**Bombs, Bolsheviks, Ballet: Soviet Culture and Civlization**

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**T/R 10:30-11:45**

FSHT. Course fulfills the General Education requirement for FSHT (historical analysis): you will be asked to examine, discuss, and critically evaluate both primary and secondary sources pertaining to Soviet society. This course focuses on the shapers of minds, bodies, and ideas (rather than the shape of political or social organizations as such), e.g. we will look at elements of mass culture and entertainment as well as influential intellectual movements; we will look at State-sponsored campaigns to educate and indoctrinate, as well as everyday tactics of resistance, personal fulfillment, individual and collective quests for meaning.

C-LAC. Students with some knowledge of Russian should register for the corollary CLAC section for this class. C-LAC assignments will be imbedded into the class coursework and scaled according to your individual skill level in Russian. [See separate CLAC syllabus]

REQUIRED BOOKS: [purchase in UR bookstore]

Philip Ingram. *Russia and the USSR*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Lydia Chukovkaia. *Sophia Petrovna*. Northwestern University Press, 1994

Chingiz Aitmatov. *Jamilia.*  Telegram Press. 2008

Margaret Peacock. *Innocent Weapons.*  UNC Press, 2015

SELECTED REQUIRED READINGS: [in rough order of reading; some will be added later]

*Note: This list does not include movies, media clips, and audio recordings, which will also be provided as needed.*

Evgeny Zamiatin. “On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters”

Nikolai Fyodorov. “Karazin: Meterologist or Meteorurge?”

Asif Siddiqi. “Imagining the Cosmos: Utopians, Mystics, and Popular Culture of Spaceflight”

Andrei Platonov. “Lunar Bomb”

Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov. “Directed Desires: *Kul’turnost’* and Consumption”

Alexander Dolgun. “An American in the Gulag” [excerpts]

Yuz Aleshkovsky. “Tovarishch Stalin, You’re a Great Scientist” (and other songs)

Catherine Merridale. “Death in the Age of ‘Developed Socialism’”

Jean Stein. “The Rise and Fall of Monuments”

HERE WE GO: INTRODUCTION TO BOMBS, BOLSHEVIKS, AND BALLET 2017!

Theme #1:

The opening sentence of Leo Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* is one of the most famous and oft-quoted sentences in all of world literature: “All happy families are alike, all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way.” Tolstoy captured something about our messy personal lives and relationships – all “perfect” relationships are in some sense alike as long as they last, things are just “good between us.” But as soon as things start to unravel -- jealousy, misunderstandings, alternate attractions, confusions, betrayals, etc. -- every collapsing relationship seems to collapse in its own way, unique to the people involved.

This is not a primarily a literature class; this is a course in Russian cultural history. So for heuristic purposes (\*heuristic = technique of problem-solving that’s informal, trial-and-error, but good enough to get the job down, as opposed to the “classic” or “proper” technique) … for our purposes, let’s turn Tolstoy’s maxim around and propose this formula as a guide to understanding Soviet history: *all unhappy (bad, failing, inhumane) civilizations are alike, all happy civilizations are happy (creative, constructive, humane) in their own way.*

• In this class, we will see that the destructive and inhumane aspects of the Soviet experiment – deviations into xenophobia, police-state tactics, one-party dictatorship, criminal structures and environmental destruction – were manifestations of fanaticism, fear and corruption that (in their basic structure) can arise in any society, if the necessary conditions are present. No people or nation is immune from tyranny; no people or nation is immune from the temptation to invent an “other” that needs to be “cleansed” when the social order is diseased. All unhappy societies are alike in this respect.

• On the other hand, at least for heuristic purposes, we will propose – and celebrate – the fact that the specific creative, artistic, philosophical, and spiritual contributions of every given culture is somehow creative, artistic, and humanely enriching in its own unique way. Soviet contributions to 20th century art, literature, film, dance, music, math, chess, sports, and science were often extraordinarily beautiful and bizarrely unique. The same country that produced bombs and Bolsheviks (symbolically: military might and ideological extremism) also transformed the art of ballet, pioneered the art of film and montage, produced some of the world’s great modernist and abstract paintings, pioneered modern architecture, invented the concept of the “gene pool” in population biology; put the first artificial satellite into orbit into outer space, and produced the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, Andrei Sakharov, who was awarded the Peace Prize in 1975 for his opposition to the abuse of power and his work for human rights. All “happy” manifestations of human culture are “happy” in their own unique, culturally original way.

This theme has to some degree determined the choice of books for this year’s rendition of this course: *Innocent Weapons: Children in the Cold War* highlights the similarities between the capitalist West and the communist East in terms of what people desired, and how regimes strove to shape and contain those desires. Many of the other materials we will look at highlight the distinctive creativity of Soviet art and science – radically new forms of art and (in some cases) science that arose out of the contradictory circumstances of Soviet life.

Theme #2:

Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism. In order to understand what’s going on today, and how Putin has managed to more or less rally his people around a fairly potent notion of “making Russia great again,” we have to be smarter than most commentators and realize that he is resurrecting an identity paradigm called Eurasianism that predates communism, but also allows for a nifty bridging of certain aspects of Soviet greatness with global capitalism. In general, our investigation of the Soviet past should obviously inform our understanding of the present. In fact, I hope that in the course of learning about Soviet cultural history, you will paradoxically gain a much better understanding of American culture as well.

Logistics:

Three categories of assignment for a total of 1000 possible points.

1. In-class exam. 250 points.

You have one in-class exam. Short answer identification of key concepts and short essay analysis. This exam is designed to solidify your grasp of events and their significance in the era leading up to WW II. In other words, in this exam, you will:

-- articulate an understanding of how and why Soviet-style communism emerged as dramatic and unprecedented experiment in modern social organization;

-- identify key figures and events in this process

-- describe cultural and historical paradigms\* (\*=models, patterns) that were engaged (either to legitimate or to overturn) in order to create the new “Soviet” world

2. Worksheets. 500 points.

You have 5 “worksheets” to complete as part of your written work/historical analysis grade. You are allowed to sway 1 worksheet for a topic of your choice; e.g. if you very much want to write another course reading, *or* if you watch a Soviet or post-Soviet movie (approve title in advance) and propose to write an interpretive review of the movie.

**All worksheets submitted for a grade (100 pts each) will consist of 500-800 words of well-organized and clear prose, in a style that is appropriate to topic and the source text you have chosen to analyze. *See attached rubric for general writing expectations.***

3. Final Research Project. 250 points. In pairs or threes, you will produce a final research project. You do not have a final exam. The research project is multi-dimensional and will require sustained work over the last one-third of the course (early November onwards). See final project guidelines for details. Key elements of the project:

a. Your team chooses the topic according to your interests, in consultation with me. Be bold and have fun – the range of topics is enormous!

b. Your team turns in written research portfolio during final exam period, consisting of a introduction, annotated bibliography of sources, summary of findings, and conclusion [see guidelines]

c. Your team gives a 10-15 minute oral presentation of your research during the designated class periods at the end of the semester.