

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Russian 2113. Bakhtin's Aesthetics

Spring 2011
CL 2321, M 2.30-5.25

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Hours: TuTh 1.00-2.00

This course examines the major ideas of the Russian literary philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, paying specific attention to aesthetic concerns. The full evolution of Bakhtin's thought is covered from his early proto-existentialist works through his later theories of language, including all of the thinker's central concepts: consummation, dialogism, heteroglossia, the chronotope, carnival, and speech genres. Discussions will alternate between close readings of Bakhtin's texts and the analysis of works of literature, film, and contemporary art that address Bakhtinian questions such as self-other (author-hero) dynamics, the persuasiveness of alien discourse, metaphoric representations of time, and the politics of grotesque realism.

Readings and other materials:

Assignments from Bakhtin will come from the various translated volumes of his works, most of which are readily available in online bookstores. Page spans of assigned excerpts will be posted on CourseWeb two weeks in advance of every assignment.

Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
Rabelais and His World. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
Speech Genres & Other Late Essays. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
Toward a Philosophy of the Act. Ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

English-language editions of the four novels for the course should also be readily available:

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pnin*. New York: Penguin, 1960.
Platonov, Andrey. *Happy Moscow*. Trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler. London: Harvill Press, 2001.
Sorokin, Vladimir. *The Queue*. Trans. Sally Laird. New York: New York Review Books, 2008.
Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1959.

Unless otherwise indicated, films and videos should be viewed at home or in the media library (when available):

Vito Acconci, *Undertone* and *Theme Song* (<http://www.ubu.com/film/acconci.html>)
Darren Aronofsky, *Pi*
Liisa Roberts, *What's the Time in Vyborg?* (a viewing will be scheduled outside of class)
Peter Greenaway, *Drowning by Numbers*
Evgeny Yufit, *Suicide Warthogs* and *Woodcutter* (DVD-6148 – 6150)
Paul McCarthy, *Sauce* (<http://www.ubu.com/film/mccarthy.html>)

Requirements and grading:

- Attendance, preparedness, and active participation in class discussions. **(20%)**
- Five short essays (3-4pp) raising a significant question or elaborating a central concern of Bakhtinian theory in light of one of the artistic works analyzed in the course (essays are due by the class period in which the artistic work is discussed). **(50%)**
- Leading the discussion during one of these weeks (your essay must be completed a day in advance and will be assigned reading). **(10%)**
- A 20-minute presentation contextualizing some aspect of Bakhtinian thought within the Western theoretical tradition, comparing Bakhtin to a thinker of your choice (see suggestions below). There will only be time for six presentations, so students may be asked to work in groups. Before your presentation, you must assign a brief reading to the class. **(20%)**

Suggested final presentation topics:

Henri Bergson (time-consciousness, memory, laughter)
Edmund Husserl or Maurice Merleau-Ponty (phenomenology)
Martin Buber (I-Thou dialogism)
Georg Lukacs (genre and history, novelistic realism)
Walter Benjamin (negativity and transcendence, messianic time, the storyteller)
Jacques Lacan (mirror relations, discourse of the Other)
Michel Foucault (disciplined bodies and the grotesque)
Jacques Derrida (language and responsibility, the play of signification, parody)
Homi Bhabha (time and the nation)
Giorgio Agamben (ambivalent/suspended limits of power)

(Nietzsche, Simmel, Cassirer, Auerbach, Levinas, Gadamer, Habermas, de Man, Kristeva, Ranciere, etc)

For more ideas, see the 4-volume anthology *Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Gardnier (London: Sage, 2003) – on reserve in Hillman library.

Schedule of Assignments

week 1: (Jan 10)

Bakhtin's biography and intellectual context
"Art and Responsibility"

week 2: (Jan 17)

NO CLASS

week 3: The Ethics of Aesthetics (Jan 24)

Toward a Philosophy of the Act
"Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity"

week 4: Discussion 1 (Jan 31)

Sophie Calle, *Double-Game*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*

week 5: The Crisis of Authorship (Feb 7)

Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Work (1929)
Notes from the 1940s

week 6: Discussion 2 (Feb 14)

Vito Acconci, *Undertone* and *Theme Song*
Darren Aronofsky, *Pi*

week 7: The Linguistic Turn: From Dialogue to Heteroglossia (Feb 21)

“Discourse and the Novel”

week 8: Discussion 3 (Feb 28)

Liisa Roberts, *What's the Time in Vyborg?*

(See also: Sundell, Margaret. "1000 words: Liisa Roberts; Talks about what's the time in Vyborg?" *Artforum International* 42.7 [2004] and project website—<http://www.auditorium.vbg.ru/>)
Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

SPRING BREAK

week 9: “Time Takes on Flesh”: The Chronotope (Mar 14)

“Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel”

Bildungsroman essay

week 10: Discussion 4 (Mar 21)

Peter Greenaway, *Drowning by Numbers*

Discuss chronotopicity of works from previous weeks

week 11: Carnival: Laughter through Tears (Mar 28)

Rabelais and His World

Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1963)

week 12: Discussion 5 (Apr 4)

Paul McCarthy, *Sauce*

Evgenii Yufit, *Suicide Warthogs and Woodcutter*

Andrei Platonov, *Happy Moscow*

week 13: Linguistics of the Utterance; Discussion 6 (Apr 11)

“The Problem of Speech Genres”

Vladimir Sorokin, *The Queue*

Ilya Kabakov, *The Communal Kitchen*

week 14: (Apr 18)

Final Presentations

week 15: (Apr 25)

Final Presentations

Academic Integrity:

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Disabilities:

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the [Disability Resources and Services](#) no later than the 2nd week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.