

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Mark Von Hagen

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2016

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with name of Mark Von Hagen conducted by Mary Marshall Clark on September 16, and November 8, 2016. This interview is part of the Harriman Institute Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session: 1

Interviewee: Mark Von Hagen

Location: Tempe, AZ

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: September 16, 2016

Q: This is Mary Marshall Clark. Today is September 16, 2016. I am delighted to be with Professor Mark Von Hagen, a beloved professor at Columbia for many years and now at Arizona State University, for the Harriman Project. I really want to thank you for giving your time. I know how busy you are. But you are—

Von Hagen: My pleasure.

Q: —going to tell us stories that we just could never hear anywhere else [laughter]. As you know from studying with Ron [Ronald J.] Grele and reading his work, and Alessandro Portelli—even when we have project foci, like the Harriman Project, we're always interested in the life story of the person that we interview. Otherwise, we don't know—

Von Hagen: Right, yes.

Q: —very much in the end.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: I'll ask you the question I ask many people in this project, which is how early did you begin to cultivate interest in that region of the world?

Von Hagen: Well, that's hard to say. My mother was Viennese, so I grew up with some consciousness of Austria and its role in the Cold War. I remember, even as a child, going to the Hungarian-Austrian border and seeing the barbed wire and the watchdogs, and trying to understand what that meant as a—I think I was in elementary school if not kindergarten. My father was in the military, and he was in Strategic Air Command intelligence. So, he studied the Soviet Union, even though I didn't know what that was at the time. But he would bring home scrap paper from the office with maps that were probably secure [laughs], classified, of Eastern Europe that I used as a scrap paper to draw things. The first real engagement came when he retired, or we were about to retire in Denver. I was taking music lessons with an Italian American, and there was another student of hers who was the daughter of another Air Force retired officer veteran. Our families became friends, and that officer was named Walter Zealand, and he was actually Romuald Zelinski. He was a Polish American, and he taught Russian at a Christian Brothers high school where my father eventually ended up teaching. Mullen High School, in Denver.

He had the idea that I was a good mate for his daughter at the—in sixth grade, I think it was. Or maybe seventh grade. He thought that the way of getting us together—neither one of us liked each other particularly. We performed together, she played the piano and I played the accordion. We did things together in music, but we didn't really have much in common. But her parents were insistent that I was a good match. And so, her father started to teach us Russian.

She hated it because, as I learned later, he was an alcoholic and he probably—she didn't want to spend more time with him than she had to. I loved it, and ever since then, I wanted to know more about the Soviet Union. Every time I had a high school social studies project, it was about the Soviet Union. And then, by some, again, fortuitous circumstances, in my high school there was a Slovenian American, Ivan Ambrose [phonetic], who taught Russian. It wasn't a very particular college prep high school. It was a very lower middle class—a lot of Mexican American and Italian American families. It was not people going to college, even, but this guy taught first year Russian, and were five of us. And then second year Russian, I was the only student. He really loved teaching us about dancing, and he made Russian food for us, took us down to see [Sergei] Eisenstein movies at the Denver theater, the arts theater downtown, and really wanted us to feel something for Slavic culture and Russian culture.

It turns out the textbook that he had us use was the exact same textbook that I would eventually use at Georgetown [University] when I entered the School of Foreign Service in 1972, after graduating from high school. I took intensive beginning and intensive intermediate Russian. The textbook we used was the same one that I had used in high school, although I never bothered to learn the grammar in high school. At least I knew the alphabet and a few words. But I had to start over again, pretty much, at Georgetown. I spent more time studying Russian, even though I was an international relations major, than all four of my other courses. It was intensive and we just—as a result of which, my Russian was good by the time I made it through five years of that intensive program.

At Georgetown, I was an international relations major, so I took a lot of history, I took a lot of political science, I took a lot of economics, and a lot of language. Graduated in '76, went to the Soviet Union the first time in 1975, on the CIEE [Council on International Educational Exchange] summer language program in what was then Leningrad. We spent six weeks studying intensive Russian in Leningrad, and then took a nationwide tour to Moscow for a week and then Tbilisi and Kiev. So, I got a really good introduction to the Soviet Union already in 1975. It was deep [Leonid] Brezhnev period.

Then I came back for a semester. My last semester, Georgetown, I spent in Leningrad again, one of the coldest, darkest winters I've ever experienced. But it was also a life-changing experience, because I was trying to decide then whether to go to law school for the first of several times [laughter], or to go to graduate school in Slavic language and literature. I had really fallen in love with Russian literature my last year, with a wonderful teacher at Georgetown, Valentina Golondzowska, who had us read little things in Russian, but we really learned how to take apart the Russian. I got to see what a great literature we had there. I ended up going to Indiana to get an M.A. [Master of Arts], and so that's how I started [laughs].

Q: Oh, okay. Let me thank you.

Von Hagen: Got us farther—

Q: That was a real rap.

Von Hagen: Yes [laughter].

Q: So, let me pull it apart a little bit.

Von Hagen: Okay.

Q: I spent some time with Tim [Timothy M.] Frye, and he took some time to talk about what his first trips to USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] were like, what his first impressions were. I'd like to hear a little bit more in terms of how that experience of being there actually affected you.

Von Hagen: Well, the first time I went was in 1975. I was between my junior and senior year at Georgetown. I had taken, by that time, three years of intensive Russian, a lot of courses in Soviet politics, and Soviet foreign policy, and Marxist ideology. I was best prepared for having never been there. I had a lot of teachers who were Russian or Ukrainian. I had met people in the Soviet embassy who entertained me in their homes. I even had the official point of view from them. But it was still a culture shock, I think, the first time we went. It was still very much the Cold War. We had an orientation session in Paris for all the 150 students who were going from the United States to Leningrad for the summer. We were told about the KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti], and about black marketers, and how we were always to be careful and be good citizens and be good diplomats and obey the rules. [They] put the fear of God in us. That was the idea, that we should be afraid of what we were going to—and be very careful.

I had celebrated my birthday in Leningrad with all of our fellow students, and it was a very nice moment. This was late Brezhnev period, and it was hard to find things in restaurants and stores, so it was quite an adventure to just get the birthday cake. The Russian students who were there also participated and helped find stuff. It was really a nice coming together.

My initial impression of the Soviet Union was—and something that has lasted through my research is how militarized it was. By which I mean the number of people who wore uniforms from streetcar drivers to—and, again, Leningrad is a military city. It has got the naval academy, it's a big port city. It's sort of like Washington and other military cities in that you would expect military. But just the whole system of ranks and titles and uniforms and badges and epaulets was much more widespread than just the military. That stuck with me, and I realized—again, I was living in Georgetown and living in Arlington, which is also a very militarized part of D.C. [District of Columbia]. You see a lot of uniforms there and a lot of people doing defense work. It just struck me there was something about socialism in the Soviet Union that was much more military than what I thought socialism should be.

I ended up writing a book called *The Red Army* and the origins of this militarized socialism, which was an attempt to understand how the party, the communist party co-opted what they thought was the best military ways of running a society and of building socialism. It wasn't so much the military that was driving—it was the party who, I think, for whatever reason, looked to the military, military methods coming out of the civil war, as the best way of building socialism. Of course, military doesn't have a lot of room for dissent or disagreement or discussion. I think

that helped lead to the police state that was [Joseph] Stalin before too long. Even under [Vladimir] Lenin democracy was curtailed pretty early.

Early critics in Germany, German Social Democrats, referred to the Soviet experiment as barracks socialism. Not real socialism, but a militarized—so, that was an initial impression that I have still been grappling with. The problem of civil/military relations in Russia and in Ukraine and other countries—and even this country—is always up for grabs. It's always up for revising, and it has a lot to do with how the rest of society works, so that the relative weights of the military and the civilian sectors and how they interact and how they affect each other. That's true with the United States, too, I think, and especially these days when we fight eternal wars and—

Q: Yes. [Laughter] Yes, I just—I don't usually comment in oral history, but [laughter] West Point has a great history department.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: I've been to visit several times while they were developing their oral history program.

Von Hagen: Oh.

Q: They said the same thing. We're in a state of perpetual war.

Von Hagen: Yes, unfortunately.

Q: Yes. So, that book came out five years before you got your Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy]

Von Hagen: Oh, no, no, that came after.

Q: Oh, what year did you publish it?

Von Hagen: I did my dissertation research in Moscow and Leningrad, '82, '83, on a Fulbright IREX [International Research and Exchanges Board]. I came back the next year and wrote up the dissertation. I got it defended in '85. Started teaching here in '85, and it took, I think, until '91—the book came out.

Q: Oh, really?

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Oh, I thought that it was—

Von Hagen: No, it took a long time.

Q: —an earlier book.

Von Hagen: No, no. No.

Q: Okay.

Von Hagen: There was an earlier book that I helped—my advisor at Stanford, Terry [Terence L. Emmons], introduced me to a Siberian social revolutionary early in my career. I really developed a great deal of affection for this old guy. Actually, turned out he was Ukrainian, but he ended up in exile in Siberia and lead the Siberian revolutionary movement in 1917 and '18. He ended up in Palo Alto, actually, in Menlo Park, and working in the [Herbert] Hoover archives, and was trying to write his own biography and an eyewitness to what he saw in Siberia. He had me as his editor and, yes, research assistant. I think that also affected me, because I now am working on a Ukrainian social revolutionary—and other social revolutionaries. I sort of like those guys, because they were losers in the revolution. I always seem to veer towards the underdogs. I really think, more and more, that they were the human rights activists of their day.

Q: Oh, interesting.

Von Hagen: They were against war. They were the most strong peace candidates in 1917, '18. They wanted to make the working classes a lot better, and the peasants better, and wanted freedoms and all sorts of things. They were on the left, because that's where such people would be in [unclear] society. They were defeated by the Bolsheviks largely because they chose to play by the rules and to respect majority opinion, unlike the Bolsheviks, who were more willing to resort to coercion and manipulating elections. And so, they lost. But I have been recovering their

legacy ever since I met this Siberian guy. Who turned out to be a Ukrainian guy, but I didn't really know to ask him back then, because I hadn't had my imperial turn yet [laughter].

Q: Oh, when did you have your imperial turn?

Von Hagen: Well, during the time I was at Columbia, I think.

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: I started getting to know—actually, it came out in my Soviet history class, the first time I taught Soviet history here, which was 1985. The spring semester, just after I arrived. First class I taught. [Mikhail] Gorbachev came to power two months later. That was the beginning of—already Brezhnev had died, and we knew things were changing there. The first time I taught Soviet history, I must have had about seventy-five, eighty students. And I knew a lot of them were descendants of East European Jews. One of my advisors was an East European Jew, Alex Dallin. I had lots of Jewish people in my education, but they never had drawn my attention to that aspect of Russian history, or even of their own identity. They downplayed it, and were very assimilated into American and European society. The students wanted to know what it was like to be a Jew in the Soviet Union. I thought, that's a good question. So, I started educating myself.

I turned to my colleague, Michael Stanislavsky, who was the chair in Russian East European Jewish history. He put me on a bunch of his dissertation students' defense committees and oral exams, and I started learning the field of Jewish history. It's a very rich field, and I started

realizing that Russian history's not just about Russians. Shortly after that—well, not shortly after that, but about 1990 or so—I met Frank [E.] Sysyn and Alex [Alexander J.] Motyl, who was working at Columbia at that time. Both of them Ukrainian Americans. Started sort of edging me off into the Ukrainian direction, saying that's a big part. I was looking to do another book, sort of on the Red Army. But I wanted to do something new, and I was hoping to get into archives. I had come across a lot of stuff when I was doing my Red Army book about Ukraine, because it's the biggest military district. It's the most important strategic one for a long time, because it was on the border with Poland. Out of opportunistic reasons, I decided why not study Ukrainian history? Because it's the biggest nationality after the Russian, it's a language that I should be able to understand or learn, because it's between Polish and Russian—so I thought.

I just started Ukrainian-izing myself a bit [laughter] and learning the historiography. I realized that the historiography was very rich, and very contested, and full of politics, and not with a whole lot of archives, still, because the archives had been closed. I was going to do a book on the Ukrainian military district in the interwar period, going into [Joseph] Stalin, up to World War II. And then I got bogged down in World War I and—[laughter] because I think that's when it really started, the rise of the Ukrainian movement. By 1917, it was full-fledged. That's where I've been, moving in that direction. Along the way, I decided in order to understand the place of Ukraine in the Russian empire, I needed to know more about the Russian empire more generally. So, I took Turkish for a couple years, thinking I would do the Muslim people and the Turkish people—Ottoman empire, and went to Kazan with [Catherine] Evtuhov and [Boris] Gasparov, and we did a long conference there and book out of that.

I wanted to do Islam and I wanted to do Turkish, because I felt that there was another relationship that was very long in Russian imperial history and that is different from our relationship with Islam or other French or British—and so, I started wanting to know much more about how the empire worked, and along came Andreas Kappeler, a German scholar, who wrote this book on Russia as a multinational empire, in German. I was asked to review it in German. He and I have become best friends ever since then. He sort of was the intellectual leader of the imperial turn for a long time, and everyone was reading—his book was translated into Russian, into French, into English. He was actually relatively late, but his book had a very big impact on letting me see the bigger picture of where the Ukrainians, and the Jews, and the Muslims, and the Turks fit in this ever-evolving, complicated creature called the empire.

Q: For non-students of Soviet history, and post-Soviet history, could you define very simply, for the audience, what the imperial turn means literally and its impact on post-Soviet and Soviet studies?

Von Hagen: Yes. Well, I was trained, as a Russian historian, to believe that—well, I should say believe. I was trained—again, at Stanford, with Terry Emmons and Alex Dallin. Terry was a student of a great Moscow historian of the Soviet period, [Petr Andreevich] Zaionchkovskii, who was called the state school, the latest representative of the state school, which believed, along with Hegelians from the 19th century, that the real reformist, progressive element in Russian society was the bureaucracy, the state, because the society was too weak and too diffuse, and whatever other reasons. A bunch of, mostly cadet liberal historians wrote a history and established a narrative of Russian history as the progress of the state building a society. Most of

them were westernized, so they hoped that the Russian nation-state would join the European community and have parliamentary democracy and all those good things. But they really also believed that Russia could, like France, forge a national identity from its regional diversity. Or even like America, because some people thought that America's a melting pot. So, we learned the history of Russia as the history of the Russian nation-state.

That was always a problem. And there were always alternative voices, especially coming from people who are not Russian, Ukrainians and Jewish historians and Turkish historians, who emphasized the imperial nature. But we didn't teach Russian history as imperial history, even though the Russian empire was proud of being an empire. The Soviet Union was not so proud and decided it was not an empire. It was, in fact, the leader of anti-imperialist forces and we were the empire. There was a political element to—a lot of people who would say that there was a Russian empire said the Soviet Union was not an empire. I said, I don't think you can draw the line there. I think the Soviet Union also was an empire, because it had a multinational population, it was trying to regulate different—there were people who were already saying that we should pay more attention to the nationalities, the national minorities, because by 1970, I think, they made up half the population. Russians had only—great Russians, however you define them, were only half the population according to the survey. The other half was non-Russian, and the more we got into 1990s we have independent states now who are claiming their own narratives of historical development. That gave a new impetus to thinking about how the empire worked before there were independent states.

Again, it was partly a matter of convenience, laziness maybe. It was already hard enough to learn Russian for most Americans. Most of us had to learn German or French as a research language, because that's where most of the good research—so the thought of adding another language or two, which I think is what you need to understand the empire—that's a lot to ask. And so, there's a lot of resistance to thinking about the empire as empire, and a lot of sort of default mechanism to think about Russia as Moscow and St. Petersburg and forget the rest of the country, even though it's an immense country—the biggest country in the world—and has always had, from its origins, a multiethnic complexion. But we chose to see Russia there instead of that. Again, partly Russian historians themselves wanted to see that. There were other historians, even Russian historians, who were offering alternative—but we only in—

Q: Who were some of those?

Von Hagen: In St. Petersburg, there was [Sergey] Platonov and a couple guys who worked on Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth who, even in the Soviet period, were—and they were sort of marginalized and almost dissidents. But they were offering a view from the periphery and a much more complicated than the Moscow/St. Petersburg view. Even this project that Catherine Evtuhov and Boris [Gasparov] and I did in Kazan with other people—it was called “Kazan, Moscow, Petersburg”. There were three different capitols that were playing very important roles at different moments in different ways. That's all lost when you just talk about Russia. For a long time, we tried to get our students to say Soviet Union, not Russia. Of course, now Russia's back and you have to get them to say [laughter] Russia again.

That's why it was important to understand how the empire worked, because we didn't look at it as an empire. I think that if you look at all the problems that they're having today, still, a lot of them go back to the unsatisfactory unraveling of this empire, which had been put together largely by force and coercion, and held together by force and coercion for decades, centuries, and is still coming apart in violent ways.

Q: That's very helpful, thank you.

Von Hagen: Yes, good [laughter].

Q: Thank you. You started teaching in 1985. What was the Harriman Institute, what was your relationship with it in those very early years, and up until 1989—I believe you became associate director.

Von Hagen: Already, when I was a grad student in Moscow and Leningrad on my IREX Fulbright year, one of my Stanford graduate school buddies, David [G.] Gutiérrez—who I just saw in San Diego, where he teaches now—he sent me a clipping from, I think, *New York Times*, maybe even, about the gift that the Harrimans had given that year. I think it was about twenty million, maybe ten million. I can't remember the initial gift—and that they were going to start up again area studies, after it had been—in its latest decline, and it was going to be given a new boost by this big Harriman gift. My buddy, Dave, said, “Well, maybe this is the place you should go.” [Laughs] Prophetically.

I was writing my dissertation in Moscow and Leningrad. I came back and started applying for jobs that year. There was a job, I think, at the Naval Academy in Hawaii, Columbia, and one other school. I can't remember. I applied to all of them. The only one who answered me was Columbia. Why Columbia? Because, I think, Alex Dallin, who had been one of my advisors at Stanford was a Columbia product himself. He knew everybody. He knew Marc Raeff, he knew Leo [Leopold H.] Haimson, he knew the whole gang here. Knew Marshall [D.] Shulman.

He had been here the semester before as a senior fellow. He was touting me to people, from what I understand, and he wrote—I saw the letter he wrote for me once, and it made me blush [laughs]. He was my biggest agent here. I was competing against Lynne Viola and Lynn Malley [phonetic], two Lynns. One from Berkeley and one from Barnard [College] and Princeton. I got the job, with my dissertation only having two chapters done. That was the days when you could do those things, because [laughter] the job—and I really had no illusion that I was going to get a job at Columbia. That was the farthest thing—I thought Columbia was a place that I would come to when I was a senior scholar. They would invite me back from some provincial university and I would start after I'd already made my name. But, no, I was going to start from my first job.

It was a very interesting. Seweryn Bialer was still around, and he was part of the search committee. He loved my dissertation. It was about the Red Army. He had a very soft spot in his heart for the Red Army, because they liberated him from the camps in Poland. He was probably still a communist at heart in some ways. He liked my work a lot, and Bob [Robert O.] Paxton was the chair of the search committee. So, I got to meet him for the first time. Wonderful gentleman, who I still have a great deal of affection for. Ainslie [T.] Embree was the chair of the

department, also a very sweet man. I had prepared for the worst. I thought Columbia's going to be this—and there were people in the faculty—I won't mention any names [laughter]—who did give me a hard time and who really made me feel like I was a piece of worthless I-don't-know-what, and that I had no chance to be in the job there. But I was wrong. They had, apparently, less influence than I thought.

I ended up getting my first job as a junior professor to Marc Raeff and Leo Haimson who I had read as a grad student in my graduate courses. I thought, whoa! [laughs] Then I realized that they didn't talk to each other [laughter]. So, they would talk through me. They hated each other since at least the late '60s, over something here during the '60s. I never was able to get a clear story from either one of them or from anyone else who knew them what failed. Because they had been very close at one point. But then something happened during the '60s, the troubles at Columbia, and they became mortal enemies. I would have to be on dissertation committees with them, with a poor graduate student who saw them fighting with each other. The poor graduate student was trying to [laughs] make it through his orals. So, it was an interesting time. I learned a lot of diplomacy [laughter]. All my diplomacy from my Georgetown days, I think, came in handy.

I was able to get along with both Leo and Mark, most of the time. That was my main contact at Columbia, was with those two. Then, Michael Stanislavsky was my refuge from them, because he knew both of them, too, and was closer to Mark than to Leo. But my office was always in the Harriman until my very last year here. It was up on the twelfth floor.

Q: I was surprised by that when you said that yesterday.

Von Hagen: It was next to István [Deák] for a long time. István was my neighbor from the beginning. Dick [Richard M.] Wortman eventually moved in when he got the job here. So, it was Dick Wortman, me, and István. We saw each other a lot. John [S.] Micgiel was there, Bob [Robert H.] Legvold, Rick [Richard E.] Ericson, all of them. I ended up spending more time with the area studies folks, except for Leo—and even Leo was—Leo's office was there, whereas Mark's office—because he identified more with the History Department and didn't really like the Harriman Institute. His office remained at Fayerweather, so if I wanted to see him, I had to go over there. Michael, because he was Jewish studies, he was over there. I had a split life all the time physically, topographically. I was torn between Fayerweather and SIPA [School of International and Public Affairs] all the time.

Q: Yes, there are many historical battles between those two.

Von Hagen: Exactly, yes. Ainslie was my first chair, and then I had—when I came up for—and again, there, too—when I was hired, I was told that Columbia had a history of tenuring people that they hired from outside, that it was—I should say, they didn't tenure their own who they hired as assistant professors, sort of on the Harvard model at that time, that they sort of wring you out for five or six years and then cast you off like an orange to some other university where you can go prosper, away from them. But all of the people who were on the search committee assured me that Columbia was changing its tune, and that they were not going to hire people anymore who they didn't have confidence they could tenure down the line. But that was a gamble.

Three of us were hired that year, I think. Marc Van De Mierop in Ancient Near East, Richard Billows in Ancient Greece, and me. We all ended up getting tenure, so they were right. But none of us believed it until we got tenure [laughs]. Along the way, I was even encouraged by some of my senior colleagues outside of Columbia—Sheila Fitzpatrick and Ron [Ronald G.] Suny, to name two—to try to get offers from outside so that Columbia would take notice of me and not forget I was here. I didn't really want to do that, and I felt bad about doing it. But I applied for jobs at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], at Chicago, and Toronto. I was on the short list and invited to all three of them, and I didn't get any of those jobs. I thought this is not a very good [laughter]. Actually, at UCLA, whoever got the job bombed out. Chicago never hired anybody until they hired Sheila Fitzpatrick, which—yes, I couldn't compete with that. Toronto ended up hiring Lynne Viola, who was the one I beat out for the job here. That was nice, and she seems very happy there. So, that didn't work, but on the other hand, I did get an offer from Yale the next year. I taught for a semester at Yale.

Q: I noticed that, yes.

Von Hagen: They offered me a job. Without tenure, still. They said that they would put me up for tenure the following year, but they couldn't offer me the job with tenure. Then, Columbia finally decided that they would have a place open. Columbia didn't have lines—or they said they didn't have lines. It was assumed that until Haimson retired, I had no place to move into. When I got the offer from Yale, they opened a place for me. They said that there would be a line once I was ready for tenure. And the next year, I got tenure, so—

Q: So, that was an effective strategy.

Von Hagen: Yes. Well, maybe, indirectly [laughter].

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: But I really felt bad. I was chair of the history department here and then I was chair of the history department at ASU [Arizona State University]. When someone applies for a job and they're already at a good place, I think to myself are they doing the same thing that I was doing?

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: And do we want to really invest all those efforts in someone who doesn't really want to move here? We just did that again with the search for Melikian. We had a woman who, I think, was trying to get a position for herself at her home university. She got the first offer, and we spent a lot of months wooing her before we realized that she didn't really want to come [laughs]. That's the academic market and its risks and downsides.

But I made it. I made it, and then I even got promoted to full, eventually. I got the [Boris] Bakhmeteff chair. When I left, I had the Bakhmeteff chair, which then went to Boris Gasparov, who I think still holds it. Then I was associate director for a while under Bob Legvold, and then

under Rick Ericson, and then I took over, myself, sort of, if you say that you take over that thing [laughter].

Q: So, let's talk more about that thing, that thing in the heyday of area studies. One of the big themes of this project, of course, is to look at area studies during that period.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: I think you could just start with when you came in and became more affiliated in the mid-to-late '80s, and describe what was going on.

Von Hagen: Well, I came in at a very interesting moment, 1985, which as I said, was when Gorbachev came to power. I was teaching Soviet history when he came to power. I was teaching Soviet history the next spring when Chernobyl happened. Then through 1991, when I was in Berlin, when everything came apart. I was involved with the Harriman at a time when Soviet Union, namely the object of our study, was disappearing, or at least about to disappear. We were called the W. Averell Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union, [in] those days. I thought that was always a little bit pretentious, but—[laughter] make the Harrimans happy that we were doing advanced study, instead of some primitive study [laughter].

When the Soviet Union ended, we had a big debate. What do we do now as Soviet studies people? That's when we also started realizing that American triumphalism was going to impact the funding for area studies, because now that we had won the Cold War, no one needs to bother

to learn any languages, or about any other countries, because everyone's going to be— [Yoshihiro Francis] Fukuyama being the most caricatured example of this *End of History* [and *the Last Man*] argument that “Why do you need area studies?” because everything's going to be market economy, everyone's going to speak English. We lost all of the funding that we had from State Department and Defense Department and even some of the foundations. A lot of the foundations withdrew from area studies and moved into domestic politics, which is also important. But we live in the world and we need to know about the world.

Then came 9/11 [September 11, 2001 attacks], which meant a further diversion of whatever resources there had been to Middle East studies. Arabic and Persian and all that stuff became cool and hip and funded, and we had to scramble. Even a Harriman endowment, which you would think would have cushioned the institute from these sorts of economic trends and political fashions more—one of the things I had to do when I was director was fight off a hostile takeover attempt by the Europeanists, who wanted to have—the New Europe was going to include the Harriman part of Europe. But they had no money, and we had money, so there was a group of faculty who spearheaded this attempt to take over the Harriman endowment—

Q: Now, what year was this?

Von Hagen: —which we stopped. This was—

Q: What role were you in during that?

Von Hagen: I was director. I was director.

Q: You had partially created that alliance between the Eastern European Institute and Harriman, and then they turned against you.

Von Hagen: Well, it's more complicated than that.

Q: Well, okay, you tell the story [laughs].

Von Hagen: Yes. As part of the change of our title, and the change of the object we study, we—and also because István retired and there wasn't a senior East Europeanist any more who could in all rights run an East Central Europe Institute. But it was the oldest freestanding East Central Europe Institute, so it wasn't going to go away. We tried to accommodate a sort of federalist arrangement, in which they would keep their identity and even keep John. But somebody—

Q: John who? I'm sorry.

Von Hagen: Micgiel. Micgiel.

Q: Micgiel.

Von Hagen: But—[laughs] up there.

Q: Right. I put his name down as a possible interviewee.

Von Hagen: I don't know, it was either he or István got the idea that I was trying to do away with East Central Europe or that we were, and they went to the dean. The dean put a little quash on it for a while. It did happen in the end. But then, another group came in—

Q: Excuse me, what did happen in the end?

Von Hagen: That we merged with East Central Europe. They became a part of us. Well, on the same floor anyway, but they became less autonomous and more part of—and we tried not to—I mean I had no empire—I didn't really want to take over anything. I was happy that they did—but they needed some administrative and financial support, and we had that and they didn't. So, I was trying to save them from going out of business, but that's not how they saw it. Again, I don't think it's so much John or István as it was just a general sort of diffuse feeling of suspicion. The field, like I say, had been under threat for a lot of reasons, and I was just another threat to them.

That we solved, and we declared that we were also a New European model. We started doing more with Europeanists, too, and there was no Europe studies center at Columbia. European studies is everywhere. It's in the CC [Core Curriculum], it's in Lit. Hum. [Literary Humanities], it's everywhere. But there was no place that needed to Europe until recently, and then Institute for the Study of Europe was created. They had some endowment from, I think, a former ambassador, too, but they wanted more. We had more, and there [were] constant attempts to sort

of turn the Harriman into an institute for the study of Europe, which meant it would be headed by someone from Western Europe. So we fought back, and we [were] mostly successful, I think.

But along the way, I should say that I think all area studies institutes and centers learned that they had to be a lot more entrepreneurial. Especially a lot of elite ones like Columbia, Harvard, Yale had been coasting on their laurels and becoming a little bit complacent, I think, about their security and not being the most innovative or enterprising people. What the funding crisis did, and all the attacks on area studies, was made us look for allies and coalitions with East Asian studies, with Middle East and Asian languages and with South Asian languages, with all the people who are on our borders, and who had—and Jewish studies. That's the model I have in Arizona State. I realized that we're nothing if we don't have powerful allies all over the place, and people we work with and can share things with.

Because in America—I mean, since I've been living in Arizona, I went to Las Vegas once, and we have this thing on TV [television] that what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas. I think that's the attitude of Americans about the world, that what happens in Syria or in Russia or in Ukraine doesn't really affect us. I think [you] only have to open the newspaper, even American newspaper, and you'll see that we're entangled with everything. We're a big country. We have bases all over the world, we have companies all over, we have citizens all over the world—my students all over the world. We just can't be like ostriches and put our heads in the sand. I think that's the mission of the area studies, is to keep alive some global awareness and some consciousness that we're part of the world and the world is part of us [laughs].

Q: Yes, very much so. I admire that tremendously.

Von Hagen: In Arizona, especially, around the border, two hours from the border with Mexico. The whole discussion about others is about Mexican immigrants, and illegal immigrants, and deported immigrants, and the whole Trump campaign and—which has been—he finds a lot of fertile ground in Arizona, because there's a lot of anti-global people there who just really want—they moved to Arizona, or grew up in Arizona and chose not to leave Arizona, because they wanted to be away from everything. They wanted to be away from New York, they wanted to be away from California, they want to—and the world. But the world is there [laughs]. It's a nice place to live, it's a safe and secure place, with a reasonably good economy. So, we have refugees from all over the world, from Vietnam, from Ethiopia, from Bosnia, Herzegovina, from everywhere, pretty much. It's hard for people to get used to that. It's hard in Europe, it's hard in Russia, to absorb all these people. But I think that's what—we have no choice, other than war and violence [laughs] and incarceration.

Q: Yes. I'm with you on that. When you became head of the Harriman Institute, you published a fifteenth anniversary book, and I think I found a background document that—a lot of that text came out in that book—but about how you had to find the mission of Harriman again.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes.

Q: One of the things you said, the mission of the Harriman Institute—just connecting to what you just said—is the duty to challenge ignorance.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about some of your strategies for doing that and how you wanted to build it out to be more of a regional studies institute?

Von Hagen: Well, as an academic center, our main focus has always been on teaching. I think probably our biggest impact on combating ignorance is teaching our students, both graduate students and undergraduates. But also we had—through the Title VI money in the good old days, we had outreach to high school teachers and—

Q: Really?

Von Hagen: —and we did an annual conference on the area for high school teachers in the region. Encouraging people to come here and share their knowledge with us, from those countries and other countries where they did their research. Then talking to the media. For a long time—before I came, I should say—*The Washington Post* or *The New York Times* or any reputable newspaper that was going to send a reporter over to Moscow had them do a year at Harvard or Columbia, absorbing as much as they could. We did a little bit of that toward the end of the Soviet Union. But I remember the first time David Remnick decided he didn't need to come to Harriman. He was going to have a tour of Russia by himself and he was going to learn everything he needed to know on his own. I hate to say this, but I think David Remnick's reporting from reporting from Moscow reflected that. He had a lot of strange misconceptions

about the world. I mean, he did well for himself and he did do a lot to publicize Russia, and wrote a couple books that were bestsellers. But we didn't have much of that anymore, because first of all, I think newspapers couldn't afford it. They were having their own problems. Newspapers were less interested in foreign correspondents.

Q: About the same time, they started closing their bureaus.

Von Hagen: Exactly. That was a challenge we really couldn't overcome. But we did what we could where we could, and we worked with the journalism school to try to keep ties—

Q: That's interesting.

Von Hagen: That was even before the woman came, who was from the Committee to Protect Journalists—

Q: I'm blanking on her name, too.

Von Hagen: But that was before her. I knew her from before. We didn't have anybody who did that, but we tried to find people like that who would talk about journalists' situation and how to do reporting in the post-Soviet world. The other thing was I had a very interesting trip, as director, to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], because one of our alumni was a director of intelligence there. I don't know where I met him, but he invited me to come down to the CIA headquarters in Langley to meet research people there. This was already, like, the mid-'90s. The

idea was to see what it is that the intelligence community now is studying and what they need to learn, and whether there's anything that we do that would help them or not help them. So, I spent a day at the CIA. Again, that—about combating ignorance. That's their job, too. They need to combat ignorance [laughs] in order to protect our country. So we hope.

It was a lot of that kind of stuff. I did my own things with *The New York Times*, too. I don't know if you remember. I became famous for, or infamous for, Walter Duranty—anti-Duranty.

Q: Oh, I'd forgotten that. Yes.

Von Hagen: Every big, round anniversary of the famine—which was '32, '33—every ten years, the Ukrainian community mounted a campaign to strip Walter Duranty of his Pulitzer Prize for having denied the existence of the famine.

Q: I did read about that.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: I remembered it, yes.

Von Hagen: At some point, the Pulitzer Prize committee asked *The New York Times* to reconsider his prize. They turned to me as the sort of in-house [laughs] historian of the '20s, because that's when he was there. They sent me all of his stories from the '20s that he had

written and asked me to do an analysis of them. I wrote back and said, “If I were going to get a Pulitzer Prize, I wouldn’t want this man in my company. I think he was basically a propagandist and a yellow journalist. He took what Soviet statistics and *Pravda* said without questioning it.” There were a lot of reporters who were under a lot of stress in the Stalin period and were under constant threat of being deported if they violated any laws. But all of them, when they came home, at least, wrote memoirs in which they talked about what they saw. Even in his memoir when he came home, he denied that there was a famine. We know from his testimony to the British embassy that he saw the famine and he—but he just lied about it.

I said that, as I became—and even Ukrainians who, if they knew my opinions about anything, would never agree with me on anything else—because I’m the anti-Duranty, I have some street cred with them that I probably shouldn’t have. I think he was a good example of the complicated lives of journalists in Stalin’s Russia, yes. How do you tell—? I think we’re going to be facing some of that again. Not the same, it’s not Stalinism, but there are certain narratives that are being pushed and certain people who are not being allowed to share their narratives. I think also the sort of surveillance techniques on journalists, and other foreigners, are probably more insidious and more sophisticated than they used to be in my day.

Q: No doubt about that.

Von Hagen: Yes. So, ignorance is a—in Arizona, I often get requests from our local media. It is sometimes just so frustrating when I try to explain to them things that I consider basic facts about Russia and Ukraine, and they have no—and even if I explain it to them, because they have no

context, when it finally comes out as a story, I don't recognize what I said to them. I am not very optimistic about our success in educating our media—including the national media, who are only a little bit better. What I have chosen to do lately is I have a guy at the Radio Liberty, Yuri Zhigalkin, who interviews me in Russian. He broadcasts to a Russian-speaking audience over there, presumably. We usually have two or three people that he has on a conference call, and we talk about contemporary stuff and Putin and whatever. That, I really feel is something I can do, because he understands, first of all, Russia, he understands me, he doesn't distort what I say, he doesn't take things out of context. We have a really serious discussion, which gets put up on air, but also in text. That, I feel, [is] still very important part of our mission.

The other thing I've been doing lately, as an adaptation of this, is Facebook. I used to hate Facebook, and I still have my doubts about Facebook. But it's a very good way of keeping up with a lot of colleagues in Russia and Ukraine and around the world who I don't see very often. Even on email it's hard to keep up with them. They share things with me from their own research or from things that they found persuasive that I see as a teaching tool. I share it with my students and my colleagues. If I think something's interesting, I share it with them. I think that Facebook has somewhat offset the sort of letting-us-down of the media. I'd say that. But it's not satisfactory, I think. We still have constant work to do.

America just loves to not think about the world if we can—I think that's a characteristic of a lot of big countries. I think the Soviet Union was a lot that way, too. They thought "We're so big, why do we need to worry about what's happening elsewhere?" But that's the arrogance of power [laughs].

Q: Right. So, back to your teaching. I'm so interested that you brought that up right away, because this is a legacy issue for the Harriman Institute, and I really would love to hear you talk more about it. As you were teaching, as the Soviet Union was falling apart, could you take me a little bit through the change that was happening in terms of the nuclear anti-proliferation work that, say, Carnegie [Corporation] was doing. I'm sure you had relationships with Carnegie. Did you—?

Von Hagen: Yes, but not with nuclear—and with other things, yes.

Q: Not with David Hamburg.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Yes. Okay.

Von Hagen: Oh, David—

Q: Hamburg, who was the president.

Von Hagen: Yes, I was on a committee with him at Human Rights Watch. That's where I met him, but not otherwise.

Q: So, I'm just interested in who was—

Von Hagen: Yes. That was more Marshall Shulman and Bob Legvold.

Q: Right, okay. So, just take me through it, then, in terms of those figures and how you were— especially after Chernobyl, how you were shifting your thinking from nuclear encounter to environmental disaster and all of that. What were you teaching people?

Von Hagen: Well, when I taught Soviet history for the first time, I wanted the students to realize that a lot of what they thought about the Soviet Union was propaganda, American propaganda. Some of it was true, but a lot of it was less true. I taught the course as a historiographical debate. I had them read a very Cold War history by Donald Treadgold, who I got to know, and actually I published in his series. He starts the book with some thing about tyranny and [Alexander] Pushkin and ends with tyranny and Pushkin, and that's all the story of tyranny in the Soviet Union. Yes, there was plenty of tyranny. Then I had them read a Soviet textbook translated to English by Progress Publishers, and it's *A History of the USSR*, the last two volumes, which was completely the opposite. It was progress, harmony, love, peace, socialism, justice.

Then I had them read Sheila Fitzpatrick in the middle, who took some of the Soviet claims seriously, but was a British-trained Australian, English-speaking historian of E. H. [Edward Hallett] Carr, and who was a rising star in the field and had been at Columbia when I—actually, she was at Columbia my first semester. She was a senior fellow here that last semester, even though she was on her way out and had been denied tenure, which was a very awkward position

for me to be in, since I was her replacement. This snot-nosed little big kid [laughs] from California, replacing poor Sheila, who went on to Texas and then to Chicago.

I wanted them, first of all, to realize that Soviet history is a very contested field, and that people have very strong opinions, whether you're on the right or the left. I think that semester, the movie *Russia House* came out and the movie *Red Dawn*, which was a remake of some—and so here, I said, “Two extremes. Here we have wonderful Russia with the dissidents, heroes, and scientists, and love story with, what's her name, [Michelle] Pfeiffer. On the other hand, we have a Soviet-Mexican-Cuban-led invasion of the Southwest being fought off by these high school kids in Colorado.” [Laughs] The way that—we're at the point where things were changing.

I wanted them to realize how even our culture shaped their ideas about America and the Soviet Union. How the Soviet Union was, in some ways, our antipode, that everything that we thought we were good about, they were the opposite. The other thing, I mentioned yesterday that I—even as I was a—from my first time there, I always looked at my friends and my Soviet friends and I said, “I wonder what I would've become if I'd lived here and grown up here.” I wanted them to think that, too. I said, “Think about sort of little people and ordinary people, not just Stalin and Lenin. But how would you as a—” and I had them do exercises that got them to think about that.

I think that was my point, to humanize the Soviet Union, without ignoring all the gulag, and the war, and all the horrible stuff, and the repression. But that these were people who were trying to make their way in a very complicated and sometimes difficult world. That's what history is about, trying to gain some empathy with some other culture and some other time. I think the

biggest impact I've had is on students I've taught who still write me about how that course changed their view of the world. That's kind of—

Q: So exciting.

Von Hagen: Yes. I still think that's what I do the best, is explaining that to kids. I've got four months to explain all of my weird ideas about how the Soviet Union worked or didn't work, and get to know them while they get to know me. I want them to realize that Soviet citizens were human beings, that they were very diverse human beings, that they changed, that they weren't all automatons who listen to everything the propaganda—but on the other hand, propaganda was powerful. It was all-pervasive and hard to avoid, and there were not too many niches where you could be something that was not officially Soviet. So, that was my challenge.

Gorbachev was really good for that, because he was opening up, everything was opening up. People were talking about the terror and the revolution and Lenin and Stalin in ways that they had never spoken about—not since [Nikita] Khrushchev. Even Khrushchev didn't last long and it wasn't that far—but under Gorbachev, the doors were opened. I started going to work in archives for the first time. I had never been allowed to archives before.

Q: You mean, you went to Russia.

Von Hagen: Moscow.

Q: Moscow.

Von Hagen: Yes. I worked in the party archive, I worked in the state archive. Then I started doing these archival projects where I got entrée into everybody's archives, and had my students going to work in archives. It was really a time of great hope, and it was good to be teaching Soviet history for a change instead of saying, "Oh, it's not all dark and bleak and ugly." Then [Vladimir] Putin came back and [laughter]—

Q: He ruined your game!

Von Hagen: Yes, yes. I think he ruined it for Russians and Ukrainians, as well. It wasn't just us that got it ruined.

Q: Of course.

Von Hagen: But it was exciting to be doing it then, and also to be discovering about the non-Russians. There were now fifteen states where there'd only been one. Even some of those states were, like Czechoslovakia and farther east, were breaking up into other states. Yugoslavia was breaking up. So, there was a lot to study. We were used to a very static, monolithic world, and a grey world. All of a sudden, everything was exploding around us. That was the '90s, when I was moving into [laughs] the directorship.

Q: Right. What were some of the earliest challenges? I read in your report that you were trying to raise money for four or five different lines for faculty hires.

Von Hagen: Yes, and that meant dealing with a lot of departments. Again, area studies, as I said, was one of the first fields, or disciplinary inventions, that presumed that people from different disciplines would talk to each other, and even sometimes write together and work together and even teach together. I think that's now the trend; interdisciplinary trend, disciplinary. But I think we were doing that back in 1940s, already, at the Harriman, at Harvard. So, that was a natural—but the thing is that the Harriman never had the power to appoint anybody. We always had to go through a department to work with them. They weren't going to sacrifice one of their increasingly rare and precious lines for something they didn't think would advance their own interest. So, it was a matter of trying to translate how our field could help political science or anthropology or—well, Slavic, we didn't need to convince, because that's all they did—history, economics.

The only success I had in the end was raising money in Ukrainian studies, because we hit upon Petro Jacyk and—thanks to Frank Sysyn—and then Roman Procyk down in Philadelphia, also thanks to Frank Sysyn.

And there, too, it was kind of a strategic game. Both Jacyk and Procyk had given a lot of money, or raised a lot of money, for Harvard. Harvard, for a variety of reasons, was not as well-received by the diaspora as they had wanted to be. We were the new kid on the block. Again, there are more Ukrainians in the New York/New Jersey area than there are in the Boston area, anyway.

So, we should have been, and we were once, a powerhouse of Ukrainian studies back in the '40s and '50s. We had some pretty important people here who left for a variety of reasons, some to Canada, someplace else. It wasn't as if we'd never done Ukraine, but we hadn't done it for a long time.

The diaspora was ready to help Columbia put itself back on the map. We got first money from Jacyk for the visiting chair, and then from the Shevchenko [Scientific] Society that funds Mark Andryczyk position now. That was the biggest success. Yuri Shevchuk in the Slavic department was another thing we helped raise money for, and convinced the Slavic department that Ukrainian was good. But that's about it, in the end, because all the other ones—I mean, endowing a chair is like a three million, or five million, dollar operation, and there are not too many people around. We were looking for oligarchs, like NYU [New York University] eventually did successfully, and other schools. But I think we're lucky we didn't get involved with them [laughs]. Because oligarchs are usually not good news. Although Harriman was an oligarch himself, so—

Q: [Laughs] Oh, yes.

Von Hagen: An American oligarch.

Q: Oh, gosh.

Von Hagen: How they wouldn't have taken his money back then, either, if we'd known.

Q: [Laughs] So, that was one of the things that you were working on.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: What were some other early challenges when you became director?

Von Hagen: I think once we got Putin, the challenge—I would say the challenge to keep the— with Cathy [Catherine Theimer] Nepomnyashchy we developed this core curriculum for the certificate for the Harriman. There had been one in place before. It was a very rigorous thing and a lot of courses. It got to the point that there was almost no one completing the certificate anymore. So, we thought—

Q: It required a thesis, right?

Von Hagen: Yes, and lots of other things that were just—I mean, maybe in the old days when people didn't have too many other competing demands on their time—but, like, political scientists just would drop out, because they had to do all the statistics and all the methodology. It was mostly history students and Slavic people who were left. That's not really enough for—I mean, that's the core of area studies, but it can't be the end. So, Cathy and I worked a lot with faculty to try to come up with a new curriculum that was streamlined down, but also more up-to-date, and also to come up with this legacies course, which became the sort of—not the capstone,

because it came at the beginning, but sort of opening course. First it started as Legacies of the Soviet Union, then became Legacies of Empire in the Soviet Union. I think that's what it is now.

We tried to get people from different fields to present their disciplinary highlights of the field.

We had them read things that came from different fields, and the students themselves came from different fields. It was about half MIA [Master of International Affairs] students from SIPA. That was always a big group, subgroup, too. We were embedded in SIPA, and at least half of our certificate and Master's students were SIPA students who were doing a regional concentration in addition to whatever else they were doing. That kept us a little more grounded in the real world, in the contemporary world, than if we'd just done history and Slavic.

It was a challenge to teach them, because of them were not going on to academic careers, whereas the historians and the—even the political scientists were going on, most of them, to some academic career. So, we had to find some way of creating an interesting enough situation that the non-academic-oriented folks could talk to the more practical-oriented folks and learn something together. That is, I think, still an ongoing challenge; how to do that successfully.

The non-academic fields into which our students are going now are somewhat similar, but also different. Like I said, the refugee thing is just big. I mean, we didn't have that many people doing refugees in the past, but now half of the students who came under one of our fellowships this summer were doing refugee work and humanitarian, which is the other side of the military intelligence crew—has always been our mainstay. The military intelligence/security complex people. They're the ones who do the wars, and then the humanitarian people deal with the

aftereffects of the wars. Sometimes the war continues. That's our new audience, I think, journalists and humanitarian workers and development workers, even.

We were starting to reach out to journalism, to law, to business, to public health, and even the—like, one of the things I've been recently doing, which is not so relevant to my Harriman thing is NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] is one of the few official government-to-government cooperations we have with Russia left. We're flying up into space on Russian crafts and we're training American pilots to go live with Russian cosmonauts. One of our former [Berkeley] grad students, Tony Vanchu, heads the office in Houston. So, I'm bringing him out to talk up Russian to the Earth and space exploration people. Cybersecurity is a new field. I mean, cybersecurity didn't exist ten years ago, and now we have cybersecurity people who do Russian, Turkish, Persian—all the languages we teach. They're now doing—in the computer and engineering, whatever it is, department at ASU. So, again that's new fields that we wouldn't have even thought about twenty years ago. Now, [laughs] there they are.

Q: This is such a grossly broad question, but I'm going to put it on the table anyway [laughs]. As the tensions started building between classical area studies and the new social sciences, how did you define that during your time? The rise of functional institutes. There'll be sub-questions that come out of that for us later around your work with Columbia and pressures from Columbia, so on and so forth.

Von Hagen: Yes, area studies—again, after 9/11 and after we turned our attention toward—especially—but even after 1991, like 1991 after the end of the Soviet Union and the end of

Soviet empire, there was a kind of—again, with our triumphalism and—American triumphalism in general—geopolitically, there's a triumphalism of rational choice in political science, which was a very quantitative—one of my sociology friends said that political scientists had economics envy, because economists got the bigger salaries and they were the ones who were making consultations with important people. And so, the political scientists were jealous of the economists and decided they had to become more like economists. I've done a lot of thinking and talking to people who work in this field, and transitology was one of the outcomes of that, that everyone is on their way to democracy and market economies, and we just follow the path. Early on, that had problems.

A lot of people in political science, especially, would start writing about the Soviet Union, Russia, having never been there, having never studied the language. Even the data sets that they used, someone else collected them. There was no attention, to me, to how the data was collected, what questions they were asking, what conditions the questions were asked. All the questions that, as oral historians, think are important. That was irrelevant to them, because if it complicated their yes and no questions, that was to be discarded. The most important questions, as far as I'm concerned, were not treated by most political scientists, who were on making their careers.

Again, someone like Alex, I think, has been a little bit out of the mainstream. You don't find that many numbers in his books, thank goodness. He talks to people and listens to them. I think that's—and there are a lot of political scientists who don't do that stuff and who do still believe in human beings and not just in numbers and large ends. But unfortunately, political science has defected from area studies, as has economics even before. If you're not doing market economics

in classical European-American—I don't even know what that is anymore—you're not doing economics. A lot of economies around the world don't operate like ours or French or the British. And yet—[laughs] they ought to be studied, too. It tends to be area studies, since—and anthropologists who study those weird economies and political economies. Political science wanted to be the queen of all area studies, or the king, not sure which—

Q: Maybe some hybrid version.

Von Hagen: Yes, maybe some hybrid [laughter]. They wanted to tell the rest of us that they were the only ones who understood the contemporary world, and they were the ones who were scientists, and the rest of us were playing with intuition, and it was—

That was part of the attack, was the rational choice, quantitative methods story. But the other was the rise of global studies or transnational and transregional studies. Again, there is, I think, more justification—and that's something we have had to adapt to. I mean, there are some problems like climate change, which don't recognize boundaries. Or Zika viruses, which don't recognize boundaries. Even refugees, to a large degree, don't recognize boundaries anymore. So, there are certain global problems that cannot be addressed only from the boundaries of one country. We've have accepted that. I think that's one of the other reasons that we have been so entrepreneurial in reaching out to other regional institutes, because we recognize that their histories are part of our histories, and their economies, are part of our economies. And their refugees fly into our lands and their refugees fly out. We're all entangled, and I think—

The global part, I think, was a very salubrious challenge for us. I think we have, to a large degree, met that challenge. A lot of places now call themselves transnational and international studies, or regional transnational—so there's a recognition. But that was a challenge to us, too. People said, "If you don't do global stuff, we don't want to fund you." We kept on saying, "But the global is also perceived through the regional and the local, and you can't understand even globalization without getting some sense of the context in which globalization is happening."

Q: Let's just take that word globalization as it was used in the mid-1990s. But there were a lot of problems with how that term was used.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about it a little bit?

Von Hagen: Well, it's part of the same triumphalism, and that all—

Q: It's almost an imperialism.

Von Hagen: Well, that's the way some people looked at it—[laughter] our U.S. imperialism. It was, again, a kind of ignorance, a blind insistence that we could export our democracy, our markets to these countries that had not had those traditions. Again, a lot of people who had no background in the region coming and telling people—especially political scientists again, because both the political scientists, economists could say, with good reason, that there was no

political science or economics field in the Soviet Union. There wasn't; it was some other mystification. So, they went in assuming that Soviet scholars would be tabula rasa, and they would just impose on them [these] new Western political science and economics models. I think historians were a little bit better, and literature people were even better, because we recognized we had to read what they read and wrote and discuss it with them. I think historians and literature people were able to not be as arrogant and imposing when we talked to our Russian colleagues and our Ukrainian colleagues as the political scientists, because we could learn from them, and actually they could teach us a lot. Political scientists never thought that the Russian counterparts could teach them anything. To some degree, they were right. But still, that created a whole different set of asymmetries, that we face here, too. It's not just there; it's here, too.

I think that globalization was part of the same thing that's sort of—automatism, that once communism was gone—again, Fukuyama, that everything was the end of history, we were all going to be liberal democracies, and we're just waiting until we all get there. The last twenty-five years have, I think [laughter], relegated him to the dustbin of intellectual history. But those ideas had big impacts. Neoliberalism, and austerity economics, and the undoing of the welfare state created the same kind of economic and physical and psychological stress that it's created everywhere else. Even worse, I think, in the post-Soviet state, because they so—I really think what they did was introduce capitalism with Bolshevik means, because they really forced it onto people, and didn't care about the victims and rewarded the victors.

I had this theory, which I occasionally share with crazy people, about negative convergence. I was a big fan of Sakharov, Andrei Sakharov, and he had this book about positive convergence,

that the Soviet Union and America should take the best from each other. We should take their welfare state and then they should take our thriving, dynamic market economy. I think what we got instead was we took their police state—we have now the biggest surveillance network in the—and we're building walls. They took their walls down—and what did they get from us? They got the dirtiest, most corrupt kind of capitalism that [laughs] you could imagine. That's what we got, negative convergence. We became the worst of each other instead of the best of each other.

Q: I think we have one of the largest police forces in New York City and—

Von Hagen: And the largest prison populations in the world.

Q: In the world [laughter]. Our police force is the size of police forces in some countries.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes.

Q: Yes, it's amazing.

Von Hagen: I say, if Stalin were alive today and saw what [Edward] Snowden had revealed about the extent of NSA [National Security Agency] and CIA and—I think he would be turning in his grave. He would be salivating at what he could imagine to do with all of this. Again, thank goodness we don't have Stalin at the top, but we could someday. That's another thing.

Americans, I think, said that could never happen here [laughs]. I think history should teach us otherwise, not to be so confident about things always being good here.

Q: Yes. The fading notion of the good empire.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Right. So, we'll take a break in a couple of minutes but I'm intrigued to ask you about—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, just the Harvard school, and people like Jeffrey Sachs and Graham Allison, and their writings and thinkings during this period.

Von Hagen: Well, I got to know Jeffrey Sachs the first time at an Arden House seminar. One of the things that so happened under my directorship, and I think still a couple times under Cathy's, was Harvard and Columbia convened a bunch of area studies experts, and practitioners in the field, at the Harriman residence up in upstate New York, at Arden House. We would gather for about two and a half days, and under my watch, together with Marshall Goldman up there, we started inviting Russians, because that had always been a very closed thing. Only Americans and Europeans, and sometimes Japanese, who were working with Soviet people. It had been a good way of getting people to talk together. Again, Harvard and Columbia can put on a good show, and the Arden House is a beautiful place to get away from the city, so people could be away

from distractions. That's where Geoff Sachs first appeared, as a Harvard professor, having sort of saved Poland from communism, and was about to embark—

Q: That remark was in quotes, by the way.

Von Hagen: Yes [laughter]. Okay. He was now advising the [Boris] Yeltsin government on how to save Russia from communism or decline or collapse or whatever. I was impressed by hischutzpah. And yet, before that, he'd done Bolivia.

Q: Right.

Von Hagen: He went from Bolivia to—and he was an example of these people who had some kind of a recipe of fixing things. Had no background in East European economies or social economies, but was a Harvard economist and, I think, a very well-meaning person who wanted to better the lives of people. But he explained—when someone asked him what worked in Poland, he said [that] why it worked in Poland was because Poland had such a big dependence on foreign trade. If you changed the value of the currency, the złoty, it could have immense impact. The other important thing was that the [Lech] Wałęsa government had a big moral capital that he could drain down when conditions got bad. And so, we said is that true for Russia? No. Russia had a tiny portion of its economy in international trade. It had Yeltsin, who had not much moral capital to expend. And so, it was a disaster there. But he didn't see that that was a problem [laughs]. And I just—yes.

I got to know him when he came here and took over Michael Crow's Earth Institute. Michael Crow is my boss now at Arizona State, so I've heard a lot of interesting opinions about the evolution of the Earth Institute under Jeffrey Sachs, but I won't share those with [laughs]—but it's, yes, it's typical of the kind of advice, and the kind of people who are coming into the field. Again, many of them with very good intentions, but also ambitious and a little bit arrogant about the superiority of their research methods and their analytical methods. I think played a not very positive role, ultimately, in the transformation of the Soviet Union to whatever it's become, and contributed to a lot of, I think, illegitimate wealth-gathering, not only by Russians but by Americans who made a lot of money off the Russian disaster.

Q: Well, I was wondering about that in relation to Graham Allison.

Von Hagen: I don't know Graham that well. I haven't read him that much, and I don't really know him that well. But I know a lot of people have wonderful East Side apartments thanks to the Russian crisis.

Q: I should say I don't know him well at all, either.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: He struck me as the person who went back and forth a lot.

Von Hagen: There are a lot of people making a lot of money off this, and a lot of people were getting hurt, and a lot of people were losing their jobs and living in poverty. The fact that Putin is so popular today has a lot to do with the outcome of those reforms, which left a lot of people defenseless and vulnerable.

Q: If you could rewind that clock, then what would you have had happen? [Laughter] Sorry, that's a what-if question.

Von Hagen: No. This is something that is not original to me. I mean, I think George Soros had said a long time ago, that what we needed was a serious kind of Marshall Plan thinking for Eastern Europe. I mean, look at Germany. I was in Germany when all this happened.

Q: I meant to ask you about that, yes.

Von Hagen: Nineteen ninety-one.

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: The West German economy devoted so many billions of dollars into that East German economy, and still it was difficult and painful. It's still not fixed, and there's still a big difference between the new Bundesländer and the old Bundesländer. The attitudes and the resentments of East Germans towards West Germans, even with all that money coming in. And yet, what we did in everything post-Soviet was tiny. I think Soros probably gave more money

than the U.S. government did. So, we never really took recovery seriously there. I think we're paying for it. We didn't expect Germany or Japan to rise from the rubble of World War II without the Marshall Plan or some version of it. We just didn't have any visionary statesmen at the head of our country. Not [William "Bill"] Clinton, not [George H. W.] Bush, not any of them.

Q: So, in the dream world [laughter], the Harriman institute might have played a role with that.

Von Hagen: Well, the one that—

Q: Should there have been any reciprocity? I mean, was there any conversation going on with—

Von Hagen: No. With the Arden House, we started inviting big level Russian parliamentarians and government officials and—

Q: But I mean with Washington.

Von Hagen: Well, our one attempt at intervention there—big one—was NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] expansion. We were pretty much, to a person, against NATO expansion. [Richard C. A.] Holbrooke was the chair of our board.

Q: Oh, that's right.

Von Hagen: Holbrooke was very much in favor—with Madeline Albright, also an alumna of ours and Georgetown professor and ambassador and all that stuff. They were all gung-ho for NATO expansion, and we kept—I mean, Legvold, Shulman, I, everybody—and Bialer—all said it's a bad idea; we should try some other security arrangement; like use the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] or OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] or whatever it is to include them. They just wouldn't listen.

Again, I don't blame NATO expansion for Putin like many people do. But we never really took Russia seriously, from the beginning. We started off on a bad relationship with Yeltsin, because Bush had supported Gorbachev to the very last minute. Then, when Gorbachev lost, he declared that we won the Cold War. We won the Cold War. Not the Soviets themselves, and not the Soviet opposition that brought them down, but we won the Cold War. That's not a way of running the world [laughs] and our country.

The next thing we tried to do was at least encourage some integrating Russia and Eastern Europe into Europe through some mechanisms and some exchanges and some aid programs, and that just didn't get any—that didn't sell during election year—Bush was up for election; he lost the election. Then things started getting worse with [laughs] other things. It was a lot of missed opportunities on both sides. I think the Russian leadership, has as much if not more responsibility for the outcome of their country. But we did play, unfortunately, a significant—and for a large part, I think, a negative role in things there, at the top levels. I mean, I think other things were happening all along at different levels that were more positive. But the way Washington treated Moscow from the beginning was—and again, Yeltsin was not an easy partner. He was a

drunkard and erratic and [laughs]—but, still, I think we could have done better, yes. And Ukraine, too. We didn't really—I mean, as we complain about Ukraine being a mess now—but we've never really offered much support to them, either. Soros, again, I think, has given more money to Ukrainian civil society and economic development than all the U.S. government agencies put together.

Q: Right, he offered money to Harriman at one point, didn't he?

Von Hagen: No.

Q: No.

Von Hagen: No.

Q: Okay.

Von Hagen: Not that I know of. We asked him a lot for money. I was in this transformation of social sciences. I was at a big power breakfast at his mansion when he launched that thing. I asked him if there was any—and he said, no, he wanted to give money to people from there. If they wanted to come here, he would pay for them to come here, but he wouldn't give us money directly, because he said that was America's job, to finance our universities. He had a Central European University where Al [Alfred C.] Stepan was director, from here, and then came back.

That was a wonderful institution, too. I mean, some of our best grad students came through there. People I still—on their way from Russia to the West, they came through Budapest. That was a very nice development in that period. It had gone through rough times, too, and been under attack by Hungarian intellectuals for being too foreign. It was one of those institutions that was a product of this period, and that has survived, for better or for worse, in one condition. It played a very important role as a bridge between East Europe and the rest of the world.

Q: Yes. Want to take a break?

Von Hagen: Yes, sounds good.

Q: Okay.

Von Hagen: I should call István, speaking of Hungarians [laughter]. Got to try calling István again.

Q: Okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: We're continuing the session, and I would like to ask you about the incredible dialogues, face-to-face dialogues that you've participated in in your lifetime, up through your time at Columbia.

Von Hagen: Okay. Well, I came here in 1985, after having spent '82, '83 on my IREX Fulbright year in Moscow and Leningrad, and having all kinds of troubles writing a dissertation about the Red Army, because I was considered by some people over there to be a military spy. Because who would write about the Red Army but a military spy? Had they known my father had worked in counterintelligence, it would have been even more—but maybe they did know that. But I wasn't really a spy and I wasn't interested in those things, and was just working the libraries and reading Soviet journals from the 1920s and before to write my stories.

I came, '85, to the Harriman and to the history department. We started exchanges in the '90s with Soviet scholars. But before that, we had a unique opportunity to [laughs] invite Soviet scholars for the first time to the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, which was going to have its convention in Hawaii. I can't remember which year it was that we had the convention in Hawaii. I was tasked by the then president of the association. Our executive secretary, Dorothy Atkinson, who had been my advisor at Stanford when I first came, then ascended to the executive secretary job at Stanford for the Slavic Association.

She asked me if I would meet a group of, I think, a dozen Soviet academicians and historians, mostly, who were going to come through New York, spend the night before they got on a plane to go to Hawaii. My Russian was good, I felt comfortable. I got a car, I took them on a tour of New York, and I kind of was their guide to America. All of them here for the first time, and some of them in the West for the first time. Most of them didn't speak any English. I felt a big

responsibility of making this first experience—and they had a wonderful time, and they loved Hawaii. It was November, so it was already cold in Moscow and Russia, and here in Hawaii, they were going around in leis and mau-maus and everything else, and it was good. That was, again, the period of great hope, that we were all going to be able to talk to one another and work together. To a large degree, that succeeded.

Columbia was one of the first schools, thanks to Leo Haimson, of all people, that signed agreements with the Institute of History of the USSR, and the Institute of World History of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, to bring over one or two Soviet scholars to spend a semester at Columbia, doing their research or giving papers and seminars. Then we would send people over to Moscow or Leningrad or wherever they needed to go to do their research. That gave us our first real foot in the door with Soviet scholarship and the transformations that Soviet academia was undergoing.

The Institute of World History was headed then and still is headed by a man named Alexander Tchubarian, an Armenian Russian historian of, I think, twentieth century, for the most part. He was then thought of as a more liberal, pro-Western, open to cooperation—the Institute of History of the USSR, by contrast, was headed, eventually, by a man named Sakharov. Not Andrei Sakharov, but a different Sakharov who was very right wing, very nationalist, and actually was reputed to have been a member of the Pamyat group, which was this nationalist, anti-Jewish, anti-cosmopolitan intellectual—which came out of the Gorbachev era. We started seeing that the historians who we had known as all Soviet historians—one was a Menshevik, one was a monarchist, one was a right-wing nationalist, one was maybe a cadet. They all had very diverse

opinions about Russian history, and that was wonderful to discover that. But we ended up having difficult relations with the Sakharov people, because they tended to send over people who were not really interested in scholarship or exchange. They wanted to go shopping. This was the time when people came here with empty suitcases and went back with full suitcases of things they couldn't get in the shortage economy of Gorbachev's perestroika.

I remember going to Moscow on behalf of our exchange and meeting with the director. He basically told me he didn't want Leo to come anymore, because they had enough of these Jewish Mensheviks of their own. I said "He's my senior colleague. He's the one who created the exchange. I don't even think I can tell him that." I did tell him eventually, because I thought we shouldn't deal with these people anymore. And yet, there were people who we liked at that institute, like Albert Nenarokov, who worked with Leo on his Menshevik project and, like, Viktor Danilov, the leading historian of collectivization and the peasantry in the Soviet period, who came over here several times to teach, and who worked with us on many projects, on publishing archival documents. They were all in that institute, but also were fighting with this reactionary leadership they had.

We had to play this very tricky game with keeping the exchange alive, even though we detested the people who were running it. But we needed to get our colleagues over, who we really liked, and respected, and wanted to work. So, we had an early insight into this politics, I think. At some point, I refused to step foot in the Institute of History USSR anymore, because I just thought they were a bunch of reactionaries and really were doing bad things to their own colleagues. They were blackballing colleagues who were too liberal or—

Then came the putsch, and we thought that they were going to win. They didn't quite win, but the Institute of History USSR is still not in very good shape. Institute of World History is still under Chubarian, believe it or not. He's become a bit more, in the current condition, more Putinesque. But we didn't have that exchange for a long time. It eventually petered out, and it was easy enough for us to go over there on our own and for them to come over here on their own, and we didn't really need to go through a whole university mechanism, and exchanges, and all that money that was committed and all that work that was committed. So, we abandoned that. But it worked for several—maybe four or five years very successfully.

I went over a couple times, Leo went over a couple times. Our grad students went over, and they came over here, and we ran seminars together. That was the first time that ever happened. I think our graduate students benefited from it greatly. Our colleagues—we had colleagues from other universities in the area come to take part in our seminars. We had this wonderful kruzhok that Leo Haimson presided over in his inimitable fashion. We had, again, a lot of his graduate students. Like, Ziva Galili was teaching at Rutgers. Others were teaching in the neighborhood, and they would come in for these seminars once a month. We would sometimes have them in Russian, and we would read text in Russian. But sometimes they would be in English, new work that was out—new English work in progress. That was probably one of the best educations all of us got, faculty and students, because we really looked at each other's work critically.

Leo would always sit back with his cigar or his cigarette about to burn some pocket or [laughter] his hair, and food coming out of his mouth into his beard—he was drawing some weird things on

the board. Eventually, he would say something at the end and everyone would think, wow, he did make sense. He was paying attention to all of this, and put it all together in an amazing way. It was just a wonderful—all my grad students still remember this kruzok experience. We would go off to a Chinese restaurant afterwards and continue the discussion. Again, more and more often, we had people from Moscow, or Omsk, or Siberia, or someplace like that who shared their research with us and were able to talk to us in Russian, because all of our students' Russian was so good.

Q: That's great.

Von Hagen: That was a good time.

Q: Yes, fantastic.

Von Hagen: It didn't die altogether. Out of those things, I then went on to do some projects with Russian scholars and Jane Burbank, in this empire project that Ford Foundation funded. We were going back and forth between New York, and Omsk, and Samara, having moving, roving seminars about empire, and working—half Russians and half Americans. Again, I think we were closer to our Russian colleagues, as Americans, than we were to most American colleagues. We had this—

Q: You had shared knowledge.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes.

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: We became friends and it was. I think there was even a marriage somewhere along the way [laughter] out of all of this, which eventually happens.

Again, same thing with the Russian/Ukrainian thing. That was the NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] project that—I got money from NEH, and from the Humboldt Foundation in Germany, and from the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies to bring together Russian and Ukrainian historians to talk about some of the difficult issues in their shared histories and not-so-shared histories. That went on for four or five years, between Cologne, which was where Kappeler was stationed at the time, and here in New York. We had a group off people, Russians and Ukrainians, who were talking to each other. It seems, like, so long ago now [laughs], because that doesn't happen anymore. That's sad, but that was a good time.

Q: Yes. Tell me a little bit more about the inspiration behind your article in—you published in 1995, “Does Ukraine Have a History?” Your motivations for writing it and the impact it had.

Von Hagen: Okay. It's interesting to reconstruct. The title was suggested to me by Alex Motyl as a provocation, because, of course, Alex Motyl believes Ukraine has a history, and I believe Ukraine has a history, too. What I meant was not that Ukraine doesn't have a past. What I meant was that, because of empire and because of imperial narratives—and not just the Russian

imperial narrative, but the Austrian imperial narrative, the German imperial narrative, the Polish imperial narrative—they all write Ukraine out of history. Ukraine didn't exist as an independent state since 1917, '19, and then, now again in 1940, 1991.

That was what I was saying, that Ukraine has a history, but it's not a history that anyone knows. It doesn't count, because there's no state to go with it. But now that there's a state, we have to come up with a history, and not just a history but a lot of histories, because there is no one history that explains Ukraine. I wanted to suggest to the Ukrainian historians and the historians of Ukraine, who might not necessarily be Ukrainians, that Ukrainian history could actually be very cutting edge, because of its intersection at so many imperial crossroads over such a long history. It's the story of an empire's borderlands and diasporas, which was the later version of the manifesto. That's what the modern historiography's about. It's about deconstructing nations, and it's about re-inscribing nations and empires and regional histories.

That what was the, "Does Ukraine Have a History?"—in *Slavic Review*, they asked five or six people to respond to me, including [Yuri] Slezkine at Berkeley and—I can't remember who all the other ones were. But a respectable group of people took me to task for certain parts of my argument. I wasn't out to offend people. I wasn't out to demolish—I just wanted to basically say that what I had learned about Ukrainian history, in my five years of self-Ukrainian-ization, made me think that this was a very interesting history, partly because it had been so shunted for so long, and that much of what we can learn about Ukraine will help us learn about the Russian empire, will help us learn about the Polish state, about Austria/Hungary. And so, a good Ukrainian historian should know all those comparative empires, and that's kind of got me into

comparative empires, which—I did a project with Karen Barkey comparing the Ottoman Hapsburg, Russian, and Soviet Union as empires.

Q: I would like to talk to you about that after I've read the book.

Von Hagen: Okay [laughter]. You don't have to read the whole book. The introduction and the table of contents explains what we were up to.

Q: Okay, yes.

Von Hagen: The idea was just to look at these four empires through similar questions and see how they were different and what role nation played in each empires dissolution and reconstitution, insofar as they were reconstituted.

Q: Okay.

Von Hagen: I am still quoted—that's probably my most cited article.

Q: It's a wonderful, wonderful article, yes.

Von Hagen: I don't think it's aged too much.

Q: No.

Von Hagen: I mean, you could still ask that question, does Ukraine have a history? [Laughs] And I'm working on that. I'm working to answer it yes.

Q: Yes. Well, I was very intrigued by the talk you gave yesterday. We'll provide a link to that talk for people who eventually read this oral history, so they can access both.<sup>1</sup>

Von Hagen: Good, yes.

Q: But I was really intrigued by your comparison of the future of Ukraine to Israel. Could you talk a little bit about that now?

Von Hagen: Yes. Well, that's a very new thing for me since my trip to Israel in—whenever I went—July. Yes, a couple days after my birthday, I was on the plane to Jerusalem. I can tell you, I've been sort of heading to Israel for a long time. I used to teach the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible as we called it in CC. I learned some ancient Jewish history. I worked with Michael Stanislavsky and, again, Leo Haimson and Marc Raeff both were Jewish, but, again, didn't talk about that much. But almost all of my teachers, my grad teachers, and people I read, I knew there was a big—partly because Jews in the Russian empire had a special educated, liberal, progressive, socialist, even—for the most part. I mean, there were Jewish merchants, obviously, who were not so socialist. But a lot of the leading historians of revolution in the Soviet Union

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<sup>1</sup> Mark von Hagen, "EVENT VIDEO: From Cold War to Civilizational Conflict: On Learning, Relearning, and Unlearning | Columbia | Harriman Institute," September 15, 2016, <http://harriman.columbia.edu/event/cold-war-civilizational-conflict-learning-relearning-and-unlearning>.

were Jewish Mensheviks or some other people. So, I needed to go there sooner or later. Again, with all my work with Michael Stanislavsky and his students, I felt that Jewish history was my minor field, after Russian. The other thing was, when I was even working on the *Red Army* and the Soviet Union and this militarized socialism, I had the idea that Israel was similar to the Soviet Union in the constant mobilization of society for future war.

I mean, I think the Soviet Union was always mobilized for war in one way or another. That goes back to my militarism, and the uniforms that I saw the first time I went there. I got the sense that Israel had to be like that, although I had never been there. I started reading—thanks to one of my grad students here, Amir Weiner, who now teaches at Stanford, who served in the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and who was a—he’s a native Israeli or sort of ancestral Israeli, unlike my student Igal, whose family came from Russia, and who grew up in Israel, but who was really Russian, culturally. Amir was really Israeli. And so, he introduced me to all kinds of literature on the civil-military relations in Israel. I knew that it was an important thing.

I started teaching these courses on occupation, and I realized, of course, one of the biggest occupations is Israel and Palestine. Especially since 9/11, I think the United States probably has been learning, and has a lot to learn, from Israel’s long history of dealing with Muslims and Arabs and terrorism and all those things that are part of their neighborhood. I think we have a lot of very close intelligence and military connections with the Israelis. But unlike us, Israel is still a society where everyone’s conscripted and everyone has to serve, and so everyone’s a veteran. So, my veterans’ issues interests came [laughs] into play here, too.

Especially after my trip to Ukraine last September, when I was in Kiev for the first time in probably ten years, and the first time since the war—and a year into the war—and I met all these people who the war was affecting in all kinds of interesting and sad and scary ways, sometimes, but also a noble—the mobilization of Ukrainian society since the war is like Solidarity in Poland—but not quite there yet, but something like that—and the national patriotism and service—and all service is something that they hadn't seen, any of them, in their lifetime, I don't think. That was inspiring, but I thought Russia's not going to go away. Putin's not going to go away. And even if Putin does go away, there's no guarantee that somebody better than he is going to show up.

Ukraine really has a long-term future with a very hostile state that seems to be interested in destabilizing it. And I said Israel has, since its birth in 1948—I think within a few days after it declared independence, six Arab armies attacked it. Then a war in '67 or '68, then a war in '73. So, that country has been living with war and occupation, and threat of war, and the threat of extinction since it came into existence, which is not that long ago. I thought, Ukraine's only had this for two years, but the first line of the national anthem is, "Ukraine has not died yet." So, they have this in their mentality that they could die, and that extinction is not to be ruled out.

I had a discussion with Jonathan, who was at the talk, who was the head of the Nevzlin Center in Jerusalem. I had long talks with him about this in Jerusalem when I was there, about the differences between Ukraine and Israel. He said there's some things that he thinks that make sense, and that he fears for Ukraine if Israel is its future. And he's an Israeli [laughs]. One thing we talked about was corruption, because he said one thing—well, so, let me back up a minute.

Israel was founded by Jewish socialists from Eastern Europe. In some sense, Israel represents an alternative to the Soviet Union, for those people.

Q: Fascinating.

Von Hagen: Right? Collective farms, kibbutzes. I mean, the kibbutz has sort of worked in Israel. Collective farms in Soviet Union? Not so well. I think that Israel and the Soviet Union and Ukraine are tied in more ways than meets most people's eyes. Now, I think, the existential geopolitical situation of Ukraine is much closer to Israel than almost any state I can think of. If they want to be a democracy—and I think they do, the Ukrainians—it's going to be a militarized democracy, like what Israel has. Again, that's something post-Columbia, and even post-Israel [laughs].

Q: That's okay, we're allowed. Sorry, Alex [laughter]. I think this session has to be a little bit referential to the wonderful talk you gave yesterday.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: It's just fascinating, because in making that comparison, you're really demonstrating the work that you realized had to happen after the fall. I mean, you had to really think cross-culturally, cross-regionally—

Von Hagen: And learn new things.

Q: And always be open to learning new things, and making new comparisons.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes. And it's not going to go away.

Q: No.

Von Hagen: I think that's what we do. That's what we do best, and that's what we should continue doing as well as we can.

Q: Maybe we should talk about nationality studies a little bit, along this same line.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes. Well, again, that's something that Columbia was known for, as—not quite *sub rosa*—but from, I think, even the '50s, there was a seminar on Soviet nationalities problems, run, I think, at the early days, by Michael Rifkin and a bunch of other people from the local community colleges and city colleges, almost all of them émigrés from that part of the world who felt that they had to keep reminding the rest of us Soviet studies types that Soviet Union was not Russia only. It was Russia, but it was more than Russia. They also were people who kept alive the idea that Russia was an empire, and the Soviet Union was an empire, which was not something that a lot of other people wanted to hear, especially Soviet people. But those who sympathized with, or even empathized with, the Soviet Union, for a long time, resisted the idea of calling it an empire. There are still people who—again, it's not the same empire as the

Russian empire, it's not the same empire as the British Empire. But none of those empires are the same as other ones. So, that's okay.

That is where I think I started learning about other people's histories of the Soviet Union and the Russian empire. That's where Alex Motyl was very key in mobilizing those people. A little bit captive nation, out of the '50s and '60s, idea that the Soviet Union was an illegitimate state that was held together only by coercion and force. I never belonged to that group, although I understand where they're coming from. If you were an emigre or refugee from that part of the world then you probably find the captive nations narrative a powerful one. But I, nonetheless—even from my very first trip there, I said I—we got to see not only Leningrad and Moscow, which are two very different cities in themselves in Russian history, but Novgorod, which is a provincial and medieval city that predated even Moscow, and also represents a very different Russia and a different Russian history. But then we went to Tallinn, we went to Tbilisi, we went to Kiev. We got the idea that Russians were not perceived the same way in all those places. In fact, in Tallinn we learned that it's better not to speak Russian. Speak German or English, in those days. Even in '75, if you wanted to get good service or get a seat at a table in a café—we understood that Estonia was where you go to get good coffee, relatively speaking. You could not get good coffee anywhere in Leningrad or Moscow. Tbilisi, you could get all kinds of good fruits and wines, and again, sunny people and sunny climate, and very different from cold, Russian Moscow, Leningrad.

We had an idea of the diversity of the Soviet Union, but didn't quite know how to process it until much later. That's where the seminar on Soviet nationality problems really—the fact that it was

called Soviet nationality problems, assumed this was a problem, in a negative sense, that this was going to lead to the undoing of the Soviet Union. In fact, to some degree, I think it kept them together, but not without coercion, not without intimidation, not without terror. But it wasn't just about that. Over the centuries, the empire did develop some cohesion and coherence. But not everyone was willing to accept that. I think they were a—

Then we got the Association for the Study of Nationalities to come here on a regular basis, and that happened under me, too. I'm glad Alex and Tim kept that going, that the ASN looks to the Harriman as its home for its annual spring conference. I tell you, this is the—even having been president of the Slavic Association, the ASEES [The Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies] thing, I still think that the ASN is the most exciting, dynamic—because it's less institutionalized. It's more spontaneous, so people don't—I don't know why it is, but there seems to be a lot more energy and a lot more interesting things. Maybe it's because it's focused on stuff I care about. ASEES deals with a lot of stuff I care less about. But ASN is really about nationality, empire, all that kind of stuff, which is what I do now.

I was really glad that that became part of the Harriman's outreach to people from Europe, we get people from the regions—meaning Eastern Europe—and people from all over the place who come to Columbia every April to do this thing. That's one thing I miss the last nine years. I haven't been to one of them since I left, because it comes just two weeks before classes are over at ASU. I just can't get away in the middle of the last months to come out here, however interesting it is. But I a couple of my students have been out here already, so at least someone representing us is here.

Q: That's great.

Von Hagen: The ASN has been a very good thing, too, and kind of has mainstreamed nationalities issue, and no one—I don't think anyone—if anything, there might be a backlash against too much nationality stuff now, because we've kind of forgotten about Russia for a long time, and we spent too much time looking at the non-Russians. I think we need to get back to the Russians and—because without the Russians, nothing that makes sense.

Q: I do realize this is beyond Columbia, too, but I do want to ask about your decision to go to ASU, and what you thought you could do there that you might not have been able to do here, if that was a factor.

Von Hagen: Well, by the time I left here, I was the chair of the history department for one year only [laughs]. I had not been director of the Harriman for I guess about five or six years now. Yes, Cathy took over. I was Cathy's biggest supporter. I nominated her. I thought a person in Slavic languages and literatures was perfect at this time when—and all the news coming out of Soviet Union was corruption, and dark, and terror, and horrible stuff. I thought at least Russian culture still had some cachet; music and ballet and opera. That's what Cathy did, and I think she did a very classy job keeping people's attention a little bit focused on the positive sides of our region. Not just the corruption, and the murders, and the terrorism, whatever else that is also reality, unfortunately, but needs to be put in some context to not scare away everybody who might study Russian or Armenian or something like that. So, I—I lost my train of thought.

Q: I was asking about your transition to ASU.

Von Hagen: Yes, oh, yes, ASU. Strange as this may sound, and it's all my own doing, I think, I felt, by a couple years before I left Columbia, that I was in a rut here. We weren't getting that many more grad students. I thought I'd sort of taught my fill of graduate students. Had a lot of great graduate students, but they were all off and I just had a couple left who were sort of stragglers, and I did not think we were going to get any more. Dick had retired, Wortman had retired, Haimson had retired, Raeff had retired. It wasn't clear that there was going to be a big commitment here. Nick [Nicholas B.] Dirks was not very supportive of Russian/East European studies. He was mainly promoting his own field, the South Asian Middle East, which is fine. I'm glad we have more of those people, and I've learned a lot from them. I think his post-colonialism is also interesting and valuable. But he could care less about Russian history in Europe. So, I felt there was less commitment here within the university under his reign, and he was the one I answered to as director of the Harriman.

I had applied the year before for a job at Brown University, because I really had a wonderful time up in Providence. I went to a seminar at the Watson Institute up there. It was an area institute, a global studies institute, but it was much more humanities focused. It was run by an anthropologist, and they had really—the Slavic people and the history people were the dominant forces there. The social scientists kind of accommodated them by being more humanist than they might ordinarily be. I really liked the place, and I applied for the job. I was on the short list. I got interviewed and they—turned out they—I had sort of insider sources on the committee. They wanted somebody more Washington Beltway banded—inside Beltway types who had

connections to funding and policy-making people. That's not me, and I never pretended to be that. So, they ended up not hiring anybody for a couple years, and when they finally hired somebody, Michael Kennedy from Michigan, he quit after a year. So, I don't know what happened there.

But anyway, that got me in the mood for moving. I thought, I never thought I was going to live in New York for all of my life. I never thought it would be even my first job, let alone my only job. After I had already thought about Brown and leaving to go someplace else, I got an email from Laurie Manchester, who was at ASU and said, "We're in the second year of what had been a failed search for a new chair of the history department. Michael Crow had designated history as one of those things he wants to bring up to whatever levels, and they really would like someone from an Ivy League school to come in and upgrade us. If you have any interest in moving—" I did some research on what Crow had been up to since he left here. I talked to Jonathan Cole, too, as you remember, and provost—

Q: I know him very well.

Von Hagen: Jonathan said that he would hate for me to leave Columbia, but if there was any place he would recommend that I go, it'd be Arizona State. I thought, wow [laughter].

Apparently, he was on a board, still advising Crow out there. I was wooed like I had never been wooed before. Well, for a while [laughter]. That was nice, and like I say, when I sent their offer letter, which came after my third interview—my second—I had two interview visits, and then

they made me the offer sometime in the middle of March or April. No, no, sorry, that Valentine's Day. It was Valentine's Day, yes.

I sent the offer to Nick Dirks, expecting that he would schedule an appointment with me, as my boss. He just said, "Make an appointment with my assistant." I won't tell you what I said in response to that, but that decided it for me. I was leaving. I think I was ready to leave, but I wanted to have a chance to talk to him about what I had done here and why I was leaving and what I hoped I was going to move to, and he didn't have any interest in that. So, [laughs] I left. My colleagues were pissed that he didn't put up any resistance to my leaving. Volker Berghahn, particularly, I think has held that against him ever since [laughs].

What I was told at Arizona State—Michael Crow was in his golden period, and he had lots of money to throw around. It was before the big crunch hit. I was lead to believe that I had the power to make, like, five appointments a year for the next five years, and rebuild the whole history department. Well, I got there—came the crash, [laughs] next year. Not even the next year. That year the crash came.

Q: Oh, God.

Von Hagen: The legislature slashed our budget. I think I had to scramble to even get one appointment a year. Well, actually, we had three the first year, but none of them in things that I really thought we needed, but things that we could get because—so I struggled there a bit. I guess I had to learn the history field much better. I was interested in learning Southwest history

and Native American history, which we're very strong in. Already then, we had Laurie in Russian history, Eugene Clay in Russian history, but it was in religious studies. His wife also does Russian Tatar stuff. T. Batalden.

We had a pretty good Russian group, and they weren't really interested in hiring another Russianist. They wanted a chair for the history—and since I had just been chair for less than a year at Columbia, they thought that was enough qualification [laughter]. The first couple—I mean, I left under somewhat—I ended up getting an offer, as I got diagnosed with anal cancer, and so I ended up spending six weeks in chemo and radiation before I left, and lost about forty pounds which I've never gained back. And who knows what else they did to me? So, I arrived there a diminished creature from what they saw me—and so, it was rough the first couple years, just because health-wise, getting my stamina back.

I had a really good humanities dean who I still miss, who was a French literature specialist. She took such good care of me. She got me a parking place right next to my building, and that's a big thing in the desert. You have to be close to your building so you don't have to walk in the sun. She also had the outgoing director, the outgoing chair overlap with me for a month. Paid him an extra month so he could sort of coach me while I was still recovering from my chemo and radiation. They really made me feel welcome there.

I got out of my rut. I started teaching new courses. I taught a new course every year, and courses that I could have taught at Columbia. I don't know why I didn't teach a course about World War I, since I'd been working on World War I. I never taught a course on World War I. The first—I

taught a course with a graduate student of mine, who just finished his Ph.D., who was at the talk yesterday, too. Young man who was a World War II specialist. We did a course on the Eastern Front together in World War—we did Germany, Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia, the whole thing. It was so much fun. I thought, “Why couldn’t I have done this at Columbia?” I don’t know. But it was my own—I was stuck teaching CC, legacies, Soviet history for the last—I don’t know. That’s fun, I like it, but—

Q: But you had a lot more you could do there.

Von Hagen: Yes, exactly. I was learning new things, and I didn’t know how to talk about them. I’ve taught a course in comparative colonialism and comparative empire. I’ve taught a course on war and revolution. I teach this new course on oral history, and America’s recent wars, with the veterans. And now, wartime occupations, as a comparative thing. Again, I could have done all that here [Columbia University]. It was inspired largely by 9/11, all these things, which I experienced here, over in my apartment on—

Q: Oh, you were here.

Von Hagen: I was here.

Q: I wasn’t sure.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Because you had a—

Von Hagen: I was here. I was on leave.

Q: You were on leave. That's why I wasn't sure you were here. Tell me about that day.

Von Hagen: Johnny was working at the Center for Race and Ethnicity or whatever it was called in those days, in Hamilton, and he was going to work. As he went out the door, he said, "Mark, I think somebody just drove a plane into the World Trade Center." I said, "Oh, okay." I just went back to my computer. All of a sudden, an hour later, I started getting messages from all over the world saying, "Are you okay, Mark?" I said, [laughs] "Why shouldn't I be okay? Why are people in Russia and Israel and—asking if I'm okay?" I turned on the TV and I said, "Oh my God! We're at war with somebody, it looks like."

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: Yes, so I was here and I still feel—every 9/11, I feel like a New Yorker again, because I really felt we became one for those four or five days when we were cut off from the rest of the world. The trains—remember the subways were shut down, the bridges were shut down, the airports were shut down. Anyone who had to get across the river back to New Jersey, they had to stay. There was no—so, we had to find places for them, and those who were stuck over there—and I thought that was—it's sad that it took that, but I really felt like a New Yorker.

I also realized that we were on an island. For the first time, I think, most New Yorkers recognized that we were on an island, and [laughs] we were cut off from—

Q: Vulnerable.

Von Hagen: Vulnerable, yes. I started this thing which evolved into what I'm doing now with the veterans, I think. I started writing what I called wartime historian reports. I was going to start tracking how the world changed since 9/11 in all my visits and my academic tourism. I went to Vienna—I think it was the first month after—and there was an OPEC [Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries] summit that was happening. So, the city was shut down like I had never seen Vienna shut down. It was around Halloween, so it was weird because Austrians don't normally celebrate Halloween. But there were Halloween things all over the place. I thought this is macabre [laughs].

Q: Why was it shut down?

Von Hagen: Because of OPEC.

Q: Oh, because of OPEC.

Von Hagen: All the Saudis and everybody was meeting there just a month after 9/11.

Q: Oh, I see.

Von Hagen: We left from Prague. We spent a few days in Prague afterwards, and we saw people being taken off the plane. It's, like, mullah-like people. People dressed in some sort of Muslim outfit, taken off the plane by the Czech police, because it was 9/11. So, it was really—I went to Washington—the first conference of ASEES was in Washington, I think over in Arlington or Alexandria, which is already a militarized place. Barriers were up, concrete everywhere. You couldn't—so, I was trying to track how war was going to change us. It's still there in some computer files, but it's turned into this wartime historian series that I write now, whenever I take a trip. We've been at war at least since 9/11, probably longer. Sometimes I go to countries that are at war separately from us, like Ukraine, Israel. That's 9/11.

The other thing, my doctor's office was down at—New York downtown medical, which was right next to the World Trade Center, like two blocks from the World Trade Center. So, a month after the 9/11, I was down there. I don't know how I even got there, because I know the subways weren't working. How did I get down there? I'm not sure. But I got down there, and I saw, still a month later, the raw—it was still smoking and all the monuments, all the memorials were up, with the people writing, with pictures and flowers. It was really quite moving.

Q: Very moving.

Von Hagen: Yes. That's where my doctor's office was, down there. My doctor's office had been a triage center for victims, for the whole month pretty much, yes.

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: I'd also say that I opposed our war with Afghanistan. I opposed our war with Iraq. I took part in demonstrations here against Iraq. Afghanistan, I signed the petitions because I thought that Bush should at least get the United Nations to go with—and he didn't bother with that. It was that [laughs] exceptionalism and preemptive strikes and all that other kind of stuff. I was against those wars from the beginning. Even the day before we launched our bombing raids in Iraq, Johnny and I were in San Francisco, and we, just by accident, happened to join a candlelight march against the war, the day before we started bombing, in the Castro District in San Francisco. In the end, I think it didn't change things that Bush and [Dick] Cheney and the gang—they went and committed their war crimes, as it was, but—[laughs]

Q: [Unclear] a lot of your books right there.

Von Hagen: But at least, I think, Europeans or other people could know that not everybody was behind this. The protests in New York and San Francisco were big. And London, even bigger. But what good did it do, except to say that we weren't all behind this madness.

Q: I don't think we had a chance.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes. So, that's why I like my social revolutionaries, because they were anti-war, too [laughter].

Q: That's great.

Von Hagen: They didn't win, either. But they thought they should fight.

Q: So, it was a day that—it was a change in your life.

Von Hagen: Yes, I think so, yes. A change in many of our lives. Again, the area studies field, we got hit because—and it was interesting to see how all of the people, who had been the Cold Warriors against the Soviet Union, very quickly found a new home in anti-Islam and sort of the new global war on terrorism. Even like the son of Richard [E.] Pipes, who was one of the most celebrated—a Reagan advisor and Harvard professor, and someone I got to know and whose books I even recommend. But a right-wing realist or whatever you want to call him. His son, Daniel Pipes, is one of the leading voices on the global war on terrorism and Islam, and how Islam is all bad—just replaced the Soviet Union with Islam, now.

Q: Do you plan to write about that?

Von Hagen: I do a little bit in my wartime historian thing. Some people suggest I should put those out in a book, so I'm thinking about it. But I was going to do that if I was on leave for longer, but I'm back to doing other things [laughs].

Q: Yes. I have been—it really was a topic I wanted to bring up with you at some point, about that Cold War energy and where it is now.

Von Hagen: Yes. Oh, it's back. It's very easy to trigger those things. Yes, it's not too far buried in our psyche [laughs]. That's the thing, I think, [unclear] spoken—even Steve Cohen, who I've been having some big fights with lately over—

Q: Was he there yesterday?

Von Hagen: No.

Q: No. Tell me about your fights with Steve Cohen. We're also interviewing him.

Von Hagen: Well, Steve is someone who also played a very important and, for the most part, positive role in my early career. I was inspired by his [Nikolai] Bukharin biography to write about the 1920s, really. I think I was right in assuming that the Bolsheviks, the Soviets, were, in general, much more proud of what they were doing in the 1920s than what they did later, in the '30s, with some reason. And so, they were much less censored about what they—and so, I could read in the 1920s journals, army journals even, amazing stories. Surveys of sex practices of soldiers, which ten years later no one would have imagined that possible. So, I owed to him the fact that a whole bunch of us decided that the NEP [New Economic Policy] and the '20s was something that needed to be done and could be done now, because it was far enough way. Then Gorbachev resurrected NEP as the new future—past is the future, mixed-market socialist economy.

It was thanks to Steve Cohen that I got my first chance to meet a lot of Soviet academicians, because he and Bob Tucker from Princeton, also, and a guy named Holland Hunter, who's an economist from, I think, Haverford [College], they were all invited to the first U.S./Soviet conference on the NEP, on the New Economic Policy of the 1920s. Suddenly the Soviets had given their own very weird spin to—it was all sort of leading up to Stalinism. And we said that NEP was the alternative to Stalinism. So, this was the first time that we were going to meet with our Soviet colleagues, including [V.P.] Daniloff, who I met for the first time, the historian of collectivization. We met in the Academy of Sciences in Eastern History. Cohen couldn't go for some reason, and he was part of the delegation. So, he asked me and one of his former Ph.D. students, Lars Lih, who teaches somewhere in Canada now, to replace him, to go as his surrogates.

We got to go with all these big name American professors and meet all these academicians and be feted with—and talk about NEP. I owe that to Steve, and I value that and cherish that very much. In fact, I got my first invitation to speak to the section on the revolution and civil war. I was asked to talk about [Leon] Trotsky. And this, back in the Gorbachev period. Trotsky never was rehabilitated. Bukharin had just about been rehabilitated, but not Trotsky. And so, they asked me to talk about how I treat Trotsky as a historian of the Red Army. That was a fascinating story in itself.

Then over the years, when Steve had Russian-speaking visitors from the Soviet Union or Russia—like Vladimir Posner, I remember in particular—and he needed some Russian speakers to come to his apartment on Riverside Drive, he invited me to come. I met Katrina vanden

Heuvel and a couple of their kids, and was sort of part of their family for a while, strangely enough. I even wrote a piece in *The Nation*. I wrote a couple book reviews in *The Nation* in those days, when he was doing *Homo Sovieticus*. But lately, with Putin, and especially since the war with Ukraine, Steve has published a lot of things and said a lot of things about Ukraine, which are just ignorant and just—I'm sorry—

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: —based on no facts and little—I put up with it for a while, and I still subscribe to *The Nation*. Finally, I decided about two years ago to write him and Katrina a long letter—like, a seven-page letter—about what I had learned and why I thought they should shut up about Ukraine [laughs]. It basically was, I had started as a Russianist, too, but I taught in Estonia, I taught in Ukraine, I taught in Minsk, I taught in Poland. When you're teaching those places, you develop a different perspective from if you only go to Moscow and talk to Russians, and Putin supporters, at that.

I didn't hear from him for a while, then I wrote him back. He said, "Oh, yes, Mark, this is all good that you're doing this. I'm glad you're doing this, but I just don't have the energy anymore. I'm too old to learn all those things." I said, "Well, then don't talk about Ukraine if you—I mean, just talk about Russia, talk about what you know." No, he still talks about—and he even defended [Donald] Trump the other day. I thought, oh my God, how convoluted that he says that Trump is being [Joe] McCarthy-ite—we're treating Trump in a sort of McCarthy-ite fashion, because he dares to say something about Putin. The only thing I can conclude is that he's so

desperate for attention these days, and no one pays attention to him, so he says outrageous things. I don't really think he's in the pay of Putin I don't think he's—I don't want to believe that. But he just—he's referred to now as a useful idiot, which is a shame, because he's not an idiot. He's a very smart man. But he, for some reason, I think is so anti-American now—and I agree with him that Bush is a war criminal. I agree with him that even [Barack H.] Obama with his drones and Libya and Syria could have done things otherwise. But I still don't think that criticizing the United States should open us up to praising or accepting what Putin does, because Putin is an evil guy. I really do think that. He's corrupt, and he's ambitious, and ruthless, and I don't want a—I had my encounter with him a long time ago, and I don't want to have another one with him. But Cohen just—

Q: You had your encounter with him?

Von Hagen: Yes, here at ASU—I mean, at Columbia, he spoke—I think it was his first appearance in the U.S. I wasn't director. I think it was Cathy was already director, and he spoke at the Low Library. I stood up to ask a question. My knees were shaking like—I don't know how I even stood up, because I was shaking so much. He didn't see that, because I was far away. I asked him in Russian a question about what he said. He said, Columbia, the Harriman, one of the centers of the Cold War—blah-blah-blah—and it's time for Russian and American scholars to overcome their Cold War things and get on to some real scholarship. I said, "I'm all in favor of that, but it might be helpful if you didn't continue to arrest Russian scholars who worked with American and British scholars and who are accused of spying and selling classified information." He went on a tirade and said—first, he asked me my name three times. Someone must have

written it down. Then he said, “You poor bespectacled professor. You don’t understand the world since 9/11. People are being strip-searched at the airport. Diplomats—you don’t want to be—” and he just went on this thing that I didn’t understand anything, and, “—the world has changed.” And so I—

Q: Did the English speaking audience ever figure out what was going on?

Von Hagen: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Q: That was translated?

Von Hagen: Yes, and actually there were Russian television reporters there. They recorded—I got emails the next day from my friends in Moscow saying, “Was that you talking to Putin?” [Laughter] I said, “Yes, that was me.” [Laughter]

Q: Oh, wow.

Von Hagen: So, I have a feeling—

Q: You save all your best stories for the last few minutes [laughter].

Von Hagen: Yes. It was when Bush was president, and I looked at him and I thought, “Could Bush have even given that talk?” No. I don’t want to sound like Trump, but Putin did not have a

Condi [Condoleezza] Rice sitting there, whispering in his ear. Didn't have anyone—he had statistics at his command. He was effective. I wouldn't say he's persuasive, but he was effective, and he looked competent. He looked mean and nasty, but he looked competent [laughter]. We had Bush at that time. And I couldn't imagine Bush doing any of that.

Q: But Bush looked into his eyes and saw a friend.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes, exactly, exactly [laughs].

Q: Quote-unquote.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Right.

Von Hagen: I actually didn't really—well, that's the other thing. Legvold and I greeted Yeltsin when he first came. I think it was '85 or '86, just after he—he wasn't yet president, but he was head of the democratic, whatever, opposition. He came to New York, and he came to Columbia. He gave a talk at Low Library, which I remember to this day. He came late, and probably drunk. We don't know, but very late. It was a very hot September day, humid as hell. Low Library was packed already. People were waiting outside. He showed up with his entourage, and Legvold and I greeted him. He said, "Who are these people?" They said, "They're people who came late and couldn't get in." "How is it they cannot get in? I want my people to hear me!" He said "my

people.” [Laughter] He said, “This is America. You can arrange this.” I said, “No, there are hundreds of people waiting in there. The president is waiting for you in this wing over here to come and introduce you.” That was, what’s-his-name. What was our president’s name? I liked him very much.

Q: Mike Sovern?

Von Hagen: No, no, before Mike. Oh, maybe it was Mike, still. Yes, could have been Mike. Yes, it was Mike Sovern. Mike was going to meet him at some left entrance to the Low Library. He said, “I’m not going in through any back doors. I’m going through the front door.” Then he wanted us to put microphones on top of the building so he could broadcast his speech to the poor people who didn’t get in. Poor Legvold was getting flustered and didn’t know what to do. I said, “We have a solution. Only the president can decide this.” So, I said, “And we have to meet the president.” That’s when he didn’t want to go in the back door. “So, the president will decide everything.” We finally got in the—

Q: That was the perfect thing to say.

Von Hagen: We finally got him through there. I realized this guy is like a party boss. He’s coming to tell us who’s the boss here. He’s letting the locals know that he’s in charge, and he treated us like he would’ve treated some, you know—and poor Legvold was just [laughs] so mild-mannered and polite.

Q: I know.

Von Hagen: After that, I asked my Russian friends, “How could you vote for this guy? He’s a bully, he talked about how he came through Harlem on the plane from J.F.K. [John Fitzgerald Kennedy Airport] and how even the people in Harlem live better than the typical Soviet citizen. And I said, “He hasn’t seen much of Harlem, I guess,” at that time. Then someone asked him about privatization. He said he’s in favor of privatization, but he’s not in favor of speculation. Speculation he defined as someone who buys something in one city and goes to another city and sells it for a higher price. That’s speculation, and they should be tried for that. I said, that’s not a very good indicator of his understanding of the market. He was going from us to see the Rockefeller Foundation.

Q: [Gasps] [laughter] Sorry that I gasped.

Von Hagen: Yes. I was a big Gorby fan, and when I met Yeltsin, I was even more of a Gorby fan.

Q: He wanted to meet the head of Chase Bank, I guess.

Von Hagen: Yes, yes, exactly.

Q: That’s what it was all about.

Von Hagen: Yes, and he wasn't even elected. I mean, he was just head of the opposition. He wasn't even a—so, yes.

Q: Okay.

Von Hagen: I met Yeltsin, I met Gorbachev later, after he was out of power. That was another Cathy event. It was very nice, but he was also weird. He talked about himself in the third person all the time, Gorbachev. Another weird thing [laughter]. But I still had a lot more sympathy for him than [anyone] who's come after him, that's for sure. I met [Leonid] Kuchma, and [Leonid] Kravchuk here, the first two presidents of Ukraine. I never met the other ones. After those first two, I decided I don't want to meet any more of them. I'm supposed to meet [Petro O.] Poroshenko tomorrow, but I'm not sure I want to meet him, either [laughs]. I have a good record now. I said no more—

[INTERRUPTION]

Von Hagen: Yes, I should probably wrap it up, then, yes.

Q: Okay, thank you so much.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: And we'll continue.

Von Hagen: Okay, all right.

Q: Okay, great.

[END OF SESSION]

ATC

Session: 2

Interviewee: Mark Von Hagen

Location: Tempe, AZ

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: November 8, 2016

Q: Okay. Today is November 8, 2016. It's a big historical day—a possible turning point in American history [laughter]. I'm very glad to be with Mark Von Hagen in his beautiful adobe home in Arizona. Mark, thank you for tolerating another a session.

Von Hagen: Oh, my pleasure.

Q: It's great. I did send you some notes on the first session and realized a couple of things were left out. Human rights discussions, your work on Memorial. These are very important themes for the Harriman project because we're really looking at what impact the Harriman Institute had on those kinds of discussions.

Von Hagen: I recently had to give a couple talks to ASU students about my career and kind of make sense of it for them today. They asked me what I thought my biggest impact was in my career. I thought it was in my students actually, and the people who I've had the honor and privilege to teach, and who have gone to do wonderful things like Rachel. But I've had people in the Soros organizations, and all kinds of other human rights and development organizations. I've taught them all some kind of Soviet history. I think the way I even touched on the history from the start was very much with a focus on human rights, and the nature of the repressive regime, and how people resisted, and how people founds of way subverting.

The most important phase in that my part of my career was when I made my first acquaintance with Memorial in the Soviet Union still under Gorbachev. Memorial was one of the first NGOs to make a claim to recover the forgotten past of Stalin's repressions. The aim was that if they could educate enough Russian and Soviet citizens more broadly about the character of Stalin's regime that maybe it would help prevent the return of such a regime in the future. I was interested in pursuing a second book project after my Red Army book, and I wanted to do something about the Ukrainian military district, which existed in the inter-war years, as a kind of microcosm of Soviet politics in a national periphery.

I realized that if I didn't get into archives on the 1930s and the repression in the Red Army, which was very hard hit for a lot of reasons, I wasn't going to have much interesting to say. This was a period of Gorbachev coming to power, so archives were starting to open up. Memorial appeared, and I was able to get involved with Arseny [B.] Roginsky, and Aleksandr Daniel, and Nikita Okhotin who were all historians who had, in one way or another, suffered under the Brezhnev regime in some kind of penal—they had been punished for their dissident views and for their historical views.

So I started working with them. I found all kinds of people who were recovering memoirs and documents that had been somehow saved from the NKVD [Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del] from people who had played important roles in opposition and dissident movements in earlier periods. Memorial then expanded its reach to even the [Vladimir I.] Lenin period and archival access more broadly. They had a lot of archival access to KGB archives, to party

archives during the Gorbachev and Yeltsin years that's been restricted. So I got involved with them, and then in Kiev I met a guy who was working on the putschs in the Red Army, who later became deputy prime minister of the Ukrainian government, and who wrote his first book on the putschs in the Ukrainian army. Then I ended up going back farther into World War I. So that part of my historical interest I left a little bit behind, although I did write a couple pieces on the terror in the Red Army based on new some archival materials I got in Moscow.

But human rights was, again, the way I taught Soviet history to a large degree, and a way I thought would help us understand the character of the regime and what kind of choices it offered people. Memorial was a big part. I was able—with the Ford Foundation—to get a grant. Edward Kline who was part of the Helsinki support group in the west, and who was a veteran of the sort of old human rights movement back to the '60s and the '50s even, and who was the publisher of Chekhov Publishing House—which published a lot of dissident memoirs and émigré memoirs. He put me together with the New York City human rights people, including Pavel [M.] Litvinov, the son of the old diplomat—and then other—Petro Grigorenko. We put together a grant proposal to help Memorial activists, like Roginsky, and Okhotin, and Daniel come to the west and find the archives of those dissidents who had emigrated, a lot of them in Munich who were working for the Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, a lot of them in the United States.

We put them in universities or research centers that had big collections of dissident memoirs. We microfilmed them, and catalogued them, and sent the microfilms back to Russia where they helped build the archive in the library of Memorial's information center in Moscow. That went on for several years. They had a conference on the history—the project was something like the

History of Human Rights Movement During The Sakharov Era. They didn't want to call it the Brezhnev era; everyone called it the Sakharov era to sort of refocus the history of the Soviet Union from the dissident human rights movement.

Through that I had students who had went out then like Rachel to—and again she was never my student because she was a political scientist, but she took my Soviet history course, and I think we found a lot of things in common. Then when she ended up on the Human Rights Watch Board, she invited me to be on the advisory board for the Europe and Asia group. We had a wonderful human rights tour to Geneva for almost a week. We visited the League of Nations, and the International Rescue Committee, and the Red Cross, and the Norwegian NGOs. Really very impressive to see Geneva as kind of a human rights refugee capital of the world, and talking to all kinds of people were working for NGOs or for government agencies trying to fix all kinds of injustice, and right wrongs, and help the vulnerable and the oppressed, and all the kind of things that I feel—

At the Harriman Institute, Colette Shulman was a very big voice for human rights for a long, long time and sort of people-to-people contact and women, especially women-to-women contact. Whereas Marshall, her husband, occupied another part of what you might called the liberal Soviet studies perspective, and he was a big advocate of arms control, and negotiations for arms, limitations and reduction. He was kind of dealing with the big power politics, and Colette was sort of with the people and their opposition. They lived in a kind of uneasy balance at the Harriman because they were both very political. They represented two powerful examples of engaged scholarship. We were never entirely neutral people that didn't think that the world

mattered out there. What we did have some impact on—again, I’ve had a lot of students—besides going into human rights organizations—I’ve had a lot of students who ended up in the military or in intelligence. I’m hoping that I whatever I shared with them has helped them understand—and now I learn from them. That’s the other good the thing is those who stay in touch with me, they teach me what they’re learning from their new positions. I think that’s one of the things that centers like the Harriman Institute, and our Melikian Center are—that’s what they do best is share what we know about these places far away, and not so far away, and then we learn from the people who we helped at some earlier stage when they learned something that we didn’t have access to, or are learning things new things about something that we thought we knew.

Q: Just a question to append to that. In the time that you were associate director and director, how close of a net was the alumni group to the Harriman? What networks did you use to keep in touch?

Von Hagen: That’s a good idea. Yes. Well, because I came into it in the ‘90s at the Harriman, there was a time when we had a lot of alumni in Moscow—or not just in Moscow—all over the former Soviet Union or over the former Soviet space, in D.C. and in European capitals. Whenever a director would go to Moscow, we would try to gather the alumni and then we started building some networks. But the expat community is very unstable, like all refugee communities [laughs], too, so it was hard to keep up with them. I think our Internet communication skills were not quite up to what they are today. But we did bring a lot of alumni back, including Russian alumni and Ukrainian alumni who had spent some years at SIPA or a summer program. We had

a lot of exchanges with—again, human rights—I think it was with the Pew Foundation. We did a thing on religion and human rights with Paul—oh, god. I can't remember his name. Paul—

Q: We can fill it in.

Von Hagen: Yes. He brought over a lot of religion and human rights activists who were trying to promote multicultural, multi-religious societies, and tolerance, and separation of church and state, and all those tied issues. And again, they're human rights issues. We had activists—I remember this was a Buddhist from Poland who was trying to open a space in a very Catholic Poland for Buddhism and alternative religions. It was a big part of what we did. I was really glad to be associated with both the Soros organization, Open Society [Foundations], and with Human Rights Watch as my two main—but again, almost all my Ukrainian contacts, as Alex would testify, came up with a kind of captive nations human rights critique of the Soviet Union. That was very easy for Ukrainians to see that position. Then they would go march before the Soviet embassy and condemn Soviet imperialism and all that sort of thing, in the name of the suppression of Ukrainian rights, and for the famine, and all sorts of other things.

Recently—and just how this has come around—I was in Toronto a week ago for a conference that I helped organized for the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium. I finally convinced them that famine is not just something that communist regimes do but imperial regimes more generally, and we can conclude communist regimes as imperial or colonial regimes. So we had experts who wrote about both the history of the Irish famine in 1846, '48 and also public memory, and the collected memory, in Irish politics and history of that famine. On

the other side, the Soviet Ukrainian famine of '32, '33, we had the Bengali famine of 1943, also a British imperial famine under Winston Churchill during World War II. Again, Britain is supposed to be the model empire and the Soviet Union far from being the model empire, but empires seem to behave in certain ways. So we had a wonderful meeting of—and again, in Canada—the politics and multi-culturalism. Ukrainians played a very important role in the '70s getting multi-culturalism established in alliance with the French Canadians. And now they're looking to making alliances with the Indian Canadians, and Chinese Canadians, and Irish Canadians on issues like human rights, and famines, and these—so it's

Q: Really grown beyond its original borders.

Von Hagen: What started, as Alex and Rachel, as a very small subset of area studies, has now become much bigger. I even think the people I work on, as a historian now—1917 Ukrainian activists—I really think they are kind of the human rights, or the community organizers of their time. They're worried about the peasants' poorest condition. They're worried about the oppression of minorities. They're worried about war and peace. For a lot of these leftists—I kind of see myself transplanted back there—they want kind of social justice to prevail, but they're in the middle of a war. And the war keeps on diverting attention and worsening the situation, and so they are anti-war. Ultimately the war destroys the revolution in their minds, so I feel it's very contemporary. They were, again, human rights workers. They called themselves socialists, or Ukrainian socialist revolutionaries in the case of the one I'm most involved with these days, but they cared about—

Q: Who's that?

Von Hagen: A guy named Pavlo Khrystiuk who was an Ukrainian socialist revolutionary in the several Ukrainian left-wing governments in 1917 to 1919. He ended up in exile in Vienna, where he wrote what's considered one of the classic eyewitness participant histories of the Ukrainian revolution. It's called, very modestly, which I like about it, "*Notes and Materials Toward a History of the Ukrainian Revolution.*" It's nine hundred pages of notes and materials, but it's very modest. He doesn't claim it's the end of the—he wrote it in Vienna, and then went back to Soviet Ukraine because he thought Ukrainianization was the best thing that the Ukrainian movement was going to be getting for a long time. He didn't see that he had much to do in the immigration, although he was editor of newspapers, and working in the Cooperative Movement, and doing all those kind of things.

He went back to Soviet Ukraine in 1923 and ended up working in Kharkiv until he was arrested in 1930 as part of the an NKVD-contrived conspiracy called the Union for Liberation of Ukraine. He was accused of agitating for the succession of Ukraine from the Soviet Union and he was sent to the Gulag, where he died after living I think eight years in the Gulag. So he was defeated several times by the Bolsheviks because he stood up for human rights of Ukrainians and then the minorities of Ukraine. So it's been—I keep going back to the past to find the future and the present in some research.

Q: All right. But in a way, the kind of work you're doing is recovering the history that's been lost. Could you talk more about that in terms of your most recent work? How you did it and what you had to do to research it.

Von Hagen: Again, it's starting back to this thing I was doing with Memorial. A lot of the history of the Soviet period, and of even the Bolshevik Revolution and the Non-Bolshevik 1917 Revolution, has been not just silenced by Soviet censorship since 1921, but the Bolsheviks were very good at—I mean, destroying outright physical artifacts. I just was on a dissertation in Edmonton on the history of the Belarusian state, which also came about as a result of World War I and the revolution, and they had a brief moment of independence. In Minsk, they called a parliament or a national congress, and then the Bolsheviks arrested all the members of the Congress. And not just arrested, they destroyed all the documentation. So this poor woman who wrote the dissertation had to go to Lithuania and all sorts of other places to recover what was left of the memoirs of people who took part in this aborted attempt at Belarusian national independence and democracy.

They did the same thing with the Ukrainians. They not only wanted to wipe out any memory of any alternative to the Soviet version of Ukrainian history, which also starts in 1917 in Kharkiv—in a situation very parallel to what we've seen recently with the Donetsk and Luhansk Republic—they lost the majority in Kiev, so the Bolsheviks decamped to Kharkiv where there was another congress in play. They declared that to be the Ukrainian Socialist Republic, and organized a government there, with Moscow's approval, and started a civil war essentially. It's

frightening how parallel these things are and how much has changed, but how little changed in the attitudes—

I think one of the biggest problems of Putin, and Russian elite in general, is they have not appreciated the kind of damage that they have done to eastern Europe and the peoples between Germany and Russia. They, I think, really believe that they were doing good for a lot of the people. And maybe they were doing some good, but they don't appreciate the Stalinist period—what it left for Poles, and Ukrainians, and Lithuanians, and Belarusians—and they are surprised when people express sort of anti-Russian sentiments.

We had been doing a lot of work on bringing Russian and Ukrainian historians together to see if they could work through some of the sticky issues that are in conflict between the Russian and Ukrainian multiple narratives. We made a lot of progress, I think, over five or six years. We had meetings in Germany, we had meetings in New York, where Russians from Russia and Ukrainians from Ukraine would meet with Russianists from the west—then Putin came to power. Even before the war with Ukraine, Russian-Ukrainian relations were deteriorating quickly. Since the war in Ukraine, that whole—whatever we achieved there has been at least temporarily wiped out. If anything now, they're back to worse stereotypes about each other than we could have imagined before, and that's on both sides. I mean, the longer the war goes on, the more it's going to be hard to present a more nuanced, balanced, multi-vocal picture of what happened in the world, because the camps are getting very rigid.

Q: Well, last time you compared the situation to that of Israel and Palestine.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Which is really an enduring conflict.

Von Hagen: Yes. I don't think Russia is going to go away soon, just like the Arabs are not going to go away from Israel. If Israel is going to be a democracy, it's going to be a very—always kind of on the verge of collapse because of the threats outside. I think Ukraine—with a lot less democratic experience—is going to be facing an unfriendly Russian neighbor for a long time, and it's going to have to find some ways of forming coalitions with its smaller neighbors and some of its bigger neighbors to keep that threat at bay and to keep a democracy going in a country that has the kind of corrupt post-Soviet economy that Ukraine has. It's something that Israel didn't have, too, so it's got more challenges than, I think, Israel. I think the founding fathers were not oligarchs and were not [laughs]—in 1917, nobody got rich from the first Ukrainian revolution. The contrast between that generation and the 1991 generation, where everyone seems to get rich in power—and it's not just a Ukrainian sickness, it's a worldwide sickness. But it's kind of stark, the contrast between this generation of founding fathers and one hundred years ago.

They all suffered for what they did. They all ended up in the Gulag, or in emigration, or killed some other way. And these guys are all—I think some of them escaped to Russia, like [Viktor F.] Yanukovich, but others of them are in the Poroshenko government [laughs].

Q: Before I leave the field of human rights and students, which got connected nicely, I noticed that you had a done a human rights course with Lara [J.] Nettelfield.

Von Hagen: Yes. My last semester at Columbia.

Q: I understand that she's coming back to Columbia in ISHER, the Institute for the Study of Human Rights.

Von Hagen: Great. Well, I didn't know that. You're ahead of me. She, too, like Rachel—she was in political science, and—

Q: She was [Jack L.] Snyder's student, right?

Von Hagen: Yes. And at first, they couldn't find any adviser in political science who took the human rights sort of politics seriously, and I kind of took them under my wing. That's not fair either, but I encouraged them to stay with it, and I offered to be on their committee and to make an argument with them. Together we, I think—well, I mean, Rachel never finished her Ph.D. That's a sign of how hard it was to do that. At least Lara did finish, but not without a struggle, as you might know and I know.

Q: She took my course.

Von Hagen: Okay. Then she brought Jerry to our class. That's how I met Gerry [Jerald Albarelli].

Q: Yes. Oh, okay.

Von Hagen: Because we told the students how important oral history was—the techniques of oral history to get human rights testimony for all kinds of things, whether war crimes, or refugee camps, or any number of other situations. So yes, that was a lot of fun.

Q: Yes.

Von Hagen: I know we had a lot of good speakers come in from the neighborhood, and Soros, and the Ford Foundation, and I think the students—we had a really nice mix of practitioners, and SIPA students, and political science, and people from all over the world. I wish I had done it earlier, and I hope Lara is going to continue that.

Q: That is a question, though—a general question—human rights practice and historical analysis, should that be part of the Harriman Institute, and to how much is it a part? How much should it have been a part from an earlier period?

Von Hagen: I think it should be a part. I think it has been a part. Somewhat contested and always with opposition—again, people who for whatever reason valued a certain kind of connection with certain kind of Soviet bureaucrats, including academics, they got nervous when they heard

that he Harriman was paying attention to Ukrainian human rights violations. This is something I even felt on the IREX program. When I complained that I wasn't going to get any access to archives, and they not only couldn't give me access to archives, but they were going to make me leave Moscow and go to Leningrad, where I didn't know what I was going to do for a year. The IREX people said, "Well, don't make too much of a noise because we don't want to jeopardize the exchange."

I was just supposed to put up with Soviet arbitrary decision. I didn't listen to them, and I fought for three months. I finally wore out I think the resistance of the bureaucratic authorities in Moscow and they let me come back for my last four months, and I had the best four months I could imagine once I got back to Moscow. But even IREX, which is supposed to be our advocate—the survival of the exchange was their first priority, and the rest of us were kind of collateral damage, I guess, if we didn't succeed well.

Part of the dissident movement, which I took as my kind of mantra, was that the Soviet Union has a constitution; it has signed all kinds of human rights declarations with Helsinki; and the human rights activists acted as if the Soviet Union actually observed its constitution and its legal obligations. So they pretended they were in a free country. I thought, while I was there, I was going to try to do that. I had much less to risk than they do because I could always leave or be deported. And so I kind of thought I'm going to stand up for what I think Soviet citizens have rights to stand up for [laughs].

It comes back to my gay side there, because I had the same idea. I knew I was coming to a country where sodomy was illegal. This was before Putin. This was a Stalin era thing. I knew people I was meeting with were people who had to hide their identity and who could be blackmailed or worse if someone denounced them. That was part of the, I think, power of the Soviet State was to keep people in fear of each other because people would always snitch. And so all the gay circles that I hung out with in Moscow and Leningrad, there was this kind of aura of fear that there was somebody in the group was a KGB plant, who was there to record everybody, and snitch on them, and eventually turn them all in. There was a lot of anxiety produced by that, which turned into all kinds of—you know, on top of the gay subculture, you had this KGB Soviet subculture, which is something that all the dissidents understood, too, where you were afraid of saying things, if you were overheard by some.

I was trying to think since yesterday how my being gay led me to human rights, which I think it probably is some kind of causal linkage there. I was always aware that people were being discriminated against, or harassed, or worse because of their identity. Again, racial identity is something that is more apparent and visible most of the time, but sexual identity is trickier that way. I think, especially that year that I went on my IREX Fulbright year—

Q: That, again—that year was?

Von Hagen: That was '82-'83, so the very last year of the Soviet. Well, not quite the last year of the Soviet State, but the beginning of the end because that's when Brezhnev died, in the fall of 1982, and I was there. Because I decided—well, I don't know how much I decided this. I had

some contacts from the United States largely through Ardis [Publishing] in Michigan with dissident writers on the one hand, and with a kind of a gay subculture related to the dissident writers on the other hand, who didn't really know each other. I had to keep them apart because of all this KGB stuff. I came out in a meaningful way in Moscow and Leningrad during '82-'83 in the throes of the end of the Soviet Union.

I think the kind of trust that I was able to achieve with Soviet friends at the time—and I met men and women from—mostly men, but a lot of women, too—from all over the Soviet Union, all nationalities, who were gay, and who were living in fictitious marriages, who were having all sorts of other ways that they were trying to disguise who they were because of the consequences. It wasn't Stalinism, where you would be jailed or put to death most of the time. But you could be dismissed from jobs, you could be kicked out of cities. That was equivalent to a jail sentence of sorts. I think the kind of intimacy that one has in sexual relations, and the trust that one has, made it possible for me to see a side of the Soviet Union in that last year—'82, '83—that I don't think I would have ever seen—or I would have had to have some other circumstances to explain. I got to be taken to morgues, and the basements of hotels that were for foreigners, and I saw what kind of things they had underground there with friends who worked in the hotels.

Q: I'm going to do what Gerry does in his interviews. I'm going to say show, don't tell [laughter]. Take me into those places. What was the nightlife like? Who you were hanging out with? I noticed that you at one point met Yevgeny [A.] Yevtushenko, and I always loved him.

Von Hagen: Yes. Well, that's another interesting—

Q: That's another story?

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: All right. Well, don't let me take you away from this story.

Von Hagen: Well, this one—and the best example was a guy who probably was one of my first romantic attachments. I saw him as kind of a [Ernest] Hemingway. He was a wannabe fiction writer, and he worked in the Pribaltiyskaya Hotel, which was an Intourist hotel. One of the newest ones built by, I think, the Fins or the Swedes—somebody. So very modern and on the bay of Finland. Very nice. Far out from the center of town, but that's where they had tourists. That's where it was safe for tourists to go for Intourist, and a lot of Finnish tourists went there and they would get drunk. And there was a sort of prostitute ring that ran out of the hotel that was designed to entrap tourists. I kind of saw this at work.

This friend of mine just took me. He said, "Look at the bar," and he pointed out who was—because they all knew. It was all below the board, of course—I mean, below radar. And so I got to know that there was a big prostitution market in Leningrad and Moscow. Again, I could have known that before. Even like the day I arrived—there's this sort of typical example—I kind of was in a mood because the Soviets had rejected me for six months before they let me in with the rest of the group. I was kind of a mood to say, "I'm here, and if you want to send me home—I know you don't need an excuse, but I know that that's a possibility. But I'm not going to think

about that.” So I arrived a week late. Oh, it was during a holiday. It was Constitution Day, so nobody from the IREX or from the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education met me at the airport, which was kind of typical because you had to have someone take you to the place. You aren’t supposed to have any foreign currency.

Nobody met me. I came on my own. And so this taxi driver comes up to me after I make it through passport. He says, “Where do you want to go?” I said, “Moscow State University.” And he said, “Well, let’s go.” I said, “But I don’t have rubles.” He said, “Well, that’s okay.” I said, [clears throat] “Really?” He said, “Yes.” The currency exchange store is closed because I got in too late. I said, All right. Well, here I go. I may be arrested now before I get to the university. So, he took me there, and on the way he said, “This is where the strippers and the hookers hang out. This is where the drug addicts hang and others.” This guy just met me, right? Because I spoke Russian and because I was an American, he just wanted to give me a tour of Moscow.

Q: The underground tour.

Von Hagen: Well, I said, I’ve never had a tour of Russia like this before. I came over as a student. I always had very official tours, very sanitized, ideologically correct tours, and here I just—my first hour after I got through passport control, I was breaking at least three laws I imagined [laughter].

Then I got to the Moscow State University and of course there was nobody expecting me there because I wasn’t supposed to be there. But I didn’t know that because they had given me a Visa

the week before, and they decided to change their mind. They didn't want me to stay in Moscow because they didn't want someone working on the Red Army in Moscow. So they thought if they packed me off to Leningrad, I would be safe.

I get to the dorm and one of my Stanford friends, who happened to be an elected elder—I mean, what was his name? [Bert Patenaude] Anyway, he was there as the elder. He welcomed me and he said, “What are you doing here? You're supposed to be in Leningrad.” I said, “But I don't want to go to Leningrad. I want to be in Moscow.” He said, “Well, they told us that you have to Leningrad.” I said, “Who told you?” He said, “IREX and the foreign department.” So I fought for a week. I got into the hotel somehow. They found a room for me. I stayed there for a week and I went to the embassy every day, went to the foreign department every day, and I said, “I don't want to go to Leningrad. There's nothing for me to do there.” They said, “Well, you go now and we'll see if we can get you back later.”

I went on a train. A friend of mine who had good connections in the train station got me a nice [unclear] ticket so I could have a nice cabin to get there. A gay friend met me at the train station and took me to the dorm. Again, they didn't have an adviser for me. They didn't expect me, but at least they knew I was supposed to be in the dorm, so I had a room. Then I had to, again, fight to find an adviser, because they didn't want to find someone for me. I just kind of thought, “Okay. I could have been in France. I could have been in London.” [Laughter] I had a Fulbright then, and if the Soviets didn't let me in I had an option to go to work in the libraries in London and Paris, which wouldn't have been the same thing, but I could have got a lot done. So I was

ready to say, “I’ll go to Paris.” Eventually, like I said, after four months of fighting, they let me come back to Moscow for the last four months, then I got done.

I had another kind of romantic attachment to a guy who worked for the Psychological Institute. He was a psychologist. All my other gay friends were saying that he’s a KGB agent because psychology was being used to treat dissidents, and Moscow especially was where most of the dissidents were being locked up in psych. So everyone said, “You shouldn’t hang out with him because he’s going to compromise you and steal all of the information you—” I said, “What information do I have? I read journals from the 1920s in the Lenin library every day. That’s all I know, and a few gossip from the Stanford history department about it. That’s about it. I mean, I’m not a great intelligence source.”

I think one of the things I always was finding was that most Americans assume that the KGB just can’t wait to follow them because they’re so important and interesting. I said, “Well, what exactly do you know?” I’m sure the KGB wastes a lot of time tracking people who don’t pose any kind of threat or interest. But they have created an image, and it’s a kind of romantic image that Americans like to indulge in, that we’re so interesting and important because we’re Americans that the KGB really—and I have the feeling I do have an interesting KGB file [laughter]. But I said I didn’t want to live like someone who was afraid of everything he did. I didn’t want to be afraid of living a full life there.

So I somehow had a lot of first, important—and again, as a gay man from the United States, who spoke pretty good Russian by that time, so I could pass—I think maybe part of being gay that’s

helped me in my life is I can pass better. That's something that seems to matter to me or has mattered to me more than maybe a lot of other people. I kind of had an obsession at some point in my Russian career when I wanted to pass as a Russian. By the mid-1982-'83, my diet was so bad and my clothing was so outsized that I looked—I could fit into—people would block me from entering the foreign currency because they thought I was a Russian until I brought my American passport. So I kind of played with this idea and had some sort of obsession about—not an obsession, but kind of a mild game I played with myself on how well could I pass. Not because I wanted to be a spy, just because I wanted to blend in and see what it was really like being a Russian.

I think in that year of '82, '83, I really got to see sides of Russia. That again, people had shared a lot with me. I had some very good friends—one who is in New York now, Eugene Zubkov, a doctor—who really showed me a lot of Soviet life, too. He's not gay. He had a series of ballerina girlfriends who I got to know, and got to see a lot of good ballet when I was there, too, thanks to that. But I think what I saw that year I went back for the first time, as a not quite out gay man, but out enough, was I could never think about the Soviet Union again the same way. Just that there was a lot of possibility for people to do things, but you had to know the system. And you don't know the system if you come out from outside and don't have any kind of internal access. I think that was tied to my interest in human rights because I know so many talented people—and not just there, here, too—who, because they were gay or lesbian, were not able to realize what they could have done and not just for themselves, but for humanity, I think.

I think gay rights are human rights. That's at the core of a lot of these fights we're having with Russia right now or the Islamic State is about sexual identity, and family, and gender roles. For Putin, Europe is Gayropa, and for some reason Russian male identity is so threatened by [laughs]—even though Russian culture is supposed to be so righteous, and moral, and so firm, and traditional, but apparently very vulnerable to contamination by all sorts of strange Western things.

Also, even on the gay rights things, I had a lot of Columbia students who I didn't know were gay, but who somehow knew I was gay, and who have over the years kind of reconnected with me. One, Ian Bateson in Kiev, is now a correspondent for the civic radio there. He didn't really know he was as Ukrainian as he was, and I don't know how gay he knew he was, but he was one of my hosts last year in Kiev and showed me all around. I had a wonderful time with him and I tried to introduce him to all the people I was meeting to kind of connect things.

Then two of the first dissertations on gay life in Russia were at Columbia in the sociology department. One of them, Laurie Essig, is Middlebury [College], and the other was Dan Schluetter [phonetic], who never published his book. But I was on both of their dissertations because there was nobody in sociology who [laughs] came anywhere close to what they were working on. They both did pioneering work. And then David Tuller was over there as a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter, and I also advised him for his book that came out. It's one of the first books on gays in Russia under Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

I was involved also—I had a student at Yale when I taught there for one semester, who went off to Moscow and headed up one of the first AIDS activism and awareness and consciousness raising groups at a very difficult time, when the Russians were basically saying AIDS was a Western epidemic that was being brought in to destroy the Soviet Union and it was not only a gay thing but a drug addict—and it was all of those things, too. But it was very demonizing. I think to this day even, you have to have a certificate from a doctor if you're going to stay longer than three months in Russia. You have to have—that you're HIV negative. So there was a lot of activism around that, and I had students who were involved within the HIV side and the gay rights side all through the '90s. There was a lot of possibility in the '90s, which began closing down when Comrade Putin came to power. Something about white Russian males—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: You were talking about your experiences in Russia, and that made me want to—unless you're finished with it.

Von Hagen: Oh, no.

Q: Maybe you're not finished with it.

Von Hagen: No. I can go back to earlier because, as I say, I thought I had learned a lot about the Soviet Union before I came out. I think I did, but it was very different. I realized—it was kind of a performance, I suppose, being straight all this time, but I never thought of it that way. So

already at Georgetown, I suspected I was gay. But I thought it was something I could get rid of. I was in a Catholic Jesuit university so I thought enough prayer [laughter] and thinking about it would make it go away. I had girlfriends there, but I also was confronted with something that kind of made me get there faster than I thought. I was a reporter for the Georgetown University—one of the two newspapers, *The Hoya*—and I think it was my second semester only. There was a gay movement starting on campus and the university was doing everything it could to quash it immediately.

I was assigned to go to the meeting of the students. They were having a meeting basically illegally because the university wouldn't give them formal access to any classrooms because they were advocating gay and lesbian's rights, which back in 1972, and even today [laughter], is not a position most—although the church has evolved a lot since then. So there were these, I would say, radical queer activists on a Catholic campus who were trying to just assert the right to exist, and to have meetings, and to talk. I was shuttling between the meetings. The academic vice president, who was a Jesuit, Father—I can't remember. Father somebody or another—sort of an assistant provost for academics' affairs. He was the deciding which student organizations had the right. And so I was having to go listen to his explanations for why Catholic institutions cannot do these things, then go to the—I was so conflicted because I thought someone's going to see me at these meetings and they're going think [gasps] that I'm one of them. I was scared by that.

My first semester there—and again, I was in the school of foreign service. I really went to Georgetown with the thought of becoming a diplomat and working for the state department, and that's why I studied languages and that's why I wanted to travel. My very first semester, I took a

course in African literature, which was a way I was able to get out of taking English literature courses. I, for some reason, didn't want to learn the classics of English literature; I wanted to learn world literature already then. So I signed up for this African literature course, which was taught by a retired state department official who had served in Africa in several places. We read *Heart of Darkness* and we read all sorts of African novelists, which I'm very grateful to this day I read Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi and, really great stuff, starting with [Joseph] Conrad. He told us this story about—and I don't know what even prompted it. I can't remember. But he told us a story about how there was a gay man in one of his embassies where he was deputy chief of admission who was outed by some political rival, and who left the state department in disgrace and committed suicide even. I thought wow. That is some kind of a lesson [laughs].

If you were studying Russian, or Chinese, or Arabic at Georgetown in those days, you were as likely as not being looked at by CIA recruiters or NSA recruiters. That was a very natural Cold War career path. But we all knew it came with a lie detector test, and there would be tests about drug use. This was the '60s and '70s and I didn't do that then. And again, I hadn't practiced being gay, but I kind of suspected there was some part of me that would be revealed if I ever had to sit in a lie detector test. I kind of realized, sadly, at an early stage that I would never be a diplomat in the state department. I would never be a CIA agent, if I even thought that was a good idea, which I wasn't sure because I was an anti-Vietnam sort of person and I kind of blamed the CIA for a lot of stuff that happened.

Q: But your father was.

Von Hagen: But my father was a CIC [Counter Intelligence Corps] agent. So I probably didn't have the same reaction as most leftists would toward the military industrial complex, because I realized there were humans there. But I also realized that he was studying the Soviet Union as an enemy, and here I was a Soviet historian, studying the Red Army not as an enemy, but sort of [laughs]. A woman tried to do some analysis that I was working on some kind of Oedipal complex with my father. That he was studying the Soviet Union as an enemy, and I was challenging him by studying the Red Army as a kind of normal army with normal soldiers. Anyway, there was all kinds of stuff going on there. I realized that that whole side of the area studies career path was shut out for me probably forever. It's hard for me to imagine today what it's like—what opportunities. But even today, I think if there's a country where sodomy is still a capital crime, which it is in some places [laughs], I don't think I want to be assigned to Malaysia, or Singapore, or wherever the latest capital punishment things are.

We're not liberated. I don't think we're ever going to be fully liberated, whatever that may mean, because I think liberation keeps on expanding. But it's not the same as it was in the '70s, where you really would be kicked out and even jailed, I think, but certainly removed from any kind of security clearances. So there was always that security clearance threat that a gay person faced. I realized that I had to go a very civilian path, and I think that was a good thing that other paths were maybe blocked out for me. But on the other hand, as someone on the left, I feel if people on the left don't care about things like war, and peace, and militaries, and armies, and soldiers, that means the right has the monopoly on any kind of discussion and decision making. However much we may find it difficult, I think we have to understand that world, and try to explain it to people, and do something about it. I think I'm still a peacenik. I think I'm a human rights activist

[laughs]. It comes out of my strange family and identity evolution in a lot of ways, that I'm only kind of still fixing together how it all comes together.

One of the reasons I really don't want to go Russia right now is because of the homophobic, anti-Americanism that is now state policy and state media policy. I so worry about my grad students who are over there right now. They send me long reports, and I encourage them to write up daily logs to me. They don't do daily logs, but I hope they do some research. But they're finding amazing stuff, and they are all being treated so well, and they're posting on their Facebooks, and they're having discussions with other students about how there are still a lot of Russians who like Americans who want to know about us.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. We're back on now.

Von Hagen: The best part about teaching is performance, but the worst part is also performance.

Q: We segued when I was changing the card to your interest in performance [laughs]. We're talking about all the wonderful things that are happening here at ASU.

Von Hagen: Yes. So I think my last manifesto was about how we should keep all the exchanges open. We should keep inviting Russians, and Ukrainians, and Tajiks, and everybody to conferences. I don't believe in academic boycotts; not in Russia and not in Israel. I think we

should keep everything open. If Putin, and [Recep T.] Erdoğan, and the [Lech A. and Jaroslaw A.] Kaczynski brothers, and [Viktor M.] Orbán in Hungary—they all want to shut down their countries from contaminating Western democratic influences. They're doing their damndest to do it, whether it's in the media, or shutting down institutions and shutting down exchanges and NGOs. I think we have to fight to hold on to the ones that are left because we know what the long-term impact of those things are now. We've had a generation or two experience of how people have been affected by learning about another country in that country, and getting to know something more than a media superficial knowledge.

Q: Since we're talking about current day Russia, I'd like to get your thought on Legvold's new book.

Von Hagen: Yes. Well, Legvold was my predecessor. He wasn't the director when I was hired, but he was the associate director under Marshall Shulman and then became the director. I had a good relationship with him and Marshall because one of my Stanford advisers was Alexander Dallin, who had been at Columbia until the heady days of '68, and ended up, in his perception, being caught between the left and the right, because he tried to reconcile the hardline academics and the student rebels in 1968. And so he came to Stanford where he started his career again. But he was a Soviet foreign policy specialist and a Russian Jew, who was born in Berlin, and who served in World War II, and actually wrote his first book and his doctorate dissertation about the German occupation of the Soviet Union. Which I'm now working on the German occupation of Russia, so I think he's sort of my grandfather at least, and certainly my father. He was one of my biggest supporters.

He always taught us—as did my other adviser, Terry Emmons in imperial history—that we ought to try to understand Russian points of view about Russia, even if we don't find them easy to understand, and even if we find them sometimes objectionable. It's like you wouldn't study America and not study unpleasant things, too, and things that you disagree with. So I was encouraged to read widely and try to put myself in their shoes. Alex Dallin was very important in the '70s, and '80s even, in calming people down about Soviet foreign policy, and Russian foreign policy, and Cold War excesses and alarms, and trying to keep the long-term perspective a bit more global. I think Legvold and Shulman were very much in that tradition, too. And again, Dallin came from Columbia, so some sort of even spiritual connection probably.

I think that's what Legvold is trying to do in this book. I really was captured by the first couple of chapters where he talked about how incredible it was for him—who has been advocating for arms control and dialogue with the Soviet Union and then with Russians, and replacing old security arrangements with more modern and inclusive ones—that he is writing a book about a return to Cold War when he's been fighting against the Cold War, I think, for most of his career and I think had thought like many of us that it was behind us, despite all the troubling signs later. I appreciate that, and I have a lot of senior colleagues in that position now.

There's a guy in Germany, who I've become good buddies with, Karl Schlögel, who is a historian who would not object if I said he was a Russophile. He loves Russian culture, he loves the history of Russian intelligentsia, he loves Russian literature and culture. He wrote a book called, *Entscheidung in Kiew*, which means *Decision in Kiev*, last year. It's a short very sort of publicistic book in German about how the future of Europe is being decided in Ukraine. He did a

kind of a literary, cultural, historical, political tour of all the major Ukrainian cities at very different times, and how they are very European, and how they deserve to be part of Europe. He has also had that kind of crisis of conscience like we all have. I mean, no one expected Russia to turn out this way and Putin to be the voice of Russia, which he's not, but he is certainly a powerful voice in Russia.

I think that's what Bob has been trying to do with it. Anyway, I agree with him, too, that both sides share a great deal of the blame for misunderstanding, and missing opportunities, and squandering opportunities and possibilities for a new relationship. But in the end—and I haven't got to the very last few pages yet—but so far, all he's said is we need to keep strategic dialogue going. I agree with that. But how we can do that without giving something up on Ukraine that Ukrainians, I don't think, are wanting to give up, and probably shouldn't have to give up. On several points in there, I think he hit the nail on the head. He said that the Russians have not learned how to understand the bitter memories that their East European neighbors have about Stalinist and even Brezhnev era Soviet domination, and that they don't really want to go back to that, and they see Putin—and you know.

I agree with him. That's why I had this polemic with Steve [Stephen F.] Cohen and Katrina vanden Heuvel on the same thing, that the Russian point of view is a very important one. But the Russians don't get it, and you don't get it because you don't talk to anybody but Russians. The Poles, and Lithuanians, and Estonians, and Ukrainians are scared as shit about what's going to come to them. I think a lot of Russians are, too, but for the moment they're enthralled with Crimea fever and Russia being great again. There is a lot of pain all across the post-Soviet space

that's twenty-five years old at least, with all the violent reforms that brought the market to stratification and impoverishment. A lot of refugees from Russia and Ukraine—

I mean, people I teach every summer are kids in their twenties and thirties who already have a degree from a Ukrainian university, who have daily contact with their family members in the Ukraine, and who I think want to go back, but they don't think that it's a good time to go back, and they don't foresee when. They ask me, "So you understand what it was like a hundred years ago. What has changed since then that we should want to go back?" It's hard to answer that question. It's going to become very personal and professional. I don't think I've ever felt them so entangled. I write about entangled history. It's because mostly I'm entangled, I think, that I see the world that way.

Q: No, no. There's so many questions that could come out of this about how the mindset of, say, take Steve Cohen remain the same all these years, and how others still see really Russia as a state, like almost like a Soviet Union, and have not really worked through the area studies post-Soviet.

Von Hagen: Imperial turn.

Q: Imperial turn.

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Has that held that Harriman back? Has that held area studies back?

Von Hagen: I think we were at the forefront of it.

Q: You were at the forefront of it?

Von Hagen: I think we were. Yes. Alex Motyl and his nationality seminar, when it wasn't popular and it was kind of shoo-shoed as right-wing captive nation stuff. I kind of was part of that, but I also always knew that there was something—because I knew enough émigrés, and I listened to their stories even before I went into graduate school and had a lot of friends from my first visits to the Soviet Union who had family members—so I got the orthodox and Jewish—and who spent a lot of time explaining the culture to me, and the good parts and the bad parts. I think I was prepared for a more complicated view of the world. So going there, I already was connected to people by the families even who I knew. That was something that was hard to do back then, but it was possible. It should be now more possible, but it's kind of, for me at least, less conceivable, I think.

Legvold, too, I really have to give it to him. He took a semester and went to teach there. It must have been kind of a challenging time, I would say. He's brave, and so I really appreciate that he wrote that book. But in the end, I don't think he has been saying the same thing that I've been saying, that we got to keep the doors of dialogue open and hope somebody comes to power somewhere who will—

Q: How would you write that final chapter?

Von Hagen: [Laughter] I don't think I'd write it much differently. I just thought when he started out that he had something more [laughs]. He talks about specific areas in which you could possibly talk—but you have Syria, Ukraine, nuclear arms, missile, anti-missiles—it doesn't look good. Democracy, human rights?

Q: You talked also last time, or maybe I read it in some of your writings, about how you thought in a way—or maybe I'm mixing you up with Legvold, I'm sorry—how the U.S. thought the Cold War was over at a certain point. Scholars—

Von Hagen: Oh, yes. History was at an end even.

Q: —and also the Council on Foreign Relations. Were you the one who said it really got displaced to the Middle East?

Von Hagen: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Von Hagen: I think I was one of many. I wasn't the only one who noticed that. In some ways the emblem of this was Richard Pipes—who was a national security adviser on Russia to the Reagan administration and a distinguished Harvard professor—had a son named Daniel Pipes who

became a Middle East expert and with a similar kind of aggressive containment position toward the world of Islam, and a similar kind of Cold War attitude toward ideological rivalry and super power.

After 1991, first of all, we didn't know what to call the place that we were studying. We had the crisis of the name, which was the then labeled Harriman Center Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union. That was the name. That was already kind of—how shall we say—less than modest [laughter]. I mean, that we were the advanced study for—I mean, advanced studies like Princeton and Stanford. Those kind of people who do graduate-level research. And then we were studying the Soviet Union. One country. Of course, it wasn't just one country; it was an empire. But we didn't really think of it that way. So we had to have a new name before long [laughs] at the end of 1991 after there was no Soviet Union. And we were doing advanced study anymore since—how can you have an advanced study of something that just came into existence? [Laughs] Or went out of existence?

Q: [Laughs] That's a great line. It's going to appear somewhere in bold in your transcript.

Von Hagen: That was part of the identity crisis that started. But then the U.S. government and the major funding agencies—and I just speak about the loser generation [laughs] that we hear about these days. I finally reached the point where I was going to be put on all these committees to give out all this government money from the National Security Council and the State Department, and then it all dries up two years later. My senior generation really had a gravy train existence. They would go to San Diego in the winter and decide on all these tens of thousands of

dollars of grants for scholarships and policy relevant areas. And then I got put on these committees—the National Council for Soviet East European Research, the IREX—and then they lost all their funding because we won the Cold War. So what do we need to know about those people anymore? They're going to be like us soon.

I think that's part of the problem that we're still facing. We expected them to become like us, and when they didn't become like us, we got annoyed with them. The Chinese, we never won the Cold War with them. We never think of them as having lost the Cold War, because they're still going. Are they communists? Are they capitalists? But they're still Chinese. Partly, I think, it's like a racial thing. I don't think we expect the Chinese to be like us, so we don't—but the Russians we do because they're European, they're white—I don't know—they're Christian, whatever racist thinking is [laughs] behind this. I think that's why our relations with Russia are so much worse than our relations with China. Although what the Chinese are doing is hardly better than what Comrade Putin is doing. But they're more powerful and we can't get away with what we get away with—and we probably can't get away with it anyway with Russia.

I think we had a very false sense of victory. Again, George Bush had something to do with the sear because it was an election year and he knew—because he was defending Gorbachev until the very last possible moment because he and the United States government at that level, with a few dissenting voices, wanted to keep the Soviet Union together because they were so afraid of the kind of crazy, fascist nationalism that they thought the Ukrainians represented. This is the same thing that happened after 1917 with World War I. The French and the British were afraid of the Polish nationalism and they really didn't want to see a Polish state resurrected. Well, now,

Bush, and [James A.] Baker, and all those guys did not want the Soviet Union to break apart. And so they fought Yeltsin and for Gorbachev until late 1991, and then it fell.

Then Bush was up for re-election, which he lost. He had to declare that we won the Cold War as if we had anything to do with it. It was the Russian people and the Ukrainians who brought down the Soviet Union. We did not do that. But we've living with that illusion, and they've been living with that idea that we have that illusion that we're the ones who liberated them. That's kind of poisoned the relationship from the start. We thought that we should tell them how they could become like us. They kind of had their own ideas about how to do that [laughs]. And not just the Russians. The Ukrainians, too. There was a lot of American arrogance and European arrogance.

I saw it firsthand in Germany when in 1991 I was on my Humboldt [Foundation Fellowship] year. I was on leave from Columbia. I wanted to sort of integrate myself into—and I had these models of Raeff, and Haimson, and Dallin who all grew up speaking Russian, French, German, and English before they even seemed like they were born. So they were kind of were very at home. I felt that my generation of Americans—we're very monolingual and maybe bilingual at best. I wanted to kind of get to know European academic culture. I got the opportunity with the Humboldt Fellowship. I got to spend a year a University of Berlin. It was during the Bevanda [phonetic]—first the capital was moving from Bonn to Berlin, then the wall was coming down in all sorts of ways.

I got to know a historian—a very respected historian—who was the head of basically a putsch committee of East European academics. I got to know how dysfunctional German academia was.

It has great history and great heritage, but it's kind of stuck in this very hierarchical, rigid—which they know about themselves. But, instead of taking the opportunity, that here they have this new colony to colonize in East Germany after 1991, and try something new out, and maybe see if there was something useful from the Soviet era—no. They purged everybody. This guy was on a committee to purge East German intellectuals because they weren't up to ideological and methodological, basically political, standards.

Of course, the same German professors had a little bit of a conflict of interest. They have a whole bevy of Ph.D. students who had no jobs, who just needed the jobs of all those East German—and I thought wow. Is there any wonder that there's any bad blood between East and West Germany to this day, too? I mean, it's better in East Germany because they had a lot of money and they have the raised the level. But even with the billions of dollars that West Germans poured into East Germany, it's still a lot of injustice, a lot of unequal salaries, and kind of still elite colonial attitudes that. “We, the West Germans, liberated you from your slavery and now we're going to tell you how to be Europeans.”

I think that's the tragedy of the last twenty-five years. We weren't humble enough to listen to their voices and it turned into this ugly mess. I think, again, the Russians have their fair share of the blame. I think a lot of Putin's power is about holding on to power. He's making life for Russians miserable, too, but he's also threatening the world order and certainly the European community. Again, I don't think anybody in Russia really expected this. I don't think anybody in Ukraine—I know people in Ukraine didn't [laughs] expect it until fairly recently and we didn't

either. I guess perhaps we'll come back to Bob. That's what it's about. It's kind of a good testimony to what we don't know, and what we're confused by, and what we need to rethink.

Q: Let me ask you the question that all historians dread, which is the what if question. What if you were just coming into Columbia now as director of the Harriman Institute? What would you recommend be done over the next five years?

Von Hagen: Well, keep doing what I think Harriman has does best, and what all these area studies do best, which is keeping bridges open to our colleagues in the societies that we purport to study. Again, we have an increasingly international student body—training them in the languages, and cultures, and politics of those societies. And as much as possible having scholars from there teach, and co-teach, and co-research with us. Trying to teach about this region in more complex and nuanced ways than Wikipedia, or CNN, or FOX presents the world.

Q: Same mission, which is really to combat ignorance.

Von Hagen: It's the mission of the humanities, it's the mission of the social sciences, and probably the mission of all liberal arts universities. But I think that we're a special niche in that. There's another quote I found in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that I liked, about how humanities especially is about humanity. And humanity is not something that's given. It's not just out there. Humanity has to be created on a daily basis. And humanities is about creating that humanity, and explaining the definition of humanity, and understanding what it means. It's not something that just—it can go away if it's not tended to. That's, again, I think why area studies is

a very important part of the humanities. Those social sciences, and other sciences that see culture, and difference, and I guess pluralism as important values.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So we're back on. Still on session two. I was asking some more questions about Georgetown off tape, and you said you'd like to talk about the group that you went to the Soviet Union with.

Von Hagen: Like many overseas studies programs, the Leningrad program, as we called it CIEE—Council on International Educational Exchange—was a transformative experience. It was a bonding experience for the thirty Americans who went for the four months of winter and almost spring in 1976, from January to the beginning of April. We were sent by the Council of the International Educational Exchange, and I think most of us had some kind of fellowship support. I had worked the semester before that as a translator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington, D.C. to make money to pay for part of the trip, but I got a grant from the university as well and so I was able to go for a full semester in Leningrad to study Russian on a more advanced level. I was already at the fourth year level at Georgetown, so this was going to be over the top. The group was chosen nationwide. we've stayed in touch over the years, and I think we're planning a reunion sometime soon in D.C. because many of our alumni ended up in D.C. or along the east coast.

The most notable of our group has been John [R.] Beyrle, who was U.S. ambassador to Russia during the late Yeltsin years into the Putin years, and was the immediate predecessor to Mike

[Michael A.] McFaul, who is a Russian area studies, Soviet area studies, political scientist also at Stanford who is often in the media these days. So John Beyrle was a tall, redheaded guy from Minnesota, I think. He spent the four months with us and went on after he completed the program to serve two tours on the USIA [United States Information Agency] USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] exhibits. This was a kind of branch of the State Department—the U.S. Information Agency—that sent Americans over to be guides for these exhibitions about American culture. They were about American consumerism, about American kitchen technology, about American agriculture, about American space, all sorts of things. The Soviets had an equivalent. They would send over like similar exhibits to the United States simultaneously, and they would go to all kinds of different cities and basically explain the Soviet Union from an official point of view to American tourists and citizens who showed up.

John did two of these. So I think when he was appointed ambassador, he was probably the ambassador who had the most intimate experience of real-life Soviet Union, and godforsaken parts of the Soviet Union that most of us never went to, because he was out in Siberia. He had to face every day often hostile Soviet audiences who came there to taunt him about America. He, nonetheless, during the time that he was ambassador to Russia—even under Putin—relations didn't go as bad as they went later. I give a lot of credit to John for having salvaged what was a deteriorating relationship, but from letting it go further. I couldn't imagine a better person of all the people that I knew who could have been ambassador.

Again, this is one the guys who was on this four-month program with me in Leningrad. Another guy, who I am on Facebook friends with, his name is Bruce McDonald. He's an intellectual

property lawyer. He became sort of an adventure buddy of mine while we were in Leningrad. He was always willing to try crazy things. He was a jazz musician, and just loved life, and could drink a lot, which was important in those days in cementing Soviet-American friendship. Again, this is kind of strange. I had very good friends who were in the theater business, so I got tickets to all kinds of wonderful Soviet theater and opera almost four times a week—something I never was able to replicate anywhere in the west—thanks to some good connections I had.

One time I was invited to a poetry reading. I was studying Russian, so I was interested in poetry and thinking of getting a degree in literature. I was invited to a poetry reading by a World War II poet named David Samoylov, a Russian Jewish poet. All the more interesting, he's someone who has identified with Leningrad and the blockade. I got an invitation, which was kind of a big thing in those days, and especially since I was a foreigner, just to go to a poetry reading of this guy in a bookstore. It turned out he took ill, but he didn't want to disappoint his fans, so he sent in his place Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who also has a reputation as a rebel and a poet of the '60s. By the time I met him, he was already a wizened sort of older guy. But I was only what? Twenty-one. So a lot of people seemed a lot older than they probably were.

I don't know how I had the balls to do this, but after the poetry reading I went up to him and said, "I'm an American, and I've read your poetry. I really like your poetry and I just wanted to tell you that." He said, "Well, I'm so glad to meet you because I have a poetry reading that I'm sort of supervising or presiding over the next day in the House of Writers here in Leningrad. I want you to meet some of my poetry friends and then we're going to go drinking afterwards." I

told this to my friend Bruce and he said, “I’m going to go with you.” I said, “Okay.” I was kind of afraid if I got too drunk I would need some help to come home.

We first went to this poetry reading. We were on stage with Yevtushenko and all the leading young poets of Leningrad, most of whom I didn’t know, and a lot of whom were Jewish, and they were very eager to tell me how grateful they were to Yevtushenko for standing up for them as he did for Ukrainian poets, too. He had a very complicated Soviet intellectual life. People accused him of being a sellout. But he also showed us a very good side with this thing. Then he took Bruce and me drinking at the House of Writers buffet. We were living on cafeteria food, which is sort of subhuman, and horribly full of fat and grease, and not having good digestion, and here we were eating caviar and what the Soviet elite—even the literary and academic elite—enjoyed in those last few years.

We drank with him. Both Bruce and I were at this sort of critical moment in our careers. Both of us were thinking about going to law school. I can’t remember—I was interested in going into international law. I was coming out of Georgetown. I had did school of foreign service. I thought I was going to do something with Russia and the law. Bruce wanted to do law, too. He was deciding between jazz musician career or the law and doing something in the public sphere. We really don’t remember what Yevtushenko told us, but we asked him—both of us—what to do as a poet and a man of the world. Somehow in this drunken haze we were both convinced that I should go to graduate school in Slavic literature and put off law school until later, and Bruce was going to go to law school and do the music on the side. Then Yevtushenko sent us his latest collections of poems with his autograph, which I still have in my library here.

We hung out a little bit a little bit more, but he then went back to Moscow. I didn't see him anymore until he came to Barnard when I was a professor at Columbia already. I think it was Catharine Nepomnyashchy or—probably not Cathy, but there was somebody at Barnard who invited him to spend the semester. He gave a big poetry reading, and I went up and took him out. I took him out that time [laughs].

He was someone who was a big believer in U.S.-Soviet friendship, and he was always [unclear] he could go abroad. He was kind of a Soviet propaganda showcase to some degree. But he also wrote *Babi Yar*, which was one of the first Soviet acknowledgements of the tragedy of Babi Yar in Kiev. The Soviet official media sort of didn't want to make much of because they didn't quite know what to do with the Jewish question in World War II. So it was just Soviet losses and there was nothing—there was no monument there. People knew the story. And he and a couple of other—the writer, Anatoly Kuznetsov, who wrote a sort of novel document about Babi Yar—and then Yevtushenko wrote this poem in which he tells Russian anti-Semites that, yes, I am Jewish, too. I mean, even though he's not Jewish, but he kind of sort like knew some [unclear]. And this was where he was saying, “All Russians who are decent people are Jewish.” He said, “And the anti-Semites will hate me for this.”

It was kind of a gutsy thing. He always was treated by the literary establishment also—especially the conservative, more Russian nationalist ones—as Ukrainian [laughter] and therefore a separatist and a Mazepist. I think his career could be looked at, again, through the prism of nationality and how he navigated his Ukrainian-ness as—Yevtushenko is a very Ukrainian name.

He was in exile as a child, in Siberia during World War II, and wrote one piece of his memoirs about that. He was a very interesting character, too. I knew a lot of his poems by heart at one point when I was sort of more modeling myself after him and Voznesensky.

I really got to know some very interesting people. Again, one of the things about being an American in those days—in a different way from the gay thing—because I had connections with the Samizdat and Tamizdat community and Ardis in the United States, I got to know a lot of writers and people around writers in theater who wouldn't normally talk to—I don't know—ordinary Americans, and who shared with me kind of the Moscow version of Hollywood and Broadway. I love this actress, Alisa [B.] Freindlich, who I got to know through the Teatr Imenii Lensoveta in Leningrad. I used to see everything that she did. She had become a movie star, and I had gotten to know her husband who was the producer and the director. I was in their home a couple of times, you know, as an American undergraduate and then later as a grad student. It was a kind of life that I couldn't imagine in the United States in American theater. I mean, I have got to know a lot more about American theater and American literature, thanks to my Russian connections [laughs] strangely enough. It's another way in which I think I became a better American—if I can say that—by going to Russia.

One of my best friends—this guy I told you about, Eugene Zubkov, a psychologist who lives in New York now, and works with alcoholism treatment programs back in Russia still—he introduced me to [William C.] Faulkner and Hemingway and a lot of American rock music, which in my Air Force family bubble I had somehow missed the '60s. I had to Leningrad under Brezhnev to have a Russian introduce me to my own culture.

Q: Well this, I think, a hugely important area—it's one that we're considering adding to the Harriman blueprint, which I'd love to show you just to get your feedback—our languages, letters, novels, literature and culture. It has really been nice today to hear you talk about those connections you made through exploring the culture, and all of its more hidden dimensions. Not just being gay, but really having access to the great poets and writers of that time.

Von Hagen: Yes. One of my closest friends was a woman writer named Inna Varlamova, who wrote a novel about—sort of a woman's version of *Cancer Ward*. She knew [Aleksandr I.] Solzhenitsyn, and she was from the House of Writers in Moscow, and she was the closest thing to sort of my Russian mother that I had. I'm still good friends with her daughter, although I haven't seen her for a few years now. She's a little older than I am. She's taught in the U.S. and Russia. Those are two of my best friends. They knew about me pretty early on and were very accepting, and I remember even Inna once—when I told her I was gay, she said, “Are you passively or actively?” As if you had to choose something. I said, “Well, I don't think I've ever—”

Q: Made that distinction?

Von Hagen: It's not that I needed to make a decision. And that was kind of a shock to her.

Q: Really? What did that question mean to her?

Von Hagen: That I was either passive or active. That I either took or gave [laughs] in sort of a vernacular.

Q: Oh, I see. Yes.

Von Hagen: And that you had to be one or the other. I thought, hm. Anyway, that was kind of—

Q: [Laughs] I've never heard that.

Von Hagen: But I got to go Peredelkino a lot because of that connection to the Writers Colony outside of Moscow. I nearly slept overnight there a couple of times, and I would always go from writer's house to another. She wrote this book that in retrospect—again, I just gave it to my assistant for her mother to read because it's about a Russian woman in a cancer ward in Moscow. Actually, not in Moscow. She was in Kazakhstan, She was exiled to Kazakhstan because her husband was charged with being a Trotsky-ite and in the '30s, and so she and her family had to move to Kazakhstan for a while. Then she finally made it back to Moscow and wrote a novel about this whole thing called *Mnimaia zhizn'*. Translated, it's *Counterfeit Life*. It's autobiographical, but it's still fiction. That's how I got to know her and she was like—I would go see her at least once a week the whole four months—all the time I was in Moscow.

When Johnny first came to Moscow with me, which was—what was that year? Eighty, I guess. '80? No. It had to be under Gorbachev already. It was the year of the Gulf War. We had permission from the Soviet registration agency for him to stay at her apartment, or her daughter's

apartment, and she died the week that he was arriving. Instead, we had all the relatives from all over the country descend on that apartment. So we moved into the Academy of Sciences Hotel for that week. He got a very big dose of—and I went to her funeral. I went to a couple of funerals of Soviet friends—and weddings. I went to weddings. I really feel like over the years I got to see a lot of the humanity of the Soviet Union, and its variety. From the very first trip—I went there in '75. I started in Leningrad, went to Moscow, went to Tbilisi, ended up Kiev. My exit was through Kiev. And so how ironic that I'm back in Kiev after—by some strange path.

Q: Fantastic.

Von Hagen: Sounds good?

Q: Sounds great. Are you ready to stop?

Von Hagen: I think so. That's probably enough

Q: Thank you so much.

Von Hagen: I kind of feel guilty talking too much about myself in a—

Q: You didn't really. You used your own life history to talk about Russia more intimately, and the field.

Von Hagen: And how people have really influenced me. I really rely on listening to people, and what books they like, and how they learn something about—and I kind of feel I'm an eternal student and an eternal teacher.

Q: And an unnamed oral historian [laughter].

Von Hagen: That, too. Yes.

Q: Okay.

Von Hagen: All right.

Q: Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]