

Narrative and Memory in Russian Culture / RUSS 369 / 001 / 3 credits
Historical Narrative and Memory in Soviet and Post-Soviet Visual Culture



Sergei Borisov. Glasnost & Perestroika, 1986.

Fall 2023 / Tuesdays and Thursdays / 8:35 – 9:55 / SH680-491

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Office location / office hours: ARTS W-290 / Wednesdays, 12:00 – 13:00

Course overview

This course explores the dynamic relationship between history and memory as manifested in the visual culture of the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia. Through a critical examination of artworks, buildings, photographs and films created from the October Revolution of 1917 to the present day, students will investigate the intersections and collisions between official historical narratives and personal recollections of past events. They will examine these visual sources to enhance their comprehension of various experiences of witnessing and testifying, sociocultural functions of nostalgia and amnesia, institutional practices of commemoration and memorialization, the changing conceptions heritage and trauma, as well as political paradigms of conservatism and reaction. In sum, this course empowers students with effective tools to research the role of historical narratives, as well as individual and collective memory, in the formation of national identity and cultural consciousness in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation.

Learning objectives

- Acquire a nuanced understanding of the Soviet and post-Soviet cultural production within its social and political contexts.
- Develop familiarity with the evolving meanings attributed to the concepts of “history” and “memory” throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Russia.
- Develop skills in visual analysis of images, buildings, and films.
- Effectively employ both visual evidence and scholarly literature to enhance critical analysis of broader social and political phenomena covered in this course.

Required course materials

- All weekly readings, PowerPoints, and handouts will be posted on MyCourses.
- The liaison librarian for Russian Language & Literature is Tatiana Bedjanian: (Tatiana.Bedjanian@mcgill.ca)

Teaching and assessment methods

- Students can contact me by email for any questions or concerns. I am available for on-campus meetings during my office hours, as well as virtual meetings over Zoom upon request. I aim to respond to emails by the end of the day, and students are encouraged to check their email and myCourses for course updates at least 24 hours before each class.
- All lectures and exams are conducted in person.
- Students are responsible for all course material covered in class, whether they are in attendance or not. If you miss a class, you must acquire notes from another student.
- Class recordings will be made available upon request for students registered with the SA&A office and for documented justifiable absences.
- Learning technologies used by the instructor: myCourses, Polling @ McGill, Zoom.
- FAQs for students using myCourses: Teaching & learning - myCourses (learning management system)
- Mobile computing and communications devices are permitted in class insofar as their use does not disrupt the teaching and learning process. Exception: Mobile and computing devices are not permitted during the in-class assignments and the midterm exam.
- In the absence of a medical certificate or analogous circumstances, any required evaluation submitted after the due date and time will incur a penalty of one grading unit per day, including weekends.
- All written work must be submitted on the assigned date by 12AM. Coursework received after 00:00 without an approved extension will be subject to a grading penalty.
- All assignments submitted are final - students will not be permitted to submit any additional work or an alternative version.
- Students who feel they may be warranted an extension must complete the Extension Request Form immediately, at least 24h before to the assignment deadline.
- Having more than one test/quiz/assignment submission deadline scheduled on the same day does not constitute a schedule conflict.
- Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text-matching software within myCourses.
- Students must complete all coursework to pass the class.

Evaluation

Name of assignment or exam	Due date	Grade %
<p>Attendance of weekly lectures and participation Attendance of weekly lectures is mandatory. You are expected to bring detailed notes on assigned weekly readings and contribute to class discussions regularly and respectfully. You are also invited to post discussion prompts on MyCourses and/or respond to discussion prompts posted by other students.</p>	Throughout the semester: August 31, 2023 – December 5, 2023	10%
<p>Visual analysis workshops and in-class assignments There will be two formal analysis workshops, each followed by a short in-class assignment (5% each).</p>	September 21 and October 5, 2023	10%
<p>Midterm exam This is an in-class, closed books examination that consists of 10-15 short-answer questions (1-2 paragraphs). For details, consult the “Midterm Handout” on MyCourses.</p>	October 19, 2023	25%
<p>Exhibition review Students are required to visit “Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot’s Russia” (MAC) together with the instructor and a guest lecturer on November 16, 2023. Based on this visit and lecture, they will then be asked to write an 8–10-page paper. For details, consult the “Exhibition-related Paper” on MyCourses.</p>	Visit – November 16, 2023; Assignment due – December 5, 2023	25%
<p>Final exam This is a cumulative, open books, take home examination that consists of one comparative formal analysis question and one more general essay question. For details, consult the “Final Exam Handout” on MyCourses.</p>	TBD	30%

GPT Disclosure Agreement: This class maintains a policy that you may use AI writing tools to assist you in the writing process but that all artificially generated text needs to be explicitly labeled. In handing in your assignment you agree to disclose the extent to which you used #chatGPT or other AI writing tools in your assignment. All text written by AI must be quoted with the source of the model in parentheses (chatGPT). At the end of your paper please include the following statement. Failure to adequately disclose your AI use will result in a 0 for the assignment. "This paper used (did not use) AI for the following components of the writing process:" Choose none to three of the following: brainstorming, editing, sentence generation.

Course content and weekly schedule

Week	Date	Lecture topic	Required readings	Evaluations
1.	August 31	History, historical narrative, memory. Syllabus overview.		
2.	September 5	Long twentieth century. Historical overview of the region. Events, personas, ideas.	Katerina Clark. "Changing Historical Paradigms in Soviet Culture," In <i>Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Novostroika</i> , ed. Thomas Lahusen and Gene Kuperman. Durham: Duke UP, 1993, pp. 289-306.	
	September 7	Russian avant-garde and the Bolshevik Revolution.	Boris Groys. "Chapter 1: The Russian Avant-Garde: The Leap over Progress," In <i>The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond</i> , New York: Verso, 2011, 14-32.	
3.	September 12	1920s: Monumental propaganda, AKhRR, OST and Productivism.	Christina Lodder. "Lenin's plan for monumental propaganda," In <i>Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture, and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992</i> , ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, 16-32.	
	September 14	Socialist Realism and the Soviet Myth. Historical films - recycling Nevsky and Grozny.	Brandon Taylor. "Allegory and iconography in socialist realist painting," In <i>Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture, and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992</i> , ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 73-85.	
4.	September 19	The Great Terror and public trials in documentary media.	Julie A. Cassidy. "Trials on Film: Mythopoetic Justice II," In <i>The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen</i> . DeKalb: Northern	

			Illinois University Press, 2000, pp. 81-109.	
	September 21	Visuals analysis workshop.	Anne D'Alleva. "Formal analysis," In <i>Look!: The Fundamentals of Art History</i> , Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2006, pp. 21-51.	Short in-class assignment (5%)
5.	September 26	"The Great Patriotic War" (WWII). Heroic narrative in painting, poster art, and film.	Konstantin Akinsha. "Painting went out into the street. The war of images along the eastern front," In <i>Windows on the War: Soviet Tass Posters at Home and Abroad, 1941-1945</i> . Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2011, pp. 136-159.	
	September 28	(Self-) Commemoration, memorialization and reconstruction under Stalin.	Antony Kalashnikov. "6. Self-Commemoration and the Interwar Culture of Time," In <i>Monuments for Posterity: Self-Commemoration and the Stalinist Culture of Time</i> . Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023, pp. 113-129.	
6.	October 3	Khrushchev Thaw (mid-1950s-mid-1960s). De-Stalinization. Rediscovery of Lenin's testament and the ideals of the Revolution.	Katherine Zubovich. "Chapter 8: De-Stalinization and the Battle against 'Excess'," In <i>Moscow Monumental Soviet Skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin's Capital</i> , Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, pp. 191-214.	
	October 5	Visual Analysis workshop 2: the moving image.	Yale Film Analysis Guide, <i>Online</i> : https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/	Short in-class assignment (5%)
7.	October 12	End of the Thaw. Manege Affair (1962) and the birth of the underground (1960s-1970s).	Susan Emily Reid. "In the Name of the People: The Manege Affair Revisited," <i>Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History</i> . Slavica Publishers. 6 (4), 2005: 673-716.	
8.	October 17	End of the Thaw. Budapest (1956) and Prague (1968) interventions. Anti-	Magdalena Radomska. "Correcting the Czech(oslovakian) Error: The Cooperation of Hungarian and Czechoslovakian Artists in	

		Soviet visual culture in the Eastern Bloc.	the Face of the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” In <i>Art Beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945-1989)</i> . Leipzig Studies on the History and Culture of East-Central Europe. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022, pp. 369-381.	
	October 19			Midterm (25%)
9.	October 24	Theoretical interlude: Memory and Trauma Studies in North America, Europe and Russia.	Kerwin Lee Klein. “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” <i>Representations</i> , no. 69 (2000): 127-50.	
	October 26	Stagnation (1960s-1980s). Victory cult and Victory Parades. Collective memory of WWII under Brezhnev.	Jeremy Hicks. “Victory Cult in the Age of Television,” In <i>Victory Banner Over the Reichstag: Film, Document and Ritual in Russia's Contested Memory of World War II</i> . University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020, pp. 131-169.	
10.	October 31	Stagnation (1960s-1980s). Renewed interest in spirituality and folk culture. Christianity, Orientalism, and New Age.	Susan Reid. “The 'art of memory': retrospectivism in Soviet painting of the Brezhnev era,” <i>Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture, and architecture in a one-party state, 1917-1992</i> , ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 161-187.	
	November 2	Stagnation (1960s-1980s). Individual memory in cinema. Tarkovsky and German.	Mikhail Iampolski. “13. Memory and Trace,” In <i>ReFocus: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky</i> . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, pp. 225-238.	
11.	November 7	Perestroika and the western influx (mid-1980s). Youth	Alexei Yurchak. “Chapter 5 Imaginary West. The Elsewhere of Late Socialism,”	

		culture(s), presentism, and historical amnesia.	<i>In Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 158-207.	
	November 9	The fall of the Soviet Union (1991). New historical narratives and reassessment of the past.	Alexei Yurchak. "Chapter 7 Dead Irony: Necroaesthetics, 'Stiob,' and the Anekdot," In <i>Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 238-282.	
12.	November 14	Nostalgia of the '90s – in search of a golden age. Looking back to pre-Revolutionary Russia, but also the Soviet Union.	Svetlana Boym. "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," <i>The Hedgehog Review. Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture</i> . The Uses of the Past, Summer 2007. Online: https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-uses-of-the-past/articles/nostalgia-and-its-discontents	
	November 16	MAC exhibition visit - Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot's Russia.	https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/velvet-terrorism-pussy-riot/	
13.	November 21	2000-2008: From nostalgia to revanchism. Patriotism and populism. Contemporary art vs the Church.	Jade McGlynn. "Taking Back Control of History," In <i>Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia</i> . London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, pp. 1-28.	
	November 23	2010s: Memory politics in Putin's Russia. Memorial, Yeltsin Center, Gulag museum. Dissent in art.	Jade McGlynn. "The Kremlin's Memory Policies," In <i>Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia</i> . London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, pp. 29-50.	
14.	November 28	Russia's international image as a defender of conservative values. Sochi Olympics (Winter 2014), RT. Pussy Riot case. Politicization of art.	Elise Herralá. "'History Is Repeating Itself.' Russian Art and the State," In <i>Art of Transition. The Field of Art in Post-Soviet Russia</i> . New York: Routledge, 2021, pp. 118-147.	

	November 30	Consolidation of historical narrative post-Crimea. War-themed blockbuster movies, TV series and video games.	Stephen M. Norris. "War, Cinema, and the Politics of Memory in Putin 2.0 Culture," In <i>The Future of the Soviet Past: The Politics of History in Putin's Russia</i> , ed. Anton Weiss-Wendt and Nanci Adler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021, pp. 170-190.	
15.	December 5	Invasion of Ukraine. Weaponization of history.	Jade McGlynn. "Past as Present: The Historical Framing of Ukraine, Sanctions and Syria," In <i>Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia</i> , London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, pp. 51-102.	Exhibition-related paper due (25%)

Additional information on the course schedule: [key academic dates](#), [holy days](#), [university-scheduled reading breaks](#).

McGill policy statements

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- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or Student Accessibility and Achievement.
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