

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of
Elizabeth K. Valkenier

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2016

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with name of Elizabeth K. Valkenier conducted by William McAllister on October 28, and December 22, 016. 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: Elizabeth K. Valkenier

Location: New York City, NY

Interviewer: William McAllister

Date: October 28, 2016

Q: My name is William McAllister. I am a senior research fellow at INCITE, the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Research [Theory] and Empirics at Columbia University [New York]. I'm here today, on October 28, 2016, to talk with Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier. At present, Professor Valkenier is a professor of Russian art history in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, and a research scholar at the Harriman Institute. Among other works, Professor Valkenier's books include *Russian Realist Art [The State and Society: the Peredvizhiniki and Their Tradition]*, *Ilya Repin and the World of Russian Art*, *Valentin Serov: Portraits of Russia's Silver Age*, *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind*, and *The Pre—Prayerviziski [phonetic]? No—School of—*

Valkenier: Peredvizhniki.

Q: Thank you [Laughter]—*School of Painters Against their Social and Cultural Background, 1860-1890*. Professor Valkenier earned her Ph.D. in History at Columbia University. Welcome, Professor Valkenier.

As we were talking, you came with your family to the United States in 1940 or '41 during World War II.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: How did that happen, exactly?

Valkenier: Well, my father was in Western Europe at the beginning of the war, in—

Q: In September?

Valkenier: —in September of '39. He taught in Belgium, and we were in Poland. To make a story short, he had eventually—because of the spread of the war west of Germany—he ended up in Portugal. He had friends at Smith College, and Smith College had an English—or—well, anyway, it doesn't matter. It was the president of Smith College. But anyway—[William Allan] Neilson, I think—they had given asylum to quite a few prominent scholars during the '30s, people who had to escape from Germany. So they offered my father a job teaching Russian—which, to be frank, he didn't know very well, because he was born in the Austro-Hungarian part of Poland before World War I, of course.

He arrived in a way so there was a charity [laughs] gesture. And once he arrived, they were also very generous and organized a real campaign to bring us out, because we were under Soviet occupation in eastern Poland, in Vilna—or Vilnius now, the capital of Lithuania now. It was part of Poland between the wars. To bring us out, it not only involved money, but all kinds of diplomatic [laughs] negotiations, because—Americans on the whole were very helpful with refugees—but people who had, as we did, a relative under German occupation were not exactly

welcome, because there was a possibility of sabotage and all that. So he had to circumvent that somehow, and get around that rule.

Smith College somehow had very good connections [laughs] in Washington, so we finally got a visa and, well, traveled on the Trans-Siberian railroad [Trans-Siberian Railway] for, I think, something like a week. Ended up in Japan. And our papers, which were waiting for us in Moscow—and actually, from Vilna, we took a train to Moscow first. In Moscow, I still remember walking to the American embassy across the Red Square. Well, they had our papers, but the ambassador was hunting or something important. No, I think [laughter] it was hunting. That's the irony of it all. So they said, "Oh, you have three weeks' stay in Japan. Your boat doesn't depart—" I still remember: *Kanakura Maru* [phonetic], the name of the boat—"doesn't depart until three weeks after your departure." Anyway, so we went off happily to Japan for three weeks.

Well, the papers didn't arrive. Once they arrived, there was difficulty. They started questioning our application or our visa because my mother's mother was under Germany occupation in an industrial city. Well! So we waited—I forget—from February until end of August to get the visa, the American visa. And then there were no more direct boats from Japan to the United States, so we went to Shanghai. There were boats, but American citizens had priority, and we were not. So from there, [laughs] we went to the Philippines. And what was very helpful, and really what enabled us to go—because it involved, I think, another thousand dollars to pay for the boat and so on—was that my father was a sort of a public intellectual. He was not just a literary scholar and renowned for that, but he was also a "fighting Democrat," so to speak. A Social Democrat.

He was not a communist. We met a Polish Jewish lady with her two children in Shanghai, or on the way to Shanghai, and she took us to the Jewish Joint—I think it was called Joint Committee [Jewish Joint Distribution Committee]. On the strength of my father's name and his reputation, they gave us the loan—or maybe just a gift—of whatever it would cost to go from Shanghai to the Philippines. In the Philippines, we stayed in President—I think his name was [Manuel L.] Quezon?

Q: Yes.

Valkenier: Gave us—and not us, but he donated or he assigned part of his estate guest houses for refugees. We stayed there for—I don't know—maybe two weeks or three, until we got a Swedish boat to the United States. That was already in September. We left Japan end of August. Well, anyway, we arrived on the Swedish boat in Seattle, Washington, and there was a—Smith College had a connection: the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company, a very prominent family, and they put us up for a day or two. Then we got on the train and set up—I don't know how many days—across the Rockies [Rocky Mountains], and arrived—I don't know where—in Northampton, Massachusetts. I forget whether we changed on the way.

But anyway, so we were there by the beginning of—in November sometime, and [laughs] I remember Halloween was a big event. Well, there was really a marvelous reception. Because Smith College and the Smith community helped my father not only with getting us out of Russia, Soviet Russia, but also both my brother and I were given full scholarships in prep schools. He went to Deerfield Academy, and I went to Northampton School for Girls, which since then has

merged with Williston, a boys' school, and so on. But anyway, that was really very—the so-called "charity" was remarkable, and the amount of effort people spent getting us—

So then we lived happily, more or less. Well, it wasn't exactly happy, because, you lose your friends and all your possessions, but—and a very secure social and cultural standing. We were part of the elite, so to speak, because professors were very important, [laughs] and at least in pre-war Poland, it was a very prestigious position. Living under very, very modest circumstances. I remember my father would get butter, and the rest of us would eat margarine [laughter] in order to save. No, but the main thing is that we—they enabled us to get out from under the Soviet occupation, and so on.

Then I went to this girls' school for three years, on complete scholarship. And then I went to Smith, because my father taught there, from '44 to '48. I have very fond memories of my teachers. They were excellent, and very dedicated. I majored in history, just general history. I didn't have much else to do but study, so [laughs] I was a good student. Socially, I matured quite late, so the library was always popular [laughs] with me. Then I got a fellowship of \$1,000 for graduate work. I went to Yale [University], and there—and the fee was—I really would like to mention it, because it was \$500, I think, for a year. The other \$500, I got a room for a year for \$200. The \$300 sort of fed me for the rest of the year, though by the end of the school year, my future husband fed me, I am afraid [laughter] . Had to feed me, rather.

But anyway, so Yale was another lucky development in my life, because there I discovered Russian history. George Vernadsky, a venerable historian, taught there, and I just fell in love

with Russian history. By then, my father had to quit Smith, because of age, and he came to teach at Columbia. The Polish government financed—a Communist government, by the way [laughs]—financed a chair. Well, he was here, and also Czeslaw Milosz, who was Polish—the poet who got Nobel Prize [unclear], but I am not quite [laughs] aware—I haven't thought about these things for a while, so it all seems vague. But anyway, so Father was here, and Czeslaw Milosz was Polish cultural attaché. They were both leftists before the war, and actually, Father defended not only the Jewish minority, but also his students who were accused of communist or leftist tendencies, because the Polish government by the '30s was quite conservative and not liberal.

We arrived, and with this fellowship, I went to Yale, discovered Russian history. Then I went here, to the Russian Institute. That sort of created a point of reference or a direction in my life. Because here I could learn the language, which I didn't know. Knowing Polish of course was helpful, but I started from the very beginning, and took the basics. We had very good teachers. Stilman, Leon Stilman and his wife—I forget her name—Leon and Galina Stilman. Very nice people. Russian Jewish refugees from France. He was a lawyer, and I don't know what she was. But anyway. And also Mrs. Chorna [phonetic], who was a Russian refugee. [Laughs] Not a very good teacher, actually. She lasted about a year or two, because instead of teaching us, she talked about herself. But at least if she had talked in Russian, it would have been good practice. But she talked about herself in English. Anyway, Mrs. Chorna was here.

The Russian Institute had quarters of its own, on 117th Street. Now it's been razed to make room for the [Columbia] School of International [and Public] Affairs, but it had a little brownstone,

with a colonnaded entrance, and only two secretaries [laughs]. The head of it was Geroid [T.] Robinson, the history professor.

Q: Just so I have the chronology right, this is about—

Valkenier: Forty-eight.

Q: —in the late 1940s? You are talking—

Valkenier: Yes. I was there from '48—no. I graduated in—'48. From '48 to '51.

Q: And you came to the Russian Institute to be in their certificate program?

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: Was that the idea?

Valkenier: Yes. Even though I had an M.A. from Yale, but I had to learn—that's where I discovered Russian history. That's why I came to the Russian Institute: to learn the language. In those days, the program was quite demanding. You were obliged to take language courses, first of all, I forget how many years. But then courses in history, literature, economics, and government. We had [John N.] Hazard for government, [Ernest J.] Simmons for literature. For history, it was Robinson, and politics and government was Hazard. I forget; maybe I am

repeating myself. Oh! And [Igor Y.] Birman for economics. I think Birman, subsequently he went to Harvard. Very devoted teachers, very good. The student body wasn't very large. I didn't make many friends because I lived with my parents. So, you know, it will always put a crimp on your—

Q: The building itself is where SIPA [School of International and Public Affairs] is now?

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: And you said that it—I don't remember your exact words, but you said something—that it gave you direction, or it kind of centered you somehow? I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that. That you felt that it kind of—

Valkenier: No, it gave me a sense of direction and purpose, because I was studying just history in general. West European history and American history, well, were okay, but nothing grabbed me, so to speak. But with Russian history at Yale, this one course with Vernadsky gave me—no, no. I really responded, and felt that this had some relevance and considerable—great attraction, even—to me. I really wanted to read on. Frankly, before that, I studied because that's what you were supposed to do [laughs], and it came naturally. The only jobs I could have gotten getting out of Smith was teaching in another girls' school, which didn't attract me—in a provincial town again. [Laughs] I must say, even after Poland, [laughs] which wasn't the most advanced country in the world, Northampton seemed a little provincial [laughter]. A lovely city and all that, but—and so on.

Anyway, I spent two happy years at the Harriman In—I mean, it was called the Russian Institute. Geroid T. Robinson was the head of it. I don't know whether he shared the directorship with [Philip E.] Mosley. I never got along with Robinson because, as I said, he was a taskmaster. In general, I think he thought that women didn't belong in academia. They should be, you know, doing housework and all that. Being homebodies.

But fortunately, thank god—in a way, I was very lucky. Philip Mosley was the co-director, and he was a man I admire boundlessly, if one can use [laughs] that word. Because he was a historian and political scientist, but he knew the language. He had lived in Russia. His first wife was Russian. He had worked with Ruth [F.] Benedict, or one of the anthropologists, and knew the Balkans, had traveled in the Balkans—and you probably know all that—and had written, worked on *zadruga*, sort of the communal life that had survived in parts of present-day Yugoslavia.

He was—I don't know—so many-sided, and so kind, and a real academic. Students came to him first. This is something that I always admired in my father, whom I never admired altogether, you know. But as far as students were concerned, they—and academic work—they came first with Mosley. For example, I remember that—I think it was President [Lyndon B.] Johnson once invited him to some meeting, and it coincided with a seminar that Mosley was giving, so he said no. That seminar came first. Can you imagine anybody these days? [Laughter]

Q: That's very impressive.

Valkenier: For [Donald J.] Trump, maybe, but—[laughs] they would say no automatically.

Q: Just to pick up on being a woman in this environment, it sounds like from what you've said here and some things I've read that Mosley made that—that was not an issue for him as it was for Robinson. I was wondering if it was an issue for other people, too, so that Mosley really became a key person for you and maybe for other women, too, in terms of making you feel accepted and part of academia.

Valkenier: No, I never felt it. I don't know. Well, in Poland—even [laughs] though it wasn't, as I said, the most advanced country—but in our circles anyway, there were outstanding ladies. I mean, one was a sculptress; another one was an anthropologist, and so on. Another one was a whatever—an engraver. We knew a number of professional women. So I mean, that issue, it really never existed. I didn't think that—what's his name—Robinson's attitude represented a much wider attitude in society. I just thought it was his personal prejudice, and, you know, God be with him [laughs], and so on. I never felt that I was discriminated against or overlooked because of being a woman. In my whole career, I never felt about it. Maybe because I never had a full-time job. But on the other hand, I didn't want a full-time job, because I was usually often writing something, either a book or an article. Then I was married, and then eventually I had a daughter. So it's nice to have—and even when I once had a full-time job, my first full-time job with the Council on Foreign Relations, after a year, I asked them to please give me Friday—just employ me four days a week rather than five for a reduced salary, and they agreed.

Q: And that was the attitude in general at the Russian Institute specifically? Aside from Robinson, it was—

Valkenier: Oh, yes.

Q: —welcoming?

Valkenier: No. I never felt—there were relatively few women. Well, one of them was Charlotte Saikowski, a Christian Scientist, and then worked as a correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* in Japan and Moscow. She was a recognized person. But I don't remember many other women, really. In seminars, usually there would be eight or nine students, and there would be—either I would be the only woman, or there would be another one.

Q: Just to get a sense of the Russian Institute at the time, how many students were there in the program? How collegial were the people in interacting with each other? Were there tensions over—you know, this is the time of the beginning of the Cold War. I don't know if there were tensions among faculty given their political stances.

Valkenier: As to that, I was not aware of—except that—I mean, most of our faculty had been to Russia, so then you are aware of the issue of East and West in Russian culture and political history. Some of them were leftists. Simmons apparently had been very close to the Communist Party, and was even investigated—or at least, so it was rumored. No, the attitude was really very objective. Well, of course they were aware of Russian imperialism [laughs] and so on, but it

wasn't drummed into us that this is the leading line in Soviet foreign policy or Soviet history. So it was very objective. I—

Q: Were they—? pardon me.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: Sometimes, later in the history of the institute—and we can get to that, but I'm wondering about back in this time period: any tension between trying to have an influence on policy of the U.S. towards the Soviet Union and encouraging students or faculty to have that, and the intellectual drive of the institute to be more academic and research-oriented than, say, policy-oriented? You see this comes out in other eras, and I was wondering if it occurred back then. If there was any kind of—

Valkenier: Not that I was aware of. But I myself, I am not a competitive person, so—or [laughs] I don't really sense it or feel it. All I know is that Mosley was just a model for me as a human being and as an academic. That sort of gave an aura of almost sanctity to the whole—right now, the institute is also a marvelous institution. Well, later on, it had other less pleasant or laudable [laughs] directors.

Q: Yes. We'll talk about that.

Valkenier: Well, I didn't have a very active social life because I lived with my parents, so that sort of cut that aspect of college life or graduate school. I became friends with Charlotte, and so on. Also, by then, I was sort of engaged to my future husband, so I would go back to Yale, and so on.

Q: I read your lovely piece about Mosley that you wrote for the—I think—sixtieth anniversary booklet. And one of the stories that you tell there that I was curious about—I thought maybe it would give some insight into Mosley—is the story that you wrote when he wanted to bring his research materials home when he was studying there in the 1930s, studying in the Soviet Union. They did not want him to bring his materials home, so he—if I understand you right, somehow, he basically made an appeal to Stalin, to get Stalin's clearance. And Stalin gave that. Do I have that correct?

Valkenier: Well, I'll have to re-read it. I don't remember anything—

Q: I was wondering about the details of that, if Mosley ever talked more about what happened there.

Valkenier: [laughs]

Q: But we can let that—

Valkenier: Oh, well! Yes. Well, his archive isn't here, unfortunately. That's one critical point I have about the Harriman Institute: that when he died, they didn't get his papers. Some are in Illinois, and that's a scandal really. But anyway—

Q: Do you know why that happened? What the story is there?

Valkenier: Oh, well, you know: lazy directors. [Laughs] I won't name names, but—[laughs] No. I am a very loyal person. And anyway, you know, out for their own professional advancement, and no sense of continuity, and so on. But it happens.

Q: Just talking about Mosley some more, you also wrote about his being very supportive of you when the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] wanted you to report on a conversation that you had with the editor of *Pravda*. And he was not encouraging students to cooperate with the CIA. I would imagine that the CIA probably at the time thought, oh, the Russian Institute is perhaps a good source of information for us for what we are trying to do. I wonder how did you experience this kind of—or maybe you didn't as a student—the CIA trying to access the Russian Institute, and Mosley's pushback?

Valkenier: Well, I never—I am just trying to think—no. My only experience was after taking the *Pravda* editor Romansev [phonetic], who was a marvelous, really very impressive person—we talked about Russian literature, and about his favorite contemporary writer—well, modern writer—Paul Stofsky [phonetic]. [Laughs] And then when they called me—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So as we were talking about Mosley, I was asking you about how the CIA was trying to—you had an experience with the CIA when they wanted you to report on the conversation with the editor of *Pravda*, and Mosley was very supportive of your not doing that. And he encouraged other students not to cooperate with the CIA. I was wondering if you had, aside from what happened with the editor there, if you had any other experience of the CIA trying to access—or that you saw—other evidence of the CIA and how Mosley pushed back against them.

Valkenier: No, no. This was the only time. Again, through Mosley, I used to do volunteer work for the Quakers, who were very active in trying to keep cultural ties or exchanges despite the Cold War. Mosley, of course, believed and supported something like that. I would act as either an escort or a translator for various other Russians. I remember one of them was a famous doctor.

But anyway, CIA got in touch with me only once, with—well, Romansev, the editor of *Pravda*, was a big enough fish [laughs] in the political waters. So they were interested in him. I never was approached by them again. I wasn't born here, and all that. The only time—when I was looking for a job, I had an interview in Washington, and then they were interested in sending me possibly to London to spy on—[laughs] excuse the word—on the Polish émigré community. Well, that wasn't very exciting. I never got the job.

Q: What agency of the government was that that was interested in interviewing to do that? Was that—?

Valkenier: No, I think Mosley gave me introductions to various people. I had a letter of introduction from him. He was tireless helping students. He never published very much himself, but he really dedicated his life to advancing his students. He channeled financial resources, because he helped the Ford Foundation and whatnot, and other places like that, to fund various projects and students.

Q: Was he trying to fund various projects under the aegis of the Russian Institute? Is that what—?

Valkenier: Well, that I don't know. The administrative aspect of it, I don't know. But obviously, the Russian Institute must have gotten some funds from Ford and Carnegie Foundations, but then when it came to fellowships or funding, for example. Yes, my beginning writing career I owe to Mosley, because he gave me a very exciting topic for the seminar we had: namely, the Sovietization of Polish history, historiography, and what type of changes the academic world had to institute in order to meet the political realities. I gave a seminar paper on it, and he said, "This is very interesting. Turn it into an article." I did, and it was published the same year, or later on—within a year, anyway—in the *Journal of Central European History*, or—anyway, it should be there somewhere in my—

Later, when I started working, I became Mosley's—I got a job with him, working as his research assistant. He was going to write a book on Soviet policies toward the Third World, because that was a big Cold War issue. Well, he never wrote the book because he was always [laughs] helping others, students, foundations, and so on. So I did a great deal of research for him, and he encouraged me to write articles about it, which again was most generous, because as far as Robinson was concerned, you had to write your M.A. on a topic that interested him. I don't know what I was supposed to write on, but I left the [laughs] Institute after I got my M.A. from them. Mosley would never do that. He would think of something that was important and interesting: important in the terms of scholarship, and interesting for the student. He really was an exceptional human being [laughs].

Q: After you got your certificate, what was your relationship to the Russian Institute? Mosley had become the director by then—by himself—I think, in the '50s.

Valkenier: That I don't remember.

Q: Yes, in the early to mid-'50s.

Valkenier: Yes. Mosley suggested I apply for a job at the Council on Foreign Relations, so I did. I had an interview with Percy Bidwell, who was their economist. They wanted me, but didn't have the funds. So I waited for a year or two, and just did odd jobs. Then finally, when they got the funds, I got the job: research and reference.

Q: And this is the mid-'50s?

Valkenier: Yes, this was—

Q: The '60s?

Valkenier: —fifty-three or something like that. So probably I waited about two years. There I worked happily, until there was the first American exhibit in Moscow in '59 [American National Exhibition], I think. It should be there somewhere. I think it was '59. Or fifty—[gasps] my god, now. I don't know. Do I have it here? [Hums] No. That first exhibit was in—oh my god. I think—it must have been '59. I don't know. I didn't wake up this morning, [laughs] it seems. But all of a sudden, dates seem—

Q: That's okay.

Valkenier: Oh, yes! Fifty-nine. Yes, of course. Fifty-nine, the first American exhibit—sort of an “end to Cold War,” so to speak. I applied, and I was selected to be one of the guides, and I—

[INTERRUPTION]

Valkenier: So we were talking about '59.

Q: The exhibit, where you were a guide.

Valkenier: Yes. I didn't think I should apply because I wasn't born here. But, well, I suppose I was a good example of success [laughs] in this country for someone coming, you know, penniless and all that. That was a great experience for me, because—well, I was not brought up in a Cold War atmosphere, and also I avoided being brought up in a very patriotic Polish household [laughs]. My father was very liberal, and actually, Russia was ignored if anything. So I didn't think of Russia, as many Poles do, as an oppressor, or backward, and un-Western, Asiatic threat and so on to Western civilization.

Going to the exhibit and working there for six weeks, and living there a week or two weeks, both before and after, showed me how the Russians were very much human beings, and did not talk like *Pravda*. And that they were skeptical about their government, even critical. Not all, but I mean, they had their own minds. It was a revelation, really. I wasn't predisposed to find it, anyway, but sort of seeing the reality of it was really a mind—opened up so many new ways of looking at things. So when I started writing about the Soviet Union in the Third World, because of my work for Mosley and his encouragement to write articles—that was my next phase after the historiography—I was able to read the material with an insight, or with the goal of looking for dissent from whatever we thought was the official line.

Since Mosley could sort of produce funding, I asked him to send me to Moscow—and maybe St. Petersburg, but anyway Moscow—to interview people in these various research institutes: Institute of Africa [Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences]; of Asia [Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences], and so on; or Latin America

[Institute for Latin American Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences]. I knew the writings already, and I knew who was on the liberal side, and who was on the conservative side. That was just marvelous to go over, and I was one of the first Americans to go there. But to be fair, I got the idea from an English publication [laughs]. Not that they sent people to Russia, but the Foreign Office [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] had a group of people examining Russian writings on the Third World, or on foreign policy issues, anyway: *The Interpreter*. And Mosley would get it. It was an internal publication. I saw from there that there were differences of opinion, and so on. So I went.

He encouraged me again to write an article, for a well-known and very prestigious publication by Princeton: *World Politics*. I didn't know I was famous—excuse the word [laughs]—but apparently, I was the only person to write two articles in succession for *World Politics*. That was due to Mosley, not that I was that bright or anything, or—but anyway, he thought of the topic, so that was great. [Laughs] Recently, I met someone who said, “Oh, you are the person who had not just one, but two articles in *World Politics*!” Well, anyway, I never looked at it that way, but—

He also encouraged me to get my Ph.D.; so did my husband. I always thought that was unmanageable, because I always had my father, in a way—thinking, oh, you had to be as knowledgeable and bright as he was. Wisely, he [Mosley] said I should get it in history, not in politics, political science. Then, because of the seminar and being usually assigned topics on art or architecture, or cultural topics, I chose the Peredvizhnik: the Russian realist painters of the late 19th century. It was a great, again, just stroke of luck, because I did my basic research and

outline in three months. [Laughs] So the whole Ph.D. process—of course I was older by then, and had published. It was just one pleasure.

Q: That certainly is fast, and is a model for students that isn't [laughs] followed so often. Let me ask you about when you were Mosley's research assistant. I know you said you went to Russia, but when you were here, were you physically working at the Russian Institute, or—?

Valkenier: Well, I was his research assistant; probably the Russian Institute paid for it. I kept track of my hours, and present him with a bill every month or whatever it was. I remember my starting salary was \$3 an hour [laughs]. But anyway, I enjoyed it, and I could do it at home, or I could do it—I didn't have an office then at the—they didn't have that much space.

Q: We're talking the late 1950s, early 1960s. This is kind of the height of the Cold War in some senses. This is Sputnik all the way leading up to the Vienna summit, and then to the Cuban Missile Crises. I was wondering if, in your interactions with the people at the Russian Institute at the time, if you had any sense of what was happening there, to characterize their sense of how the U.S. was responding to the Soviet Union at this time; if there were differences among the faculty; that sort of thing.

Valkenier: Not really. I could not really comment on that, because I think my main impression was that on the whole, they tried to keep the Cold War spirit out of the atmosphere at the Harriman Institute. If anything, it was probably—well, they sort of spread a spirit of moderation, if I may say. Maybe that's because I myself didn't feel that strongly that we were fighting forces

of evil. To me, if one country is strong enough, they are [laughs] going to turn imperialist anyway, no matter what regime they have, and so on. So, no. I didn't feel it. And certainly, the atmosphere of Cold War—or at least of being one-sided—did not prevail, and it was rather, I would say, a forced moderation. [Charles] Gati might have a very different interpretation, being Hungarian and all that, and I mean more Hungarian, and I am Polish. [Laughs] Sort of in that traditional way, he would feel it. But I didn't.

Q: In the '60s, you were at the European Institute [at Columbia University]?

Valkenier: Yes, because Mosley became head of the European Institute. I forget. He resigned to become some head of something or other at the Council on Foreign Relations. That's when I helped him with the book on the Third World. Then he became head of the European Institute, because—I forget who succeeded him, and they couldn't dislodge whoever it was, or didn't dislodge. So he was head of the European Institute. And then I still worked for him, gathering and filing clippings, and all that. I would write him a report every week or so on what I had read, and what the developments were. Then we had a big filing cabinet, and I would file it under "Russia, Foreign Relations," "Mali, Russia," "Economic Aid," and things like that.

Q: Do you have a sense that when he left in 1955—he left as director of the Russian Institute to take this position that you're talking about in the Council on Foreign Relations—do you know or have a sense of was there kind of a split with his leaving? And then even when he came back, he comes back to the European Institute rather than to the Russian Institute.

Valkenier: Well, I'm sure [laughs] it wasn't easy. But I really don't know any details. I gossip [laughs] very little. So I don't remember talking about it, or wondering. It happens, and it happened, and so on, and we go ahead. So I am sure—but it probably wasn't—maybe [Alexander] Dallin was head of it? I forget at that time.

Q: Yes. It was Henry [L.] Roberts—

Valkenier: Oh! Henry Roberts. Yes.

Q: —after Mosley. And then Dallin from sixty-two to sixty-seven.

Valkenier: Roberts was great. Yes. But he left for Dartmouth [College].

Q: Right. What was the European Institute, and did it have any kind of official relationship with the Russian Institute?

Valkenier: No, no, no. It was west European Institute. So this was an illustration of the east/west division. Yes. I don't know whether they created it for Mosley when it started. It still exists, but it's not a big presence.

Q: You were associated with Mosley until 1972, when he dies. You have your degree. And then what was your relationship with the Russian Institute after he dies, and you now have your degree?

Valkenier: [Laughs] Heavens! No, then I probably had—I wanted to turn my Ph.D.—no, he died—when did he die?

Q: In 1972.

Valkenier: Oh, yes. Okay. No, by then, I was working on my Ph.D. I got it in '73. So I probably got some sort of a small fellowship to finish the Ph.D., and then to turn it into a book. At one point, I taught at Hunter [College]—but that was only one year—and then in some college outside of New York. I forget. I probably didn't put it down. It's not in my—but anyway, in-between, I would teach part-time.

Q: But with Mosley's leaving, you didn't really have much contact with the Russian Institute?

Valkenier: Oh, yes, I always had it. Because I knew people, and I would go to their meetings, or I would get funding from them. Right now, I am a resident scholar. I have an official position, but I forget at what time it became a fact. We have lived there for over fifty years. On mornings I would go to all their—I am friends with many members of the faculty and so on.

Q: An issue I touched on just a little bit before, and I wonder if we could pick up on it, was the business of the Russian Institute as trying to influence policy, but also as trying to be scholarly and develop knowledge. It was trying to influence U.S. policymaking towards the Soviet Union, and in that way it developed people in professional fields, but in trying to develop scholars, it

obviously was training Ph.D. students. From your experience, both going back to the '50s, but over the life of the Russian—and now Harriman—Institute, was there much tension between these goals? Do you think the differences between them became stronger?

Valkenier: The political and academic?

Q: Yes.

Valkenier: Well, this is again my failure, because I don't look for that. [Laughs] I am not a competitive person, as I said, and just accept things as they are, and I don't go into analysis, [laughs] or look what might be behind the façade. So I really couldn't comment on that. I think most people, most graduates, went into some kind of government work—or maybe later on, into business—rather than academic. I kept up with those people who were in the academic field, so I can't comment on that with any kind of special insight.

Q: Okay. Some people have talked about that there's a declining influence of the Russian Institute in particular on policymaking, and perhaps especially compared to the time that [Marshall D.] Shulman was there. Is that your sense of it? I'm not talking about particular people, but just the idea of policy influence, and the idea of developing scholars. Has there been kind of a decline in the policy influence, and emphasis—?

Valkenier: Oh, yes.

Q: —on the scholarly, and do you think this is something that's a good direction?

Valkenier: Probably. Though Washington always could use specialists, it doesn't necessarily mean that they think the right way, or are really well informed and moderate, and objective. But definitely, because the Cold War declined, so then the importance of this specific and specialized knowledge also declined. They have obviously fewer students, and many fewer students came because of the paucity jobs and so on, and prospects. Right now, Carnegie, our partner, gave us \$1 million in order to sort of prop up Russian studies, because the Cold War is over. Even though, obviously, there is competition and there are issues between the two countries, still fewer people—they go and they study Chinese or whatever, or the Balkans.

The Carnegie Foundation thought that an infusion of dollars is necessary to keep up. Well, definitely. And, well, it's because of the way the politics are, and so now China is obviously much more important, for different reasons, than Russia. But it remains an atomic power, and we should cooperate in the Near East, for example. So rather than point fingers that you are transgressing here or there, it's cooperation. But it would take ages to overcome—or years to overcome—the initial distrust, which probably dates back to the [Russian] Revolution, and nobody—there was the Red Scare here after 1917. It didn't help matters.

When I worked in Russia, either during my research or the American exhibit, I always met with the friendliest attitude on the part of ordinary Russians. I mean, I never heard any accusatory statements. Actually, [laughs] the Soviet government or whatever, or the city authorities, during the exhibit, would send us agitators who would ask us poor guides about what we were doing to

the black population, [laughs] and we had to deal with that, or etc., etc. But, the ordinary people, visitors at the exhibit, were always just curious at how we lived, what we earned, and where our children went to school, and prospects for professional work, and so on.

Q: Let me ask you about that exhibit that you were talking about, where you were a guide, as you now pick up on that a little bit further. You were talking about it earlier as well. This is the exhibit where [Richard M.] Nixon and [Nikita S.] Khrushchev had their famous—

Valkenier: Exchange.

Q: —"kitchen debate." Right. Were you there at the time that this was—I mean specifically there at the time that Khrushchev showed up and Nixon was there?

Valkenier: No. It was in the kitchen. I was in the book exhibit. But my friend Charlotte, the Christian Scientist, was there, and some other people: George Fiver [phonetic], who was in with the car industry exhibit. Well, apparently, [laughs] Nixon didn't do so well, between you and me and the recorder. Khrushchev was a very wily, and peasant, and very witty. And apparently—I don't know the details, but the exchange wasn't dominated by Nixon, to put it mildly. But that's [laughs]—

Q: When you were at the exhibit, and your job of showing the Russian people who came through, it was pretty much just a curiosity, as you were saying before, about American life, as

opposed to—and did you pick up any sense of tension? The things that are going on in the wider world between the U.S. and the Soviet Union—

Valkenier: No.

Q: —didn't filter down to the level of the exhibit?

Valkenier: Well, you know, we couldn't engage in any sort of philosophical conversations, but no. Mainly facts how people lived, or how much an apartment would cost, and how much one earned, and whether schools were free, or medical or healthcare, and so on. No, no. These were simple people. I had the good fortune of meeting several people, Russians, at the exhibit. One was a viola player, a violinist, with the Bolshoi Orchestra, Velodia Grot [phonetic]. And some people even invited me home. It was Velodia and someone else; I forget.

[Laughs] I met someone else there, a Soviet who worked for the exhibit. But he had some connection with the—whatever—Soviet F.B.I. [Federal Bureau of Investigations] or whatever. At one point, later, even asked me to spy for them. And so of course I threw him out. [Laughs] I remember he came with 200 rubles. What could one do with 200 rubles? Well, anyway. But so that was short, and—[laughs] but they never tried it again.

Q: And on the other side, were the American spies interested in kind of debriefing you when you came back and—

Valkenier: Oh, yes. Oh, they are all busy at the same—you know, on both sides. Yes. But I don't remember being debriefed by Americans after I came back. The only time I remember is one after the visit with Romansev, where I accompanied him for the Quakers. I am sure they were debriefed, but no, I wasn't.

Q: Speaking of your visits to the Soviet Union, when you were talking with the specialists about the Third World, these were people in the Soviet Union, and researchers who were specializing—

Valkenier: Scholars, yes.

Q: —on the Third World, and Soviet/Third World relationships. Was your experience of them that they were fairly forthcoming in terms of talking about how they thought and how the Soviet Union thought about their relationships with the Third World at that time?

Valkenier: Yes, because I think they were—well, I got my idea about the weakness [laughs] of the Soviet position there really talking to them, or first of all reading their—sort of between the lines, or the development of their arguments over a number of years. I got the sense that they were questioning the wisdom of this, and the efficacy of pouring money into the Third World, which was going its own way, no matter—and taking both from East and West.

But what they appreciated very much, I think, was that I talked to them as scholars and not as policymakers. They regarded themselves as scholars, just as someone here would. Not

everybody, but—and that created sort of a common language, and that I did not challenge them, and I knew their writings, I knew the development of their arguments. For two, three, four years—well, I forget how long—but anyway, I had worked, and I had read all their works.

Also, Mosley had very good connections. He was very highly respected in the Soviet Union by the Russians because he was an objective scholar, and knew Russian, and somehow had a feeling for Russia, having lived there and so on. Spoke the language, knew literature, and so on. So that already creates a certain bond of understanding, and a common frame of reference. So I came there under the aura of Phillip Mosley, to begin with. And then I didn't come there to sort of challenge them and to pinpoint some failures. I wasn't aggressive, first of all, in my questions. We developed very good relationships. He knew some of these people personally, like [Vasily G.] Solodovnikov, who was the head of the African Institute.

So these people even invited me home, and I saw what an academician could live like: big apartments and all that. I wasn't really aggressive, and I talked to them really as scholars, and not as policymakers. They also, frankly, told me that they didn't think that their work had an influence up there. But what interested me is that their work expressed some kinds of doubts, whereas according to our point of view, the Russians were forging ahead in the Third World. Well, they were trying, that's true, but whether they were successful, that's another thing. And they certainly had doubts about it, from—read between the lines, and talked to them.

Also, this is where I think it helped me that I was a woman. I was less aggressive, and the fact that I knew, just like Mosley—I don't mean to compare myself [laughs] to Mosley—but I knew

the language; I knew literature and history; and maybe the Polish background also made a difference for them. I really met top people there. It's amazing that they had the time. It was really very lucky, [laughs] in a way. Somehow, everything worked out very well. And then several of them, when they came here—on the United Nations mission, or later on, one was invited to teach at Princeton [University]—they would come and either come for dinner, or stay with us. It was a very nice give and take. Friendly. Not adversarial.

Q: You were talking about your being a woman may have helped in carrying out these conversations; they perceived you as less threatening. It made me think about—wondering about if you have any sense of women in the field of Soviet studies from when you started in the—you and Charlotte were the only two women at the Russian Institute. And now, of course, there are many more women; a woman was head of the Russian Institute—or the Harriman Institute—for a while. I was wondering if you have had any thoughts about having seen changes in the opportunities for women, in what women might bring to studies of Russia or the Soviet Union that might not otherwise be there.

Valkenier: [Laughs] No, I really don't think of humanity in terms of gender. One thing I was recently looking—because I was rearranging books, so I looked at my books, and I looked at my early publications. I noticed, much to my surprise, that I was the only woman who had contributed an article to either—well, like, the early ones: the *Journal of Central European History*, or *World Politics*. And that struck me. I didn't look through everything, but that was going back to the '50s, and so on. Of course, that wouldn't be true now, that there would be only one. Also now, of course—this wouldn't be true now. So obviously, women have advanced

[laughs] in this field. As I told you, never mind publications, but also Charlotte and I were the only women, I think, at that time in the class of whatever it was—'49, '50. Were the only people. So that's in part why we became friends, [to] sort of help one another. Now, I think there are probably more women studying than men, because it's less remunerative in many cases, like teaching and so on. Anyway, women have come up, and thank god!

What could women—? well, since I never divide humanity [laughs] into genders, or think of it— but I imagine it all depends on their character. I am a noncompetitive person, so I take the moderate approach. If I were not, I suppose I would be more aware of tensions, of competition, and so on. I am more Quaker-like, [laughs] to come to think of it, even though I was baptized Catholic. Nobody asked me [laughs] at that age. So I think that really depends on the character. I know some women in the field who are very competitive and sort of aggressive as far as their own advancement goes, and so then they transfer that point of you to professional life as well. With me, it never mattered very much. I was just satisfied with my own work, and tried to do the best I could, and that was—

Q: When the Soviet Union collapsed in the late '80s, and into the early '90s, you were—as you still are now—a research scholar at Harriman. I don't know how much of a connection at the time that you had with the people at Harriman. I was wondering what your sense was about whether people there were seeing the potential for this collapse, and then how they responded to it after the collapse happened. Especially as an institute, what do you do if your center focus has kind of disappeared?

Valkenier: Well, that you will have to ask someone who was part of the inner core [laughs]. But I think I was not that surprised, because in my own field, I knew that there were very, very pronounced weaknesses in the system. I mean, people really didn't believe in it, and Russia was not economically strong enough to hold onto its empire, and so on. The countervailing forces were very strong. So I was not surprised. But some people at the institute, I'm sure, were caught up in—I couldn't name names, but some obviously were caught up in the Cold War atmosphere where you aggrandized the Soviet Union. And I have heard it said about my own work that I was one of the few people who pointed out the weaknesses of this, where it—small as it is, but still, it was an important part of Soviet presence and of Soviet self-perception that, in as far as the Third World went, they didn't amount to a big threat. So in that way, I think I was sort of unique.

Oh! Just to give you an example, I was part of a study group at the Council on Foreign Relations on Soviet/U.S. policies. I just thought of it recently; otherwise, I wouldn't remember. There was an economist there—Helena Stalson—and I, we wrote a paper together on Soviet economic policies. When the final volume was published—and both she and I had a similar point of view that economically, Russia was not a threat—and that chapter was not included.

Q: This was a volume published in the U.S.?

Valkenier: Yes. Yes. I don't know whether it came out as a book or as a xeroxed—but I remember it came out, and—so that just shows you. But Helena Stalson was also not part of any sort of well-formed [laughs] group that had [a] Cold War outlook on the world, but completely professional and objective. I don't respect the editor of that volume—not because I wasn't

included, because I had enough publications, but as omitting a dissenting voice. Not that we were pointing fingers at anybody, but that was unfortunately the tenor.

Q: This is in the mid-'70s or mid-'80s? Or early '80s?

Valkenier: That I couldn't remember.

Q: Somewhere around there, though?

Valkenier: Yes. Yes.

Q: It's around there? In the '70s and early '80s? Right. When you said that you kind of recognized from your own work the weakness in the Soviet system and therefore were not surprised by it, you are referring to the work about Soviet relations in the Third World, or your art history?

Valkenier: Oh, no, no. Third World. Art, well, that has nothing to do with politics. No, no. No. All I would notice as far as art is the widening coverage of modernist or non-socialist realist paintings, or art. But that went with the general liberalization. But let me mention that I know that my work was being read in Washington. Someone very high up in the CIA, Mr. [Graham E.] Fuller, would come periodically and see me. But just to talk about my work and my insights. He was an interesting gentleman, but the CIA sent—not CIA did this. No, that was not. USIA [United States Information Agency] sent me once for a month to India to lecture on Soviet

economic policy. That was fascinating, because India was very—I mean, at least the intellectual elite, I recall—were very pro-Soviet because they gave them lots of aid and support against—

Q: This is in the '60s? Seventies?

Valkenier: No, that was—

Q: The '70s?

Valkenier: Probably, yes. And that was fascinating, because the Indians are very [laughs] sharp and very intelligent. Half the time, I was petrified because I would have to talk to generals and people high up in the ministry. That was very interesting, to sort of give them my insight into what the Soviets were up to, and so on. The American cultural attachés were really very capable, and very pleasant, and I became friends with one family and would see them afterwards. Well, anyway, it was fascinating. It was worth it, certainly. I even said, “You don’t have to pay me. I can stay another week.” So I stayed with one for a week, and had some more talks. I saw there were south and north, and so on. That was certainly a memorable—

Q: What was your sense of how the Indians, at the time, were regarding what the Soviets were trying to do in giving them aid?

Valkenier: First of all, they had just gotten rid of one empire. But they were very eager and very grateful to get the Soviet aid, and then grateful to the Soviets. But of course, they had their own

line to peddle and to follow. So they were not in cahoots with the Russians, but they were using Russians for their own ends, and then certainly not necessarily—anything that would help them against the Western—but they had their own agenda, and they weren't toeing the Soviet line. But very suspicious, for obvious reasons, of the West, and so on.

Q: One area—just switching a little bit—I wanted to ask you about was the notion of area studies, and also just in the context of thinking about what Harriman has done in the past, might do in the future. Area studies has suffered in the last twenty years or so relative to this growth of functional institutes, like on the environment or on specific issues. I was wondering what you think of that development. Should Harriman keep pursuing an area studies approach, or should it somehow try to integrate more with this functionality approach as a path to take?

Valkenier: [Laughs] Well, in general, I never have followed general trends, but my own vision, so to speak. But no, I am disturbed by it, because now it's fashionable to talk about globalization, intercultural, and all that. Well, given my own age and all that, and background, [laughs] obviously, a nation's history and cultural traditions play a very important role. And so as far as Russia is concerned, I think we wouldn't equate [Vladimir] Putin with evil and all that, but we would see him as someone trying to gain for Russia the recognition that it deserves, being geographically a power, and an atomic power, and with its culture and whatever achievements in sciences, and so on. I think that all they really want is—or primarily; I wouldn't say "all," because that's too broad a statement. But what they primarily want is to gain a recognition as one of the two big powers, and not someone who follows the American lead. That, I can understand,

and I wouldn't object to that. But of course, I am not sitting in Washington, either, and [laughs] managing our affairs.

Right now, with whatever is developing in Syria and the Near East, well, we better get together, [laughs] and forget about—for example, with Iran, the opposition to our recent agreement is insane. It's a big country, it's a major player in the area, and it has an educated elite—maybe not the mullahs and all that, but the elite is educated—and has to be worked with and recognized. And thank god we have done something there.

Q: Do you have a sense that the scholarship that's going on now at the Russian Institute—or in general, in the area—can play a role to kind of give a different sense of Russia than what might be generally true in the political environment right now?

Valkenier: Oh, sure, to the extent that they are objective. Surely. To see imperialism, for example, in a comparative [laughs] way, and not that one nation is imperialist and another one liberates people, and so on, and all that nonsense. Of course! I don't know what the professors now—but I am sure, teach—and [Robert] Legvold, I mean, he just probably—are you going to interview him?

Q: I am not, but somebody else either has or will, yes. For sure. Yes.

Valkenier: Yes. You would get better answers from people like that, because I am purely academic and so on. But no, in the sense of educating students about just—and giving them an

objective sense of Russian history, reality, and so on. Another thing that is so helpful now, and I don't know whether anybody else mentioned it, is so many of our students go to Russia now, for research or jobs, or someone who had worked in Russia comes to get an extra training. So it's not something that's sort of threatening and unknown, and anybody can paint in any color they want, but people have direct experience.

So I think that, to begin with—you should give them objective education, and then there are so many opportunities to find out for yourself. Well, I was never sort of a “Cold Warrior,” but then working or being in Russia and meeting with ordinary Russians, and meeting fine scholars, and seeing that not everything is controlled by the Communist party made me even more moderate, I suppose [laughs], and less aggressively minded. And I am sure this is the same. Students now go, and there is more intermarriage both ways. So it begins to look like a, well, normal country. Of course, it has a system that's similar to ours, where we still—well, okay, Putin is authoritarian, but my god, that's—[laughs] if you knew what it was before this, liberal [laughs] by those standards.

So, no. I think, really, the fact that so many students can go to Russia now—can go and do go—has a very beneficial influence. We have more Russians coming here. Like the other day, I was entertaining a Russian scholar—because I always make a point of it—who was here studying photomontage or something like that. Really, my god, what a difference from the old days, when—she is going to cooperate with Garafola, Lynn Garafola, from Barnard [College] on some kind of a project, dance project. She even is going to give a course on photomontage in the coming semester. And before, that was unheard of, to have a—well, of course, twenty years ago

or more; not ten years ago, maybe. Our former director, Timothy [M.] Frye, is teaching at the [National Research University] Higher School of Economics, and so on. Really, [laughs] it's just from black to white.

Q: There are some things I would like—if you are willing as we talk—to come back and discuss some other things, including your art history scholarship. But let me conclude this phase by following up on what you were just saying about these opportunities for Russians to come here, and for Americans to go to Russia, which, as you noted earlier, was very rare when you were with the Russian Institute in the '50s and into the '60s. I'm wondering—aside from yourself—if there was a difference between people, back then, who got to the Soviet Union and came back, if there was a noticeable difference in how they thought of the Soviet Union, and of U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union, as opposed to Americans who stayed here and did some kind of archival research of some sort. Do you have a sense of—?

Valkenier: Oh, yes.

Q: —differences, either in the people—but also in—and maybe even some Cold Warriors went there and came back, and said, “Oh, it's not quite as monolithic as I thought?”

Valkenier: Well, I didn't keep up with the [laughs] Cold Warriors, so I can't tell you. But definitely, those people who went there had a different and milder outlook. I know Peter [H.] Juviler, who taught at Barnard for quite a few years, led a student delegation. He died recently, so unfortunately, you couldn't interview him. But anyway, he went with a student delegation,

and he and I shared the same Quaker-like—let's just use that word—views, moderate views, on Russia. Well, he was a moderate person to begin with. And I don't know whether Gati—I shouldn't pick on him, but I mean—Gati ever went. Of course, he was Hungarian to begin with, but let's just—and being invaded by Russia and escaping from there, so that's obviously a person with a completely different background.

But no, I definitely felt that made a difference, just meeting ordinary—and this is why all the exchanges that go on now reinforce that. That's what the Quakers were [laughs] trying to do in the late '50s and '60s: trying to initiate unofficial exchanges in order to lessen this image of evil. I think that the Russians were less anti-American than the other way around. Maybe because of cultural differences they were less anti-American, whereas with most Americans, communism was a dirty word or a term of condemnation, negative.

I remember I went with my father to Poland—I think it was in '48—because they were trying to get him back to teach and so on, and entice him back. I remember people—by '48, the Cold War is [laughs] on already—being horrified that I was going to a communist country, and so on, and so forth. Well, anyway, I did go. Thank god those days are over. That's the main thing.

Q: Well, thankfully—

Valkenier: And we don't have to contend—or whatever the word is—ach! I'm tired [laughs].

Q: Yes. Thank you very much for talking with us for so long, and I look forward to talking with you again. Thank you very much.

Valkenier: Okay.

[END OF SESSION]

ATC

Session: 2

Interviewee: Elizabeth K. Valkenier

Location: New York City, NY

Interviewer: William McAllister

Date: December 2, 2016

Q: My name is William McAllister. I'm here today on December 2, 2016 for a second conversation with Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, a professor of art history at Columbia University. As we talked last time, you told us about this fascinating journey of how you came to the United States during World War II. What I would like to do now is just fill in some details and what you remember about what you saw and experienced at the time. Through your father's appointment and contacts at Smith, you, your brother, and mother got visas to the United States when you were living in Vilna. Is that right?

Valkenier: Yes, Vilna, yes.

Q: And when was that?

Valkenier: Oh, well, we left in February 1941.

Q: February '41, okay. And from Vilna, you went to Moscow. And was this to pick up the visas?

Valkenier: The visa from the American embassy.

Q: Right.

Valkenier: But the ambassador was out hunting or something [laughs], and since we had a three-week layover in Japan for the boat that was booked—where we had places booked—was leaving three weeks later, after our arrival in Japan, the American embassy said they would forward our papers to Japan and everything. Well, when we arrived—we arrived there by Trans-Siberian railroad—seven day, I think, trip, or maybe nine. Anyways, was long.

Q: Do you remember anything about that trip specifically?

Valkenier: Oh, well, yes [laughs].

Q: Yes? Like what do you remember?

Valkenier: Well, first of all, the length of it and the fact that it was a very long train filled, for the most part, with Jewish refugees from western Poland who were fleeing the Nazis. And also others, obviously. We didn't have much contact with them, because for some reason, we had first-class seats. We weren't that well off, but maybe that's the only thing that was available. So, we shared a compartment, my mother and I, with another Polish lady and her daughter. My brother maybe slept in the compartment with the conductor, I forget. But anyway, he wasn't—there were four of us.

It was a very long journey. I mean, it seemed very long. All I remember is the endless snow fields and the Urals, which we had to pass, seemed very flat. I mean, they were not really

mountains [laughs] as far as I was concerned, at least compared with Tatra Mountains. And so, it was a little dreary. But, I mean, there was my brother and I and the other lady and her daughter, so we had company. I don't remember who the other occupants of this carriage or rail—

Q: And you pretty much stayed in the carriage during the trip?

Valkenier: Oh, yes. I remember when the train would stop at various stations—I have no idea why, whether anybody was getting off and on, because I really don't remember walking out of that carriage except once, and seeing the third-class carriages, which were pretty awful and filled with [unclear] poor people, and in dreadful condition and so on, filled with luggage and crying babies, etc., etc. The usual refugee scene. No, I remember stopping at various stations, and there were always Russian babushkas, older ladies wrapped up in shawls—it was cold and snowy—selling cheese and, I don't know, bread. Maybe we bought something there—well, my mother—I don't remember what. There was a dining room car and we could get food there.

Q: When you arrived in—did you arrive in Shanghai or in Japan from the Trans-Siberia—?

Valkenier: No, from Vladivostok, we went to Tsuruga, a port on the west side of Japan, I guess. That was an overnight trip, and we were just packed like sardines at the bottom of the boat. It wasn't the best [laughs] trip, as I remember. The unpleasant thing, leaving Russia—or Soviet Union—was that our luggage was inspected and they confiscated any jewelry or any valuables they could get. That was highly—well, with us it didn't—the sentimental value of whatever—they did take. But other people, the refugees who arrived from western Poland, the only thing

they had was some extra jewelry. I remember we had to sell most of our possessions, and my mother bought a big diamond with it, [laughs] I remember. And how did we smuggle the diamond out of Russia? Well, she had it embedded—she had a crown made, so it was up in her molars or whatever, behind a gold crown. But, for example, with me, I think I had my mother's gold watch attached to a gold bracelet that came from my grandmother. Not that—we didn't have that much. So, they said, "You can keep either the watch or the bracelet." So, whatever—we had to. Well, with us, it didn't matter. But with the others, it was a real loss, because they depended on selling it and getting out of Japan and so on.

Well, anyway, we cross—I think it was overnight to Japan. And there, since we knew the Polish ambassador to Japan, the exiled government ambassador, Mr. Rohner [phonetic], I remember—he sent one of his attachés, who fetched us. For some reason, he took us to Kyoto. That was like a dream, really, because, well, the cherry blossoms were in bloom, the cherry trees were in bloom. The old temples were there on display. Well, anyway, it was marvelous. Then we spent six months—we didn't leave Japan 'til, I think, the end of August.

Q: What did you observe during the six months? Because Japan, now, is involved in a war with China. It is expanding elsewhere in eastern China, and obviously it's preparing for fighting the United States. I was wondering if you noticed anything in the—just about the wartime life of—

Valkenier: Of Japan?

Q: —in Kyoto or in Tokyo or wherever you were.

Valkenier: Well, we lived both in Yokohama and in Tokyo. But all I remember is that they were all very friendly. Obviously, we stood out, my brother and I [laughs]. My mother sent us to school just to keep us out of mischief.

Q: You were fifteen at the time?

Valkenier: Yes, well—

Q: Fourteen, fifteen?

Valkenier: Almost—fourteen, fifteen. Yes, and I just—I remember there were food shortages then. The local grocers always kept something for my mother. They didn't discriminate. On the other hand, they were rather friendly and helpful. Otherwise, I really don't remember any hostility. For example—my brother and I, after school was over, we moved to Tokyo, I guess, and we helped out at the embassy. God knows what we could do as children, but anyway, it kept us busy. I remember passing the imperial palace every day on the way, on the trolley. Everybody would get up and bow. And, of course, we didn't because, you know, it's not our emperor. I imagine some patriot could have taken exception to that, but never—no, there were no signs of any hostility. The only thing that I—there were food shortages. I don't know how severe—but that you couldn't get everything. Otherwise, I just remember the Japanese as being very friendly and very formal. The conductors on buses and trolleys were women, and they would announce the stops, the names of stops, in a sing-song voice. They all wore uniforms. I mean, the women.

But otherwise, women almost hundred percent wore kimonos, so that was very beautiful to watch. Men were in Western clothes.

I remember our—we rented a room in a villa, and there was a maid that came along with the villa. She was very nice to us and gave me a little turtle [laughs]. Kame-san was his name, *kame* being, I think, turtle for Japanese, and -san, sort of an honorific. So I have very pleasant memories of the Japanese being very formal and quiet and pleasant.

Q: One of the things that I was just curious about is that it seems that the Japanese government recognized the Polish government in exile as the government of Poland even though they were formally allied with Germany.

Valkenier: Oh, really?

Q: I'm just surmising from what you're saying.

Valkenier: Because Rohner certainly was part of the [unclear] government, yes. Yes, that's good.

Q: After your six months in Japan, you left for Shanghai or the Philippines?

Valkenier: No, we left for Shanghai. No, because by then, the Japanese were expelling, or encouraging foreigners to leave. That was a sign of intentions and so on. So, we had to go to Shanghai. Fortunately, we met a Polish Jewish lady—we were Catholics—on the way

somewhere, [unclear] who had two children more or less our age. With her, we went to a Jewish rescue committee in Shanghai. Because my father had a very good name among Polish Jews and other minorities as having stood up for their rights and—he was a vocal defender of minority rights—they gave us money right away. Lent us, gave us money so we could take the next boat we could find to the city [unclear]. There were boats directly to the United States, but American citizens had priority, of course.

Q: I should back up and say you were in Japan for six months, waiting for a boat directly to the U.S., and that never happened.

Valkenier: No. Waiting for the visa—

Q: Waiting for the visa.

Valkenier: —[unclear] which we couldn't get in Moscow, even though we were notified that the papers were ready, because the ambassador went hunting. So, they sent them on to Japan. In Japan, they never arrived. So, we waited, in effect. We stayed there six months, waiting for the papers. Oh, and once the papers arrived, there were difficulties, because they discovered that my mother's mother was living under German occupation. And that something that—apparently, people like that were discouraged or barred outright, barred from coming to the United States because of the sabotage possibility and so on. Then people at Smith College helped my father. They had good connections in Washington, and somehow this was waived and we finally got the visa.

Q: So, you had the visas by the time you left Japan.

Valkenier: Yes. Oh, yes. We had to or they could have—yes.

Q: Right, and how did you learn that the—to go to Shanghai? Your mom, I guess, how did she learn in Shanghai that the place to go was to go to the Philippines for a boat to the U.S.?

Valkenier: Well, because there were no more—I guess I guess she and Mrs. [unclear] were running around—or probably with the help of that rescue committee—were trying to find direct passage to the United States. I don't know who helped them, but I'm sure that that committee—because they were very efficient, really. They found us places to live in the French district of Shanghai, I remember.

Q: What was that like?

Valkenier: Very elegant. Huge apartment, and we had a room or two. I have no idea, again, who paid for it and how. But anyway, somehow, it came with a maid, also. I remember walking around—[laughs] oh, yes, my mother went—we walked through the Russian section of Shanghai, and that was pretty awful. I remember the Russians were just—it was very loud and very messy, and [laughs]—and so on. No, but our French—it was next to the French club, and very elegant, I must say, yes. Maybe we stayed there—not too long. At the most, maybe a week or so, or ten days. And then we got a French boat to Manilla, the *D'artagnan*. I remember the

name of the boat. That was the only time I was hungry during the war, because the French—the sailors there were trying to make as much money on us as possible. And really, we had the minimum of food. But anyway, it didn't matter. In the Philippines, again, probably of the Jewish committee, we stayed on the estate of the president.

Q: Quezon, yes. I remember that. What did you notice about Manila when you were there, at the time?

Valkenier: Oh, it was a beautiful city. I remember the palm trees. First ones I had seen probably in my life. And very beautiful big, white buildings in the center. Well, the villa itself was very nice, and we were in one of the cottages on the ground. Again, the Polish embassy there, or whatever diplomatic representative, took care of us and helped us. I remember going to the jai-alai game. I don't know, the ball?

Q: Yes, jai-alai, that's—

Valkenier: That was very interesting. I remember the Philippines being tropical as far as I was concerned. Then we went down—we got a merchant, Swedish merchant boat—had to go down south and put on some cargo, and then it took three weeks or so. We had a gun on the boat, just in case. But everything—we arrived in Tacoma, Washington. And there, the Weirhorser [phonetic] family took care of us, because their daughter went to Smith, and Smith College was helping out. Maybe we stayed there one night or two, on an island. Very nice, large, wooden house, I remember. And then got on the train and set up—

Q: Before I ask you about the trip across the U.S. to Northampton, I was wondering—you are a fourteen going on fifteen-year-old girl. When you were in Tokyo and in Manilla, did you go out by yourself and wander around the streets and see what was happening? Or did you pretty much stay close to where you were living?

Valkenier: No, I can't say I was—well, the only other part of Japan we had seen was Kyoto, on the way, just after arriving. No, no. Actually, first I went to French school in Yokohama. And then, when we were in Tokyo—well, I said I “worked,” helped out at the Polish embassy just to have something—to be busy. It was my mother's plan, anyway. Maybe we might have gone to the theater. I'm sure someone took us to the kabuki performance. I vaguely remember—and maybe we had a geisha dinner once. But otherwise the—really, the Polish lady—we left for Canada way before—soon after we all arrived from Russia. No, I don't remember having any friends, even, because the ambassador didn't have any children. And the attaché who took care of us had tiny children. Oh, yes, there was one—yes, there was another attaché who befriended us. We had a little social life. But otherwise, not much. I imagine my mother worried all the time [laughs] but—

Q: When you left Seattle, you were on a transcontinental train trip to Northampton. When you were on that strip, looking out the windows—this is going to be your new country, at least for a while. What impressions did you have, if any? Or at any places that you stopped off along the way?

Valkenier: Well, I just remember—we must have crossed the Rockies or something like that [laughs]. I remember endless fields in Ohio and all that. That created a great impression because, in Eastern Europe anyway, the fields were tiny and here, this horizon without any boundaries was actually very beautiful, yes. No, I was really amazed by the size of things and the beauty of the—the sort of severe beauty of that landscape.

Q: And this was about September or so.

Valkenier: Yes. Well, late October already.

Q: Oh, late October. Around harvest time, that's right. You arrived at Halloween, that's right, in Northampton. Let me just end on that. When you arrived in Northampton—and you said previously that there was this Halloween celebration. I was curious as to what you thought of this kind of strange American event that you were encountering [laughter] when you first come to the States.

Valkenier: Well, no, because Christmastime in Poland, young people, university students, would dress up and go around and get gifts for the poor or whatever, or for student organizations. So, dressing up was not that strange. No. All I know is that [laughs] when the—both my brother and I were given full scholarships in local private schools: Deerfield Academy for him and Northampton School for Girls for me. I remember they had a banquet for Thanksgiving, when people dressed up. [Laughs] And since I had a kimono—[laughs] I wanted to wear it—or maybe it was already at Christmastime, I forget. But I wanted to wear the kimono, but since it was after

the Pearl Harbor attack [laughs]—I forget, I wore my mother's morning gown that she got in Shanghai, I remember, and came out dressed up as a medieval princess or something with a curtain hanging from my head [laughs]. But anyway, that was—yes

But no, I remember people were very kind, because—helping my father, certainly. Institutionally and financially helping my father through all the administrative problems and whatnot. The official outpouring of help—or administrative, institutional—was amazing. I mean, he couldn't have done it by himself and so on.

Q: You mentioned Pearl Harbor. I was wondering if you remember where you were—this is one of these dates that people often remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when the news came. Is this true for you?

Valkenier: No, no. I do remember Roosevelt's death. But that was several years later. But that, I don't remember at all. No, no.

Q: Let me switch topics now and talk to you about your own work as an art historian. You have focused on the 19th century Russian realist school in your work.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: I was wondering, why was it that these painters interested you, to study them?

Valkenier: Oh, [laughs] that's a sexist story, in a way, because when I took my graduate seminars, especially with Professor Chenyafsky [phonetic], he always assigned me topics dealing with architecture or art. Not because I asked for it, but I mean he assigned books or articles to students to read and report. So, that sort of came—I probably would have chosen either history or literature. Well, and I chose history. But that certainly sort of already—there was a natural affinity, it seems, between me and art. Chenyafsky's stressing it and directing my graduate work sort of reinforced it. And then, because I read sort of simple-minded histories of Russian literature and Russian art, I thought how very interesting and, in a way, simple. There were the Peredvizhniki who read [Nikolay G.] Chernyshevsky, who was sort of a radical writer in the middle of the 19th century. Here they read Chernyshevsky about the educated classes' debt to the people. So, they went out to the countryside and paid the peasants. Well, [laughs] it wasn't that simple at all. Once I started working on it, it was a fascinating story.

Fortunately, our library had all the books, because during the Soviet period, the Russian realists, pre-revolutionary art, was the art that was definitely favored—or at least during the Stalinist times. Nobody took interest in—or officially—in the literature and in any of the modernists. So, there were lots of books—documentary—books with documents on everybody's correspondence, the minutes of the meetings of the association of realist writers. There was plenty of documentation here, primary documentation. You did not have to go to libraries and dig in primary sources to write anything. So, I had the best time writing about it, because—and that was all new to me. And I discovered that the story was much more complicated and much more interesting. Actually, when Meyer Schapiro, who was the dean of art historians here—and he

was on my dissertation committee—read it, he praised it highly and said he'd learned things from it, which he had never thought of before.

Q: Following up on what you were just saying, these painters are very politically involved as well as artists in the sense that they were trying to—they were anti-aristocratic, they were promoting the life of the countryside, of the people. Is that correct? And is that part of what—

Valkenier: No, that—

Q: —attracted you to it?

Valkenier: —that oversimplified it. No, I mean, they were upwardly mobile and while Russia was a very stratified class society. Actually, there were fourteen grades. Most of them came from the lower ranks of society. And so, there was a good deal of social climbing involved in it. It wasn't all—it was a combination, like anything, any motivation anywhere, and all kinds of things that—mainly, it was to win for themselves recognition as artists, as independent, as creative professionals. They were regarded as sort of *chinovniki*, bureaucrats, because patronage wasn't very plentiful. Except for the court, for the imperial family and the state, patronage was not very plentiful, unlike in Western Europe. So, you always had to work for some official—institution, I mean—not always, but most of the time. To be anywhere under—and the Academy of Arts had a tremendous role—much more influential—an almost strangling influence to play in Russia because of the paucity of private patronage.

So, what they fought for, really, was to win for themselves recognition as independent, creative artists, and to find a market. By then, Russia was beginning to industrialize. The textile industry was taking off and so on, and middle class patronage just began to materialize. So, in a way, they came at the right time. In a way, they exemplified the economic advance and the economic change, and took advantage of it at the same time, and rode the—and their motivations—they were more concerned about winning an independent—sort of appellation of independent, creative artists than for—and at the same time, I mean, what do you paint in Russia, I mean, as realist painters? Either portraits of the aristocracy or—so, they started painting portraits of middle class. [Pavel M.] Tretyakov, whose name is remembered because his private collection is now in the gallery in Moscow. He was the one who ordered portraits, at first, of famous Russian writers and musicians. And then, it went on from then.

In 1871, the Peredvizhniki—or The Wanderers, in English—set up their organization and received official permission and held annual exhibits. One of their claims to fame was not only to be independent of the Academy, but also to take art outside of the two capitals. So, Peredvizhniki, The Wanderers, is a reference to that. Moving around, as one of my Russian friends [laughs]—the movers around. But they were also called the Itinerants. But, with a few exceptions, they themselves were not very radically minded. They were more concerned about their own skin and about their own position in society.

Q: Was part of that, that in the break from the Academy, that they wanted to paint in a different style from what the Academy was sanctioning? Or was it that they were more interested in kind of the upward mobility of having the independence that that would provide them?

Valkenier: No, it wasn't like the impressionists in Paris. Topics would be different. No, style was not involved—though sort of a diluted neo-classicism reigning—but painting [unclear] scenes was already accepted as—maybe not for the top prizes—but, anyway, in the lower—earlier stages in the procession and advancement. No, it was really the content more than the style.

Q: And the content being about—

Valkenier: Well, everyday life. Urban life. Lower classes. Well, urban classes, workers, peasants, and away from aristocratic past times and so on, and portraiture. Also celebration of Russian—no, there was a good deal of—there was a mixture of nationalism in it, too, because the court was very cosmopolitan, and the aristocracy spoke French much of the time. They emphasized the Russianness of Russian culture. The more Russian and unspoiled by Western culture—middle class.

Q: And the court and the more institutionalized parts of the art world in Russia at the time, they tolerated this? They did not embrace it, but they did not try to quash it either?

Valkenier: Yes, because it was not an outright challenge. It was just a step for professional independence, and they never—actually, one of the first—some of the earliest exhibits were held, actually, in the Academy, because there were no exhibition spaces in Russia, in St. Petersburg. So, it wasn't a bold challenge. No, they were careful not to cross the permissible line, because, after all, the Academy was very much part of the imperial order. So, it had very strong

political implications if you wanted to look at it that way. But that's not the way they necessarily did.

Q: You hinted at this before, talking about the art of the Peredvizhniki and the Soviet Union in terms of the documents being available at Columbia. I was wondering if artistically or politically, you see a connection between the art of the Peredvizhniki and socialist realism of the Soviet Union from the 1930s, for the most part.

Valkenier: Oh, yes, sure. Definitely. The Soviets, once Stalinism took over in art, in the cultural field, definitely. I mean, they just worked it to death, but the difference is it—[laughs] it was a style freely chosen by this—it was a free choice on the part of the painters. Nobody dictated to them. They took some risks. They didn't start out—they didn't start challenging the establishment, but they certainly, in their own little way, they were taking a serious departure.

But, no, there's really no comparison [laughs] between the two. They took risks, and everybody who subscribed to socialist realists actually milked the state, and the painters who obliged and who cooperated lived well. They were members of the painters' union. They got studios and materials to work with. The ones who did not subscribe or maintained their independence did very poorly. They depended only on private patronage, which was smaller and smaller once the communist system took over, the state controls took over. So, no, no.

Q: Artistically, in terms of either the subject matter and/or the style of painting, is there a comparison there to be made, an analogy there to be made?

Valkenier: Oh, yes. Yes, surely, because it is a realist style. It is narrative, though landscape was very popular among the Peredvizhniki and later painters. But definitely, oh, no doubt. You can't escape that. As far as content of that art, there's a very strong similarity between—but institutionally, one was an expression of independent choice and the other one was associated with state patronage and imposition.

Q: You wrote a book on Ilya Repin.

Valkenier: Oh, yes.

Q: What fascinated you about Repin, to write a book about him?

Valkenier: [Laughs] I don't—because he was such a colorful personality and left—first of all, he was the best-known of the Peredvizhniki. He was not a sophisticated painter. His father was a horse dealer or something like that [laughs]. He came from the countryside, very close to Ukraine. But he was a Russian. He was not a Ukrainian, even though some Ukrainians would like to claim him. Because he was such a colorful personality. And also, here, our Bakhmeteff Archive had his letters, because he lived in exile in Finland. He lived until 1931 or '33. His letters were donated by, probably, one of his daughters to the Bakhmeteff Archive. Because of the availability, there's an awful lot of material on him, either secondary, primary sources and the documents.

He had a very colorful life and was a marvelous—he was a liberal. He was [unclear] revolution. He was a very liberal person, and very much alive. The way he reacted to everything that was happening—when he first went to Europe, most other Russians had some kind of an inferiority complex and would start claiming and commenting on how things were better, this or that was better in Russia than in France, let's say. And Repin, no, he just was indifferent. Some things were better. He missed his country, obviously, but he appreciated—so, that open-mindedness and generosity of spirit was rather unusual.

The combination of his art, his personality, his attitudes, as well as the interesting life he had, made for a natural choice for me. After I finished the book—I mean, made my dissertation into a book. But then—[laughs] I went to Russia several times, or to the Soviet Union, to do some additional research. One of the foremost historians, Sarabianoff [phonetic], helped me with his advice and comments and so on. Once we were walking through the Tretyakov Gallery, and we walk first, to get to the Repin section, we had to walk through the [Valentin] Serov section. Serov was a student of Repin's, and someone who marked the transition to modern trends in Russian art. And Sarabianoff said to me, “Elizabeta, how can you work on Repin when we have a truly great painter like Serov?” So, that was the next one I took up.

Q: I noticed that, and I was wondering what it was that interested you about Serov. Was it that he's a kind of a—I don't want to say a later version of Repin—or that—?

Valkenier: No, the transition, yes. First of all, he came from an educated milieu. His father was a composer. His mother was a feminist activist. Dreadful woman [laughter]. Not dreadful, but a

very strong woman. He was a sophisticated person, educated person. Spoke languages. But he was trained by Repin and respected him as a painter. But later—I forget already whether they parted on good terms. But he distanced himself from Repin. Anyway, he was a mild person, never denounced—respected him as a fine painter and as a good teacher and so on. But I'm sure he grated on Serov's nerves [laughs].

Q: Why would that be?

Valkenier: Well, no, because Repin was very unsophisticated. Crude to put it mildly—well, and an enthusiast and—[laughs] and not quite given to—well, explosions of enthusiasm for this or that. Even when you see his house—he built himself a house in what is now part of Finland. Or maybe—no, it was part of Finland for a while. Now it's back in the Soviet Union, or in Russia. But built himself a house, and it's not a normal house; all kinds of turrets. And, oh, and he was a vegetarian at some point. And, I don't know, the—all kinds of—[laughs]

Q: Sounds like he's—

Valkenier: Yes, vegetarian, and then—oh, a gong would announce the supper. Why not ring a bell? But no, there was a huge [laughs] gong, hanging in the doorway. Anyway, he was an exotic personality.

Q: It sounds like, yes—we might say he was a character.

Valkenier: Oh, yes. But very lovable, really, and very generous also, in spirit. He was not a narrow Russian nationalist, which also attracted me.

Q: You mentioned that you were interested in Serov because of the transition. What do you mean by the transition? What transition is that, exactly?

Valkenier: Away from realism to modernism. Because Serov, well, was not an impressionist, but he was sort of—well, he wasn't a realist, either. There was another painter—I can't remember his name right now, begins with V—who was a symbolist. [Mikhail A.] Vrubel, a very fine painter who was, in a way, much more original than Serov—well, a different type of painting, but more original in style—who painted demons and whatnot, and also semi pre-Cubist sort of pictures with a—he painted a demon on a horse, or a demon which was composed of facets—really fascinating painter. Vrubel [was a] younger man, I think, than Serov. I forget his dates, but—Serov was now the radical, but it was a sort of a mild transition away from storytelling pictures. One of his best known and beloved paintings is *Girl with Peaches*, which was painted in the dacha, whatever, summer estate of a middle-class industrialist, [Savva I.] Mamontov. There she sits, and the emphasis is on light—what interested him was light and the positioning of objects and perspective. And it is without a story. [Unclear] just enjoyment of the summer afternoon, whereas a true Peredvizhniki would paint either a suffering peasant, or the departure of a soldier for military service. I mean, typical Peredvizhniki [unclear]. Serov just painted things for the artistic pleasure that he himself derived from it.

Q: You describe Serov as being part of this transition from the realists to the modernists. I was wondering if, by modernist, did you mean—? you referred previously to cubism. I was wondering if you meant modernism more generally in the way of cubism, or were you specifically thinking about [Kazimir S.] Malevich, for example, or [Wassily W.] Kandinsky and that kind of modernism?

Valkenier: Well, that's too radical, but—well, Mirius Kustva [phonetic]—and he also sort of—another closer association with West European painting, because certainly the Peredvizhniki looked down on Western painting as not being socially conscious and not being realist enough, let's say. Certainly, they downplayed impressionism, that it's sort of washed-out painting, and they didn't—and Serov, well, appreciated art for what it was. He had no preconceived notions that Russian realism is the pinnacle of [laughs] attainment, and had open eyes and appreciated Western art, and never felt that he had to denounce it in order to make himself into something—or Russian art into something better, that surpassed—

Q: So, Serov's art and Repin's art is not just a link to the modernism of the Eastern European or Russian painters at the time, but it's a link to the modernists of Western European painting.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: Yes, yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay, what I'd like to now turn to is to just ask you for your impressions of some people that you were associated with or that you knew of from your long history with the Russian Institute, and now the Harriman Institute. In our previous conversation, we talked a lot about Philip Mosely, and somewhat about Geroid Robinson and Marshall Shulman. I was wondering about some other people from that time and since. Earlier today, in our conversation, you mentioned Ernest [J.] Simmons. I was wondering about what was your sense of Simmons as a teacher, as a scholar, as a part of the Russian Institute.

Valkenier: [Laughs] Well, I'm always frank, I always say what I think.

Q: Well, good [laughs].

Valkenier: But maybe [laughter]—well, no, first of all, I had a very good impression of him as an administrator. He really built up the department and took very good care of his students.

Q: The department being Slavic languages?

Valkenier: Yes. And literature. He tried to get the best people, including my father [laughs]. But anyway, no, there were others. You know, so he was a very good administrator. I don't know how much—his Russian wasn't very good, I know. But, that was true of many of the early specialists in the field. Then, he was also a—I remember he always gave Christmas, or parties, so he had a very congenial wife. I forget her first name. A blonde lady. They would have parties in

their house. I don't know, I think it was for graduate students and professors. Nobody gives that—and that was very nice of them. You know, homey and—it's different than a cocktail party at the Harriman Institute, which is nice but it's not the same—so, there was this very—the nice ambience of—you know, acceptable paternalism. Care, I would say—paternal care.

But for some reason, I didn't care for him very much as a person. But that's just my own—I don't know why. I know my father respected him very much. But as a scholar, he was not anything special. He wrote some very factual biographies of [Leo] Tolstoy and [Fyodor M.] Dostoyevsky. Oh, and I know why I didn't like him very much, because his lectures were a direct copy of a very fine history of Russian literature by [Dmitry P. Svyatopolk-] Mirsky, a very fine scholar of Russian literature, who lived in England after the revolution and went back and died a tragic death. But anyway, he managed to write this—and my husband had given it to me. I was in the hospital for some reason, and—my future husband, that is [laughs], at that time—gave me just to read. So, I knew the book, I read it, all the history. And there is Simmons, and I had to take his course, because the requirements of the Russian Institute were quite rigorous then. You had to take a course in economics and history and political science and whatnot, and literature, as well, and—which I think was very good, because had a good grounding, which the Institute doesn't provide anymore. But, everything else has been diluted, so it isn't just our fault here.

Anyway, so I didn't respect him very much for that. And if you asked him a question that went a little beyond [laughs] what Mirsky had said—[makes sound] it was a little vague [laughs]. But the main thing, he really—now, as an administrator he was excellent. He certainly provided sort of paternal oversight to his students, and he trained very good people. So, you know—

Q: Edward [A.] Allworth is another person from that time. I was wondering if you have any impressions about him?

Valkenier: Well, yes, he just died recently.

Q: I saw that he was in the hospital. We were going to interview him. He did die.

Valkenier: Yes. I saw him just a week before he died. He was very—he was getting ready to go to Princeton. There was going to be a celebration. Well, you see, he was more or less my age. So, I don't—maybe he was a student then. But I know that he's very much respected for—he was one of the early people here, at least or only people, really—to pay attention to Central Asia. So, he really carved out for himself a very important field and continued it a great deal, and trained many people. Very mild, very fine gentleman.

Q: Yes. I was curious about some of the directors over the time that either you were here or associated in some way with the Institute. Henry [L.] Roberts, for example, was a director in the 1950s. What was your impression of him as a director or in other ways?

Valkenier: Well, he was a very fine human being, first of all. I didn't know him as well as Mosely. Mosely I really was close to. But a friend of mine was a secretary here, Helen Gillespie, then, and now Atlas—there were only two secretaries at the Harriman—at the Russian Institute then. He was a fine scholar and a perfect gentleman. I never took a course with him. I might have

read one or—some book, but I know that he was universally respected. And I can't think of anything negative to say about him except that probably he was too kind. I don't know why he left Columbia for Dartmouth. I think maybe—I don't know, but he left, and he was sorely missed. I think he was incapable of any machination. Is that the way to pronounce? Or mach—

Q: Yes.

Valkenier: I think Simmons would be capable of it if it were necessary for the common good. But, I sort of associate him with good old New England families and so on, and with the—

Q: This is—you associate Roberts?

Valkenier: Yes, that's Roberts, yes.

Q: Yes, right.

Valkenier: Not Simmons.

Q: Right.

Valkenier: Oh, Simmons had some kind of communist background in the—but I don't know how serious it was, [unclear] young people it wasn't anything dangerous, anyway.

Q: I think after Roberts—either right away or maybe there was somebody in between—but Alexander Dallin was head of the Institute for a while.

Valkenier: He was a scheming type. He had—marvelous father, a Menshevik, who was a walking example of goodness. But Dallin was a scheming kind, very—he was married to a very vulgar lady [laughs] who he divorced, and then married someone else. But anyway, so first I remember the vulgar one. I'm sorry [laughter]. Then he himself was no great scholar. He was—many political scientists, in my view, being a historian, are not that remarkable as far as scholarship goes. So, he—very narrow as far as—I may be very prejudiced—but he was just narrowly ambitious and scheming. I know someone who worked with him and knew that he went through other people's correspondence in their absence. That's what I heard. I never caught him myself doing that, but I have—and this other person also worked with Roberts and absolutely adored him, and respected him.

Q: Right. Leopold [H.] Haimson, did you have any interaction with him at all?

Valkenier: Oh. [laughter] That's another—

Q: Two in a row, huh? [laughs]

Valkenier: No, who took himself too seriously. I disliked Haimson very much. He wrote one very good article about psychoanalyzing Russian revolutionaries. That was very interesting and very innovative way of looking at them. Basically—I don't want to psychoanalyze anyone; I'm

not very good at that—but he had some kind of an inferiority complex and always wanted to show, first of all, how important he was. That, in a professor—well, I could accept it in Barson [phonetic], [laughs] because Barson, first of all, was tall, good-looking, and somehow had the air, a la Montebello. You know? [Laughs] But Haimson was short and ugly and very Semitic looking, so [laughs]—and I know that he could be really—he schemed, in a way. I saw him sort of apple-polishing with people, people whom he thought were important. That created a bad impression, because what was the need for that? So, I didn't respect him, basically, yes.

Q: Were you aware there's a—? When I was talking with Richard [M.] Wortman, he was talking about Haimson's Menshevik project. Do you know about this, that he was doing some study of the Mensheviks that were here in New York?

Valkenier: Oh, yes. Well, I never worked on it, but I know that since they were here, that was very worthwhile. He collected all this primary evidence and so on. He collected it, and so he had graduate students working for him and so on. But he sort of blew his own horn and—

Q: Right. Were you familiar with Abram Bergson, the economist?

Valkenier: Well, I took his course, and I liked him very much because he was very benign—very good teacher, first of all. He explained things very thoroughly and very competently. And after all, I wrote a book on Soviet economic aid, and that was the only economic course I had in my life and somehow, it got through my skull. Again, he struck me as a very benign person. But I

never had anything to do with him beyond taking that course. But in class, that's the impression I had, that he was a very good teacher and sort of had a kindly aura about him.

Q: Did you have much interaction with Seweryn Bialer?

Valkenier: Oh, yes. [Laughs] Well, he was a turncoat, first of all [laughter].

Q: You're talking about his Communist Party background?

Valkenier: Yes. And again, like Haimson—no, we always had very good relations with him. He was always very pleasant with me and very obliging. But I never either needed him—or at one point, yes, I wanted to organize a conference and he said he would help. No, we had very good relations. But he was another one who, I think, was probably capable of scheming. And, oh, there was a French lady, a young woman, very beautiful and very elegant. I forget her—well, it doesn't matter, the name. And I forget who was her first boyfriend, whether it was Bialer or [laughs] Haimson. But she was so beautiful, and so elegant, and so upper class, [laughs] and both Haimson and Bialer were just the opposite. And, anyway, had a relationship, and I could never see how someone with her gifts and looks could go for either one of those gentlemen, who physically were not very appealing. No, but Bialer was always very—I think he would always try to be very helpful and even-tempered. I think he's still around. I've never seen him—

Q: He is—as far as I know, he's up in Connecticut.

Valkenier: Northampton?

Q: In Connecticut, I think, some—but I'm not sure that his health is good.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: Yes, this is what I've heard.

Valkenier: He must be in his nineties, yes.

Q: Yes. Yes, yes.

Valkenier: No, but he was always very obliging, and I never took a course with him, so I don't—

Q: Did you have—? Zbigniew [K.] Brzezinski—

Valkenier: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: —had his institute at the time, and it kind of interfaced with the Russian Institute. So, I was wondering if you had any interaction with him, and what your sense of him was or is?

Valkenier: No, again, formal and good. But he came from a conservative [laughs] Polish background and I came from a leftist Polish background. So, we never had very much to do, and

I never worked for him. I respected him, and—not his political ideas, but he really had a first-rate mind. There was one not very commendable young professor here—I can't think of his name—who once challenged him to a debate because he was very pro-Russian, the younger man. Well, Brzezinski was the more conservative and negative side. And Brzezinski just made mashed potatoes out of him, you know. I respected him as a mind, very much, yes. And also, you know, good manners and everything.

Q: In the 1960s, I guess, there's a professor at Barnard, Peter [H.] Juviler, who began getting involved in human rights and making that kind of contribution to the Institute. Did you have any interaction with—?

Valkenier: Oh, yes. Well, he was a family friend. I liked him. And his first wife was absolutely great. She was half Italian, half English. [Sighs] I can't remember her name. But anyway, just great, whereas Peter was very gentlemanly and calm, well, she was explosive and so on. I liked him, first of all, as a friend and as a very decent human being. He felt the plight of human rights, and lived by it. I [unclear] was a very good teacher. I never took any courses with him, but I'm sure that he was a very dedicated and thoughtful teacher who took care of his students and their needs. But I was very much impressed at sort of—he lived human rights. I mean it wasn't just a subject for him, and what I am very grateful to him for is that he was active in unofficial cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union Citizen Exchange Corps, which was operated by some wealthy financier here, Stephen [D.] James.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: You mentioned earlier Robert Legvold.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: Talking about more recent directors, did you have much interaction with him? And what was your sense of him as an institute director and in other ways?

Valkenier: Well, I first noticed his name because it's unusual and because of some early article he wrote. Probably he was—whatever graduate student—and it was about Soviet Union and the Third World. It was very informative and even-tempered, not colored by Cold War atmosphere and so on. As a scholar—well, first of all, he's a political scientist, so, you know, as far as I'm concerned, they always have a slightly limited—could have a broader view. Whereas Mosely was reputed to be a political scientist, he really knew the culture, the history and the language and so on. No, Legvold spoke good Russian. Shulman did not, but he was older, so that's not unusual. And then he hadn't written very much either. He was forever administering this or that.

Whereas with Mosely, I was aware he was also administering and not publishing, but he created—he really kept Russian studies going with—and I think, whereas Mosely was really very modest about everything he did, and he did an awful lot, Legvold sort of took himself very seriously as being whatever he was. I think he was ambitious. Not a mean way, but he was ambitious and enjoyed the whole—and so, comparing him with Mosely, who was modest and generous and so on—I have nothing against Legvold [laughs]. He never did anything that was

reprehensible or negative. But still, I did not necessarily admire him. And one thing—oh, that I remember. That I have against him. I'm dredging up all the—that he once organized this study group at the Council of Foreign Relations on U.S./Soviet relations, which came out as a book. To me and economist Helena Stalson— an economist who worked at the Council of Foreign Relations for quite a few years, wrote on Soviet economic policy. She about domestic and me about foreign. We both took very neutral, objective—and he did not include those [laughs] two articles in the book.

Q: You told me this in the previous interview.

Valkenier: Yes.

Q: Yes, I remember this now.

Valkenier: I thought I was—

Q: Yes.

Valkenier: So, that I held against him, because that's pandering. Mosely would never have done that, and so on. But otherwise, he was always very dapper, well-dressed, and always very warm. But, okay, that's my one objection.

As far as being director of the Institute—well, I never paid much attention to that, really. Maybe there were—so, I never sort of judged the institute. It's there and it's very pleasant to visit [laughs] and to go to their—maybe he didn't—well, by contrast with Cathy [Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy], who succeeded him—or, no, Mark von Hagen—he certainly didn't favor culture or history. It was more politics and government. I think he sort of had his eye on what was popular in Washington and so on.

Q: Well, speaking of Cathy Nepomnyashchy, what was your interaction with her like?

Valkenier: Oh, well, first of all, I knew her way back. [Laughs] And she was always complaining because she was a graduate student, or just an instructor, whatever, at Barnard and couldn't finish her Ph.D.—whatever it was on, I forget. And she was always complaining. So, I just remember this complaining lady, well, younger woman. She was very kind and very concerned and really tried to do well by everybody, and always—if she thought she did something wrong, she would apologize for ages. Her goodness was really very disarming and something to remember her.

When she was a director, she did—well, she was capable of doing sort of crazy things, let's put it that way, or very extravagant things. She herself liked to drink. I don't know whether the Institute drove her to that or whatever. But always champagne for lunch and all that. But she really was very disarming with her goodness and openness, and sort of just spread good cheer. And actually, I don't know whether she did any—because I sort of never judged the Harriman as an institution—I know that she brought in cultural events, and those were always very enjoyable.

But whether she was a good administrator and whether—that I can't—she certainly enlarged our field of lectures and the type of topics we promoted.

Q: That's what other people have said, too, is that she was quite kind of animating in doing lots of different things, yes.

Valkenier: And she's always on the upbeat—so, never depressed, and didn't take herself seriously. I read one or—sometimes she talked—you couldn't make out what she was talking about, because she would start on one topic and switch to another, sort of like a stream-of-consciousness. But I read some of her articles and they were always very well written. I was really impressed. So, no, I have just—unorthodox sort of [laughs] person. But a breath of fresh air. She came after Mark von Hagen, so I said it would have been, certainly, a breath of fresh air after Legvold [laughter].

Q: Well, let me ask you, since you mentioned Mark von Hagen—again, did you have much interaction with him? And what was your impression?

Valkenier: He was a close friend, because I—he came here as a, whatever—teach history. I always make—not always—but I liked him very much, from the beginning. So, he always came here, and I also liked his boyfriend, Johnny [phonetic]. And so, we were friends. I really never sort of judged him as a director because—I don't even know how many years he was a director. No, you better—I always thought of him as a friend.

Q: Yes, I understand. But Robert [L.] Belknap, did you—

Valkenier: Belknap?

Q: Belknap, right, did you interact with him much?

Valkenier: Oh, yes, well, he was another friend. He was a student of my father's. But that, I can't really tell you—again, I judge him as a friend. A perfect gentleman. Oh, my God, really—he came from an old New England family. Didn't have any airs, obviously. But it was just a pleasure to be with him, sort of feel that good old world [laughs]. Oh, just really—always attentive, always kind, and never pushed himself forward and so on.

Q: There's another director, William [E.] Harkins. Did you interact with him much?

Valkenier: Well, he was a mystery, sort of. Boring, excuse me [laughs]. No, he wasn't—he was not effervescent. Everybody else had a personality. He was a very private person. So, I have no idea. But he never did anybody any harm. I couldn't associate him with any positive idea. I mean, in the sense—not positive on my part, because I have nothing negative to say about him. But he was sort of self-effacing, almost. I don't know whether he did any harm or any good, but he didn't push himself forward. So, I think we probably existed, but—[laughs]

Q: And then there was an economist of the Russian economy, Richard Ericson.

Valkenier: Ah! Oh, he—no, you know, again, I can't cite anything special. I mean, I have no direct—but I remember him as a very upright person. But in the sense of moral and academic. Really, probably, I have nothing but very good and positive thoughts about him. He was, again, very friendly, very considerate and just upright [laughs]. That's the only word I can think of. Always had a nice smile, but I can think of no specific measure he had introduced or any new policies he had inaugurated.

Q: Just to conclude our interview, I was wondering if there's anybody else whom you interacted with over your long association with the Russian Institute, and the Harriman Institute, that I haven't talked about that you think was important for the history of the Institute, or that you personally found engaging that you think that we should mention?

Valkenier: Oh, well, Padma Desai.

Q: Oh, Padma Desai, yes.

Valkenier: Yes. Well I always had very good relations with her. She never was a director, but she wanted to be a director. I think Mark von Hagen—to the extent that we were friends and would gossip sometimes—he was very much against it, because he thought she was narrowly ambitious and would really promote more her own career rather than the Institute. So, that's why he influenced the selection of Cathy Nepomnyashchy. So, it was sort of an anti-Desai step. Well, I was never involved with it, because I liked her and respected her very much. Because she always

struck me as—well, very ambitious, and obviously knew where her career was headed for and attended to it. But at the same time she didn't lose sight of larger things.

I think she was very devoted to her students. As far as I'm concerned, when I taught Soviet Union and the Third World, I always invited her for a lecture, and she readily did that. Whenever I had any questions, I could always go to her office and talk to her. Once, there was an Indian scholar here visiting, and she introduced me to that Indian scholar—a woman, I forget her name—who knew my work. And then, she, the Indian lady, invited me to lecture in India for a month, courtesy of the State Department, about Soviet aid. And that was an important issue. That was in the '80s sometime, soon after Mrs. [Indira P.] Gandhi was assassinated. It had to be postponed a little because of the assassination.

That was a great event for me, to spend a month—I even stayed for a week or ten days more because I enjoyed it so much. I said, “You don't have to pay me, just give me a place to live.” [Laughs] that was very—well, you know, a new country, new civilization. And then, to talk to Indians, who are very sharp and really, on the whole, are very pro-Russian, because the Russians helped with their aid and with big projects, like a steel mill. We would promote agricultural development. And, of course, this could be read as an effort to keep India backwards, whereas the steel mill was associated—and actually, Padma wrote a book about it, I think. So, Padma was a very fine—but for some reason, she and Mark didn't get along. I don't know; we never talked about it much.

Q: Well, thank you once again for a really fascinating and great interview. I really appreciate it very much. Thank you.

Valkenier: Well it's nice to remember all these people.

Q: It's been great fun.

[END OF INTERVIEW]