Russian. And so, we must also acknowledge the enormous contribution of translators to this project and hope that this volume will set a standard for more collaborative and egalitarian cross-cultural and cross-lingual scholarship. Translation no doubt added a layer of complexity, but it also provided an opportunity for dialogue and debate among the authors, translators, and editors that greatly enriched the project.

A Time for Queering

There could be, perhaps, no more apt time for a book on this subject. Queer scholarship and lived experience are under attack in countries across the world in the face of nationalist revivals that involve stoking bigotry in support of a far-right agenda based on "traditional family values." In Russia, this was highlighted by the passage in 2013 of a federal law banning "homosexual propaganda," which has led paradoxically to widespread public discussion of queer sexuality and to the designation of age restrictions on all sorts of cultural products, alerting readers to their "queer" content. (Recent editions of Merezhkovskii's *Resurrected Gods*, for example, now carry a +16 designation on the cover, and the unexpurgated diaries of artist Konstantin Somov, a +18 designation.) However, as Roman Utkin (2021, 8) rightly notes, "While homophobic and transphobic legislative actions serve political agendas and are largely symbolic for much of the population, they directly affect queer and trans Russian citizens."[6] Indeed, as Alexander Kondakov and Evgeny Shtorn (2021) have documented, the legislation has resulted in increasing violence against queer Russians (see also Kondakov 2017).

More troubling in the realm of culture than the mandatory age designations, which may do as much to entice readers as they do to repel them, is the government's attempt to erase Russia's queer history. Consider the biopic of the composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky directed by film and theater director Kirill Serebrennikov, with a script by Iurii Arabov, which was in progress during the very public debates over homosexual propaganda before the passage of the federal law mentioned above (see Bullock 2018). Fearing the fate of the film was in danger, the scriptwriter gave an interview to the newspaper *Izvestiia*, in which he stated, without equivocation: "There is nothing to suggest that Tchaikovskii was a homosexual. Only philistines think that. There's no need for cinema to show what philistines believe" (qtd. in Bullock 2018, 53). He then went further, declaring the topic of homosexuality itself to lie "outside the sphere of art," which not only renders the queerness of artists irrelevant but also contradicts traditional Russian associations of homosexuality with spirituality, artistic refinement, and creativity (see Baer 2009). And so, in the present climate, the production and dissemination of queer knowledge and queer ways of seeing has assumed considerable political urgency.

The conservative-authoritarian turn in Russian politics since 2012, which led to the 2013 federal law banning homosexual propaganda, has had a pronounced effect on the visual arts in Russia. Although the construal of art and artists as enemies began shortly after Putin's rise to power (see Erofeev 2018), it was following

the appointment of Vladimir Medinskii as Minister of Culture in 2012 that "culture was defined as the spiritual experience of the country and the 'collection of moral and ethical values' that was to be handed on to future generations" (Jonson 2018b, 49). As Lena Jonson (2018b, 49) explains: "The major task was to fortify patriotism and national pride through the education system (school curricula, history textbooks), the media and cultural outputs (film, theatre, the visual arts, etc.)." This cultural policy was pursued in the realm of art in an especially heavy-handed, top-down manner, which involved appointing conservatives to head major art institutions, closing or merging museum spaces and galleries, and funding only exhibitions that aligned with the government's increasingly narrow aesthetic, favoring "a more traditional, figurative, decorative and optimistic art" with broad popular appeal (Jonson 2018b, 51).

It is perhaps no surprise then that the promotion of such art has led to the rehabilitation of official Soviet art, which is being accomplished largely by depoliticizing it, another way to forgive and forget the authoritarian violence of Stalinism. Consider the recent Deineka/Samokhvalov exhibition in St. Petersburg, which was "imagined as a soccer match between two major Soviet painters from rival cities" (Pinkham 2020, 47) and which, predictably, did not display Deineka's haunting wartime paintings and drawings discussed by Gleb Napreenko in chapter 5 of this volume. And those who visit the Stalinist Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy in Moscow today will be serenaded over the loudspeakers by international pop music, such as Michael Bublé's jazzy version of the Spiderman theme song. Such Putin-era repackaging of Soviet art is clearly meant to evacuate any political content from these works in order to paper over the violent discontinuities in twentieth-century Russian history with a kitschy banality. For example, the reviewer of the Deineka/Samokhvalov exhibition for the *New York Review of Books* declared, "It was gimmicky but cute, and it successfully conveyed the idea that the exhibition wasn't a dry academic exercise but a popular event. Nearly a century on, socialist realism can finally be fun" (Pinkham 2020, 47). Such a statement is strikingly at odds with those of the contemporary Russian artists interviewed by Lena Jonson and Andrei Erofeev in their 2018 volume *Russia: Art, Resistance and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*, who warn, "serious shifts are taking place as art has become used for the glamorous framing of various commercial or other events and that a trend of harmless, decorative and shallow art is taking over. In this way, contemporary art is losing its critical and reflective qualities while at the same time becoming more visible in society" (Jonson 2018a, 10). To be clear, our purpose in

queering Russian art is not to make Socialist Realism and its Putin-era reincarnations fun.

This volume also appears in the wake of important revisionist histories of Soviet culture, which have helped fashion a new critical language "that does not reduce the description of socialist reality to dichotomies of the official and the unofficial, the state and the people, and to moral judgements shaped within cold war ideologies" (Yurchak 2005, 9). Those revisionist histories highlight the complex and often unpredictable workings of both official Soviet culture and the independent and underground movements that existed alongside it, as well as the very dynamic culture located in between the "activists" and the "dissidents," as Alexei Yurchak describes them, namely, the diehard supporters of the Soviet state and its diehard opponents.

Now liberated from the reductive binaries of the Cold War, art historians too have been undertaking a profound rethinking of artistic movements, in particular, modernism, which was arguably the most politicized artistic mode in the postwar era and is today studied as "a world phenomenon" (Hayot and Walkowitz 2016, 1). In the West, this rethinking has led to an expansion of the term to include artists such as Derain and Balthus, whose naturalism had previously excluded them (see Perl 2017), while in the Soviet Union, features of modernism have been traced in canonical works of Socialist Realism (see Babich 2017). Moreover, the fact that Soviet artists often looked for new directions and inspiration from their past, in particular, the creative explosion that marked the early post-Revolutionary period, and from the local reception of non-Russian art, should caution against reading acts of artistic resistance or critique in the Soviet Union or in contemporary Russia as a desire for Western political, economic, or cultural forms. While acknowledging its transnational dimension, the politics of queer performance in the field of pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet art must be addressed in its own terms.

Structure of the Volume

The overarching theme of the volume is Russia's engagement with what Whitney Davis theorizes as "queer beauty," referring to the repertoire of homoerotic artistic works from ancient Greece and Rome. Regular engagements with that artistic legacy from the Renaissance through Neoclassical revivals to today underscore the enduring relevance of these ancient Greek and Roman motifs and styles and guarantee the continued circulation of queer beauty in cultures throughout the Occident and beyond. Russia's engagement with queer beauty began in the

eighteenth century, following Peter the Great's turn toward Western Europe, which led to the widespread adoption of Western European artistic forms and subjects and the largescale collecting of Western art. This volume traces an arc stretching from Russia's embrace of Neoclassicism in the eighteenth century to the adoption of a federal law banning homosexual propaganda in 2013.

The first section, titled Theoretical Framings, offers an overview of queer art and of queer approaches to viewing art that challenge a minoritarian understanding of queer art as art made exclusively by and for queer-identified individuals. The chapter explores Russia's engagement with the queer beauty of ancient art, which, while offering opportunities for queer artists and viewers, cannot be reduced to some mimetic rendering of queer desire. Certain logics underlying the production of artistic forms in early modern and modern Europe, such as allegory and citation, offer alternative sources for the production and circulation of nonnormative representations of gender and sexuality, other than mimesis.

The second and largest section of the volume traces pre-Soviet, Soviet, and Post-Soviet engagements with queer beauty, by both artists and art historians. This section opens with Olga Khoroshilova's study of cross-dressing in eighteenth-century elite culture. Documenting its ubiquity in practice while noting the scarcity of direct visual testimony, Khoroshilova notes the mismatch between the reality of the practice and its presence in the visual archive of the time; representations of cross dressing occurred most frequently in mediated form—through allegorical representations. The second chapter by Nikolai Ivanov explores the Russian, then Soviet reception of Aleksandr Ivanov's series of nude paintings of young boys. Informed by the author's diaries and correspondence with friends in which the artist discusses his romantic attachments, Ivanov opens an interpretive space—queer in its ultimate unresolvability—between a critical position predicated on the total autonomy of the artistic realm, which denies (or ignores) the artist's homosexual desire, and a critical position that sees painting as a more or less direct expression of the artist's inner life, according to which Ivanov's nudes would confirm his pederastic orientation. Chapter 3, by Brian James Baer, explores Konstantin Somov's engagement with queer beauty, mediated by eighteenth-century libertine culture and seventeenth-century Commedia dell 'Arte. The chapter demonstrates how a consideration of the artist's queer project of representing nonreproductive sexuality can lead to a reevaluation of his oeuvre, as well as its relationship to modernism. The subject of Gleb Napreenko's chapter explores one of the most popular practitioners of Socialist Realism, Alexander Deineka, whose work was profoundly shaped by the neoclassicism of the Soviet 1930s. Napreenko, however, focuses on the uncanny in Deineka's

wartime works, exposing trauma as a moral and aesthetic problem for Soviet art of the time. In the next chapter, "Carnivalesque Carnality: The Queer Potential of Sergei Eisenstein's Homoerotic Drawings," Ada Ackerman explores the explicitly homoerotic drawings of Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein as part of a broader engagement with queer beauty throughout his cinematic oeuvre and in his memoirs.

Yelena Kalinsky's "Moscow Conceptualism's Erotic Objects" is the first of four chapters to deal with queer beauty in the context of late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture. Kalinsky focuses on Moscow Conceptualist Vadim Zakharov's work, which has never before been discussed from the standpoint of sexuality or gender. The following three chapters, Andrei Khlobystin's "A Russian Schizorevolution? Observations on the New Academy of Fine Arts and Queer Issues in the Late 1980s and Early 1990s," Maria Engström's "Queering Socialist Realism: The Case of Georgy Guryanov," and Helena Goscilo's "The Lure of Implied Transgression as Revolutionary Retrospective: The Illicit as *la Belleza* in Bella Matveeva's Art," look at the work of the New Academy artistic collective founded by Timur Novikov. Their ambivalent—parodic?—relationship to queer beauty and to citations of queer beauty in official Soviet art reflected broader trends in the Russian art world exploring artistic positionings outside the Cold War binaries of official/dissident and East/West. The New Academy artists combined representational styles associated with Socialist Realism with a decorative performativity more typical of the prerevolutionary and immediate postrevolutionary period. Unlike revolutionary art, however, which thoroughly blended art and politics, their radical stylistic eclecticism, along with the strong homoerotic component, appeared as a rejection of "political" art or of the very possibility of political art.

The last two chapters in this section deal with post-Soviet performances of queer beauty. Andrey Shental's chapter "Sexual and Gender Dissent in a Bipolar World," examines two Petersburg Russian artists, Georgy Guryanov and Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe, who recycle, reaccentuate, and reprogram canonical works of art and historical figures in a variety of ways, while Roman Osminkin's study of queer artist Babi Badalov, highlights how Badalov's post-Soviet, diasporic, "non-Russian" queerness informs his art and his understanding of his "place" in the world.

The final section of the volume contains two works of conceptual art with queer thematics, followed by three critical statements by Russian art historians on the current state of queer art and art history in Russia,

ending with three interviews with contemporary queer artists, all addressing notions of translation, understood very broadly as movement between different media, disciplines, and cultures that has the effect of decentering knowledge and queering artistic experience. Georgy Mamedov and Oksana Shatalova's chapter makes use of "archival" materials to create a fictional narrative of a Brezhnev-era project to recapture and reimagine the ideals of revolutionary passion and idealism in the Kollontai Commune in 1970s Frunze. The next chapter by Yevgeniy Fiks reimagines a conference of various Russian and American queers that took place in Moscow and Leningrad in 1991 (and 2015), with 1991 representing a liminal, utopian moment in Russian culture when everything seemed possible, and with 2015 representing something quite different. Told in the voices of the various participants, Fiks highlights the conflicting agendas and overlapping desires that marked the "birth" of a gay rights movement in Russia.

The first of the art historical essays, by Viktoria Smirnova-Maizel, discusses Polina Zaslavskaya's exhibition *Material Evidence*, which consists of a series of illustrations based on investigations into the murders of members of Russia's LGBTQ community. The exhibition questions the basic premises of realism by representing objects that might appear to be the epitome of realism: pieces of evidence. But, of course, material evidence is only the trace of an event that will be subjected to interpretation in court, and the exhibition itself, while documenting the fact of violence against Russian queers, begs the viewer to confront the interpretive question of why this is happening. The next essay, Seroe Fioletovoe's "Battle over Names: Radical Queer on the Russian Activist Art Scene," discusses the radicalization of queer artists under Putin, who seek to reclaim the mantle of revolution in the context of Russia's increasingly "conservative-authoritarian Zeitgeist" (Jonson and Erofeev 2018). Seroe Fioletovoe situates queer artistic activism formally and politically in the broader context of Putin-era Russian radical actionism in public space. Nadia Plungian's "Queer in the Land of the Bolsheviks or the Archeology of Dissent" draws historical (dis)connections between early Soviet artistic and social practices and Putin-era discourse on nonnormative sexuality and gender identity.

This section ends with interviews with three contemporary "queer" artists, filmmaker Masha Godovannaya, writer and photographer Slava Mogutin, and artist Yevgeniy Fiks, each of whom understands the queerness of their work in quite specific ways, informed by their experience growing up in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia and their experience of emigration. Rather than offering a minoritizing view of queer artists, these interviews in fact "disseminate"

the notion of queerness, while also suggesting provocative overlaps and commonalities, underscoring the fact that queerness is shaped by one's life experience and the broader sociopolitical and intellectual context but is not determined by them.

Conclusion

Since the adoption of the "gay propaganda law" in 2013, Russian society has seen an unprecedented increase in public discussion of nonconforming sexuality and gender identities, both in mass media and in cultural production. A new generation of artists addressing queerness in their work has emerged since 2013 in numbers unthinkable in the first two post-Soviet decades: Hagra, Shifra Kazhdan, German Lavrovsky, Yulia Tsvetkova, Nikita Zhukovskiy, Boris Konakov, Alexander Obrazumov, Polina Muzyka, and Dima Fedorov, among others. There are also many works from Russia's past that could be productively reinterpreted through a queer lens. And so, we do not pretend that this volume is in any way comprehensive. Rather, it represents a first step not only in creating a history of queer Russian art and artists but also, following feminist art historian Griselda Pollock, in imagining queer interventions in art histories.[7]

Notes

1 The word sexuality, let alone homosexuality, does not appear in the index of Bown and Taylor's 1993 *Art of the Soviets*, Kivelson and Neuberger's 2008 *Picturing Russia*, or Blakesley's 2016 *The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russian, 1757–1881*. In a recent issue of *Russian Review* dedicated to visual studies, the word queer appears only twice, but those two instances are worth mentioning. One is by Oksana Bulgakowa (2022, 637), author of an important biography of Soviet director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein: "How can we study the transformations of the past and of today without transgressing disciplines, without fearing that we have chosen the 'wrong' subject, and without the habitual reversion to ritual incantations about the specter of ideology? How can we do so by bypassing sociology, psychology, deconstruction, feminism and queer theory, structuralism and post-structuralism, and semiotics?" The other is by Vlad Strukov (2022, 630–631), who uses the term metaphorically: "My colleagues working on visual, media, or digital culture are not fully included in the field. They occupy a position of 'queer scholars,' always working on the margin of discourse and challenging the normative position of the field." This volume attempts to move queerness from the margins to the very center of the study of modern (that is, post-Winckelmann) art and art history.

2 The two English-language volumes dedicated to the topic of eroticism in Russian art, Flegon's 1976 *Eroticism in Russian Art* and Petrova's 2007 *Venus sovietica*, are both "dedicated to the beauty of the female body" (Flegon 1976, 11), but from a distinctly heterosexual male perspective. A notable exception in that regard is the 1997 volume *Muzhskoe telo v istorii kul'tury*, by post-Soviet Russia's leading sexologist, Igor Kon; although not dedicated to Russian art alone, this volume includes a number of queer works by Russian artists.

3 As James Smalls (1996, 23) argues, "In general, there has always been a tendency in dealing with the art of this period to dissipate or derail challenging questions of sexuality into alternate terrains of investigation that do not threaten a status-quo structure of heterosexuality." That same year, however, saw the publication of a special issue of *Art Journal* 55 (4) entitled: *We're Here: Gay and Lesbian in Art and Art History.*

4 A recent Amazon prime series on the life of Leonardo da Vinci, *Amazing Leonardo* (2019), directed by Jesus Garces Lambert and starring straight actor Aidan Turner, from the BBC Poldark series, has been criticized for focusing on a fictional relationship between the artist and a woman, Caterina de Cremona. While the series acknowledges da Vinci's homosexuality, the central role of de Cremona is based on a Romantic myth that was given credence by one modern biographer, Charles Nicholl, who justified his decision with the claim that da Vinci "can't have painted female nudes without experiencing heterosexual love."

5 Such attitudes reflect what James Smalls (1996, 25) describes as "a queer-wary legacy of sidestepping the issue." Our project therefore seeks to contribute to Smalls' call for "a more pointed acknowledgment and earnest reassessment of how and to what end expressions of same-sex sexualities and desire operate in an on visual production" (26).

6 At the same time, we must avoid re-drawing simplistic maps that would separate a "backward" Russia from an "enlightened" West. Indeed, one need only consider the role of U.S. religious groups in formulating the Russian law banning gay propaganda (see Moss 2021), as well as the many laws being formulated and passed today in the U.S. banning transgender individuals from participating in sports according to their chosen gender, to remind oneself of the transnational dimension of contemporary homophobia.

7 As Pollock (1988, 17) put it, "We no longer think of a feminist art history but a feminist intervention in the histories of art."

References

Babich, Roman, ed. 2017. *Modernizm bez manifesta. Tom II. Russkoe iskusstvo 1920–1950*. Moscow: ABCdesign.

Baer, Brian James. 2009. *Other Russias: Homosexuality and the Crisis of Post-Soviet Identity.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Blakesley, Rosalind P. 2016. *The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russia, 1757–1881*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bulgakowa, Oksana. 2022. "The Slavic Soul and Visual Culture Studies: A Marriage of Inconvenience?" *Russian Review* 81 (4): 635–638.

Bullock, Philip Ross. 2018. "'That's Not the Only Reason We Love Him': Tchaikovskii Reception in Post-Soviet Russia." *Slavic Review* 77 (1): 53–76.

Erofeev, Andrei. 2018. "Culture as the Enemy: Contemporary Russian Art under the Authoritarian Regime." In *Russia—Art, Resistance, and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*, edited by Lena Jonson and Andrei Erofeev, 127–133. London: Routledge.

Flegon, Alec. 1976. *Eroticism in Russian Art.* London: Flegon Press.

Hayot, Erik and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. 2016. Introduction to *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*, edited by Eric Hayot and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 1–10. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jagose, Annamarie. 1996. *Queer Theory: An Introduction.* New York: New York University Press.

Jones, Jonathan. 2021. "Leonardo, Ladies' Man: Why Can't We Accept That Da Vinci Was Gay?" *The Guardian* (March 26). https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/mar/26/garków-aidan-turner-amazon-prime-video-series-gay.

Jonson, Lena. 2018a. *Russia—Art, Resistance, and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*, edited by Lena Jonson and Andrei Erofeev. London: Routledge.

Jonson, Lena. 2018b. "The New Conservative Cultural Policy and Visual Art." In *Russia—Art, Resistance, and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*, edited by Lena Jonson and Andrei Erofeev, 48–64. London: Routledge.

Kivelson, Valerie A. and Joan Neuberger. 2008. "Seeing into Being: An Introduction." In *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture*, edited by Valerie A. Kivelson, and Joan Neuberger, 1–11. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kon, Igor. 2003. *Muzhskoe telo v istorii kul'tury.* Moscow: Slovo.

Kondakov, Alexander. 2017. *Prestupleniia na pochve nenavisti protiv LGBT v Rossii.* St. Petersburg: Tsentr Nezavisimykh Sotsiologicheskikh Issledovanii.

Kondakov, Alexander and Evgeny Shtorn. 2021. "Sex, Alcohol, and Soul: Violent Reactions to Coming Out after the 'Gay Propaganda' Law in Russia." In "Illegal Queerness: Russian Culture and Society in the Age of the 'Gay Propaganda' Law." Special issue, *Russian Review* 80 (January): 37–55.

Leigh, Allison. 2020. *Picturing Russia's Men: Masculinity and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Painting.* London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

Meyer, Richard. 2019. Preface to *Art & Queer Culture*, 2nd ed., edited by Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, 7–10. London: Phaidon.

Moss, Kevin. 2021. "Russia's Queer Science, or How Anti-LGBT Scholarship is Made." In "Illegal Queerness: Russian Culture and Society in the Age of the 'Gay Propaganda' Law." Special issue, *Russian Review* 80 (January): 17–36.

Pinkham, Sophia. 2020. "Realists of the Soviet Fantasy." *The New York Review of Books* LXVII (8): 47–49.

Pollock, Griselda. 1988. "Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art." In *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism the Histories of Art.* London: Routledge.

Smalls, James. 1996. "Making Trouble for Art History: The Queer Case of Girodet." *Art Journal* 55(4): 20–27.

Strukov, Vlad. 2022. "On the Margin of Discourse?" *Russian Review* 81(4): 629–631.

Utkin, Roman. 2021. Introduction to "Illegal Queerness: Russian Culture and Society in the Age of the 'Gay Propaganda' Law." Special issue, *Russian Review* 80 (January): 7–16.

Yurchak, Alexei. 2005. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Part One

Theoretical Framings

Chapter 1

Between Semiotics and Phenomenology: The Problem of Queer Beauty

Brian James Baer

"Resolve our doubts, Master," he said, turning toward Leonardo, "is it Bacchus or a hermaphrodite?"

"Neither the one nor the other, Your Majesty," said Leonardo, blushing as if he were guilty of something. "It is John the Baptist."[1]

"John the Baptist? This can't be! Excuse me, but what are you saying?"

This mixture of the sacred and the profane seemed blasphemous to him, but at the same time pleasing. He then decided that he shouldn't lend it any significance: Who knows what can get into the mind of a painter?

—Dmitry Merezhkovskii,
Voskreschie bogi [*Resurrected gods*]
([1900] 1906: 776–777)[2]

A small room; on the sill of the window opening onto the garden, there were flowers: tea roses, begonias, geraniums; over the commode there were photos: [my host] as a child, friends, Michelangelo's David . . .

—Mikhail Kuzmin,
Diary, September 6, 1906