



Spring 2004

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SOVIET CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

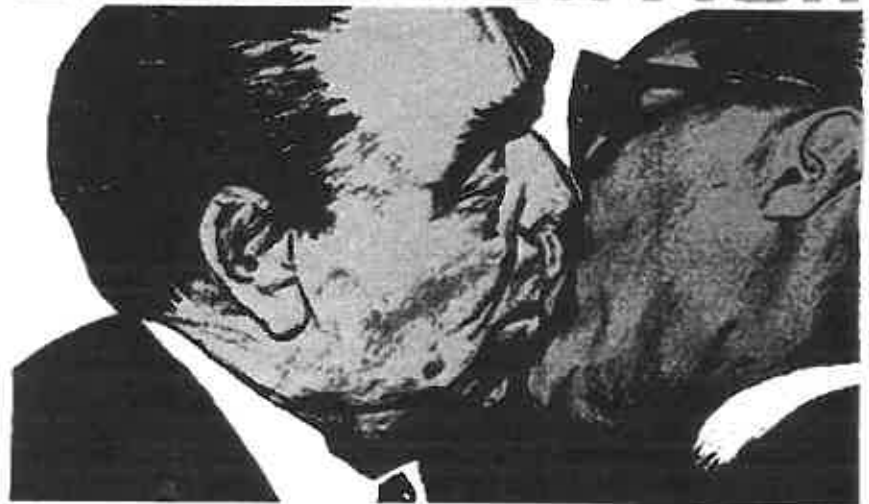


Image by Sam Withrow

At a time when discourses of globalization focus almost entirely on the Westernization of the world, it is easy to forget that another attempt at cultural homogenization took place quite recently. Soviet cultural globalization, now described as the largest deliberately-designed modern experiment in globalization, dramatically changed the cultural and social landscape of the former Soviet Bloc. Oberlin students, faculty, and community members gathered to address this phenomenon in "Soviet Cultural Globalization," a short course featuring a Saturday symposium, March 10-15. The course included lectures, films, and discussions with Oberlin faculty and a distinguished international panel of speakers.

The class began Wednesday night with a lecture entitled "Engineers of Human Souls, an Introduction to the Cultural Politics of the Stalin Era" by Arlene Forman, Associate Professor of Russian at Oberlin College. Forman was able to

sketch Soviet culture by describing and displaying images of cultural improvement projects with unrealized goals, such as the planned construction of a great workers monument in Moscow. Although it was never built, the monument represented many of the ideals promoted by the Soviet state, as did postage stamps commemorating the "development" of a blimp that, in fact, traveled only on envelopes.

Professor Forman's lecture encouraged examination of the ideals and goals behind socialist cultural programs and how ideology was represented in physical forms. Attendees were challenged to find a meaning—what were the ideals that the Stalinist regime tried to promulgate, and what do they say about Russia's relation to the world as a whole? From this vantage point, one could compare and contrast the U.S.A.



Walter Hixson

and U.S.S.R., connections that Forman highlighted, perhaps most cleverly in her description of the ambitious Stalin as the "ultimate Texan." Thursday night featured a screening and discussion of the 1936 film *Circus*, led by Elena Monastireva-Ansdell, Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian at Oberlin College. The film tells the story of the romance between two circus acrobats, a model Soviet cosmonaut, and an American woman, exiled from her own country for having a child from an interracial affair. The discussion focused on the film's numerous attempts to show the Soviet Union as a home not just for Russians, but all nationalities and races, evidenced most clearly by the film's sing-along finale, in which stereotypical representatives of different ethnicities come together to defeat an evil German and comfort the baby.

Four lectures on Saturday analyzed the discourse surrounding cultural production during the Soviet period. Greg Castillo, Assistant Professor at the University of Miami School of Architecture, began the day with "The Architecture of a Master Narrative: Berlin's Socialist Realist Reconstruction," which examined the Cold War as a cultural war evidenced through the intentionally different architectural styles of East and West. Castillo presented this "symbiotic relationship" as an interplay between U.S. High

Modernism and Socialist Realism, in which both sides defined themselves by reacting to the other. The staging ground for this architectural chess match was a divided Berlin, specifically two buildings: the United States' international style Marshall Hall; and the Soviet Union's neoclassical embassy building. Both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. selected German architects for ideological retraining, which allowed each nation to colonize its half of the city skyline. Castillo focused particularly upon the architect Herman Henselmann, who worked in two quite different styles over the course of his career. The lecture was not only important as a concrete example of how the two super-powers implanted themselves in a foreign culture, but also in teaching that neither side was completely independent from the other, and that some things could not be separated by a mere wall.

The theme of interaction between Modernism and Soviet Realism continued in "Seeing the 'West' through the 'East': Soviet Viewers meet Polish Modernism at the Art Exhibition of Socialist Countries, Moscow 1958-59," presented by Susan E. Reid, Lecturer in Russian Visual Arts, Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Sheffield. Reid illustrated how this art exhibit, which gathered contemporary works from a variety of recently united Eastern European nations, evoked Socialist Realism in a world sense. Despite the more modern style of the Polish artists, the works were displayed alongside the others. As evidenced by the comments in the guest book, the Polish exhibit sparked controversy among the attendees of the exhibition. By focusing on the interplay of different styles within the greater Soviet system, Reid was



Danielle Fosler-Lussier

able to dispel the idea that cultural elements in the U.S.S.R. were the result of a one-way flow out of Russia and into the satellites, even in spite of the Communist Party's efforts to homogenize cultural and artistic production. Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Visiting Assistant Professor of Music History at Ohio State University, presented "Crosstalk: East-West Dialogue about Hungarian Music, 1950-56." Fosler-Lussier focused on the political implications of Bela Bartok's music in the East-West debate after the composer's death in 1945. Bartok was controversial for many reasons, especially because of the time he spent composing while in America, and was thus considered too western.

However, the greater threat came from the music itself; Socialist Realist music was supposed to be simple, melodious folk music, the opposite of Bartok's



György Peteri

often atonal, dissonant and complex compositions. By playing samples of different pieces, Foster-Lussier demonstrated how the society inserted meanings into Bartok's works, and how those meanings affected the interplay between Soviet Socialism and Hungarian Nationalism.

The final lecture was "The Nylon Curtain—The Dialectics of Globalist Assertiveness and Isolationist Defensives in the Experience of Communist Eastern Europe," by György Peteri, Professor of History and Director of the Program on East European Cultures & Societies at Trondheim University. Peteri described the globalism of the Soviet Union as ambiguous, due to the continual fluctuation between isolation-oriented and integration-oriented government policies; both offensive and defensive tactics were used to deal with the feelings of superiority and inferiority towards "the Other" – the U.S.A. and the western world as a whole. Peteri aimed at explaining how Socialism and Capitalism were not wholly separate entities, and that neither would have existed in the form it did without the opposition of the other.

Following Peteri's lecture, there was a roundtable discussion moderated by Susan Larsen, Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian Language and Literature at Oberlin, featuring all of the day's speakers as well as Walter Hixson, Professor of History at the University of Akron, who delivered his lecture on American foreign policy on Friday night, all of whom gladly answered the audience's questions about their lectures and other topics.

The class met Sunday to view another film, The Story of a Young Couple, made in 1952 by the East German DEFA film studio, and to participate in a discussion led by Elizabeth Hamilton, Assistant Professor of German at Oberlin. The movie tells the story of a married couple, both actors, who find their beliefs carrying them to opposite sides of a divided Berlin. Professor Hamilton, an expert in East German cinema, helped students understand the cultural elements of the film that make it one of DEFA's most important works.

Veljko Vujacic, Associate Professor of Sociology at Oberlin, ended the course with a discussion of Russia from Peter the Great to the present day focusing on the westernization of Russian culture. Professor Vujacic provided a historical backbone to the other lectures, helping students to understand the Soviet Era as part of a much longer, incredibly vivid national saga. He also discussed those cultural traditions and themes that are the marrow of Russia, but avoided emphasis on the idea of a singular national consciousness, exploring instead the variety of notions of Russian-ness held in myriad groups and eras. Vujacic also shed light on certain key similarities between Russia and the United States, such as the shared symbolism of the French Revolution that greatly affected the political histories of both nations.

"Soviet Cultural Globalization" helped Oberlin students and community members to better understand a significant portion of world history by avoiding a singular viewpoint and a 'U.S. vs. them' mentality. In reflecting on the pitfalls of one notable attempt to globalize world culture, students, faculty, and guests could also gain fresh perspectives on the perceived Westernization of world culture today.

~ Brian Koplou '05

Upcoming Events

Russian Media Short Course --

Dr. Beth Knobel, the Moscow Bureau chief for CBS News, will offer a course on recent developments and trends in the Russian media next year. The course will take place during the week of October 25 - 31, 2004.

Studying the Mafia --

Dr. Vadim Volkov of the European University in St. Petersburg will teach a course on comparative mafia in the Spring of 2005. Dr. Volkov will be examining the similarities and differences between organized crime in Russia, Italy, and America.

Post-Soviet Conceptual Art --

Timed to coincide with an exhibition of works by contemporary Russian artist Ilya Kabakov at the Cleveland Museum of Art, OCREECAS will co-sponsor a short course on post-soviet conceptual art with the Art Department. This course will be taught in the Spring of 2005.

Post-Communism as a Cultural Problem: Russia in the 1990s

During the spring semester of 2004, Serguei Oushakine of Columbia University offered a mini course at Oberlin College on Post-Soviet cultural developments in Russia. Professor Oushakine discusses some of the main ideas of the course in the following interview.

Brianna Tindall: First, I wanted to ask you about the course you taught this semester, what subjects it addressed, and how you designed it.



Serguei Oushakine: My main idea was to have a review of what has happened in Russia in the 1990s from a cultural point of view. In other words, how the political and economic changes were reflected in cultural practices as well as how these changes were shaped by already existing cultural traditions.

This approach, of course, poses a number of problems, and one of them has to do with the issue of selection: which trend or cultural practice should one take as valid (or not valid) as a representation of the Russian culture of the 1990s? What counts as a "dominant" cultural tradition? How do we know that it is a dominant one? There are different ways to do that, but I tended to use materials that are widely present in Russian society, which means a certain leaning toward popular culture.

Another problem with the designing of this course was the issue of translation. I had to use examples that were either translated or subtitled in English for the students because I couldn't rely on Russian speaking ability. And that produced a lot of constraints. I am amazed to find out how little of the contemporary Russian culture is available in English: very few films have been subtitled, and very few new texts have been translated. No wonder that for many people Russian culture is forever associated with The Bolshoi, Dostoevskii and Tolstoy. I tried to present a quite diverse picture, but I don't think it was as diverse as it could and should have been.

In terms of topics, again I tried to look at very different movements, events, and processes that are happening in Russia now and were happening there in the 1990s: issues of violence, crime, and corruption, but also new problems and new practices that arise in the process of modification of traditional patterns of gender and age-specific behavior. I tried to introduce students not only to a political or, say, a sociological analysis of these problems, but also to show them that art – be it literature or cinema – also is concerned with the same problems. In other words, that there is no single way to think about the period of the post-soviet transition in Russia. That is to say, each particular approach – ethnography, discursive analysis,

political interpretations, sociological studies, film criticism – brings with it a different way of looking at the same problems, but also a different way of solving these problems. If you want me to frame it broadly, I could say that the course was an attempt to look at various practices of symbolization of post-communist changes, to understand the logic behind different frameworks through which changes are articulated in the Russian society.

BT: So, does the post-communist situation present something that is entirely unique and sends anthropological research in new directions, or is it similar to other transitional situations?

SO: I think, to some extent it is unique and I think this uniqueness has to do with a peculiar trajectory that a post-communist society has to go through. For example, if you take the socialist revolution in Russia in 1917 and the transition from state capitalism to state socialism that followed after the revolution, then you could see that this transition was conceived as a linear movement from one thing to the next. It was never a smooth movement and often it was associated with "jumps" and various zigzags, but nonetheless it was conceived as a progressive, i.e. directed to the future, movement.

Now, the situation now is quite different. It isn't a linear progression at all – even in terms of ideology. There is a huge difficulty that Russian society is experiencing in its attempts to explain new goals and orientations. What should they be? The values of the Russian Empire? The traditions of a brief period of the parliamentary monarchy in Russia? Or should they be the values and goals of contemporary Western society? In other words, is Russia going to mimic or replicate the logic of a capitalist society? And if so, what should the country do with its socialist past? In the early 1990s the general trend was – let's get rid of the socialist past and let's become Europe over night! It did not work: NATO quickly expanded, Eastern Europe suddenly became closed for Russians (you have to apply for visas now), etc. All that showed clearly – the idea of joining Europe is more a political slogan, a nice pacifying fantasy rather than a practical policy. As a result, there was an expected reaction, i.e. an attempt to look for one's own traditions and sources of survival. That means an increased attention to one's own history and – very often – increased nationalist feelings and intolerance.

There is a different aspect of this socialist legacy as well. During the socialist period there was, of course, a very strong social security system with a ramified network of social institutions: kindergartens, schools, hospitals, universities – everything was free. Yet, everything worked to produce a certain type of social collectivity, with a strong emphasis on group activity that downplayed individual initiative. What is the place for these traditions and skills of collectivity in a capitalist society with its totally opposite premise that values initiative, individuality, and personal activity? How do you reconcile your personal history with new social situations? It is not easy when you are 20 year old, but how do you deal with this, when you spent 40-50-60 years of your life under the Soviet regime?

I think post-communism is very interesting theoretically and practically because you see clashing tendencies and processes and logics coming together. You see how people inhabit or embody these contradictory tendencies at the same time, and how they try to sort out where these tendencies can co-exist and where they cannot.

For anthropologists, I think it's an interesting issue because in the process of this negotiation between conflicting tendencies a lot of daily practices are changing. I think for political scientists post-communism is rather predictable because they can compare it to Latin America or southern Europe where you have transitions from authoritarian governments to democracies and there are certain tendencies that are replicated. With daily routines, though, it is different; people come from different backgrounds, they use opportunities differently; yet there was a very common backdrop against which everyone is judged.

You know, I recently read in a Russian newspaper a new version of an old – I guess, it is an American saying: "If you are so clever why you are so poor?". So, in Russia people ask now: "If you are so honest why you are so rich?" In other words, becoming wealthy is suspicious. Not only because it *is* often suspicious, but also because there is no cultural tradition of the positive attitude to an individual success and to personal wealth. Soviet collectivity also meant a collectivity in experiencing shortages. And how do you construct, then, a market society that values competition if the very fundamental element of this competition – success – is taken with suspicion?

So you have very differently directed tendencies that are developing at the same time. And I think for anthropologists, that is for people who go and watch other people living their everyday life, it is a very interesting situation because you have a unique chance to see how new norms and rules and regulations are emerging right now. This doesn't happen very often; luckily we do not get to watch very frequently a whole society getting into production of core issues and values. Though, given the recent development in Afghanistan and Iraq, I might be completely wrong and we will be seeing how more and more societies facing a tremendous task of a complete self-reconstruction.

BT: Do you think it is possible to look at Russia as a whole entity and see these processes as encompassing the whole nation, or do you think that there are very regionalized or localized processes that are different from each other?

SO: I think you can talk about certain processes in relation to Russia as a country or a culture. That was the dominant trend for along time in post-soviet studies. Now I think there is a trend to look at Russia as a sort of conglomerate of often non-corresponding or autonomous trends. They could be based on class, region, and ethnicity, sometimes gender, education, or life-style. And the more time scholars spend in Russia the more detailed each of them gets. For example, I do my fieldwork in a Russian province in Siberia, and I can see clear differences between the Moscow area and the Altai region where I work. And it's not just about money or having access to an international

circulation of ideas and people, it's also about different cultural legacies that people had, it also is about different ways of relating to each other that they learned in a place where mobility is rather low.

In a way this is a very obvious issue, but I think in Russia, given the size of it, the importance of regional specificities and cultural varieties is probably higher than, say in Belarus or Kazakhstan. True, differences between the urban and the rural cultures exist everywhere, and the Midwest is just as different from the San-Francisco Bay area as Altai is different from St. Petersburg. Yet in Russia you do get very different urban cultures that have been cultivated for centuries. For instance, you go to Tomsk or Novosibirsk in Siberia, and you experience different urban cultures and it helps to know that Tomsk was often used as a place to which intellectual dissidents were exiled from universities in the European part of Russia. That produced a great university, by the way. Or that Novosibirsk had a very different historical trajectory – the government created a special academic enclave there in which scholars were "allowed" to experiment with certain ideas – ranged from nuclear physics to economic sociology. And this skill of experimenting produced an interesting impact on the city and the region in general – it is one of the most vibrant cities behind the Urals. The more I study Russia, the more I think about the role of periphery in this country, about the role of province and people from province – as opposed to the role of the two capitals in Russian history. Because people who work and live there are not bound by structures and institutions that are so prominent and visible in Moscow. To some extent they are freer to do what they want to do because they are not constrained by the already established standards. Today I showed a Russian band that sang a Beatles song. This is a very interesting example, because the usually trajectory for a provincial group even 5-7 years ago would be like this: there's a band in Vladivostok that eventually would have to move to Moscow because this is where all the institutions, money, newspapers, etc. are. The group would have to spend 5-7 years and a lot of money to get established and to clear a space for itself. But with this band, it was very different; they just moved to London from Vladivostok, produced several CDs and then came to Moscow. Through London. This kind of trajectory is becoming more and more common. Instead of fighting ossified institutions and structures people find it easier just to by-pass Moscow. And you can do it now. There are more than one points of entry now.

BT: How does this course relate to your current work?

SO: Very closely. I have written quite a few articles on the issues we dealt with. For instance, the issue of aphasia – it means inability to express yourself – it very important for my attempt to theorize changes in Russia. To put it briefly, I look at the repertoires of symbolic forms that are available to Russians to explain, to produce meaning in their current situation and I suggest that sometimes these discursive possibilities are very limited, and that's why people tend to rely on the symbolic mechanisms we used in the Soviet time. It's a general thesis that in order to explain what is

happening in the post-soviet situation you have to use soviet language. That's what I'm interested in, and that's what I tried to convey in the course.

Also, I did some work on New Russians and how young people in provincial Russia perceive them in particular and how people in general struggle with making sense of wealth, money, and the current prominence of these financial indicators in their lives. You see how people go through an intensive crash-course about the role of money in society. Not that during the Soviet period money was totally irrelevant, but it was social connections that mattered. And now suddenly monetized daily life, professional life, personal relations become extremely monetized, and you need to come up with some ways of explaining for yourself this sudden change, and you need to learn how to build these changes into your already existing life patterns. I also wrote a lot on gender in Russian; I am currently working on interviews with the mothers who lost their sons in Afganistan and Chechnya. In other words, all the topics we discussed in the course were connected in different ways to my current research.

BT: In the course we talked a lot about Russia being in a liminal or transitional stage. Do you see any of these norms or cultural practices developing into something more permanent, or do you think Russia is still in transition?

SO: I think this solidification of changes happens more on a local level, sociologically speaking. You do get institutions that produce their own policies and they try to uphold those rules and regulations, they try to tell people how to behave in this new environment and what is expected from them. Especially among the younger generation that is involved in these new sectors of the economy, you do get the impression that some new norms are emerging. We could discuss whether these norms are what we want, but this is a different matter.

But then again the regional factor kicks in —go outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, to the places where market economies are not that prominent, where people have to rely on trade, barter, and dachas (in other words, a sort of feudalization of society), to the places where life is basically about survival. When people get to the survival level, they are less preoccupied with creating new norms and regulations. So, I do see some positive signs, but at the same time I see negative ones as well. To put it briefly, the transition is not over yet. It is still pretty liminal over there.

BT: The last thing I wanted to ask you about was how you think your course was received here, and your impressions of Oberlin College.

SO: I must say that it's hard to figure out how the course was received. I think the students were intelligent and capable of doing complicated analysis and arguing complex issues. But often I was puzzled by their "terrorism of silence" so to speak; quite a few people weren't as active as they could have been in the class. Maybe I was expected to perform the whole show by myself? Maybe there is some kind of local student tradition I am not aware of? You know,

we watched a Russian film called "*The country of the deaf*", so once in a while I felt like I was in the "country" of the mute.... I do not know. Personally, I do not like lecturing, I think it is much less productive than a discussion. But any discussion needs at least two people. And for sure, there were more than two able and ready to discuss in the class. But in general I had a very good time teaching. I enjoyed it a lot and it was interesting to go through all the materials and try to explain it to people who didn't have as much knowledge about it as I had. And I also I found my colleagues and the staff here to be very helpful and nice. I think it's a very interesting department and the college is very interesting too.

A Letter From Moscow

Greg Walters '03 received an OCREECAS internship in July, 2003, to work as a journalist in Russia for The Moscow Times and The St. Petersburg Times. His internship now over, he has been hired as a staff writer for The Moscow Times. He plans to stay in Russia for the foreseeable future.

A little after 2 a.m. on a snowy night in mid-December, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy stormed into his office and announced he that wanted to change the Russian constitution. The election was over, and early results showed his Liberal Democratic Party in second place behind Putin's United Russia. I pushed into the room already stuffed with journalists, shoved past a camera crew from Germany, and put my tape recorder right under the nose of Russia's most infamous ultra-nationalist politician. And then, waiting for Zhirinovskiy to start, I paused for a moment to reflect that OCREECAS had brought me a lot farther in my first year after graduation than I had ever imagined it might. back in those early days when I was stumbling over the Cyrillic alphabet and hadn't even begun to realize what lay in store for me with the grammar.

Since July 14th, 2003, I've been living and working as a journalist in Moscow and St. Petersburg, thanks to an OCREECAS internship. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my professors who helped me prepare for it, and to OCREECAS as a whole for making the funds available. As the term of the stipend draws to a close this month, I've been offered a job by *The Moscow Times* as a staff writer. I couldn't have done it without your help.

When I walked into the office of *The St. Petersburg Times* last July, I had already spent a few months as an intern at an English language weekly in Budapest, Hungary, and had been Editor-in-Chief of *The Oberlin Review* my senior year. But I had never worked in Russia.

Following Zhirinovskiy around Moscow on the day of the federal parliamentary elections was a case in point. At 9 a.m. on December 8th I stopped by the *Times* office to get Zhirinovskiy's schedule, then whizzed across town to watch him cast his vote in a school turned voting station.

Zhirinovskiy, who publicly advocated polygamy as solution to Russia's demographic problems and once got into a fist-fight with a female duma deputy, was already in character.

After casting his ballot, Zhirinovskiy turned to address the assembled media in an impromptu press conference. But when an election observer asked him to please step away from the ballot box, Zhirinovskiy demanded the man's identification. Chaos erupted. Zhirinovskiy's guards started pushing journalists and onlookers back, while Zhirinovskiy started bellowing at just about everyone. It looked like a fist-fight was brewing.

"Show me your documents!" Zhirinovskiy yelled at the hapless official. "What gives you the right to get involved in this election!?"

The crowd surged forward in confusion and Zhirinovskiy turned his wrath on a middle-aged woman who had been yelling at him to calm down.

"You're crazy! Show me a note from your psychiatrist!"

I ran back to the office to write this much down for the next day's paper. Then, closer to nightfall, I camped out in Zhirinovskiy's campaign headquarters to wait for his post-election press conference. Holed up in the smoke-filled, windowless press room, I spent the next four hours trying to stay sober while Zhirinovskiy's press agents plied me with their boss's very own brand of vodka. I told them I had an article to write. They told me the vodka would help. I couldn't convince them otherwise.

Finally, Zhirinovskiy appeared. He declared that he would use his mandate to amend the constitution to give Putin more time to govern. "The four-year term is the American term, and it's not acceptable," he said.

Nevermind that Zhirinovskiy then announced he would run against Putin in the spring. He was casting himself as the loyal opposition — the very, very loyal opposition.

By the time he finished, it was too late to get his trade into the paper, but it could go in the next day's issue. I trudged through the snow to Chistyprudny Boulevard and caught a cab back to my apartment. After a sixteen-hour day, I was tired, but pleased. It certainly hadn't been boring.

Greg can be reached at gregory.walters@world.oberlin.edu, and appreciates getting mail from anyone in the Oberlin community with an interest in Russia.

Summer in Siberia

Two Months of Translation, Trail-building, and Fish



Brianna Tindall '04 in the Republic of Buryatia

"You're going where?!" I can't count how many times I heard this question while trying to explain my summer plans. This first response was usually quickly followed by "Isn't it really cold there?" or, in a very confused tone, "Why??" For most people, Siberia meant a bleak landscape dotted with gulags, a frozen wasteland where bears roam the streets unchallenged. I suppose the idea that I would be willing to spend two months in Siberia away from friends and family was nearly incomprehensible. But the more I investigated the internship offered by OCREECAS, the more convinced I became that this was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

The internship is based in Ulan-Ude, the capital city of the Republic of Buryatia, a semi-autonomous republic located within Russia's borders directly to the north of Mongolia. While there, I would intern with two non-profit environmental organizations. The city is located near the shore of Lake Baikal, Russia's largest lake and also the deepest lake in the world. Thousands of endemic plants and animals populate the lake and the region around it, including the world's only species of freshwater seal (I was fortunate to see these interesting creatures during my trip). Almost 50% of the population is Buryat, an ethnic group closely related to Mongols, and Buryatia is known as the center of Russian Buddhism. The Buryats speak mostly Russian, but many still speak their native language and celebrate



A national park on the shore of the lake

Buryat traditions and rituals. This is an incredibly interesting, unique place, and the more I planned for my trip, the more excited I became.

The experience exceeded all of my expectations. The lake and surrounding area were breathtaking, and the people were the friendliest, most relaxed people I have encountered in Russia. I worked for the majority of the summer with the Federation for Mountaineering and Ecotourism, the Ulan-Ude tour company that is spearheading the Great Baikal Trail (GBT) project. The GBT is a gargantuan project involving a number of different Russian and American non-profit organizations and the Russian Department of Parks and Reserves. The goal of the project is to build a system of trails around the lake (with the assistance of local and international volunteers) in order to encourage ecotourism as an economically viable alternative to more damaging development. This summer was the project's first season of construction, and I was surprised to learn when I arrived that I was its very first international volunteer!

During my internship with the Federation for Mountaineering and Ecotourism, I played a number of different roles. For my first week, I traveled to various proposed trail locations with a representative from the American Bureau of Land Management, Desna Young. Ms. Young gave advice on how best to develop already existing trails, and, as she spoke no Russian, it was my job to translate conversations with the Russian project managers and park officials. This was a very interesting and challenging experience, especially since I had to learn all sorts of new trail-building vocabulary (not something often taught in Russian class).



A park ranger preparing lunch

After a week of translation work, I joined a group of Russian and international volunteers to begin work on a section of the trail. A group of about 25 first-year Russian university students from Ulan-Ude volunteered to gain practical experience for their major, Management of Protected Wilderness Areas, along with four foreign volunteers (two other Americans, one Englishman, and myself). We were renovating an already existing trail that went about 5 km into a wildlife reserve. We camped out at the trailhead, about a 40-minute walk from the nearest village, which was truly a village; it had only two stores and one main street. I loved the trail building -- the weather was beautiful, we were working outside, and I was finally getting to do something physical. All the

Russians looked at me strangely, however, whenever I picked up a tool or did any heavy lifting of dirt or rocks. Apparently, young women aren't expected to do this sort of work in Russia. It wasn't only the guys that were puzzled; the girls were bewildered as well. "What are you lifting heavy things for?" one asked me, "We have boys." By the end of the trip, however, most of the team members had begun to actively participate in even the most demanding work.

During my trail-building adventure, I was also able to conduct a number of interviews for my honors project, and through these I learned how people of my age in Russia view the environment. During our time together, we celebrated both the 4th of July and the 70th anniversary of the Republic of Buryatia in grand style. I enjoyed myself so much that even though I was extremely filthy and more than a little tired of fish soup and kasha, I was very sad to leave.

Upon my return to the city, I was put to work translating documents for both the Federation for Mountaineering and Ecotourism and the Buryat Center for Environmental Expertise. The latter organization was headed by Galina Anosova, my host when I was in town. Galina was such a wonderful host that I was very glad to repay her by translating a grant application for her organization. The FME also assisted me in setting up interviews with local environmental non-profit organizations. This hospitality was far from uncommon - throughout my entire trip, nearly everyone I met and worked with was helpful and accommodating. Though I was technically on my own in a land halfway across the world, I never felt alone or abandoned. By the end of my trip to Siberia, I was already fantasizing about my return.



Sunset on Lake Baikal

~ Brianna Tindall '04

Public Health in Russia



*Katie Scodova '03 and Maggie Ryan '03
in Moscow this fall*

I've always wondered what it was about Russia that fascinated me. It wasn't like I had a lot of time on my hands while I was in college to fill with hours of Russian drills; my German major and pre-med concentration kept me busy enough. But there was something that kept bringing me back to Russian, something that made me cram up my schedule to fit in any possible Russian class I could take. I knew there was a reason I was studying this language and culture, and I was just hopeful that someday I would figure out what exactly it was. When I accepted a three-month internship in Moscow with AIDS Infoshare, I knew that this was an opportunity I could not pass up. Not only would I be able to learn more about the global medical world, but I would finally have a chance to figure out why I was in love with Mother Russia.

I began my internship at AIDS Infoshare in September and started my job by translating a magazine for the organization's 10-year anniversary. This translation was a fantastic way for me to learn about the organization and all of the programs that it runs. On paper, AIDS Infoshare is an incredible organization. It heads a project for HIV-positive female prisoners, publishes two magazines that are distributed free-of-charge (one for specialists and one for people living with HIV), operates a telephone hotline for questions relating to HIV/AIDS and other STDs and runs a bi-weekly outreach program for the sex-workers in the area, bringing them pamphlets about STDs, HIV, violence and their rights. Aids Infoshare was also a primary factor in the creation of the organization DOM, a coalition of 11 NGOs working in connection with HIV/AIDS throughout Russia. I was so excited to work with this organization and to see these projects first-hand. After spending the first two weeks translating the magazine, I anxiously awaited the return of the director, as she would be the one assigning me additional work. Unfortunately, she proved to be a very busy woman, and I could hardly get a minute of time from her.

I spent the next month frantically trying to pull

programs together for the BBC, Shell Oil, and MTV. I noticed frustration when talking with the English-speaking representatives of these groups--most of them had been trying to get in contact with AIDS Infoshare for some time, but their emails and phone calls had not been returned. I had thankfully become more confident with my Russian by this time, and I was able to convey to the people in the office what the other organizations needed from us.

Everyone was busy, it seemed- although how busy I couldn't tell. It seemed to me that they spent a lot of time smoking, drinking coffee and telling jokes that I could never quite understand. I ran around talking with various people in the different departments of the office and tried to gather as much information as I could throughout the month. Unfortunately, every one of these projects fell through--AIDS Infoshare simply did not get back to Shell after I gathered the information,



the visa ran out for the woman at the BBC, so she couldn't come to Russia after all, and no one was willing to talk with MTV about AIDS because HIV is still a relatively taboo subject in Russia. Needless to say, I felt the discouraging weight of Russia heavily upon my shoulders after so much work and absolutely no results.

Katie Scodova and Maggie Ryan

The lack of work at AIDS Infoshare and the disappointment that accompanied this were nonetheless counteracted by my incredible experiences outside of the office--both around the city and at home. This is a country like no other in the world. It is a far cry from the western world, yet not as dilapidated and desolate as third world countries. I had to separate myself from much of the poverty surrounding me, because I knew that I could easily get wrapped up in it and not be able to enjoy a minute of my time there. The hardship I witnessed on a daily basis allowed me to more fully appreciate the fact that many people have to expend all of their energy trying to survive, and this experience has spurred me towards my goal of practicing medicine in underprivileged areas.

Not only were my city adventures amazing, but my roommate, Zhanna, was one of the most remarkable contributors to my experience. Zhanna is a student in her late 20s who showed me a whole different side of Russian life. Zhanna took me shopping where the Russian girls shopped. She took me bowling at "Cosmic Lanes." She showed me that when there are a few shots left in a bottle of vodka, it must be finished -- at any cost. She, like my impression of all of Russia, was strange, challenging and a bit unapproachable at first. But by the end of my trip, I appreciated her and knew I would miss her dearly.

And so, I ask myself: "Why do I love this country and its people, who push me around and seem so apathetic towards everything?" Frankly, I don't know that spending 10 years here could explain why I love Russia. Maybe it's because Red Square is flanked by the United Colors of Benetton or because the Soviet Exhibition Park has a McDonald's greeting you at the entrance. Maybe it's the sight of hideous, Brezhnev-era skyscrapers with an old onion-dome church standing in front. Or maybe it's watching the diplomat-cars race down cleared streets while the Russians stand around silently, staring at the ground as usual. I suppose that I will never know exactly why Russia appeals to me. Maybe it is simply the intrigue of it all -- a world of opposites that in some strange way keeps us all interested and wanting to understand it better.

The three months in Moscow made an impression on me that will last a lifetime -- the poverty and the destitution in direct contrast to the flashing lights of the casinos and grandeur of the city. The history of the city and the constant reminders of communism, purges, poverty, and corruption will probably always intrigue and fascinate me.

~ Maggie Ryan '03

Interethnic Cooperation In Moscow

The Center for Interethnic Cooperation is a human rights organization that strives to protect the rights of Russia's diverse ethnic minorities. It does this by educating leaders from ethnic minority communities, law enforcement agencies, and governmental officials through seminars, press conferences, and workshops. The Center's work focuses primarily on Russia's ethnic communities, but because of its vast network of ethnic groups throughout Russia, the Center has a unique advantage in monitoring human rights violations against members of non-Russian communities. During my four months at the Center

for Interethnic Cooperation, I had the opportunity to learn more about the problems surrounding interethnic relations and what was being done to solve them.

Shortly after I arrived in Moscow, I traveled to a conference in Perm, organized in coordination with the Council of Europe. It was held at an isolated sanatorium on the Kama River, a nice change of scenery from the crowds of Moscow. A representative from the Council of Europe and a prominent law professor from London were the key speakers. They discussed the universal legal rights guaranteed to all ethnic minority groups as defined by the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minority Rights. The laws codified by the Framework Convention require that all member states recognize minority cultures and protect their right to maintain and further develop their culture. Periodically, each government that belongs to the Council of Europe must supply reports on the situation in their countries. The Framework Convention also allows non-governmental bodies to present alternative reports when they find any disparities in their country's



Katie with co-workers

official report. The key speakers described how the ethnic association leaders could take part in the monitoring process and develop alternative reports.

During the conference, each ethnic association leader spoke about conditions in their respective regions. Several regions reported healthy relations between the local ethnic groups, and authority figures, while others could report no such relationship. Most leaders spoke of problems dealing with governmental officials and law enforcement agencies. Ironically, the Russian Constitution stipulates strict laws for protecting its minority groups very similar to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minority Rights, but very little is being done to enforce it.

I did not fully understand the severity of racial and ethnic discrimination in Russia until I read the most recent alternative report to the Council of Europe. The report criticized the government for failing to protect immigrants, foreign nationals, and non-Russian citizens of the Russian Federation from violent crimes and discrimination. It cited examples when government officials were directly responsible for atrocities committed against ethnic minority groups

or when their negligent behavior resulted in abuse. Nonetheless, one would be hard pressed to find any indications in the Russian media that violence and discrimination against ethnic minority groups are real and persistent problems in Russia.

My main project at the Center was to reformat and maintain the English version of its website. I also translated and edited texts, which were later added to the site or distributed to various international human rights organizations. There was a lot more translating required than I had expected, but it was my primary source of information about ethnic minority rights and the Center's activities. In my spare time at the office, I kept up with Russian current events (as reported from foreign online newspapers) or discussed life experiences with the other employees.

I spent most of my non-working hours with Maggie Ryan, another OCREECAS intern. We completely immersed ourselves in Moscow's culture by exploring museums, sampling new restaurants, traveling to remote outdoor markets, attending ballets and operas, or just wandering. I fell in love with Moscow two years ago during a brief visit, and it is still one of my favorite places to be. I am very happy to have had this opportunity to live and work in Moscow, and I am looking forward to my next chance to visit.

~ Katie Scodova '03



Katie makes shashlik with other members of the Center

Summer 2004 OCREECAS Internships

OCREECAS will sponsor five internships this summer, creating new partnerships with Russian organizations and continuing established ones. The Summer 2004 interns come from a variety of academic backgrounds and will be working in two countries in Eastern Europe.

Both Kathleen Davis ('05), majoring in Russian and Eastern European Studies and Creative Writing, and Lisa Strid ('05), majoring in Russian and Creative Writing, will intern for the St. Petersburg Times, an

English-language newspaper based in St. Petersburg, Russia. During their eight-week internships, both students will be copy-editing articles, and they will also have the opportunity to write feature articles for the newspaper.

Studio Art and Cinema Studies Major Elizabeth Gallardo ('05) will extend her stay in Budapest, Hungary after the completion of her spring semester studies by interning for three months at the Hungarian National Museum. Elizabeth will be working in the Historical Painting Department, which handles all of the country's historically motivated art from the fifteenth century to the present. Elizabeth will also be assisting with the curation of the exhibition celebrating Hungary's entrance to the European Union and continuing her study of Hungarian.

Russian and English Major Cameron Wiggins ('04) will be interning for six weeks at the Dostoevsky Literary Memorial Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Cameron will assist the director with the translation of scholarly materials and information for the Museum's website as well as helping to update the Museum's collection of contemporary literary criticism on the works of Dostoevsky.

Brooke Shuman ('06), majoring in Russian and Politics, will be interning with the Federation for Mountaineering and Ecotourism in Ulan-Ude, Russia. Brooke will be working on the Great Baikal Trail Project, a large-scale ecological campaign to build 1200 miles of trails around the shores of Lake Baikal, the deepest freshwater lake in the world. In addition to working on the trail, Brooke will also assist with the reconstruction of the Posoiovskii Monastery on the Lake Baikal shore.

~Cameron Wiggins '04

Alumni Note

Dr. Edith Clowes OC '73, of the University of Kansas, recently published a new book titled *Fiction's Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy*. In the book, Clowes addresses the view commonly held by Western scholars that Russia lacks a cultural philosophical tradition. Dr. Clowes challenges this viewpoint by pointing to the rich philosophical tradition that is present in classic Russian literature.