"Spatial Form: Centers, Borders, and Construction of Difference in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia"
Friday, April 16, 2004
Hosted by Stanford University; sponsored jointly by the Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies at the University of California at Berkeley

Opening Remarks
Gregory Freidin, Acting Director, CREEES, Stanford University

Panel One "Centers, Old and New"
Chair: Monika Greenleaf, Slavic Languages & Literatures, Stanford University
David Frick, Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of California, Berkeley
"Neighborhoods and Networks in Seventeenth-Century Vilnius"
Robert Crews, History, Stanford University
"Cosmopolitanism at the Top of the World: The Colonization of Badakhshan"
Edward W. Walker, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, and Political Science, University of California, Berkeley
"Empires, Nation-states, or Multinational States? State and Community in Post-Soviet Space"

Panel Two The Other: Constructing the Difference
Chair: Reginald Zelnik, History, University of California, Berkeley
Victor Zhivov, Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of California, Berkeley
"Two Spaces of the Russian Middle Ages"
David Holloway, History and Political Science, Stanford University
"Old Debates about Russia’s Place in the World: What do They Matter in an Age of Globalization"
Anne Nesbet, Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of California, Berkeley
"Architectural Space in Eisenstein, Bely, Gogol"

Panel Three Borders, Drawing and Blurring
Chair: Mary Dakin, Associate Director, CREEES, Stanford University
Maria Gough, Art and Art History, Stanford University
"El Lissitzky on Broadway"
Amir Weiner, History, Stanford University
"Soviet Western Frontier and the Eastern Bloc, 1956-1989"
Gabriella Safran, Slavic Languages and Literatures, Stanford University
"Ansky’s Stories from the Borderlands"

Closing Remarks
Victoria Bonnell, Director, ISEEES

For further information, contact CREEES at 650-725-2563 or visit http://creees.stanford.edu to view photographs from the event.

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Annual Stanford-Berkeley Conference
Honors Professor Joseph Frank


The following remarks are excerpted from the introductory tribute to Joseph Frank, Professor Emeritus of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford delivered by Gregory Freidin, Dmitri Keuseff Professor of Slavic Cultures and Acting Director of CREEES, 2003-04.

As the title of the conference suggests, the initial source of inspiration for the conference was "The Idea of Spatial Form." This is a famous long essay written back in 1945 by my colleague Joseph Frank, whose accomplishments we celebrate today. The essay deals primarily with the new literary form—in 1945 still radically new—of the high modernist novel of Joyce and Proust, and the effect they produced of simultaneity of the present and the past. This effect was all the more radical since language art is by nature sequential and, like music, is primarily temporal. But in the new novel—Frank grasped—the temporal was transfigured into the spatial with the result that spatiality began to define the entire work. The world of Homer's Odysseus and the world of Stephen Daedalus merged in one day in Dublin. Such a radical transformation in this major art form involved—Frank remarked cryptically—"major changes in the sensibility of a particular cultural period."

Ultimately, the "major changes in the sensibility of that particular cultural period" that Frank alluded to had their objective correlate in the contemporary transformation of the European map. The romantic, profoundly historical consciousness of the tribes of Eastern and Central Europe, the Balkans—all of sudden found this map's spatial form in the multitude of the new or renewed nation states. Three quarters of a century later, we witnessed a similar "spatialization" of the national historical aspirations—regardless of their intensity—as communism collapsed, the Soviet Union fragmented, and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved to make space for some 27 new state formations. Borders have been redrawn, solidified, or erased, some centers have waned or disappeared altogether, long-time cosmopolitan, diverse enclaves, as in the former Yugoslavia, have been subjected to ethnic cleansing while other polities increased the ethnic diversity of their elites. All of a sudden the long-forgotten ethnically and linguistically mixed trans-national regions, like the Trans-Dniester Territory, Nagorno-Karabakh, the Gorny Badakhshan region, the Fergana Valley became regional or trans-national hot spots.
It is also important to mention globalization—a technological revolution in communications so pervasive that it has overlaid this reconfigured patchwork of states, confederations, and state-like entities with a network whose spatial dimensions are like those of God in Dante’s Divine Comedy. The center of the global Internet universe is nowhere, its circumference everywhere, and its temporality is more like space. The new character of space-time Frank identified at the core high-modernist novel in the middle of the twentieth century has become—by the beginning of the twenty first—part of everyday life, available at the touch a remote control button tuned to CNN. The Crusades I vaguely remember studying in the fifth-grade are the stuff of today’s news, and Tolstoy’s Khadzhi-Murat reads like a report in the New Yorker. And a middle-aged man dressed as a character from the Arabian nights presides over a non-state terrorist entity that for the last three years has kept the great modern powers in its thrall.

The reconfiguration of the post-WWII, Cold War geography that we have been witnessing over the last decade and a half has resulted not merely in a transfer of power—in some cases, as in Uzbekistan and elsewhere, the same people are at the helm—but in a radical revision of the symbolic order that has defined and sustained these new and renewed communities. And the contest in the political sphere often takes the form of a contest over the symbols of authority and power. Genealogies and histories have been revised to accommodate the new regimes and the new borders. Where Lenin’s statues once stood, there is now one to Tamerlane. This switch will surely have implications one day far beyond the ones intended by the replacement.

Many of us remember the Gorbachev-Shervadnadze campaign during the perestroika to demystify the old Soviet “image of the enemy.” But it did not take long for the Russian state and society to construct, sometimes simply reconstruct, a new Other. Even when the territory has not been reconfigured, as in the case of most of Russia, the new Russian state has to articulate it anew in order to establish its authority and create a symbolic order that defines a new relationship between the periphery and the center (Putin’s famous “vertikal’ vlasti”).

I look forward to the conference panels. They should further our understanding of the region and its new political, cultural, and historical space.

— Gregory Freidin

All photos by Jack Kollmann, please visit http://creees.stanford.edu/StanfordUCB%2004Conf.html for a complete slide show.