Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism

Christina Kiaer

For the Constructivist avant-garde that formed after the Russian Revolution, art was hopelessly bourgeois as well as outmoded, because it involved traditionally handmade objects that were bought and sold on the market. The Constructivists called for artists to go to work in factories instead of their studios, where they would use modern technology to mass produce useful objects for the revolutionary masses. This utopian Constructivist ideal of a useful art oriented toward an egalitarian culture continues to have a strong appeal today, as global consumer culture becomes increasingly stratified and everyone is jaded about the machinations of the international art market. The Constructivist emphasis on the factory and industrial production, however, might seem old fashioned, even irrelevant, in our post-industrial consumer economy, but this is where I have tried to tell a different story of Constructivism in my book: a story of how it imagined a new form of socialist consumption through its invention of “socialist objects” that would fulfill the desires of new socialist consumers. The cover image by Alexander Rodchenko, of a laughing girl crunching on Red October brand cookies, is meant to convey the potential pleasures of the collective experience of socialism, rather than its rigors. My conception of the “socialist object” of Constructivism emerged from my experience of living in Moscow from 1992 to 1994, soon after the fall of the Soviet Union. In my everyday life I encountered my own problems with consumption. From the living-room windows of my eighth-floor apartment in downtown Moscow, I looked down on a sea of makeshift kiosks surrounding the Kievskaya Metro station, signs of the wrenching transition that Russia was making to a market economy. Vendors there sold everything from apples to cotton panties to kitchen faucets. As I negotiated the kiosks and street vendors, as well as the inefficient state stores with their long lines and the shiny and exclusive hard-currency supermarkets, to acquire daily necessities, it began to dawn on me that this daily negotiation could be a source for understanding the Constructivist object. I realized that Constructivism attempted, during the era of the semi-capitalist New Economic

PHOTOS
2. Poster: “Having wiped out capitalism, the proletariat will wipe out prostitution,” 1923.
3. Lyubov Popova, Design for a window display, 1924.

CONTENTS
Faculty Research Profiles
Christina Kiaer 1
Kimberly Marten 4
Alexander Cooley 8
Robert Maguire (1930-2005). An Appreciation 6
Institute Faculty News 3
Russian Practicum 5
Fellows & Visiting Scholars 7
Boris Tarasyuk, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine 10
PERESTROIKA + 20 12
Policy in the 1920s, to enter into a similarly chaotic and transitional consumer culture of street sellers, fledgling Soviet cooperatives and private luxury establishments for rich Nepmen, in order to promote the revolutionary transformation of everyday life. I had to rethink my preconceptions about the form taken by the Marxist politics of Constructivism, which led me to the idea of the “socialist object” as an object moving toward the socialist future, but still confronting the power of the capitalist commodity.

“Socialist objects” were utilitarian objects that were meant, through their inventive design, to function as active “comrades” to human beings, as opposed to the inert possessions of capitalism. The concept of the socialist object encompasses works that have previously been seen as marginal to Constructivism, and to modern art—such as, for example, Rodchenko’s cookie advertisement. My book is about a series of quirky objects that, despite being made by major Constructivist artists, have not previously been given significant consideration. Vladimir Tatlin is known for his pioneering abstract sculptural constructions and for his towering, spiraling Monument to the Third International, but I concentrate on the designs he made in 1924 for practical objects to be used in everyday life: a multi-purpose metal pot; a boxy, almost Maoist men’s sportswear suit; and an efficient wood-burning stove that looks like a Suprematist cube. Lyubov Popova is best known for her brilliant, abstract paintings and, to a lesser extent, for her op-art style fabric designs; I examine not only the fabric designs (which were mass produced) but also her designs for sinuously elegant flapper-style dresses made from the fabrics. These fashionable dresses do not look “socialist” in the sense of our usual expectations of socialist objects, but they show that the “utility” of the socialist object was not only practical, but also psychological. Popova’s flapper dresses were meant not only to meet the consumer desires of the new Soviet woman that were left over from the capitalist past—or that filtered in from the capitalist West—but also to lead her desires in a socialist direction through the dresses’ Constructivist aspects.

At the heart of my project is the work of Alexander Rodchenko, perhaps the most famous Russian Constructivist. The commercial packaging and advertisements that he made in 1923-1925 for Soviet state enterprises, in collaboration with the revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, are certainly familiar. But I wanted to situate them in their proper context of the peculiar and little-known world of “Bolshevik business” that thrived in the semi-capitalist Soviet economy of the mid 1920s, and to understand them as road maps or diagrams of the socialist object’s organization of consumer desire. Similarly, I wanted to consider the meaning of Rodchenko’s most famous Constructivist object—his simple, lucid design for the interior of a “Worker’s Club,” displayed in Paris in 1925—in the context of his lively, hilarious letters home from Paris, in which he recounts, with pleasure and horror, the avalanche of commodity possessions that he encounters there. I suggest that his Worker’s Club is a socialist object that he built specifically as a counter-proposal to the Western commodities in Paris.

My story about Constructivist objects also turned out to be a new story about the main Constructivist artists. Tatlin appears here as a famous male avant-garde artist who risked “descending” into the denigrated, feminized sphere of everyday life. I present Varvara Stepanova as a woman artist who was unexpectedly conscious of the feminist implications of her work in textile and fashion design, while I argue that Lyubov Popova’s wealthy background paradoxically shaped her choice to design a socialist form of fashion. Rodchenko emerges as perhaps more playful and sensual, but also more incisively theoretical, than in other accounts of him. I also introduce the Constructivist theorist Boris Arvatov, whose work has received little attention in the West or in Russia, as a pivotal figure in the formulation of the idea of an egalitarian form of consumption that would harness the power of consumer desire as a weapon for socialism.

The historical nature of my research, based on work in archives and primary sources, means that throughout the chapters, the central Constructivist places are placed within their historical context of all kinds of other objects and visual images, including propaganda posters for the “new everyday life,” early Soviet advertising posters, prerevolutionary advertisements and product packaging, newspaper and magazine illustrations, including early Soviet fashion magazines, and a range of documentary photographs of everyday life and commerce in the 1920s—many of which are drawn from Russian archives and previously unpublished, and a number of which I was able to publish in vivid color (thanks largely to three Harriman Publications grants). In both the argument and visual form of my book, I have tried to convey the sense of a rich, transitional moment in the history of the Russian Revolution, during which the values of the capitalist past competed with the ideals of a socialist future, and the Constructivists invented the notion of a comradely “socialist object” to guide people out of their capitalist desires toward socialist ones.

In this way, I have sketched out a surprising and little-known chapter of Bolshevism that imagined the possibility of a form of socialist modernity that would have been markedly different from the grim, materially deprived socialism that actually developed in the Soviet Union. The Constructivists, alone among left cultural radicals in Russia in the mid-1920s, realized the link between daily practices of consumption and power, between material objects and the survival of the progressive aspects of the revolution. The story of their socialist objects suggests the possibility of an alternate path in twentieth-century history, on which socialism would not have meant the denial of the human desires of modernity, but their embrace.

Christina Kiaer is Associate Professor of Art History and Archaeology. Her book Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism is forthcoming from MIT Press (December 2005). She is co-editor, with Eric Naiman, of Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside (Indiana University Press, Fall 2005).

**FACULTY NEWS**


**Istvan Deak** (History, Emeritus) was presented with an award for Distinguished Contributions to Slavic Studies from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS), in recognition of his “scholarship, teaching and service.” The award is the Association’s highest honor.

**Michael Eskin** (German) was promoted to Associate Professor. He is the guest editor of a special issue of Posttext Today, devoted to “Ethics and Literature,” which was published in early 2005.

**Anna Frajlich** (Slavic) was promoted to Senior Lecturer. In November she presented her lecture “Adam Mickiewicz: Romantic Portrait of a Poet” at the Brooklyn Public Library. Research for this project had been conducted during the summer in Paris and Warsaw. Frajlich has developed a new course on the “Polish Short Story in a Comparative Context,” which will be offered next spring.

**Boris Gasparov** (Slavic) is the author of Five Operas and a Symphony, just out from Yale University Press. We plan to feature Professor Gasparov’s work in the Spring 2006 newsletter.

**Mara Kashper** (Slavic) is the co-author of Cinema for Russian Conversation, published earlier this year by Focus.

**Kimberly Marten** (Political Science, Barnard) was promoted to full professor. She published the chapter “Central Asia: Military Modernization and the Great Game” in Strategic Asia 2005/6: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty (National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005) and the article “In Building Nations: Establish Security, Then Democracy” in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Mar. 18, 2005).

**John Micgiel** (HI Associate Director) was awarded the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland in September. He participated in a symposium on the Yalta Conference at the Ukrainian Institute in March, and lectured on elections in contemporary East Central Europe at the Romanian Cultural Center in New York, on postcommunist parties in East Central Europe at a conference in Krakow.

**Frank Miller’s** (Slavic) book Folklore for Stalin (Studies of the Harriman Institute) will be published in a Russian translation this fall by Akademicheskii proekt in St. Petersburg. Miller’s Handbook of Russian Verba (Studies of the Harriman Institute) was reissued by Focus in July. The second edition of V puti (with Olga Kagan and Anna Kudyma) was published by Pearson Prentice Hall in August. This new edition has a website and video supplement (www.prenhall.com/vputi).

*Continues on page 9...*
What can be done to combat warlordism in Afghanistan? Is there anything that the United States and the broader international community can do to achieve that goal, and help strengthen the rule and legitimacy of the central government? This is one focus of my new research.

I became interested in the topic during my work on my last book project. That book, Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past (Columbia University Press, 2004), makes the argument that peacekeeping operations today, in places that include Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, put too much emphasis on trying to change the trajectory of political developments in foreign societies. They therefore end up repeating the failures of empire as it was practiced by liberal-democratic countries—Great Britain, France, and the United States—at the turn of the twentieth century. I argue that foreign intervention should instead be directed toward providing security and basic order for local populations until they are able to sort out their own political futures. I also argue that the history of empires led by liberal-democratic states shows that military forces can do a good job of policing, by limiting their use of force and gaining the support of the local population, when they are rewarded for doing so.

During my work on this project, I had the opportunity to be embedded for a week with the Canadian Forces (CF) who led the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) peace enforcement mission in Kabul in May 2004. I went out on four patrols with the CF, and was impressed by how well they performed this security-keeping function, reaching out to the locals and maintaining a reassuring presence. The patrols also gave me the opportunity to meet some of the local people. I was struck that the most common complaint they made to the CF was about the terrible level of police corruption. The police reportedly set up unofficial checkpoints where they extort money from people returning home after work, and are reportedly involved in burglary rings. Merchants feel that they must arm themselves and sleep in their stores at night to protect their wares. Despite the good work the CF were doing, the Afghan national government was clearly not functioning well even in the capital when it came to providing basic security for the people, and there was little that ISAF could do about it.

At one point our patrol passed an expansive compound in the distance, surrounded by lush orchards in a land that was otherwise a dustbowl. The CF interpreter, a local man, said to me, “That’s the home of our warlord, Sayyaf.” Abdul Rasul Sayyaf was one of the radical Islamist mujaheddin who led the opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. His militia forces were known for their cruelty and brutality, and he had participated in the shelling of civilian targets that largely destroyed Kabul during the war. Human Rights Watch has accused him of war crimes. Yet here he was, continuing to live in striking luxury in the impoverished post-war society. He is reputed to be a close advisor to President Hamid Karzai and to wield influence over the judiciary. In September 2005, despite the efforts of human rights organizations to have those accused of war crimes excluded from the ballot, he was elected to a seat in Afghanistan’s new parliament.

Seeing this for myself brought home to me the basic dilemma that peacekeeping forces face in places like Afghanistan. On the one hand, when unreformed warlords are simply integrated into new governments, they continue to exert their influence in ways that probably undermine real social stability and feelings of security. As long as Sayyaf remains powerful, people in his district cannot feel comfortable going about their daily lives and building for a future that remains uncertain. On the other hand, Sayyaf has enough real authority to be an advisor to a democratically elected president and to win a parliamentary seat. Although there is a great deal of evidence that the Afghan elections were marred by intimidation and corruption—and indeed that those characteristics describe the entire political system—it does not appear that men like Sayyaf can be easily dis...
lodged. Neither the U.S. nor the broader international community has the will to take them on and fight them in battle.

My research seeks to find a way out of this dilemma. The initial step I am taking is to look at two historical periods where warlordism was overcome by the efforts of the population they ruled: the rise of stable governance structures in medieval Europe and the reestablishment of a central state by Mao after the republican war era in China. I believe that the structures of warlordism in these two eras share striking similarities with the situations faced today in countries like Afghanistan and Somalia. While my research isn’t finished, it appears that the combination of strong anti-warlord economic motives, together with revolutionary ideas coming from outside sources, paved the way for both European merchants and Chinese opposition forces to be able to form strong coalitions that eventually defeated warlord rule.

This pattern, unfortunately, does not make me optimistic about Afghanistan’s immediate future. In Afghanistan, the opium poppy and heroin processing trade is believed at present to contribute approximately 60 percent of the gross national product. This trade is controlled by warlords. The second largest contributor to income probably comes from the transit trucking trade, which takes goods back and forth across Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. Here, too, warlords seem largely to control both customs duty collection and the trucking lines themselves. Consequently, there is no strong economic lobby to counter the warlords, because the vast majority of the population depends on them to survive.

Furthermore, Afghanistan’s high illiteracy rate (often reported to be about 70 percent of the population, and perhaps 85 percent of adult women), when coupled with a lack of basic transportation and communications infrastructure across the harsh terrain, makes it very difficult for revolutionary ideas from outside to penetrate the culture. The only real challenge to warlord rule in the past decade was the extreme form of order imposed by the Taliban; and part of the reason that the Taliban made such headway was that their views did not deviate very much from those common in Afghanistan’s ethnic Pashtun villages.

What does this mean for the efforts of the international community? It means that we should be realistic about what we can accomplish. We are unlikely to be able to truly transform the political economy of Afghanistan anytime soon, and focusing on elections is not likely to lead very far. Destroying poppy fields will also not accomplish much. Poppy grows quickly, harvests can be stored for several years to sell the resulting heroin at an even higher price, and warlords will not only fight against efforts to destroy their profits, using the guns that still overrun Afghanistan, but will probably convince their workers to fight alongside them. It is unlikely that the international community truly has the will to go to war against the warlords.

Instead, we should focus on the long term and help the population to transform itself into an entity with both the interests and ideas to stand up to the warlords. The international community needs to do more to encourage the emergence of alternative livelihoods for Afghanistan’s population, by opening up economic opportunities that might bring people income security without planting poppies, and eventually lead to the emergence of anti-warlord economic interest groups. We need to focus attention on basic education, so that more people are better able to communicate political ideas and learn more about other ways of life. And we need to focus on improving basic infrastructure—highways, perhaps railroads, electricity grids, radios, and satellite television communication throughout the country—so that the people of Afghanistan can more easily share ideas among themselves.

The international community talks a lot about empowering local populations. What Afghanistan shows, however, is that elections alone do not create empowerment. Instead, empowerment relies on a set of economic and social conditions that can only develop over many years. I hope that my research will contribute to this process.

Kimberly Marten is Professor of Political Science, Barnard College, Columbia University.

THE RUSSIAN PRACTICUM (SUMMER SESSION 2006)

The Russian Practicum at Columbia University in the City of New York offers three intensive courses in the Russian Language (beginning, intermediate and advanced), eight semester hours worth of credit. Each course is designed to accommodate learners with a variety of backgrounds and reasons for studying Russian. We also offer courses in Russian Literature and Culture as well as a specially designed course, Introduction to Translation and Interpretation. Language and non-language courses can be taken individually or in combination. The Practicum is known for its small classes, experienced instructors, and a variety of extracurricular activities related to Russian life in New York City. The Practicum runs for two four-week sessions (June 5-June 30 and July 5-July 28). For more information, contact Alla Smyslova at as2157@columbia.edu or see the website at http://www.ce.columbia.edu/summer.
Robert A. Maguire (1930-2005). An Appreciation

Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchyy

Our distinguished colleague, Robert A. Maguire passed away on July 8, 2005, after a lengthy bout with cancer. Bob succumbed to the illness only hours after he had handed over the completed manuscript of the translation of Dostoevsky’s Demons, the project he worked on indefatigably during the last two years of his life. Bob’s uncompromising devotion to his chosen field made it possible for him to muster his love for Russian language and literature as a source of strength and intellectual engagement to the end.

Bob was born in Canton, Massachusetts, and grew up in Massachusetts and New York State. He majored in French at Dartmouth, beginning Russian only in his senior year. After his graduation from college in 1951, Bob went on to graduate study at Columbia, receiving his MA in Russian literature and a Russian Institute Certificate in 1953. He spent 1953-1955 on active duty in the U.S. Army. He returned to Columbia to continue his graduate studies in 1955, traveling to the USSR and Poland in 1958 on a Ford Foundation grant. He completed his Ph.D. in Russian literature in 1961. Having taught at Duke and Dartmouth while still a graduate student, Bob joined the faculty of the Columbia Slavic Department in 1962, remaining there until he retired as Bakhmeteff Professor of Russian Studies in 2003. Over the decades, he served a number of terms as Chair of the Columbia Slavic Department and taught as a visiting faculty member at Indiana University, Oxford, the University of Illinois, Yale, Princeton, and Harvard.

I count myself fortunate to have known Bob for over three decades, first as my professor and later as my colleague and friend. While in graduate school, I took virtually every course Bob taught, so I can testify not only to his considerable gifts as a rigorous and charismatic teacher, but to the exceptional span of and vital interconnection between his teaching and his scholarship, which set a virtually unmatchable standard of excellence for his students to emulate.

When I began my graduate training at Columbia in the fall of 1973, my knowledge of Russian literature was confined almost exclusively to the nineteenth century. Bob Maguire’s survey of Soviet literature, which I took during that first semester at Columbia, defined the course of my career, as it did for others of my generation. It is easy to forget today, in our post-Soviet, post-cold war world how new, exciting, and challenging was the study of Soviet literature in this country over four decades ago when Bob was completing his doctoral dissertation, which would become the study of early Soviet culture through the lens of the “thick journal,” Red Virgin Soil. Bob’s seminal work was revolutionary on a number of fronts, not least of all because, at a time of political polarization, he looked at Soviet literature dispassionately, on its own merits as a subject of scholarly investigation. By the same token, in Red Virgin Soil Bob melded analysis of literary institutions and cultural context with analysis of literary texts in a seamless continuum which remains both relevant and exemplary almost four decades after the book’s first publication. It is therefore fitting that Red Virgin Soil is one of the few studies of Russian literature in the history of Slavic studies in the United States to have remained continuously in print from its initial publication in 1967 to the present. And, at a time when the study of Soviet literature within the Soviet Union was still seriously hindered by the state, and in the United States was still, if not in its infancy, then just barely in its adolescence, Bob’s book set a standard of sophistication and excellence for the field at large.

Yet for Bob Maguire Red Virgin Soil and Soviet literature were only the start, and he went on to excel in an exceptional span of activities. In the decades that followed, he established himself as one of the world’s foremost experts on Gogol, beginning with the edited volume, Gogol from the Twentieth Century: Eleven Essays (1974), and his translation of Vasily Gippius’s Gogol (1981) and culminating in his seminal study, Exploring Gogol (1994), which was awarded the MLA’s prestigious Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Best Book in Slavic Studies in 1995. Bob’s extraordinary career as a scholar went hand in hand with his extraordinary career as a translator from Russian and Polish. His 1978 translation of Andrei Bely’s novel Petersburg in collabo-
ration with John Malmstad remains the standard English rendition of one of the most verbally complex and aesthetically saturated Russian literary works of the twentieth century. Over the years he produced a remarkable range of translations, including the poetry of the Nobel Prize winning poet Wislawa Szymborska (with M.J. Krynski, Sounds, Feelings, Thoughts: Seventy Poems, 1979). Other recognitions included a John S. Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship (1969-70), the Amicus Poloniae Award from the Republic of Poland in 2000, and the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages Award for Outstanding Contribution to Scholarship in 2002.

In the citation I wrote for Bob when he received the AATSEEL Award for Outstanding Scholarship in 2002, I qualified his list of achievements by noting that his career was “far from over.” Sadly, that was not to be the case. Yet, as it turned out, in the short space of time left to him Bob accomplished more than many scholars do in a lifetime, seeing his superb translation of Dead Souls into print and completing the fair draft of his rendering into English of that most “Gogolian” of Dostoevsky’s novels, Demons. I even got a laugh out of him the day before he died by telling him I would bring The Brothers Karamazov for him to start translating the next time I came to visit. Yet, while those of us left behind find it hard to let him go, I believe that Bob himself was at peace knowing that his work was done.

Those of us who knew him will miss his Irish charm and ready wit, the intensity with which he lived Slavic studies and the generosity of spirit that let him continue to worry about others even as his own life was ebbing away. His writings and his example will remain with us all in the years to come.

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Photo by Katarzyna Stanclik. Note the Poetry in Motion poster in the background with Szymborska’s poem “Four in the Morning” in the Krynski-Maguire translation. Millions of New Yorkers got their first taste of Polish poetry riding the subway.—RM

Postdoctoral Fellows and
Visiting Scholars 2005-06

Postdoctoral Fellows

Diana Blank (Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley), “Voices from Elsewhere: An Ethnography in Place in Chelnochovsk-na-Dniestre, Ukraine.”


Tanya Richardson (Anthropology, University of Cambridge), “Odessa, Ukraine: History, Place and Nation-Building in a Post-Soviet City.”

Visiting Scholars


Ernest Gyidel (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv), “Whites and Secessionist Movements in Post-Imperial South Russia, 1918-1920.”

Zahid Anwar Khan (Univ. of Peshawar, Pakistan), “Central Asian Natural Resources.”

Karolina Koc-Michalska (Silesia University), “Political Communication and Symbolism.”

Mark Shabad (General Manager, Eastlink Lanker Group, London), “The Relationship between the Change in Property Modes and Structures in Russia and the Development of Society and Government.”


From the exhibit PERESTROIKA + 20. (See page 12 for details.)
While I have always been interested in different types of sovereign arrangements in international politics, the events and aftermath of 9/11 prompted me to explore the foreign military basing presence as a research topic. I was particularly struck by how quickly the United States made arrangements to establish military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in support of its military campaign in Afghanistan. After all, these Central Asian countries had been a part of the Soviet Union just ten years earlier, and the fact that the U.S. military was there was a sure sign of how much international politics had changed since the end of the Cold War.

The basing agreements in Central Asia piqued my interest in understanding the broader issues surrounding U.S. military bases throughout the world. What types of economic and social impacts do bases have on host countries? How much of a say do host countries have in how the bases are used by a foreign power? And what types of laws and institutional arrangements govern the activities and conduct of US military personnel stationed overseas? These all seemed important questions that political scientists had not grappled with, even though overseas basing arrangements for great powers have been an enduring feature of international politics.

Kimberly Marten, my Barnard College and Harriman colleague, and I received a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to research the bases issue in mainland Japan, Okinawa, South Korea and Kyrgyzstan. During our research trips to these base-hosts, we conducted dozens of interviews with local politicians, overseas American political and military officials, journalists, local businessmen, anti-base activists and local academics. Last year, as a Transatlantic Fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States, I undertook additional research trips to Spain, the Azores (Portugal), Turkey and Greece. I also visited Romania and met with a number of officials involved in on-going negotiations with the United States over the establishment of new military bases on the Romanian Black Sea coast.

I am now writing a book on the comparative politics of US overseas military bases in East Asia, Southern Europe and the post-Communist countries. What has most impressed me is the rich and fascinating history of the U.S. military presence across the world and how often the U.S. basing presence has been intertwined with major events in these countries’ political development. At the same time, I have discovered many common policy dilemmas and challenges that U.S. policymakers have confronted across several different continents and historical eras.

For example, the United States has faced particularly difficult political choices in order to maintain a basing presence in non-democratic host countries. During the Cold War, the United States established an extensive basing network among its democratic Western allies, but it also operated bases in non-democratic states that opposed the Soviet Union. Dealing with dictators such as Francisco Franco (Spain), Antonio Salazar (Portugal) and Ferdinand Marcos (Philippines) placed the United States in a difficult position of retaining security cooperation without wanting to support the repressive excesses and human rights violations of these authoritarian regimes. Unfortunately, a basing presence in these countries, even a substantial one, rarely translated into the capability to positively influence domestic politics. As I argue in a current Foreign Affairs piece (“Base Politics,” November/December 2005), the basing presence rarely offered a set of adequate tools to encourage governments to enact democratic reforms because host country leaders correctly calculated that the United States valued its bases more than promoting democratization. As a result,
host countries engaged in “hard bargaining” and threatened to terminate access agreements if the United States adopted a critical stance over democracy-related issues.

The expulsion last summer of the United States from the Karshi-Khanabad (also known as K2) military base in southern Uzbekistan suggested that the political dilemmas involved in maintaining overseas military bases are enduring. The Uzbek government had grown irritated with growing criticism by the U.S. State Department and Congress (although not from the Department of Defense) over its harsh crackdown in May 2005 on demonstrators in the eastern city of Andijon and threatened to curtail U.S. access to K2. It later carried out its threat when the United States backed a United Nations plan not to forcibly return Uzbek refugees in neighboring Kyrgyzstan to the Uzbek police for interrogation. Unfortunately for the United States, it lost both the operational use of the base and its political credibility by not taking a principled stance sooner and only leaving the base after it was kicked out.

A final issue that I am currently researching is whether the current creations of a web-like network of bases like K2 across Central Asia, the Black Sea and Africa — areas where the United States has not traditionally maintained a basing presence — will enhance or actually harm U.S. national interests. On the one hand, proponents of the Pentagon’s new Global Defense Restructuring Plan argue that a U.S. military presence will promote stability in these areas and deter the rise of Taliban-like terrorist havens and other potential security threats. On the other hand, it might also be the case that establishing more bases, albeit small ones, throughout the world may also unwittingly embroil the United States military in domestic political conflicts and power struggles in which it has no clear nor compelling national interest.

I look forward to presenting some of these findings to the Harriman community in more detail at my lecture “Base Politics: The United States and Uzbekistan in Comparative Perspective.”
Tarasyuk says sacking of Cabinet was process of political “catharsis”

Andrew Nynka

Nearly two weeks after President Viktor Yushchenko sacked his Cabinet, Ukraine’s top diplomat said the country was stable and undergoing a democratic process akin to political “catharsis.” The change in the government, made by Mr. Yushchenko on September 8, has not destabilized Ukraine, acting Foreign Affairs Minister Borys Tarasyuk said. Rather, the move is part of a process of “self-cleaning of authorities,” and an effort to “return to the ideals and principles of the ‘maidan,’” the foreign minister said, referring to Kyiv’s Independence Square, the focal point of the Orange Revolution.

Those ideals and principles largely revolve around rooting out corruption and reforming Ukraine so that it is more in line with Western European standards of democracy, he explained.

In that regard, Ukraine is not lacking in strategies, Mr. Tarasyuk said. “We have a lot of strategies. We sometimes are lacking consistency in implementing those strategies.”

Moreover, the “economy, the fiscal and monetary systems and the stock exchange don’t mind these events and continue to run smoothly,” Mr. Tarasyuk said during a speech at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs on September 21. The economy, he added, had slowed throughout all of Europe.

While Mr. Tarasyuk’s comments painted an optimistic picture of the situation in Ukraine, experts and analysts who focus their work on Ukraine characterized it in more uncertain terms.

“I hope that President Yushchenko is able to take advantage of the political crises in Kyiv to put Ukraine back on the track to democracy, justice and the dignity that the Orange Revolution demanded this past winter,” said Mark von Hagen, the Boris Bakhmeteff Professor of Russian and East European Studies at Columbia University.

Indeed, Prof. von Hagen, who is president of the International Association of Ukrainian Studies, said that Mr. Yushchenko could now fall back on the path taken by his predecessor, Leonid Kuchma, or complete the reforms sought by Ukrainians during the Orange Revolution.

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Faculty News, continued from page 9

David Stark’s (Sociology) new publications include “Social Times of Network Spaces: Network Sequences and Foreign Investment in Hungary” (with Balazs Vedres), American Journal of Sociology (March 2006), and “Recombinant Technology and New Geographies of Association” (with Jonathan Bach), in Digital Formations: IT and New Architectures in the Global Realm (Princeton University Press, 2005). He delivered the Presidential Address, entitled “What Counts? Calculation, Representation, Association,” at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-economics in Budapest (July 2005) and presented a paper on “Politicized Business Ties: Network Formation and Party Competition in Hungary, 1987-2001” (with B. Vedres) at the same meeting. He received a supplementary grant to an earlier major award from the National Science Foundation, Sociology Program for his project “Pathways of Property Transformation in Hungary.”

Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier’s (Art History) chapter (“The Peredvizhniki and the Miriskusniki React to the West” will appear in the collection of essays, Russian Art and the West (Northern Illinois University Press, 2006). Valkenier spent two weeks in Poland in early summer supervising the translation of her article on the Maria Mayenowa-Manfred Kridl correspondence, which will appear in a volume to be published by the University of Bialystok.

Mark von Hagen (History) presided over the sixth congress of the International Association for Ukrainian Studies (MAU) in Donetsk in June, participated in two panels at the World Congress of Central and East European Studies in Berlin in July, and in two panels at the Roundtable “Ukraine’s Quest for Mature Nation Statehood” in Washington, DC, in September. His essay (published last year in the American Historical Review), “Empires, Borderlands and Diasporas,” appeared in Ukrainian translation in Moderna Ukraina (no 9); another essay, “I Love Russia, and/but Want Ukraine, or How a Russian General Became Hetman of the Ukrainian State, 1917-1918,” appeared in a Festschrift honoring Zenon Kohut (CIUS, Edmonton, Canada) and in the first volume of a new series on Ukraine and Belarus, edited by Leonid Gorizontov at the Institute for Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow. Mark is currently on sabbatical leave, writing his book on the emergence of modern Ukraine during World War I and studying Spanish.
“If he chooses, however, to fall back on old ways and once again make deals with oligarchs, husbands and wives of oligarchs, then he stands to lose the unexpected second chance that history has given him and he will leave office perceived as Kuchma-like,” Prof. von Hagen said.

Mr. Tarasyuk directly addressed expectations of Ukraine in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution. “Today, some people in Ukraine and beyond claim that its color is fading out, especially with the resignation of the government,” he said. “Allow me to disagree with this opinion.”

The acting foreign minister said that any allegation of corruption or abuse of power would be investigated and, if need be, those charged would face prosecution and the courts.”

Mr. Yushchenko’s administration has begun to face growing criticism while members of his inner circle have faced allegations of corruption. Additionally, analysts noted the irony of the president’s recent political pact with his one-time foe and former presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych, Mr. Kuchma’s chosen successor.

But Mr. Tarasyuk made it clear that there were distinctions between the two presidential administrations. “A major difference is that we mean what we say. It is called credibility in politics,” the acting foreign minister said.

Mr. Tarasyuk, who was minister of foreign affairs in 1998-2000 under Mr. Kuchma, said that on the face of it there have been no changes in Ukraine’s foreign policy since Mr. Yushchenko’s administration came to power.

“Membership in the European Union and NATO, developing friendly relations with Russia and other neighbors, and an active regional policy have been and continue to stand out at the front line,” Mr. Tarasyuk said. “That is the sign of the stability and consistency of the foreign policy of Ukraine.”

He listed democracy, stability and development as the three basic prerequisites for a mature government and a vibrant civil society. During his speech Mr. Tarasyuk stressed that two of the three – democracy and stability – have already taken root in Ukraine.

Democracy – and especially its basic ingredients, both freedom of expression and assembly – has become the undeniable asset of all Ukrainians, Mr. Tarasyuk said.

With regard to development, Ukraine will expand small- and medium-sized businesses in the coming years and will look to further liberalize markets, Mr. Tarasyuk said.

As a further sign of progress, Mr. Tarasyuk noted that Ukraine, “for the first time, contemplates extending financial and technical assistance to other countries by establishing an agency for technical assistance.” He said that the Ruslan, the Ukrainian Antonov-124 heavy-lift aircraft, delivered “rather modest” humanitarian cargo to Little Rock, Ark., on September 20 at the expense of the Ukrainian government.

“The very fact of [Ukraine’s] transformation from a recipient country into a donor country may have a significant positive impact on our foreign policy,” Mr. Tarasyuk said.

The acting foreign minister noted that in 14 years of independence Ukraine’s foreign service still faces the same problems: lack of finances and personnel. In perhaps one of the lighter moments of his speech, Mr. Tarasyuk invited the audience of about 70 people to contribute to the foreign service. “But I would like to say that the salary is very, very modest,” he said to laughter.

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The Harriman Institute at Columbia University is pleased to present PERESTROIKA + 20: Selections from the Kolodzei Collection of Russian and Eastern European Art, an exhibition featuring works by contemporary Russian artists. The works chronicle Russian culture over the past 20 years and represent a wide range of artistic trends as diverse as Russia itself. These paintings, sculptures, and digital works, executed in traditional and contemporary artistic techniques, reflect Russian art’s creative variety. Many of the contemporary artists now on view in the Guggenheim’s Russia! exhibit are also represented in PERESTROIKA + 20, including Komar and Melamid, Eric Bulatov, Oleg Vassiliev, Natalia Nesterova, Tatyana Nazarenko, Eduard Shteinberg, and Vladimir Nemukhin. Comprised of works created since 1986, PERESTROIKA + 20 explores current Russian artistic ideas and trends from artists who began their careers during Khrushchev’s “thaw” of the late 1950s and participated in the first unofficial exhibitions, as well as younger artists who began working during perestroika (late 1980s) and the post-perestroika periods. The exhibit will be on view at the Institute through the holidays and into the new year.

The Kolodzei Art Foundation, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1991, organizes nonprofit exhibitions in museums and cultural centers in the United States, Russia, and other countries, provides art supplies to Russian artists, and coordinates Russian-American cultural exchanges.