

*annual freshman publication
issue 7, summer 2020*

SPUTNIK



Department of Russian and East European Studies

Spüt-nik

Russian, literally 'fellow-traveler': each of a series of Soviet artificial satellites, the first of which (launched on October 4, 1957) was the first satellite to be placed in orbit; Russian Covid-19 vaccine.

On November 7 and 8, 2019, our department held a multidisciplinary research conference titled Social Impacts of Post-Socialist Transition and Policies for the Future. Researchers from various fields of study presented their papers and contributed to others' research. Our own Dr. **Mitchell Orenstein** and Dr. **Kristen Ghodsee** organized the event, **Nicholas Emery**, a REES Department alumnus and a PhD student at UCLA, assisted with the research and preparation for the conference.



Dr. Mitchell Orenstein and Dr. Kristen Ghodsee

REES Department's Dr. **Kevin M.F. Platt** was among prominent conference participants. Penn's Dr. **Julia Gray**, Dr. **Michelle Guillot**, Dr. **Julia Lynch**, and Dr. **Rudra Sil** were among the conference presenters. Other participants included Mr. **Simon Commander**, a former senior official at World Bank in Washington, DC, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London, **Maurizio Bussolo**, a lead economist in the World Bank's Chief Economist Office for Europe and Central Asia, **Michael Lokshin**, a Lead Economist with the World Bank's Office of the Chief Economist for Europe and Central Asia, **John Feffer**, the Director of Foreign Policy In Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, **Johannes Linn** is a Nonresident Senior Fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program at the Brookings Institution, Dr.

Daniel Treisman of UCLA Department of Political Science, Dr. **Maya Nadkarni**, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Swarthmore University, Dr. **Maria Bucur** of Indiana University of Bloomington, Dr. **Bruce O'Neill** of Saint Louis University, Dr. **Neringa Klumbytė** of Miami University, Dr. **Maria Snegovaya**, a postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins University and an Adjunct Fellow at Center for European Policy Analysis and many others. You will be meeting a lot of these researchers at our conferences and talks. Should you choose to continue your academic career in the field of Russian and East European studies, research topics are as exciting as they are numerous.



Conference Participants came from various corners of the USA and the UK

Feast your eyes on some the topics for the conference panels:

'How Different Disciplines Address Transition Diverging Experiences of Transition for Ordinary People'; 'Successes and Failures of the Liberal Model of Targeted Social Benefits'; 'Causes and Consequences of the Transition Crises The Challenge of Demography, Migration, and Shrinking Populations: What Policies Are Needed Now?'

The field of Russian and East European studies is wide, and you can start your career with our department by means of taking our courses and becoming our major or minor. Please consult our website for contact information of our faculty.

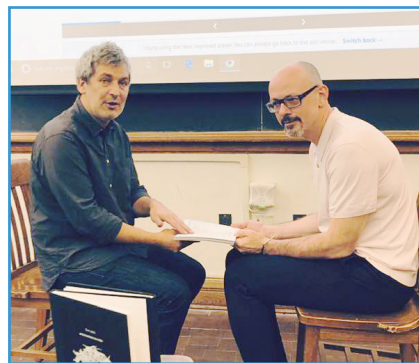


Prof. Platt's "Putin's Russia" course in the 2019 fall semester welcomed a number of special guests for events that were also advertised to the broader REES community. On September 24, Maxim Osipov visited to discuss his recently published and critically acclaimed collection of short stories, *Rock, Paper, Scissors, and Other Stories*. In the tradition of past Russian authors, such as Anton



Maxim Osipov

his appearance, Penn students peppered Dr. Osipov with questions about his writing, his biographical experiences, and the relation between the two. On October 8, Semyon Khanin, a founding member of the Orbita multimedia art and poetry collective, made his own appearance in class. Orbita is based in Riga, Latvia, but its members write poetry in Russian, which is the first language of a significant component of the Latvian population. In his reading and discussion of Orbita activities—including poetry, book publishing, and multimedia art installations—Khanin explained how the collective aspires to create a bridge between Latvian and Russian cultures. Orbita creates poetry and art that creatively translates between Russian and Latvian languages and which incorporates non-verbal media to appeal to Latvia's multilingual society.



Semyon Khanin and
Dr. Kevin M.F. Platt



Michael Idov

Finally, on November 11 and 12, the director and screenwriter Mikhail Idov came to Penn to screen two films: *Leto*, a biopic about the legendary late-Soviet rock star Viktor Tsoi, and *The Humorist*, a bitter-sweet comedy about a late-Soviet stand-up comic and his run-ins with the Soviet authorities. In partnership with his wife, Lili, Idov was the screenwriter for *Leto*, which was directed by the politically embattled

Russian celebrity director Kirill Serebrennikov. *The Humorist*, which Idov also wrote, is his directorial debut. Both films were recognized with prestigious awards. Idov's screenings and class discussion attracted a large audience of students and faculty, who grilled the writer-director about his depiction of the late Soviet era. As someone who was born in Soviet Latvia, grew up in the American Midwest, and has worked for years in the Russian and European film and television industry, he offered students valuable insight into what might be called "global Russian culture."

This fall, Professor Platt's "Putin's Russia" course will feature a (virtual) guest appearance by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, the lead singer of Pussy Riot. Platt, who has many contacts in contemporary Russian cultural life, considers contact with the makers of Russian culture to be an important and exciting aspect of teaching about Russia today.



2019 - 2020 Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant Elena Goinova worked diligently, bringing Russian literature and the latest in Russian youth culture to our students. She held a number of events designed to acquaint the students with the latest in youth films, language, and music. Elena came from Surgut (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug), and she brought a unique perspective to the department.



Our weekly Russian Tea, a conversational hour for students of Russian, was organized and held by Elena as well. The discussions that took place touched upon a variety of subjects of interest to the students of Russia. Tea in a samovar, authentic Russian candy, cookies, cakes, and other snacks were the accompaniment of each Tea. Russian Tea is our department's long-standing tradition, year 2020 - 2021 will be no different.



On October 30, 2019, our department held a Majors and Minors Luncheon. This was a networking event for the students who may or may not have had the chance to meet the other majors and minors. The faculty were also in attendance, providing answers to questions and general insight into all matters of Russian and East European studies. An integral part of the college experi-

ence is networking, and this lunch provided the students a great opportunity to mingle, have a bite, and stay in touch.



This Fall, Dr. Ksenia Nouril will be teaching REES026 Behind the Iron Curtain. REES026 is a freshman seminar which will explore art and culture across Eastern Europe since World War II. It situates key artistic and cultural developments in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, as well as the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia within broader social and political circumstances during and after Communist rule. Topics include but are not limited to: Socialist Realism, nonconformist (unofficial, dissident) art, socialist architecture and graphic design; fashion before and after the free market; everyday life and leisure time; public memory and cultures of commemoration; emergent nationalisms; the status of Muslim, Roma and other minorities; women's rights; gender and sexuality; art and the environment; art and protest.



Ksenia Nouril holds an MA and PhD in Art History from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and a BA in Art History and Slavic Studies from New York University. She was the Jensen Bryan Curator of The Print Center; previously, she worked at The Museum of Modern Art and the Zimmerli Art Museum. She has organized exhibitions multiple exhibitions. Nouril lectures widely on art and curatorial studies as well as frequently writes for international exhibition catalogues, magazines, and academic journals.



In the Fall of 2019, Slought Foundation on campus Slought convened *On the Other Side of Elsewhere*, a cultural exchange initiative engaging a broad network of civic institutions in the former Eastern Bloc and beyond. Their project plans to support people-to-people exchange and direct dialogue, and engage cultural actors and organizations that are invigorating civil society. Working together with regional partners in Bratislava, Cluj, Sarajevo, Sofia, Tirana, and Ulaanbaatar, the Foundation will interact with their informal economies, networks of interdependence, and modes of survival. The series is expected to continue in 2020.

A Message from the Chair:

Dear Students,

Get in Touch. Stay in Touch. Have a Great Semester.

No one is more disappointed that Penn is going back to school this fall online than your REES faculty. Throughout the spring, whilst we sat indoors trying to contain the virus, I was hopeful that we would defeat it and be able to experience a somewhat normal fall term. However, our US government underperformed. And this fall, University of North Carolina's experience showed what would happen if we opened up normally. Within a few days or weeks, the virus would spread dramatically and we would be forced to go back online.

REES faculty spent the summer preparing for on-line teaching, hoping for the best, but planning for the worst. All courses have been adapted to the new environment with many changes both large and small. We were reasonably well equipped to meet the challenge last spring, but much better equipped this fall. However, one of the hardest things to recreate online is the community that exists in our classes and our department as a whole, which is why I am writing to you today.

REES faculty realizes the challenges inherent in creating a sense of community in an online environment. In particular, we want students to continue to feel close to their professors (as well as each other). For that reason, I want to make clear to all my students and to all REES majors and minors that I am happy to take your calls directly from 8am - 10pm any day of the fall term on any topic. You continue to be our top priority as a department. But it is not only me: All faculty members in the department are happy to engage with you directly. I suggest that you email your professors and set up a Zoom consultation or phone call.

We understand this fall will be a challenging and unusual time. But we look forward to meeting it together. Get in touch. Stay in touch.

Have a great semester,

Mitchell A Orenstein, Chair

Meet Our Faculty:

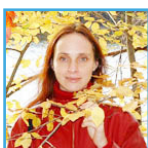


Mitchell Orenstein, Professor, Department Chair. Dr. Orenstein is a scholar of international politics focusing on the political economy of transition in Central and Eastern Europe. This fall semester, Dr. Orenstein will teach REES134: Communism



Maria Alley, Senior Lecturer in Foreign Languages, Language Program Coordinator. Dr. Alley's interests include second language acquisition and language pedagogy, proficiency testing, and materials development. This fall semester, Dr. Alley will teach:

- RUSS001 Elementary Russian I
- RUSS003 Intermediate Russian I



Maria Boulratskaya, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Dr. Boulratskaya specializes in teaching advanced Russian content-based courses for business professionals with the use of film, literature, and political and business materials. Her current research interest lies in techniques for training business professionals to develop and assess cross-cultural competency. This fall semester, Dr. Boulratskaya will teach RUSS311: Advanced Russian Conversation and Composition.



Kristen Ghodsee, Professor. Dr. Ghodsee's research interests include the lived experience of socialism and postsocialism, the gendered effects of the economic transition from communism to capitalism, and the ethnographic study of postcommunist nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe. Dr. Ghodsee is on sabbatical this academic year.



Brian Kim, Assistant Professor. Dr. Kim received his PhD from Stanford University. He is a specialist in Russian literature of the long nineteenth century, translation studies, and literary and cultural relationships between Russia, Western Europe, and East Asia. This fall semester, Dr. Kim will teach

- REES145: Masterpieces of 19th-century Russian Literature
- REES201: Dostoevsky



Mila Nazyrova, Lecturer. Dr. Nazyrova's research interests focus on Russian art and culture at the turn of the 20th-century and early Soviet era. This fall semester, Dr. Nazyrova will teach:

- RUSS360: Russian for Heritage Speakers I
- RUSS473: Everyday Life in the Soviet Union



Molly Peeney, Lecturer. Her interests are in language pedagogy, early 20th-century Modernism, and creative writing. This fall semester, Dr. Peeney will teach:

- RUSS003: Intermediate Russian I
- REES197: Madness and Madmen in Russian Literature and Culture



Kevin M. F. Platt, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor in the Humanities. Dr. Platt works on representations of Russian history, Russian historiography, history and memory in Russia, Russian lyric poetry, and global post-Soviet Russian culture. This fall semester, Dr. Platt will teach

- REES191: Putin's Russia
- REES605: Modern Literary Theory and Criticism



Peter Steiner, Professor Emeritus. Dr. Steiner's major areas of research are literary theory and modern Slavic literature and culture.



Vladislav Todorov, Senior Lecturer. Dr. Todorov is the author of several scholarly books as well as an accomplished fiction- and screen- writer. Three of his novels were made into films that garnered critical acclaim. Dr. Todorov is a voting member of the European Film Academy. This fall semester, Dr. Todorov will teach

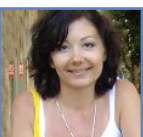
- REES111: The Art of Plotting
- REES164: Russian Film from 1900 to 1945
- REES555: Terrorism



Julia Verkholtantsev, Associate Professor, Undergraduate Chair. Dr. Verkholtantsev's academic interests are in the field of cultural history, early modern and medieval literary and linguistic culture, and the history of ideas. This Fall, Dr. Verkholtantsev will teach REES412: 19th-Century Russian Literature and Culture: Romantics and Realists



Lada Vassilieva, Instructor. Lada's research interests include foreign language teaching methodology and Russian phraseology. This fall semester, Ms. Vassilieva will teach RUSS001: Elementary Russian I.



Margarita Lappa, Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant. Born in Orenburg, Margarita now teaches in Moscow. She will be our first ever online FLTA for this academic year.

Original idea, editing, and design by Alina Yakubova, Administrative Coordinator

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