

HI 125 Russian History through Photographs

Spring 2023, Tuesday and Friday, 17:30 -19.00

Seminar Leader: Denis Skopin

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Office Hours: after class or by appointment

Course Description

The goal of this course is to introduce the students to Russian history through the study of corresponding photographic records. The priority will be given to the photographs illustrating the phenomena and events that shaped Russian society: Tsarist Russia's penitentiary system and colonial policy, Revolution, WWI and WWII, Stalinist terror, but also the continuing war in Ukraine. In addition to the study of visual documents, we'll read and discuss the most important theoretical and historical texts devoted to Russian Empire, Soviet Union and today's Russia.

A particular emphasis will be put on Stalinist period. We will begin by exploring official Stalinist imagery – posters, photographic collages created by loyal Soviet artists, but also the famous illustrated book *White Sea-Baltic canal* (1934) with photographs by Alexander Rodchenko, all copies of which has been subsequently destroyed. We'll see then some rare photographic records from the Gulag showing victims and perpetrators. Finally, we will examine the ways ordinary Soviet citizens of Stalin era handled the communist leaders' portraits and how they were punished for showing disrespect for such representations. Special attention will be paid to manipulations with snapshots, in particular, falsification of historical photographs and the practice of editing family photographs for political reasons.

Required Texts

Course Reader

David King. *The commissar vanishes*. Tate Publishing, 2014.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Students are expected to have at their disposal a hard copy of all required texts. Copies of the required books and additional readings are available on reserve at the library.

Writing

Image assignment. Students should find a photograph which represents what Russian history means to them. In addition, they should write a short caption (no more than 100 words) explaining why they chose this photograph.

Midterm paper. The midterm paper is an essay of approx. 1200 words containing an in-depth analysis of one photograph of your choice in the framework of the course topic.

Final essay. The final essay is a paper of up to 3000 words which should be based on original research and demonstrate the student's familiarity with the themes discussed in class throughout the semester. Students are expected to discuss their final essay topic, selection of visual materials and bibliography with the instructor.

All papers should be uploaded on google classroom.

Essay Deadlines

Midterm essay: March 20, 2023.

Final essay: May 14, 2023.

Concept map of Russian history and presentation

A concept map is a diagram or visual representation that maps the relationships between concepts and ideas. Building the concept map is a group work that takes place once the students have done enough reading and discussion.

Presentation. Each student is expected to make a presentation (a selection of photographs with comments) during a class session throughout the semester.

Students will receive detailed instructions by the third week of the spring semester.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on seminar participation (30%), midterm paper (15%), presentation (10%), concept map (15 %), and final essay (30%).

semester week	Tuesday session 17:30 -19.00	Friday session 17:30 -19.00 pm
	Readings	Readings
1. Jan 30-Feb 3	Introductory	Russian history and geography.
2. Feb 6-10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. <i>What is Russian Orientalism?</i> In <i>Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration</i> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. <i>Vasilij V. Vereshchagin's Canvases of Central Asian Conquest</i>, https://journals.openedition.org/asiacentrale/1196#bodyftn14 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Alexander Etkind. <i>Internal Colonization. Russia's Imperial Experience</i>. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. Margaret Dikovitskaya. <i>Central Asia in Early Photographs: Russian Colonial Attitudes and Visual Culture</i>. In <i>Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia</i> / Edited by Tomohiko Uyama. Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007. 354 p.
3. Feb 13-17	Screening: <i>White Sun of the Desert</i> , 1970 (Vladimir Motyl)	<p>Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>The House of the Dead</i> (portions)</p> <p>Photographs: <i>Views and inhabitants of the Nerchinsk hard labor camps (Katorga)</i>, by Alexei Kuznetsov, 1891, https://www.loc.gov/item/2018691430/</p>
4. Feb 20-24	King, David. <i>Trotsky: A Photographic Biography</i> . Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.	Simon Dell. <i>Visualizing Labour: The Problem and a Case Study, U.S.S.R. in Construction</i> , <i>Labour History Review</i> , Volume 84, Number 2, https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/lhr.2019.7
5. Feb 27 - Mar 2	<p><i>Erika Wolf event.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Erika Wolf. <i>"As at the Filippovs": The Foreign Origins of the Soviet Narrative Photographic Essay</i>, in <i>Translations from Russian and German of primary source documents related to the international worker photography.</i> Shelia Fitzpatrick. <i>Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s</i>. Oxford University Press, 1999, Chapters Shortages and Housing. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> John Steinbeck. <i>A Russian Journal</i> (portions). Lia Zhdanova. <i>John Steinbeck' Russian Journal in the Soviet optics</i>. Izdatelskie Reshenia, 2016 (portions).
6. Mar 6-10	<p><i>Ramina Abilova event.</i></p> <p>Dmytro Dzhulay, Coilin O'Connor, <i>"A gift to posterity"</i>, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-holodomor-</p>	Bonnell, Victoria E. <i>Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin</i> . Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007

	photographs-directory-wienerberger-abbe-whiting-bokan/31235172.html	
7. Mar 13-17	David King. <i>The commissar vanishes</i> . Tate Publishing, 2014.	Denis Skopin. <i>Photography and Political Repressions in Stalin's Russia: Defacing the Enemy</i> . London, Routledge (Taylor & Francis), 2022
8. Mar 20-24	Denis Skopin. <i>Photography and Political Repressions in Stalin's Russia: Defacing the Enemy</i> . London, Routledge (Taylor & Francis), 2022, 168 p.	1. Jan Plamper, 'Abolishing ambiguity: Soviet censorship practices in the 1930s', <i>Russian Review</i> , 60:4, 2001, pp. 526–44. 2. Eduard Andryushchenko. <i>Trotsky In The Trees: The Tragic Aftermath Of a 'Face' Spotted In The Soviet Press</i> , https://www.rferl.org/a/trotsky-in-the-trees-the-tragic-aftermath-of-a-face-spotted-in-the-soviet-press-/30362350.html
9. Mar 27-31	1. Thomasz Kizny. <i>GULAG</i> . Firefly Books, 2004. 2. Alexandre Solzhenitsyn. <i>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</i> (portions)	Varlam Shalamov. <i>The Artist of the Spade</i> , in <i>Kolyma Tales</i> .
Mon, Apr. 3 - Fri, Apr. 7	Spring break	
10. Apr 10-14	David Shneer. <i>Grief: The Biography of a Holocaust Photograph</i> . Oxford University Press, 2020.	1. Alla Mozhdzhenskaya. <i>Soviet life through the lens of 'Enemies of the State'</i> https://www.rferl.org/a/triva-soviet-photography/30725559.html 2. Triva's photographs (website in Russian): https://cameralabs.org/aeon/triva/albom 3. <i>The Missing Picture. Alternative Contemporary Photography from the Soviet Union</i> . Massachusetts Inst Technology, 1990.
11. Apr 17-21	Donna West Brett. <i>Stasi Surveillance Photographs and Extra-Archival Legacy</i> , <i>Photography and culture</i> , Volume 12, 2019	Visit of Stasi museum.
12. Apr 24-28	<i>Gil Pasternak event</i> . Concept map of Russian history.	1. Alexander Etkind. <i>Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied</i> . Stanford University Press, 2013. 2. Denis Skopin. <i>Sheltering the Ghosts? Digitized Photographs of Political Victims and World War II Veterans on Russian Online Databases</i> , <i>Photography and Culture</i> , Volume 14 (2021):

		https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/AXMKW XVBEGIVK7ENVTO6/full?target=10.1080/17514 517.2021.1927367
13. May 1-5	1. Petr Kropotkin. <i>In Russian and French Prisons</i> . 2. Olga Osipova. <i>The other Side of the Wall. What Russian Jails look like from Inside</i> . Aug, 12, 2016. https://birdinflight.com/en/inspiration/project/20160812-telkov-tarasov-other-side-of-the-wall.html	Denis Skopin. <i>Exploring Photographs about Political Life in Russia after February 24th, 2022</i>
14. May 8-12	Russo-Ukrainian war. Presentations.	Wrap up (Concept map of Russian history)
15. May 15-19	Final Essay due: Saturday, May 14, 23:59	