Cultures and Context: Russia between East and West  
Fall 2018

Monday and Wednesday, 9:30 – 10:45

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This course uses the culture of one country to explore general questions of interpretation and critical thought. We are interested in Russia because it embodies questions of identity and development that concern any student of the modern world. Russia has always been treated as part Europe, part Asia, sometimes Eurasia, and sometimes just an exceptional Russia. This course proposes that any country can be examined for what is specific about it but also on a continuum of modern world cultures. The great examples of Russian culture and the great moments in Russian history should be appreciated for their dualities, as something specifically Russian and as a contribution to a global whole.

We will approach Russia from a variety of angles: its tumultuous history, its vibrant modern literature, its bold art and architecture, its music and political institutions. We will move from one medium (primary sources and texts) to others (visual culture and music), and we will consider how each of these offers a specific window onto a larger set of questions.

Format:
The course combines lectures and a textbook with film, visual art, music, and literature. We will look at each of these media as sources that require their own type of analysis, in ways that will be explained in the lectures. Familiarity with all of these sources will be necessary to do well in the course. The textbook is required, and will provide the necessary background.

The lectures will raise questions and set up a series of questions; they will make sense only if students have kept up with the readings. The recitations will be used for a more intense examination of particular topics and genres under the leadership of the preceptor.

Grading and Requirements:
There will be three written assignments. The first two will be during the recitations, and the final one will be a take-home paper of up to 10 pages. Each is worth 25 percent of the final grade, for a total of 75 percent. Writers should use detail gleaned from the lectures, readings, and other media in order to offer broad arguments and critical analysis. Success will depend on (a) a mastery of the sources used, (b) mastery of the issues raised in lectures and recitations,
and (c) a capacity to use this information to produce coherent arguments and narratives.

Attendance at lectures, and attendance and participation in discussion sections, are mandatory, and comprise 25 percent of the final grade. Final grades will be reduced by two or more unexcused absences, at the discretion of the instructor. The recitation leaders have been instructed that a person who attends irregularly or is regularly unprepared can receive no more than 80 percent as a final grade.

Participation does not simply mean speaking frequently. It means rhetoric, i.e., the ability to convey an idea orally, critique and engage the ideas expressed in the sources, and it requires one to be prepared. This is a component part of a college education. The instructor will be looking for preparedness as well as a growing ability to make coherent arguments.

**Books and readings:**

Most texts are available on NYU Classes.

The following are available for purchase at the Book Centre:

Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (Eighth Edition)
Nikolai Gogol, *The Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*: “The Nose”
Evgeny Zamiatin, *We*
Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog.*
Vladimir Lenin, *The State and Revolution*
Kurban Said, *Ali and Nino*

**SCHEDULE OF LECTURES**

**Wednesday, 5 September**
Dividing the World: Mapping, Counting, Classifying since the Age of Imperialism
Reading: Edward Said, *Orientalism*, introduction and ch.1

**Monday, 10 September:**
Kievan Rus’: On Origins Myths
Riasanovsky, chapters 3-4

**Wednesday, 12 September:**
The Mongols and Moscow: What Asia Gave Europe
Riasanovsky, chapters 8, 9, 11
Alef, “The Adoption of the Muscovite Two-Headed Eagle.”

**Monday, 17 September:**
Fun with Ivan the Terrible: The Great Russian Ruler in History, Art, and Film
Joan Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible*, excerpts.
Viewing of excerpts of Sergei Eisenshtein’s “Ivan the Terrible”
Images of Ivan: what does a painting tell us?
Background research: the painters Vaznetsov and Repin

**Wednesday, 19 September:**
Can Russia Live without an Autocrat? Boris Godunov and the Time of Troubles
Religion and Politics
Riasanovsky, chs.16-19

**Monday, 24 September:**
Russian Architecture until the Eighteenth Century
Background research: Neoclassicism, Baroque, Rococo

**Wednesday, 26 September:**
Russia as a Laboratory, pt 1: Peter the Great
Riasanovsky, chs.20-21
“Bronze Horseman”: poem and image
Images of Peter
Background research: Alexander Pushkin

**Monday, 1 October:**
Russia as a Laboratory, pt 2: Catherine the Great
Catherine's Instruction of 1767.
Images of Catherine
Riasanovsky, chs 22, 23, 24

**Wednesday, 3 October:**
Russia in Asia. Ermak and Pushkin
Images of Ermak;
Holdings of the Kunst-Kamera;
Read: Pushkin, *Journey to Arzrum*

**Wednesday, 10 October (Kathryn David)**
Gogol and the Birth of Russian Absurdism
Students should conduct background research on Gogol'
Read: Gogol, “The Nose”

**Monday, 15 October**
Orientalism and Russian Identity in Nineteenth Century Literatures (Brianna Philpot)
*Brianna, please propose readings, if any.*

**FRIDAY RECITATION: First exam**

**Wednesday, 17 October**
**David on Gogol.**
*Katie, please propose readings.*
Monday, 22 October:
Hannah on Tolstoyevsky
Hannah, Please propose readings.

Wednesday, October 24
Russia as Laboratory, 3: The Great Reforms and Visions of Liberalism
Riasanovsky, chs 29, 32

Monday, 29 October:
Music and Empire, Music and Nation
Background research on each of these composers:
- Borodin
- Mussorgskii
- Rimskii-Korsakov
- Chaikovskii/Tchaikovsky

Wednesday, 31 October
Russian Painting in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: On Nation, Class, Culture, and the Self
Students should conduct background research on Repin, Kandinsky, Chagall, and Malevich

Monday, 5 November
Islam and Religion; The Conquest of Turkestan; Paintings of Empire
Painting: students should conduct background research on Vasilii Vereshchagin
Robert Crews, For Tsar and Prophet, introduction.

Wednesday, 7 November:
Happy Great October Socialist Revolution Day. Remember to send a card to a loved one.
The Modern Ideologies: Liberalism, Populism, Marxism
Martin Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, pp.50-78

Monday, 12 November
The Revolution of 1905: Class vs Nation
Riasanovsky, ch. 33
Manifesto of 17 October 1905

Wednesday, 14 November:
Russia as Laboratory, pt 4: Stolypin, land reform, and constitutionalism
Decree of 3 June 1907

Monday, 19 November:
The First World War and Revolution; the Freakanomics of Vodka;
Riasanovsky, ch.34
FRIDAY RECITATION: Second in-class exam.

**Monday, 26 November:**
Utopianism and the Birth of Dystopianism
Zamiatin, *We*
Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, skim

**Wednesday, 28 November:**
Stalinism: How socialism became a state project
Riasanovsky, chs 35, 36, 37.
Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog*

**Monday, 3 December**
Russia as Laboratory, pt. 5: Stalinism and the New Soviet Man
Jochen Helbeck, “Self-Realization”

**Wednesday, 5 December**
The Second World War and the Stalinist Postwar; the Thaw
Riasanovsky, chs 38, 39, 40

**Monday, 10 December**
The formation of the USSR and the multi-national union
Kurban Said, *Ali and Nino*
Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment”

**Wednesday, 12 December**
Collapse of the USSR
Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, chs 1-4

Friday Recitation: Take-home essay due.