

RUSS 30601: Culture, Media and Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia

Course convenor: Prof. Vera Tolz

Course Description: This course explores the relationship between culture and power under state socialist system and in contemporary Russia. The first part of the course will analyse the policies of the Soviet government towards the media, as well as towards writers, artists, musicians and other cultural figures and the response of the latter to these policies. Students will be introduced to relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly those developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, and encouraged to consider the extent to which these frameworks can help us understand the processes in societies which are politically and socially different from those of the 'West'. The discussion of cultural developments in the Soviet Union will be linked to major historical events of the twentieth century, such as the Russian Revolution, Stalin's terror, the Second World War, Cold War, De-Stalinisation and the fall of the communist regime. Cultural figures will be presented as, simultaneously, beneficiaries and victims of the government's approach to cultural matters. On the basis of selected case studies, the final part of the course will explore the ways in which the Soviet past has been reinvented in the cultural production of Putin's Russia.

A poster by Aleksandr Rodchenko, advertising the main publishing house in Leningrad



(1925)

Learning Outcomes: *On completion of this unit students will be able to:*

- Demonstrate a systematic knowledge of Soviet government policies towards various forms of cultural activities
- Appreciate the changing dynamics of the relationship between the government and cultural figures in different periods of Soviet history
- Consider changes and continuities between Soviet and post-Soviet periods of Russian history
- Evaluate the applicability of particular theoretical frameworks to the Soviet/Russian case

- Evaluate critically different types of sources
- Demonstrate originality and independent thinking in tackling complex issues

Transferable and employability skills:

- ability to assess large amounts of information critically
- ability to analyse different types of sources
- ability to give oral presentations
- ability to write clearly and coherently
- ability to work successfully as a team

Syllabus:

Sessions 1-2: Russian culture and the new political order

Sessions 3-5: Culture and power under Stalin

Sessions 6-7: De-Stalinisation, Russian nationalism and the new role of the intelligentsia

Sessions 8-9: Politics of culture during perestroika

Sessions 10-11: Reinventing the past in Putin's Russia

Teaching and learning methods:

The course is taught through a combination of lectures and seminars. Seminars will take the form of student presentations and group discussions around questions and topics to be supplied by the tutor in advance.

Assessment methods and feedback:

Essay 1: 1,500 words (30%); Essay 2: 3000 words (70%). Written feedback is provided on all components of the assessment. Additional one-to-one feedback is also available.

Recommended reading:

Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power. A History in Documents, 1917-1953* (New Haven, 2007)

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, 1992)

David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity (1931-1956)* (Cambridge MA, 2002)

Polly Jones, 'Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 82,2, 2008

Thomas Lah, *Late Soviet Culture: from Perestroika to Novostroika* (Durham, N C, 1993)

Krisit Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2011)

Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power and the Public* (Cambridge, 2008)

Alexei Miller and Marina Lipman, eds., *The Convulsions of Historical Politics* (Budapest, 2013)