

Digital Émigré: Journals of the Russian Diaspora

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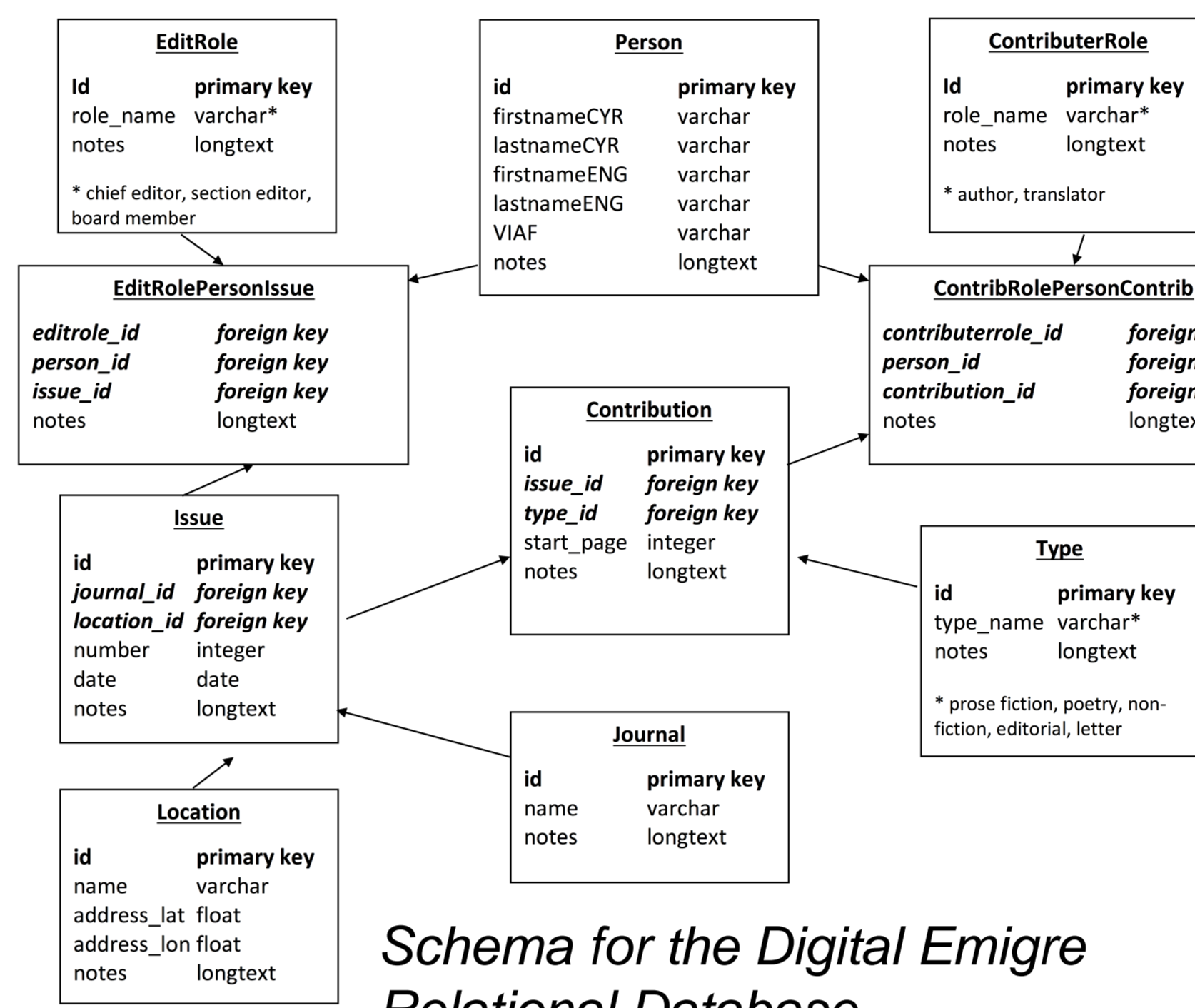
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The **Digital Émigré** is a web-based resource for exploring the periodical literature of the 20th century Russian emigration. As an online repository of Russian journals and magazines it makes accessible a curated textual corpus in an archive accompanied by a database featuring article-level bibliographical information of these journals. Allowing for new kinds of distant reading of the text and the evaluation of genres, authors and their social communities, Digital Émigré encourages new approaches to journals as mass phenomena that involve thousands of authors and are deeply rooted in the intellectual life of the Russian emigration. The project thereby bridges philological approaches, cultural studies enquiry and sociological questions about intellectual networks and communities of artistic production.

Our pilot contains four titles (approximately 3,700 articles from 160 journal issues). This selection provides insight into emigre literary and everyday culture at both the beginning and end of the Cold War, bookending the post-WW2 Russian diaspora experience. Digital Émigré is intended to scale, and we invite Slavists to contribute their data to this project, to foster the emergence of multilingual digital research environments and to advance interoperability between periodical studies projects.

Methods

As a periodical studies project, Digital Émigré provides a consistent corpus with informational depth that allows users to enquire about both individual texts and about the journals as a whole. To allow dynamic analysis of cultural communities and social networks, we authorize names and provide information such as publication location and contributor roles (editors, publishers, authors, etc.).



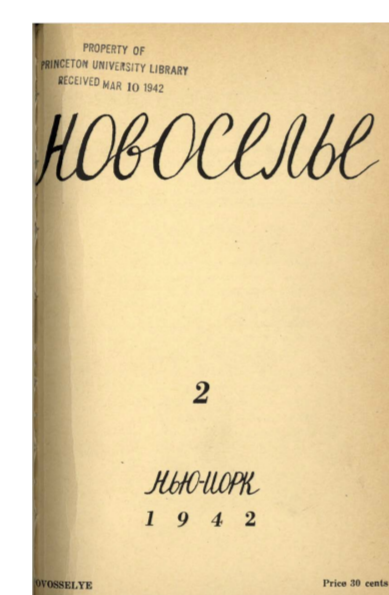
Data collection. Working with journals' tables of content, we used regular expressions to extract, parse and capture issue and article-level metadata. Full text of articles was converted to plain text and XML and stored in our GitHub repository.

Database. The core of Digital Emigre is a relational (MySQL) database that captures information about each title, issue, and article, which includes contributors' and editors' names, article title, start and end pages, and in some cases, genre and keyword.

Research Questions

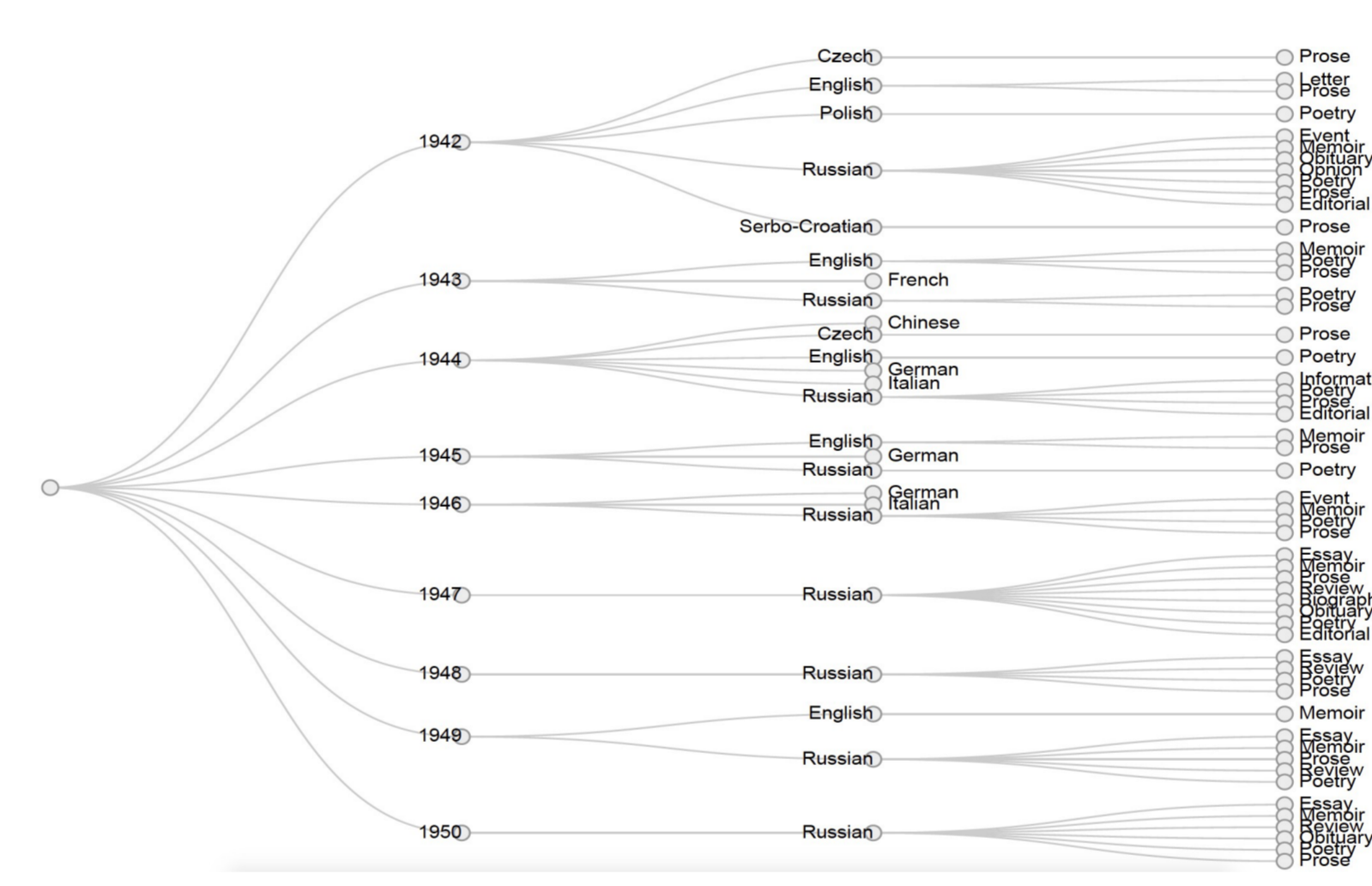
Russian New York. Founded in 1942, *Novyi zhurnal* and *Novosel'e* framed cultural debates in the rise of New York City as a capital of Russian culture abroad. To this day *Novyi zhurnal* ("New Review") continues the tradition of the Russian thick journal, publishing literature alongside with political and social commentary. It represents a model of linguistically conservative and Russian-centric culture. *Novosel'e* ("Housewarming") on the other hand attempted to engage its readership more broadly with issues of American cultural life and social issues.

Soviet Union on the Seine. Founded in Paris in 1974 by a younger group of emigrants, *Kontinent* aimed to unite the intellectual and literary elite of dissident Eastern Europe to speak with one voice against communism. In the late 1970s, the journal famously developed an antagonistic relationship with the journal *Sintaksis*, published by Maria Rozanova and Andrei Sinyavsky. The data corpus of Digital Émigré allows for new insights into the organization of the literary field between these two poles.



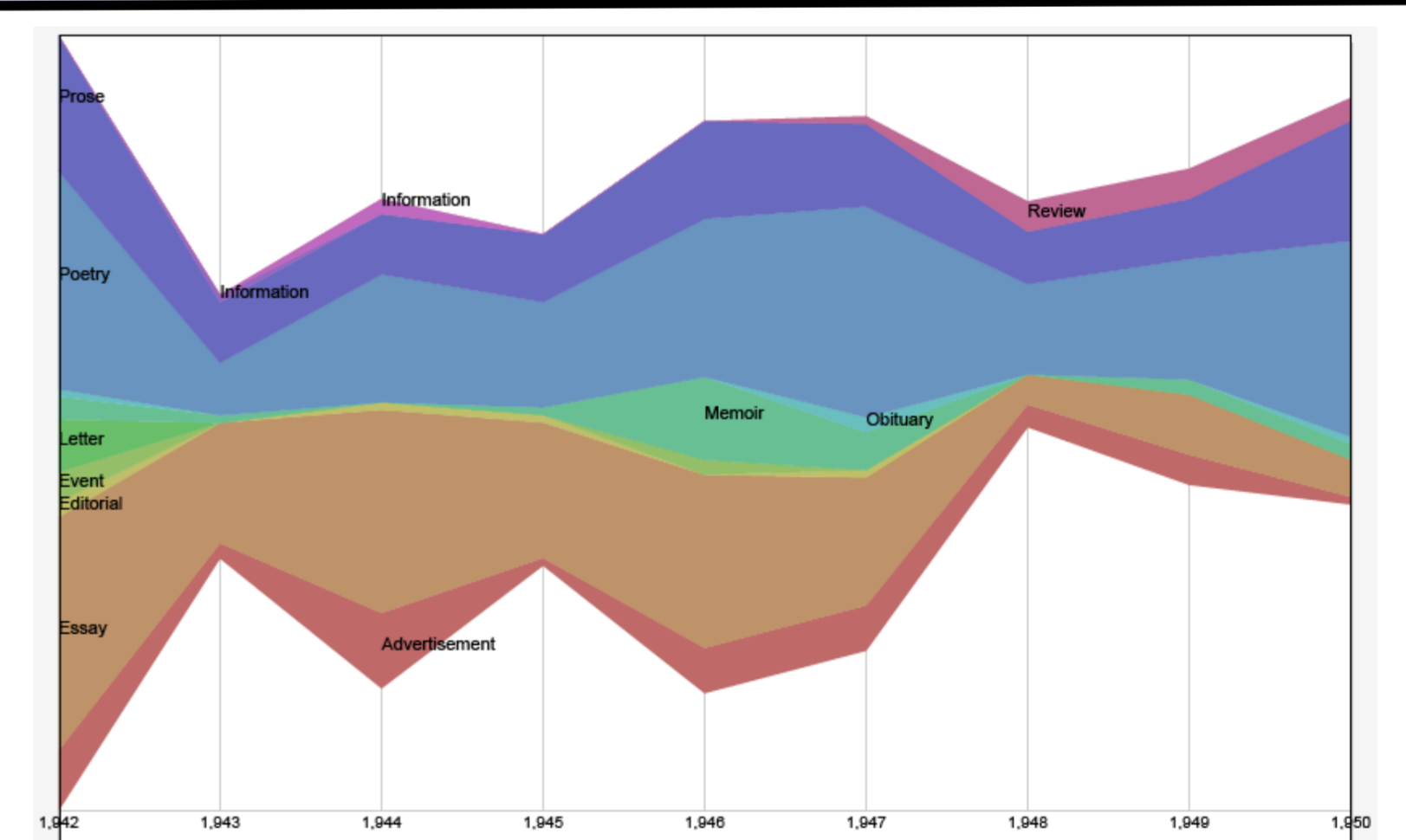
Research Possibilities and Outcomes

Scholars who access this robust data can use various computational methods and visualization tools to gain new insights into Russian periodical culture. The visualizations below are a sample of research outcomes using popular open-source digital humanities programs.



This Reingold-Tilford Tree traces the presence of non-Russian texts throughout the run of *Novosel'e*. It shows how in the early enthusiastic years of publication and through the end of World War II, the editor was concerned not only with Russian, but broader works from various cultures and genres. As the political climate changed in the 1940s, *Novosel'e* narrowed its focus to Russian texts exclusively, losing its initial cultural breadth. Created using Raw: <http://raw.densitydesign.org>

This Streamgraph shows the distribution of genres over the course of *Novosel'e's* run, and indicates in particular the continued emphasis on poetry in the journal, and a decline of the presence of essay (non-fiction). Created using Raw: <http://raw.densitydesign.org>

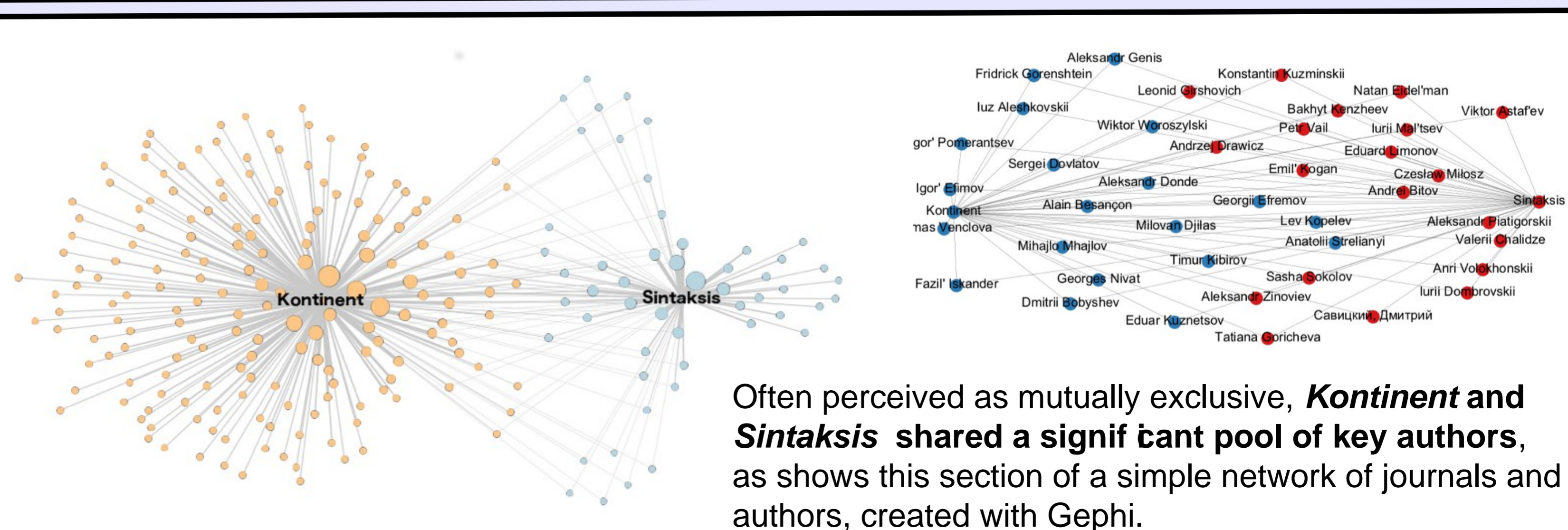
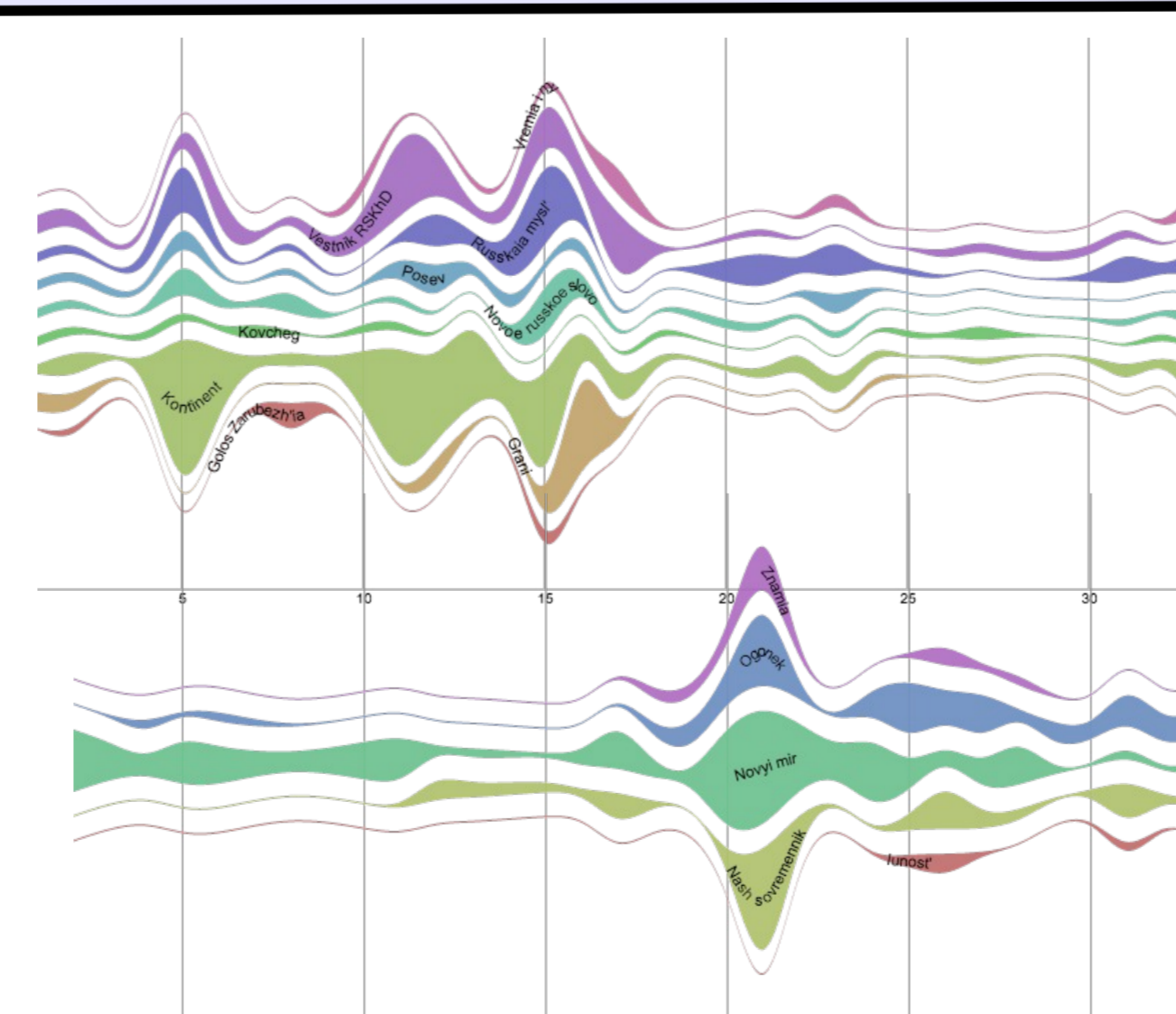


Challenges of Cyrillic Material

Optical character recognition. Abby Fine Reader has provided stable outcomes, but mixed text of Russian and English needed special attention for misrecognized character pairs between Cyrillic and Latin alphabets.

Normalization of bibliographical data, using VIAF extension for Google Refine. Double entries in VIAF from various library transliteration systems, missing entries and extensive use of pseudonyms required numerous editorial decisions. For *Sintaksis*, pseudonyms were consciously not merged with biographical personalities to highlight editorial work as artistic practice and play with social roles.

Frequency of references to other emigre (top) and Soviet (bottom) periodicals in the journal *Sintaksis*. Although *Sintaksis* was created in an attempt to evade the dominance of *Kontinent* (green), the latter remains the dominant force within the political and aesthetic debates represented in *Sintaksis*. Issue 20/1987 marks a turning point in the history of the emigre journal, which with the arrival of the perestroika years abruptly turns its attention to the official periodicals of the Soviet Union. Created using Raw: <http://raw.densitydesign.org>



Often perceived as mutually exclusive, *Kontinent* and *Sintaksis* shared a significant pool of key authors, as shows this section of a simple network of journals and authors, created with Gephi.



Contact us!

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