RUSS 500 Special Topics in Russian
Sight, Sound and Sense
Winter 2021

Prof. Laura Beraha
Tuesdays 2:35 - 5:25 pm (via Zoom)
laura.beraha@mcgill.ca

Virtual office hour (via Zoom)
Thursdays 1:30 – 3:00 pm
Or by appointment (please email me)

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: As a 500-level course, RUSS 500 welcomes advanced undergraduates and graduate students. A representative background (2-3 undergraduate courses) in literary or cultural studies, Russian or other world literatures or cultures is recommended.

Course Description: As a special topics course whose subject matter varies from term to term, RUSS 500 has no fixed description in the e-Calendar. The interim description for Winter 2021 is as follows.

Transactions across the media in the first third of the 20th century. To what extent is meaning shaped by the medium that undertakes to convey it? The arts can be categorised as those which address sight (graphics, painting, film), sound (aural effects in poetry and prose) and their various hybrids (adaptation, ecphrasis, graphics, illustration, melodic and tactile rhythm, multi-media productions). By no means unique to the period or any one culture, intermedia ferment reached new heights in the avant-garde, arguably nowhere more exuberantly than in the Russian revolutionary experience and the ground-breaking work of its practitioners and theorists. Students working in other cultural traditions will be invited to challenge this assumption.

Course Objectives:
Anchored in the Russian experiments of the 1910s-1930s, in their ‘material’ approach to the basic building blocks of individual art forms, this course aims to give you a theoretical foundation on which to appreciate their, the arts’ interaction, their ‘intermediality’ before this term was invented. You will be introduced to Russian Formalist and Structuralist investigations into the structural parallels and trade-offs between the ‘material’ vehicles of sight and sound, invited to test them out on the Russian literary texts they were originally applied to, and then, I hope, inspired to test them further in texts and/or theoretical constructs in the cultures and/or traditions that particularly interest you.

Instructional Method
We’re entering our second term of remote course delivery. There’ve been bumps along the road, and no doubt a few more ahead, but I’m eager to draw on your experience, feedback and suggestions on what you found most effective and enjoyable last term.

Our main platform for sharing content will be the MyCourses site (described below, under Remote Learning Resources). Each module will include the primary texts (short stories, films or film clips, graphic designs) to be discussed, as well as required background and theoretical readings. There are also some optional extras, some for the enthusiast and some just for fun. Each module will also feature a powerpoint (aka slideshow), to include artworks (easel paintings, illustrations and graphic designs), together with key terms to guide us through the discussion of the theoretical texts. These powerpoints will be include discussion prompts, and either a voice-over recording or
transcript to allow them to serve lecture replacements for those who, for valid reasons, cannot attend a ‘fixed’ (synchronous) online meeting.

**Fixed (synchronous) vs. flexible (asynchronous) activities:** ‘Fixed’ activities refer to those that require your presence and participation in real time, all on the Zoom platform for our course. Flexible activities are those which you can access and work on when you choose – by posting on the Discussion Board, by submitting assignments via MyCourses, and the like. Ideally, I would urge you to participate as much as possible in the fixed activities – this will give you a sense of participating in an actual, ongoing interactive learning experience! Some of you will not always be able to attend a fixed, real-time meeting, for reasons either technical (e.g. lack of bandwidth) or geographical (e.g. finding yourself in a different zone). Please be sure to contact me if these restrictions apply to you. Flexible (asynchronous) alternatives or replacement workarounds will be offered on a regular basis (see descriptions below). If you have other alternatives to suggest, I would be most grateful!

For each class meeting, you are asked to prepare (read, watch or listen to) the required materials before the zoom class meeting for a particular date. According to McGill guidelines, you should expect to spend 45 hours per credit earned towards your degree. Ours is a three-credit course, which adds up to 135 hours over the entire term. Credit hours include class meetings (or their replacement), your preparation for each class and time spent on assignments. Remote learning can be a lonely activity; our aim will be to hold lively and stimulating discussions of works you have already read and read thoughtfully, -- to recreate the joy of learning together, challenging or building from what will surely be a rich diversity of opinion. Zoom class meetings will start with my overview and summary of the highlights of the topic at hand, but their real energy will depend on your questions, your participation in close reading exercises, small-group and full-class discussions (using the chat function) and the like.

**Remote Learning Resources**

**MyCourses:** All students registered in this course have automatic access to its online site on the MyCourses platform. The general address is http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses. Here is where you will find instructions for getting on board: https://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/tips-students.

MyCourses will be our hub for assignments, discussions, course materials (under Content), announcements, emails and general course information – for everything you need to access on your own time. Please familiarise yourself with these basic functions on our site.

**Zoom:** We’ll be holding online (fixed or synchronous) meetings via Zoom, also accessible on our MyCourses site. Here’s what you will need to do before the start of classes:

- create a basic account by clicking on the following link: https://mcgill.zoom.us/ You must sign in with your McGill username/password.
- read this article on getting started. If the link does not work, go to: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac
- you can also check out the McGill-specific tips and guidelines at https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources
- please note: if for technical reasons (insufficient bandwidth, lack of a microphone or built-in camera) you cannot participate in an online discussion on Zoom, you can always use the chat function to raise a question during our online meetings. Please let me know if you have any concerns in this area.
- the above applies as well to those of you who have privacy concerns

Since learning remotely is still relatively new for us all, I encourage you to look at the resources that McGill’s Teaching and Learning Services have compiled at https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources. Particularly useful tips are

- 5 Strategies for Success
- Study Tactics
- Learning Strategies Inventory
- Learning with Zoom
For the team project assignment (see description and due dates below), you may use Bongo to collaborate on your preparation for and eventual posting of a video or powerpoint on your chosen team topic. For instructions on how to use this software see
- How to complete group projects: https://bongolearn.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360005085473
- How to record a powerpoint presentation on a single screen: https://bongolearn.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360005085473

Zoom etiquette:
- only use your official McGill Zoom with your full name.
- upon entering, please write in the chat saying “here” or “present” or even just “hi” so I have a record of everyone who is there
- if you so choose, you do not need to use your camera over Zoom.
- please turn your microphone off when you are not speaking.
- please use the wave hand signal or the chat to alert me that you have a question or want to make a comment. I will call on you.
- if you do not have a microphone, feel free to use the chat function to engage with the Zoom conversation. I will happily include chats into the broader discussion.

What to do if you cannot attend a zoom class meeting
Some of you will be logging in from different time zones, or will experience technical difficulties of access, insufficient bandwidth or privacy issues. Above, I’ve described various alternative routes for accessing course content based on the powerpoints (their voice-over recordings or transcripts, discussion prompts incorporated directly on slides). Where an in-class discussion is well represented in the chat threads for a particular class, I will post the transcripts. I will also attempt, but cannot as yet commit to recording parts of our zoom class meetings (see the next section).

Recordings of class sessions on zoom
This is an issue I will poll you on in our first survey for this course. I cannot record you without your consent. If and when (actually, as soon as) I start recording, a pop-up window will appear to offer you the option of leaving the meeting. Frankly, I’m reluctant to force students out of a class – learning should be an interactive experience and indeed, the recordings need not cover an entire session. I propose that we vote at the beginning of the term on this question and then, if need be, re-visit the issue again after the add/drop period.

Required course materials
You can order the books online from the LeJames bookstore at https://lejames.ca/search/node/RUSS%20500. Last fall the bookstore shipped to students in Canada and the USA. For updates on this policy, see (https://lejames.ca/shipping-information). They are also available, for less, in Kindle format at amazon.ca and amazon.com.

(prices quoted in Canadian dollars):

Reference Texts (optional readings, of possible use in your writing assignments and discussion posts).
Some excerpts from these texts will be uploaded in pdf format to the relevant modules on MyCourses). Available in eBook format under the Reserves function on the top navigation bar for RUSS 500 on MyCourses (click on More at the extreme right).
• Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings II: Word and Language* (Hawthorne: Mouton, 1972)

**Course Structure and Rationale:**
Can it be said that logo/literaturo-centric myth makes Russian culture especially sensitive to what many see as today’s post-literary age? that the Russian modernist experience sheds a particularly revealing light on the fate of traditional literature, the silent printed word, in the face of competition from non-print media?

To address these issues and anchor them to a concrete historical context, the course will focus on literary texts as re-interpreted in extra-literary venues such as stage and film adaptations, oral performance or its facsimile, and even the fetishisation of the word as a visual form – the manuscript books of the Russian futurists. It will concentrate on contemporary (i.e. early twentieth-century) theory (Russian formalism, Bakhtin), branching where appropriate into their immediate descendants, the Russian structuralists.

The basic game plan for a class meeting on Zoom will include the following components. We will begin with your questions on the assigned readings and/or points that need to be clarified from previous sessions. Following the pre-posted powerpoint for a particular module, I will summarise the key concepts in and the historical context of the assigned readings for that particular day. Where short test cases are offered in a particular module, we will discuss them either as a whole group or in smaller groups using the breakout room function on Zoom. (See https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources/learning-zoom, and scroll down to Participating in Breakout Rooms). Less frequently, we will tackle analogue texts – these are all indicated on the Course Materials list to be posted in the General Course Information module. To make sure that our discussions are accessible to students who for valid reasons cannot attend a particular Zoom meeting, I will regularly implore you to write pithy comments and/or summaries in the chatroom and post the transcripts in a dedicated module on MyCourses. Classes will often end with an exit poll (e.g. what would you like to revisit in more depth next class?) or takeaways (what were the main insights you gained from that day’s session). Again, I welcome your suggestions!

We will also take two 10-minute breaks over the 3 hours (!!!) of our scheduled meeting.

**Target Term Schedule** (subject to adjustment if, for example, we fall behind schedule and definitely when we complete the team project sign-up exercise).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Deadlines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>T 12.01</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
<td>Read and be prepared to raise questions on the Course Outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to course members</td>
<td>Come prepared to introduce yourself, discuss what drew you to this course and what your expectations are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekphrasis –</td>
<td>T 19.01</td>
<td><strong>Primary text:</strong> Gogol, “Portrait” 1915 silent film, surviving fragment (8 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures in Words</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Short test cases:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Those of you who for valid reasons cannot attend this first Zoom meeting are invited to introduce yourself by means of a video or audio file (see above, under the instructions for Bongo), or a short written statement.
3 To help you budget your time, page numbers according to the editions recommended are given for all required readings in the Course Materials List to be found in the General Course Information Module on our...
Gogol, “Last Day of Pompei”  
Auden and Carlos Willimans, responses to Brueghen, *Fall of Icarus*  
**Theoretical frameworks:**  
Frank, “Spatial Form”  
Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language”

| The word as Incantation | T 26.01 | **Primary text** | Bely, “The Magic of Words”  
**Short test case:**  
Bely, *Glossalalia* (excerpt) | **Response № 1 to required readings to date (post on discussion board)** |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| The word voiced: skaz   | T 02.02 | **Primary text:**  
Gogol, “The Overcoat”  
**Short test case:**  
Zoshchenko, “Nervous People” | **Short analogue texts (choose one)**  
Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, ch. 1&2  
Amis, *Money*, section 1  
Burgess, *Clockwork Orange*, ch. 1&2 | **Choose theoretical construct**  
**Response № 2 to required readings to date (post on discussion board)** |
| Word in sound and print: Trans-sense and the Futurist Book | T 09.02 | **Primary texts:**  
Selected Russian futurist manifestos  
Selections from a digital collection of the major Futurist books, combining poetry and graphics  
**Theoretical frameworks:**  
Jakobson, “Relation between Visual and Auditory Signs”  
Uspsensky, “Structural Isomorphism of Verbal and Visual Art” | **Short analogue texts:**  
Lewis Carroll, “A Mouse’s Tale” (1865)  
George Herbert, “Easter Wings” (17th century)  
Dmitrii Prigov, selected works (1980s)  
Vladimir Mayakovsky, “To Signs” (1913)  
Guillaume Apollinaire, selections from *Calligrammes* (1918) | **Choose theoretical construct**  
**Response № 2 to required readings to date (post on discussion board)** |
| Word into total art: *Victory Over the Sun* | T 16.02 | **Primary texts:**  
Kruchonykh, Libretto for *Victory Over the Sun*  
Khlebnikov, Prologue  
Reconstruction and staging (64 min.)  
Archival material for Malevich’s costumes | **Submit outline for theoretical construct** |
| M 22.02 | **Post power point on the dedicated topic on the Discussion Board no later than 5:00 pm** | **Present theoretical construct** |

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MyCourses Site). With the exception of the week devoted to Nabokov’s *Laughter in the Dark*, you should expect to read between 60 and 120 pages a week.

* Students who for valid reasons cannot attend the dedicated Zoom session for presenting their chosen theoretical construct or the in-class presentation of their term research project can contribute by submitting a written statement (no bullet points here, please) and/or a video or audio file (see the instructions for Bongo under Remote Learning Resources, above).
| Page to stage: Meyerhold’s staging of Gogol’s Inspector General | T 09.03 | **Primary texts:**
Gogol, *Government Inspector*
Photoarchives, film clips and documentary footage from Meyerhold’s production  
**Secondary literature:**
Graham, “Meyerhold and constructivism in Russian theatre” |
|---|---|---|
| Page to screen: Tynianov’s screenplay for Gogol’s “Overcoat” | T 16.03 | **Primary texts:**
Nikolai Gogol, “Nevsky Prospect” (35 pp) 
Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, dir. *The Overcoat* (1926, 64 min.)  
**Theoretical frameworks:**
Eikhenbaum, "Problems of Cinestylistics"  
Tynjanov, "On the Foundations of Cinema" (Iurii Lotman, “Introduction” to *Semiotics of Cinema*  
Iurii Lotman, “The Cinematographic Concept of ‘Depth’ and the Literary Text” |
| Page and Screen: Eisenstein, Turgenev, Babel – *Bezhin Meadow* | T 23.03 | **Primary texts:**
Eisenstein, photofilm from surviving stills  
Turgenev, “Bezhin Meadow”  
**Theoretical framework:**
Stam, “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” |
| M 29.03 | Students in presentation set 1 must post the powerpoint component of your research project in-class presentation to the dedicated forum on the Discussion Board by 5:00 pm  
| T 30.03 | In-class presentation set 1  
| M 05.04 | Students in presentation set 2 must post the powerpoint component of your research project in-class presentation to the dedicated forum on the Discussion Board by 5:00 pm |
| T 06.04 | In-class presentation set 2  
| Research project – written follow-up and development | Th 13.04  
Th 14.04 | **Primary text:**
Nabokov, *Laughter in the Dark* (novel)  
Richardson, film adaptation (102 min.) optional Course wrap-up  
**Analogues** (choose one)
Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*  
Chandler, *Little Sister*  
Waugh, *The Loved One* |
| Th 26.04 | Formatted as a Take-Home exam requested on this date  
| Subject to approval by the University |

**Means of evaluation** (see detailed descriptions below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Estimated time to completion</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>% of final grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical construct</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
<td>23.02</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to required readings</td>
<td>4x2 = 8 hours</td>
<td>16.01, 09.02., 09.03 and 16.03</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project – in-class presentation</td>
<td>15 hours</td>
<td>30.03 or 06.04</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
<td>Throughout the term</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project – follow-up and development (formatted as a take-home exam)</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
<td>26.04 (requested)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All written assignments (the outlines and follow-up for the written assignment, and the Take-Home Exam) are to be submitted via the Assignments function on the home page for our MyCourses site. Please be sure to double space and use .docx only (NOT pages or any other format). For instructions on how to use this function, see the FAQs for students using MyCourses: Assignments at https://mcgill.service-now.com/itportal?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011163

**Feedback:** For outlines and follow-ups on your theoretical construct and in-class presentations, will provide written feedback, either as a scanned document with my handwritten comments or using the “comments” function in .docx, which you can access by clicking on Print Layout under the View menu in Microsoft Word. I will do my best to return assignments by email within a week of submission. If you would like me to clarify any points I have raised in my comments, please don’t hesitate to drop in during my virtual office hours.

**Late submissions:** Requests for extensions will be considered provided you contact me for approval in advance of the due date. I will make every effort to accommodate students facing medical or family issues, an emergency and, of course, religious holidays. Otherwise, 5% will be deducted from the grade for an assignment submitted no more than two weeks after a due date.

**Time to completion estimates** are just that,—estimates intended to help you budget your time. Taking 135 hours as the standard investment of a student’s time for a three-credit course, the guestimates above come to a rough total of 47 hours. Total in-class time comes to 39 hours and a running total of 86 hours. This leaves 49 hours as the expected time you will spend on preparing the readings assigned for each particular class. I eagerly await your input and feedback on these guestimates!

**Theoretical construct**
The “General Theory” module on our MyCourses site includes texts by the Russia formalists, structuralists and Bakhtin, of direct relevance to our in-class discussions. Barthes and Benjamin are also represented there. You are asked to focus on one text, provide a critical synopsis and context for its appreciation and present them to the class. You need notrestrict yourself to these texts, particularly if you are more interested in applying the insights from our discussions and required readings to the cultural tradition you work in, and/or your own present or future research goals. as well as indicate the relevance of its insight or insights to your own present or future research goals. This assignment will entail a written outline (max. 2 pages/ 500 words, bullet points preferred), an in-class presentation (max.10 minutes) and a brief written follow-up (max. 3 pages). The submission dates for these stages (outline, in-class presentation and written follow-up) are indicated on the target term schedule, above.

For help in choosing and/or formulating your theoretical construct to fulfill the criteria for this assignment, I strongly encourage you to consult with me ahead of time during my virtual office hours or by appointment. Be sure to consult the Theoretical Construct Guidelines in the General Course Information module on our MyCourses site, which includes content tips, and evaluation criteria.

As indicated in fn. 4 above, students who for valid reasons cannot attend the dedicated Zoom session for presenting their chosen theoretical construct or the oral presentation of their term research project can contribute by submitting a written statement (no bullet points here, please) and/or a video or audio file (see the instructions for Bongo under Remote Learning Resources, above)

**Term research project**
A list of suggested topics and texts will be posted in the General Course Information Module. Given what I hope will be a rich diversity of backgrounds and interests in our group, though, I am
particularly anxious to solicit your suggestions and for this reason must ask you to consult with me on an individual basis so that I can help tailor your project topic to our overall course goals.

There are several parts to this assignment — a written proposal (point form if you so choose), an oral in-class presentation stressing points of relevance to course texts and concepts, and a written follow-up, where you are asked to incorporate feedback from the class as well as expand more freely into areas more directly connected to your own field, or anticipated field of research. This last component will be formulated as a Take-Home Exam requested for the A more detailed description of the stages in, requirements and tips for putting together an oral presentation and then expanding it into a term paper has been posted in the Administration module, under the heading “Research Project: In-class presentation guidelines. A separate set of guidelines will cover the Written follow-up.

In order to submit your written proposal for this exercise, you must consult with me at least two weeks week in advance of the due date (23 March). This is to make sure that your proposed project fits in with the “relevance” criterion (see the Guidelines), that it is ‘doable’ – i.e. it fits in with the word and timing limits, and that it can be adequately researched given the restrictions we all face in the remote learning environment. Early in the term I will invite the Russian liaison librarian, who is expert in a number of other cultural fields as well, to introduce you to the latest tools.

**Reading responses:** Four scheduled posts in designated topics on the Discussion Board. Your thoughtful reflections on or critiques of the required readings (primary texts or theoretical frameworks). For due dates, see the Target Term Schedule above. The suggested maximum is 150 words. Prompts for each topic will be posted in advance. I will design the first prompt; for the next three, end-of-session takeaways or polls. I will draw on your suggestions as they emerge from in-class discussions, analyses of test cases, You are also welcome to submit suggestions by emailing me. These posts are open, i.e. they are not moderated; they are intended to serve as a starting point or springboard for interactive learning. [Under the heading of ‘Participation,’ you are also invited to respond to each others’ posts]. You may revisit or incorporate the ideas suggested by your fellow classmates in your own posts, in your research project, in both or either of its in-class presentation component and the written follow-up.

For how to use the Discussion Board see https://mcgill.service-now.com/itportal?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011163#discussions

**Participation:** Although I will not be taking formal attendance this term, I will ask you to ‘sign in’ to each Zoom session by saying ‘hi’ or whatever equivalent you choose, when coming in from the Waiting Room. This is exclusively for my reference. Instead of the usual ‘attendance and participation,’ we will concentrate on your robust participation in real-time: impromptu questions you would like to raise at the beginning of class, either ‘in person’ or in the chatroom; your contributions to occasional ‘take-away’ exercises (your nominations for the key points covered in a particular Zoom session). Students who, once again, are unable for valid reasons to attend a Zoom class, can post in a dedicated ‘topic’ (your questions and take-aways) on the Discussion Board. Suggestions for other viable ways to assess your participation grade in real-time or online are eagerly awaited! You are also encouraged to share your web discoveries (new and particularly exciting online blogs or websites on Nabokov). At the end of term, all students will be asked to submit (via the Assignments function), a self-reflection, evaluating themselves on a scale of 1 to 10. These will remain private.

**Take-home exam:** requested for Wednesday 28 April at 2:00 pm, but subject to approval by the University Scheduling Office. To be submitted via the Assignments function on our MyCourses site. An essay (10-12pp. double-spaced, 12-point font, 2500-3000 words) that builds on and incorporates feedback from me, the instructor, and the Q&A session at the end of the in-class presentation exercise. Evaluation criteria will include focus and depth of your argument, selection and integration of supporting passages to illustrate your close reading; the structure, clarity and persuasiveness of your argument; observance of formatting formalities and originality.
**Administrative Notes:**

- In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.
- Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).
- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see McGill’s guide to academic honesty for more information) for more information).
- Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.
- © Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.
- As the instructor of this course I endeavour 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 the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.
- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

**On a happier note**

- Phew! Or, as the Russians say – oof (уф!), what a long list! what a long outline!
- Here’s wishing you an enjoyable and productive term!