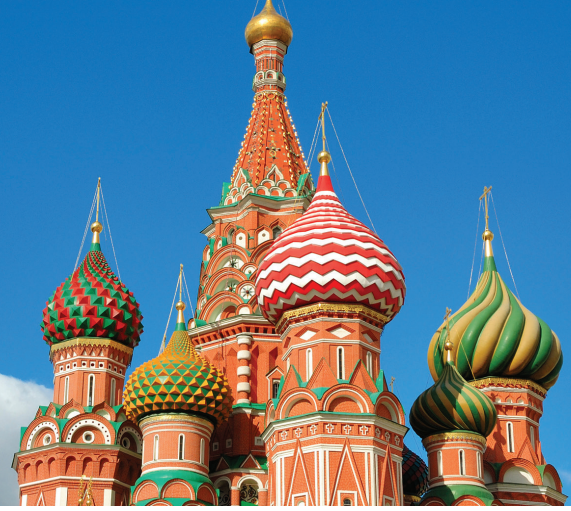


REESNews



Spring 2019 • Volume 6

Greetings from the Director

by Ian MacMillen

GREETINGS STUDENTS, ALUMS, STAFF, FACULTY, COLLEAGUES, AND FRIENDS OF REES! 2018-19 brought another busy lineup of events for Russian, REES, and OCREECAS. We concluded our Revolutions Series, which kicked off in 2016-17 with reflections on Russia's February Revolution of 1917 and on mid-20th-century communist coups around the world and culminated in last year's Fall 2017 10-event commemoration of the October Revolution; this past fall bookended the 2.5-year series with a panel and film screening marking the 50th anniversary of the Soviet occupation of Prague and the subsequent changes in Czechoslovak official and unofficial cultures. We also held several events touching on contemporary Russia and other states in the region, including a panel on misunderstandings of contemporary Russian politics, talks on environmental challenges in Central Asia and the Russian Far East, and presentations by several of our alums returning from OCREECAS internships in various parts of Russia and in Riga,

Latvia. These events with visiting speakers complemented a host of activities organized by Oberlin students, faculty, and staff, from language tables and movie nights to the well-loved tradition of creating a Lady Maslenitsa effigy and burning it on Tappan Square.

This year brings several goodbyes, and with them a bittersweet mix of pride, wistfulness, nostalgia, and excitement for our students' and colleagues' new opportunities. We are graduating another great group of Russian and REES majors and minors and look forward to seeing where their next ventures take them. We received an especially robust and well-developed set of OCREECAS internship applications from these and other students who studied with our faculty, and are proud to be sending Gillian Smith '19 (REES and psychology) to Tver, Russia, to teach English at Intercontact; Hannah Tyburski '19 (Russian) to Irkutsk, Russia, for translation and trail work in advancement of the Great Baikal Trail; Roman Broszkowski '19 (REES minor



2019 Maslenitsa celebration. Photo by Michael Hartman.

Director’s Note, cont.

and politics major) to Warsaw, Poland, to write for the journal *Political Critique*; and Julia Ingoglia ’19 (Russian minor and environmental studies major) to Signaghi, Georgia, to intern with Pheasant’s Tears Winery. Our Russian Fulbright Teaching Assistant, Julia Podstavniagina, concludes her teaching, service, and studies at Oberlin at the end of the spring term, and we send her our thanks and best wishes.

We have several departures on the faculty and staff side, as well. After 33 years on faculty in the Russian department, Arlene Forman is retiring in June. We wish her the very best and are pleased to feature some of her reflections and accomplishments in an article that follows to which she and OCREECAS student assistant Peri Levin contributed. Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian History Chris Stolarski is concluding his appointment in the history department after four years here. We hope that his next opportunity brings him as much success as he found in his

well-loved courses (and that Oberlin is soon able to renew the Russian history line on a permanent basis).

In January 2019, Liliana Milkova left her post as curator of academic programs at Oberlin’s Allen Memorial Art Museum after more than nine years to accept the position of Nolen Curator of Education and Academic Affairs at the Yale University Art Gallery. At the end of the academic year, I will be departing as well to join her in New Haven. I am grateful to Oberlin College, OCREECAS, and my colleagues for the opportunity to teach and to support Russian, East European, and Central Asian programming at Oberlin, first as a postdoc from 2012 to 2014 and now as director since 2016. I look forward to joining you in hearing about the future endeavors and accomplishments of our strong Russian and Russian & East European Studies programs in future iterations of this newsletter.

Department Events



FROM TIGERS TO OWLS

Jonathan Slaght, the Russia and Northeast Asia coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society, presented a talk in April 2018 titled “From Tigers to Owls: Endangered Species Conservation in the Russian Far East.” As Slaght noted, the “southern fringe of the Russian Far East is a poorly known region and one of the most biologically rich temperate forest zones in the world. Here, northern species such as brown bears and Eurasian lynx overlap with subtropical species such as Amur tigers and Asiatic black bears.” For more than 20 years, Slaght has worked on conservation issues in the Russian Far East. His richly illustrated talk overviewed the landscape, the species found there, and ongoing conservation projects “to protect the region’s iconic wildlife, including endangered Amur tigers and Blakiston’s fish owls.” The lecture was well attended, filling Hallock Auditorium. Slaght also visited Tom Newlin’s Wild Russia class as part of his visit.

“WHY DO WE GET RUSSIA WRONG? A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THREE RUSSIA SPECIALISTS”

Oberlin had the honor on September 27 of hosting three highly regarded specialists of Russia: Keith Gessen, founding editor of the literary magazine *n+1* and an instructor at the Columbia University School of Journalism; Michael Kimmage ’95, professor and chair of history at the Catholic University of America; and Olga Oliker, senior adviser and director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Each panelist has a different background and perspective on Russia-U.S. relations—Gessen and Oliker having been born in Russia—whereas Kimmage grew up in the U.S. The panelists began their dialogue with overviews of their childhoods during the Cold War. Kimmage relayed an amusing anecdote

Top: Jonathan Slaght holding an owl in the Russian Far East. Photo courtesy Jonathan C Slaght, Wildlife Conservation Society. Bottom: Olga Oliker, Michael Kimmage ’95, and Keith Gessen address questions from the audience. Photo by Ian MacMillen.

Department Events, cont.

about Cold War awareness stemming from his growing up next to an air force base with a B52 bomber outside. This bomber, however, was decorated with a Santa Claus during the winter. Gessen brought interesting perspective from his college years, visiting Russia in 1995 and finding it much more American than he imagined. He described a feeling of “American triumphalism” when visiting Moscow, and being glad that Russians were “getting with the program” of capitalism. Oliker similarly stated her youthful perspective on the Soviet Union, as a place to flee from, as that was the experience she had as a child. She outlined the importance of looking at Russia both from Russian and American perspectives in order to be able to understand why Russia-U.S. relations continue to fall short of ideal.

The panelists conveyed the complexity of the relationship between Russia and the U.S., much of which may be attributed to the deeply different perspectives each nation brings to the conflict. Gessen raised the point that while Americans may view their state’s interventions as failed attempts at providing assistance, a Russian perspective sees American interference as a malevolent act. Oliker was in agreement, adding that while the U.S. has had many “enemies” cycling in and out of importance, it has remained the central face of enmity for decades in Russia. Kimmage also highlighted the State Department’s desires for Russia to come to their senses, but failure to predict Russian actions. He noted a continuing decline of Cold War anti-Russian culture within the State Department, simultaneous to the influence of older politicians who are still entrenched in a 20th-century mindset on the new generation of politicians. The three panelists brought unique and nuanced perspectives on the ongoing problems of Russian and American relations.

—Peri Levin

VINYL GENERATION

In November 2018 the REES department hosted a screening of the 2016 documentary *Vinyl Generation*, directed by Keith Jones and produced by Jeffrey Brown. The film outlines the underground music world in 1980s Prague in a post-Prague Spring, Soviet-influenced climate. The event featured a reception for students, professors, and visiting guests sponsored by the Cleveland Chapter of the Czechoslovak Society of Science and Arts; a panel on Prague’s 1968 Soviet occupation; and a post-screening Q&A session with Jeffrey Brown.

The panel, moderated by OCREECAS director Ian MacMillen, included Oberlin Conservatory Professor of Violin Milan Vitek, president of the Cleveland Chapter of the Czechoslovak Society of Science and Arts Paul Burik, and Professor of Russian Arlene



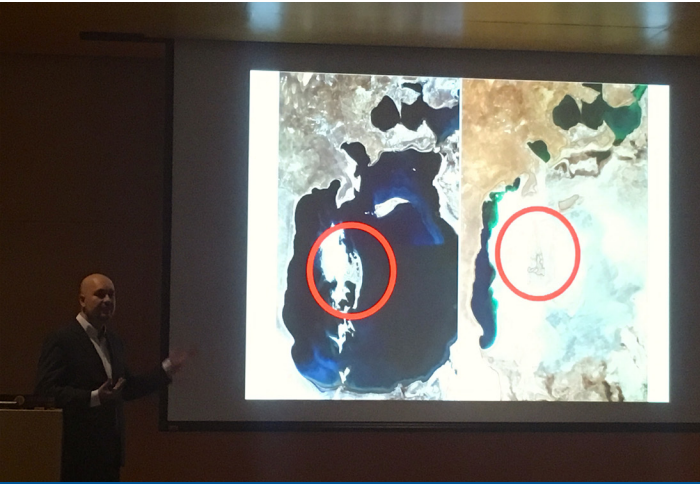
Forman. Each participant shed light on their experience in 1968 when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. Burik reflected on the events of August 20, 1968, when he heard his neighbors screaming that tanks were rolling into Prague and to turn on the radio. Vitek recalled a 4 a.m. phone call alerting him to the Soviet presence and his subsequent flight out of Czechoslovakia to Copenhagen to play with the Danish Symphony Orchestra. Forman provided a Western perspective, as she was beginning to study Russian in New York when the protests broke out, and she discussed the media coverage as viewed by Americans.

After a quick word, producer Jeffrey Brown, who studied abroad in Prague as an undergrad when he began making films, presented the documentary. The film, which focused on unofficial culture in the decades after the Soviet incursion, particularly in the 1980s, touched on the illicit trade of records on Prague streets and the tension with mass amounts of undercover police attempting to intercept Western commodities and influences. Small cultural entities such as music and community were seen as answers to social and political questions and uncertainties. These small acts of dissonance led to the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

—Peri Levin

NIKITA MAKARENKO: WRITER IN RESIDENCE

In the second module of the Spring 2019 semester, Uzbek journalist and producer Nikita Makarenko served as an OCREECAS writer-in-residence. In addition to pursuing his own research, he taught a course on Russian propaganda and the phenomenon of “fake news” permeating American media. Makarenko is also in the research process of creating a scholarly work discussing the use of nazi propaganda in central Asian countries, a topic he has found to be grossly under-investigated, and used his time at Oberlin to pursue the project. Makarenko has undoubtedly been busy; his time at Oberlin inspired him to write a theatrical drama titled *Tomorrow*, which will be staged



Nikita Makarenko lectures on the Aral Sea. Photo by Ian MacMillen.

Department Events, *cont.*

in Tashkent in September. Makarenko gave two public talks at Oberlin. His first discussed the tragedies of the now largely dry Aral Sea, a topic he is intimately familiar with as he was the first journalist to reach the shore and the former island of Vozrozhdeniya, an infamous site for USSR biological weap-

ons. Makarenko's second talk addressed the Ilkhom theater in Tashkent, the first independent theater in the USSR, which opened in 1976. Makarenko said that he was honored to be teaching at Oberlin, where he was surrounded by compelling professors and students.
—*Peri Levin*

Student and Alumni

RIGA WINTER TERM

Eight Oberlin College students embarked on an academic adventure in Riga, Latvia, during winter term in January, a trip led and organized by Russian faculty member Maia Solovieva. The students were varied in age, major, and past experience with Eastern European studies, and each had a different personal or academic desire to be fulfilled by this trip, ranging from intensive Russian language study to a personal connection to family history. The students participated in 36 hours of intensive Russian studies, in addition to taking a course on post-Soviet history, politics, and personal connections and completing their own individual research projects. The projects were an opportunity to dive deeper into what was personally compelling about Riga and Eastern Europe. Topics included: Latvian cultural identity during and after Soviet rule, relations between the Russian and Latvian languages in Riga, history and traditions involving mathematics, the Latvian art technique known as "harsh style," the Latvian and Russian Orthodox Churches, gender equality, Jewish history, and fallacies and misconceptions of Eastern European dynamics.
—*Peri Levin*

WALKER GRIGGS '17 IN SIBERIA

Oberlin hosted 2017 Oberlin alumnus and recent OCREECAS intern Walker Griggs, who presented an OCREECAS talk in March on his unique experience living in Siberia last summer. He addressed the overarching question right away: Why Siberia? Griggs described his desires to test his fortitude, experience nature, and perhaps even enjoy a moment of transcendentalism. Griggs engaged in multiple projects and travelled to many locations within vast Siberia, spending much of his time working with the Great Baikal Trail, an environmental NGO focused on trail-building around Lake Baikal. He lived on the Davsha settlement deep within a stringently protected Russian national park, and worked 9 to 5 creating trails with only hand tools such as pick-axes. Griggs completely immersed himself in his surroundings, camping the entire time and bathing almost exclusively in natural bodies of water. Despite the imminent threat of bears and the extreme vastness of his locale, Griggs developed a Russian fervor for nature protection and was able to gain insight into the element of spirituality that permeates the natural environment of Siberia.
—*Peri Levin*



Students in Riga, Latvia, for Winter Term 2019. Photos courtesy Clare Sheedy '22.

Students and Alumni, *cont.*

ISAK SAAF '18 IN RIGA

Isak Saaf returned to Oberlin to discuss his OCREECAS internship in Riga, Latvia. Saaf worked at the Museum of the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust in Latvia and assisted Oberlin in its new Riga winter term trip by teaching a Russian class and helping participants navigate Riga. He did translating work for the museum, which was run by a rabbi who almost single-handedly maintains the institution. The museum has exhibits and also works to publish Holocaust memoirs in Russian, Latvian, and English as well as in German and Hebrew. Saaf designed a tour of the old Ghetto for English speakers, which is now in the process of being translated into Hebrew. Riga's Jewish Ghetto was established in 1941 and housed Jewish people from Latvia and elsewhere before the vast majority were murdered in the Holocaust. With the shadow of Soviet occupation casting darkness on the 20th century for Latvians, the horrors of the Holocaust often go unrecognized. Saaf was able to assist in making these histories both more present and accessible.

Saaf writes of the experience: "OCREECAS sent me, graciously, to Riga—to the Museum of the Riga Ghetto, somewhere that despite the kindness and genuine joy of the people working there, is devoted to dealing with the weight of history and spreading it when possible to others. I became focused on the period of Latvian history up to and during the Holocaust. Latvia is a small country, and when I left the museum, and then the city to return to the small village I was living in, every single building, neighborhood, piece of land had its own history and relevance. Something has happened on every piece of land there. It's a banal thing to say when we're speaking universally, but here the something is the deepest cruelty of the 20th century. All that said, it's good to do these things and to study history. It's good to know a little better how the processes of the evil right are working, and what can be done about them, and to have done some small and useful thing in order to commemorate great tragedy."

LILY POSNER '17 IN ST. PETERSBURG

In October, recent OCREECAS intern Lillian Posner '17 returned to Oberlin to discuss her time in St. Petersburg on her OCREECAS grant. Posner gave a refreshingly candid overview of her time as an American in Russia, teaching English in a Russian public high school: Presidential Physics and Mathematics lycee No. 239. This was her third time travelling in Russia after a semester abroad and honors research in her senior year. Posner discussed her dynamics with Russian students, both from Petersburg and from surrounding provinces. Much of her work was with the more disadvantaged provincial students who had grown up with fewer academic opportunities than their urban counterparts. She touched on the perceived dangers of Russia from an American perspective, including those perceived by her mother, who called regularly to request Posner return home. The tensions between East and West were visible,



Isak Saaf '18 in Riga. Photo courtesy of Isak.



Katherine Dye '17 and Lillian Posner '17 in St. Petersburg. Photo courtesy of Lillian.

especially when teachers stopped inviting Posner and her fellow OCREECAS scholar Katherine Dye '17 to class for fear that they were influencing the children. Posner's advice to succeed as an American in Russia is simple: be respectful, but shameless, and do whatever it takes to speak Russian.
—*Peri Levin*

KATHERINE DYE '17 IN ST. PETERSBURG

I've been fortunate in my life to have traveled widely and to have spent a fair amount of time abroad. I can say with confidence that I had never been anywhere quite like Russia. From my brief

Students and Alumni, cont.

time there, what struck me most was how fully itself it is. I hesitate in making generalizations, especially given my position as a white American visiting the country for only a brief few months, but I felt as if, in Russia, the stakes on life are higher than in the United States. And I mean this in many different ways. There is a sense of existential unpredictability there that I’ve rarely encountered elsewhere. This existential unpredictability made all aspects of life seem more vivid and intense and was, for me, sometimes exhilarating and sometimes anxiety-provoking. Even the smallest and most banal aspects of daily life were fascinating to me. And some of these things were specific to Petersburg, since, of course, Petersburg is a unique city even within Russia. These could be as banal as the differences between Russian and American grocery stores, such as the fact that at our local Дикси (Diksi), there was an entire wall devoted to pickles and another devoted to chocolate, but seemingly only one variety of cheese. Or that I watched people regularly walk across the frozen Neva on foot in the middle of February. Or even the fact that you could get a dish at a popular Chinese restaurant chain that was advertised as “Mao Zedong’s favorite.” I was blown away by many of the typical tourist sites and experiences that one looks forward to as an American student studying Russian, such as the “onion domes” on churches, monuments to a whole host of Russian writers and artists, and Georgian cuisine.

Lily and I taught English at Presidential Physics-Mathematics Lyceum 239, a high school specializing in math and physics, which is renowned throughout Russia and draws students from different parts of the country, though the bulk of the student body is from around Petersburg. The school is located in two buildings, one of them a former mansion, which had belonged to a prince before the revolution, off of a courtyard on Kirochnaya ulitsa just a stone’s throw away from the (former) American consulate on Furshtatskaya. The students at the Lyceum are all extremely intelligent, driven, and high-achieving in their chosen fields. I think they initially regarded us with a combination of interest and suspicion, which was not an uncommon reaction. However, they quickly started to warm to us and ask us questions about the English language and life in America, and even for practical advice about getting into American universities.

PAUL KLEIMAN '18 IN KOLOMNA

For my OCREECAS internship (January-March 2019), I traveled to Kolomna, Russia, a small city located approximately three hours by train to the southeast of Moscow. Here I completed several creative writing projects based on the subject of my former honors thesis, the Soviet writer and dissident Venedikt Erofeev (1938-1990).

At first glance, the small city of Kolomna appears to be a fairly ordinary one. Located at the confluence of the Kolomenka, Moscow, and (by extension, if you count the canal built under



Paul Kleiman '18 outside of the former Kolomenskii Institute in which Erofeev studied. Photo courtesy of Paul.

Stalin) Volga rivers, it is the home of nearly 150,000 Russian citizens employed in different fields and industries one might expect common to this area (e.g. locomotive manufacturing). However, in the city’s center is a wide array of remarkable, if little-known tourist attractions: Navigator Museum, which runs tours through the city’s historical 16th-century Kremlin and “Posad” area; Kalach and Pastila museums, which relate the city’s history in the production of these grain and confectionery products; and, most importantly to me, the museum and art-commune “Erofeev and Others,” which records the place in which Erofeev lived when he was a student in this city (ca. 1961-1962) and the legacy of Soviet dissident and communal life in the city.

I became interested in these museums when I was in Kolomna for the first time last fall. I was intrigued by their collective attempt to foster a cultural and historical image of the city through touristic ventures. Not surprisingly, this aspect of for-profit storytelling (and often “mythologization”), which is particularly important to post-Soviet Russia’s hypercapitalist recent history in light of its Soviet past, became the second aspect of my honors thesis, and I was later invited back to collaborate with the Art-Commune this winter. While interning with the Art-Commune, I was able to synthesize this previous research while taking it in a new, creative direction. I wrote a short story in Russian based on Erofeev’s *Moscow-Petushki*; translated his essay “Vasily Rozanov Through the Eyes of an Eccentric” into English; attended a performance of his play *Valpurgis Night*; and am now writing a play that I hope to translate into Russian.

All of these were new creative opportunities available to me after obtaining my BA at Oberlin. I presented them to the art commune on March 29; I hope they will serve me throughout my career. I am very thankful to the OCREECAS internship for the chance to do this.

Faculty and Staff

ARLENE FORMAN RETIRES



After an incredible 33 years, beloved Oberlin professor Arlene Forman is embarking on retirement. OCREECAS student assistant Peri Levin '20 spoke with her recently about her experiences and work here these past several decades.

When Forman came to Oberlin from Tufts in 1986, she had no idea that she would play a major role in making the Russian and Russian & East European Studies programs what they are today. By January 1987, she was already exploring Russia with her students. She brought her skills in the teaching of Russian language, as well as in cinema and culture.

At Oberlin, she taught freshman seminars, the last two of which have been working to create an annotated e-book as a companion for *Second Hand Time* by Svetlana Alexievich. Forman has been involved in many collaborative projects, including an Ohio Five Colleges project, compiling audio clips of interviews in Russian, and a long-standing relationship with the University of Pittsburgh’s Russian Film Symposium and Slavic Languages & Literatures Department. Forman has enjoyed seeing Oberlin’s department evolve to bring Russian Fulbright teaching assistants and grow to include studies

of Eastern Europe as a whole. She hopes that the Russian department will maintain a level of passion that can rival her love for Russian disco.

Forman also shared some of her recent accomplishments: After a summer working with coauthor Boris Roginsky in St. Petersburg and Narva-Joesuu, Arlene Forman focused her teaching in fall 2018 on contemporary Russian culture both in her first-year seminar Re-Envisioning Russia and in The Cult(ure) of Putin. Through an examination of different forms of media (film, TV, advertising) and literary and journalistic texts, students in the latter course explored official and unofficial visions of the Russian president and the Russia he has created. In spring 2019, Forman and Tom Newlin team-taught the new course Russian Foodways, in which students investigate the historical, social, and cultural roles that food and drink have played in the tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. Weekly tastings of dishes prepared by the class help familiarize students with a cuisine and culinary tradition formerly unknown to them. Forman’s latest review for *Kinokultura*, the journal for New Russian Cinema, appeared in Volume 62 (Winter 2018). Titled “The Bird: A Feather in her Cap,” the review examines the debut film of fledgling director Kseniia Baskakova.

After more than three decades at Oberlin, Forman retires in June. She looks forward to working with Roginsky on new projects, first and foremost a translation of the prose of writer Boris Ivanov (1928-2015).



STEVE CROWLEY chairs Oberlin’s Department of Politics. In June he will be a fellow at the Aleksanteri Institute at the University of Helsinki, working to complete a book project tentatively titled “Stability Amid Stagnation: The Politics of Labor and Deindustrialization in Putin’s Russia.”

SHEILA MIYOSHI JAGER received an International Security & Foreign Policy grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation to complete her book *The Other Great Game: The Opening of Korea and the Birth of Modern East Asia* (under contract with Harvard University Press). This “big picture” narrative of the geopolitical context surrounding Korea’s “opening” in the late 19th century will provide deep historical understanding of Northeast Asia’s (China, Japan, Russia and Korea) present situation, as well as over the long term. She will take a year leave in 2020 to complete this project. She also contributed a chapter titled “Competing Empires in Asia” in a new four-volume reference work, *The Cambridge History of America and the World*



Isak Saaf who is assisting her research on the Russian portion of *The Other Great Game*. After her leave in 2020, she plans to offer courses on the Russian Far East and the Russo-Japanese War.

IAN MACMILLEN has a chapter titled “Tambura Music, Flags, and the Deterritorialization of Rituals at Croatian-American Weddings” coming out this summer in the edited collection *Music, Weddings, and Diaspora* (Indiana University Press). In fall 2019, his book *Playing It Dangerously: Tambura Music, Race, and Affective Block in Croatia and Its Intimates* will be published by Wesleyan University Press. He is meanwhile working on a

Faculty and Staff, *cont.*

second book project, tentatively entitled *Forgetting Out Loud*, which examines the complicity of music and other sounds in erasing historical memory and trauma in Eastern Europe.

TOM NEWLIN began another stint as chair of Russian and Russian & East European Studies. In his spare time he is working on various scholarly projects: a book about the 19th-century origins of Russian ecological thinking; another book titled *Tolstoy: A Natural History*; and an anthology of translated Russian primary texts about the natural world, coedited with Jane Costlow (Bates College) and Tom Hodge (Wellesley College).

TIM SCHOLL gave the keynote address “Bringing Beauty Back” on February 19 at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. The symposium was held in conjunction with the Washington National Ballet’s reconstruction of the ballet *Sleeping Beauty*. Scholl was involved in the first reconstruction of the ballet in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1999.

CHRIS STOLARSKI presented the paper “Visual Evidence, Written Truth: Prosecuting Crime in the Late-Imperial Illustrated Press,” which examined how editors narrated police procedures in magazines. His essay “Marketing the Socialist



Ian MacMillen, Tim Scholl, and Chris Stolarski

Experiment: Photojournalism and the Soviet Union in the Interwar Years,” on Marxist theory and socialist photography in the 1920s and 1930s, will be published in the edited collection *Capitalism and the Camera* (Duke University Press) later this year. Another article, on Soviet print and advertising culture, will appear this year in the collection *Media and Communication from Lenin to Stalin* (1917-1941) (Palgrave Macmillan). This summer, Chris will travel to Russia and Finland on a Powers Travel Grant to finish up his research and acquire image rights for his upcoming book, *The Performance of Modern Life: Press Photography and Public Identity in Russia, 1900-1924*.