

## RUSSIAN CULTURE – 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Overview** In this turbulent century, continuous wars, revolutionary movements, revolts, uprisings, famine and ignored problems exhausted and frustrated Russian society during the Empire. The intellectuals raised their voice against inequality, injustice, mistreatment, arrest, imprisonment and inhumane living standards, and took action against their rulers to save their life and their country. During the Bolshevik revolution, however, these same intellectuals found themselves subject to an even more repressive regime that brought few solutions to the injustices they had struggled against. All the pain, suffering, disillusionment and resistance to increasing government control and censorship was mirrored in the culture of this century.

### VERBAL ARTS

#### Literature

Literature constitutes one base of society, in that it reflects the history, politics, economic systems, and structure of a society, its people, religion and culture. Russian literature gives us a detailed view of the human experiences of a country, and it is intimately connected with the life of Russian society.

**Socialist Realism:** Although Socialist Realism claims to present an unbiased, accurate depiction of life, as did its predecessor 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian realism, there are significant differences between the two, particularly in regard to subject matter. Socialist Realist works focus almost exclusively on the themes of building socialism and creating a classless society. Maxim Gorky is widely regarded as the pioneer of this genre with his novel *The Mother*.

**Symbolism:** Symbolism conveys its message through the use of symbols whose meanings are grasped intuitively. It emerged as a reaction against realism and can be seen in the works of F. Sologub, V. K. Brynssov, I. F. Annensky, A. Bely, A. A. Blok, K. D. Balmont, and A. M. Remizov. The religious and philosophical works of V. S. Solovyev and the historical novels of D. S. Merezhkovsky also show the influence of symbolism.

**Acmeism:** Acmeism, led by N. S. Gumilev and S. M. Gorodetsky, in 1912 promoted a return to more concrete poetic imagery. Among the followers of this movement were O. E. Mandelstam and A. A. Akhmatova. Among the major figures in the field of fiction were V. M. Garshin and V. G. Korolenko.

**Émigré Writers:** Following the Bolsheviks' victory in the Russian Revolution (1917), many writers emigrated and continued writing abroad, among them Bunin, Kuprin, Merezhkovsky, Aldanov, and Nabokov.

Others stayed in Russia but no longer published, some became Communists, while others found a niche for themselves in the new system, writing but remaining above its official doctrines. Initially, literature in the Bolshevik regime was little different from that current in Western Europe.

**Silver Age:** Up until 1921 poetry continued to thrive, the major writers being the symbolist Blok, the imagist S. A. Yesenin, and the iconoclast V. V. Mayakovsky. Boris Pilnyak, an older novelist, documented the new society, and Isaac Babel wrote vivid short stories. Between 1922-1928, the era of the New Economic Policy, literary dictatorship was the subject of great debate; one group, known as "On Guard" supported it and the group around Mayakovsky was against it.

Another group that included K. A. Fedin, M. M. Zoshchenko, V.V. Ivanov, V. A. Kaverin, Y.I. Zamyatin, and L.N. Lunts, and known as The Serapion Brothers voiced their support for artistic independence, while the

formalists stressed poetic structure over poetic content. The novel was once again a major literary form, as seen in Ilya Ilf and Y. P. Petrov's satirical works, and in L. M. Leonov, Y.K. Olesha, and Kaverin's psychological and romantic novels. M. A. Sholokhov wrote epic novels on the subject of the revolution and Gorky a large audience in 1928.

**Oberiu movement:** Numerous avant-garde literary groups emerged in the early years of Soviet rule, and the Oberiu movement was one of the most significant of these many groups. Writers such as Alexander Vvedensky, the absurdist writer Daniil Kharms, Nikolay Zabolotsky and Konstantin Vaginov were among its more famous members. The short story writers Mikhail Zoshchensko and Isaak Babel, as well as, the novelists Andrei Platonov and Yuri Olesha were also associated with the Oberiu movement.

**Formalism:** Based in St. Petersburg, the OPOJAZ (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) was a major element in the creation Russian Formalism, which emerged in tandem with Russian Futurism. Among OPOJAZ's members, two became particularly influential. The first was Yury Tynyanov who wrote a number of historical novels, many set in the time of Pushkin, that were based on his extensive knowledge of Russian literary history. The second was Viktor Shklovsky whose blend of social commentary, narration, aesthetic commentary, and autobiography in his works make them difficult to categorize.

**Moscow Linguistic Circle:** Regarded as the Moscow counterpart to St. Petersburg's OPOJAZ, the Moscow Linguistic Circle was active between 1915 – 1924, and was composed of specialists in literary theory, semiotics, and linguistics such as Grigory Vinokur, Filipp Fedorovich Fortunatov, Petr Bogatyrev, Roman Jakobson, and Boris Tomashevsky. The formation of Russian formalist literary linguistics and semiotics was a result of the activities of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and OPOJAZ.

Between 1929 and 1932 the various literary groups were dissolved, and the political mobilization of writers became a noticeable trend. Stalin's purges of the intelligentsia during the 1930s only accelerated this, and socialist realism became the guiding principle of all literary output. As an art form supported by the state and widely used as a means of propaganda, drama after the revolution was associated with a number of eminent figures, among them Y. L. Schvartz, N. R. Erdman, M. A. Bulgakov, S. M. Tretyakov, V. P. Katayev, V. M. Kirshon, A. N. Afinogenov, and A. N. Arbuzov. The prominent poets of this period were B. L. Pasternak and N. S. Tikhonov, while N. A. Ostrovsky, A. N. Tolstoy, and I. G. Ehrenburg were among the most widely read novelists. V. B. Shklovski became a very influential critic.

Stalin's death in 1953 ushered in a new period for a number of writers; some who had previously been publicly disgraced, returned to official favor; other living writers were once again allowed to publish. *Thaw*, a famous novel by Ehrenburg, described the desperation of writers who had no choice but to write according to the party line. Extraordinarily, cultural exchange with foreign countries was encouraged and, in contrast to official party propaganda, literature which criticized aspects of Soviet society was permitted, at least for a while. The nonconformist poetry of A. A. Voznesensky and Y. A. Yevtushenko was immensely popular. Voznesensky's innovative form and use of language was singled out for particular praise.

However, this period of relative literary tolerance came to an end in 1963 when both the government and the Union of Soviet Writers severely reprimanded these and other dissident writers. *Doctor Zhivago*, published outside the Soviet Union and widely praised throughout the West, was not allowed to be published in the USSR, and state pressure compelled Pasternak to decline the Nobel Prize for literature.

The effort to free Soviet writing from official control increased after Khrushchev was removed from power in 1964. Public calls for an end to political censorship came from well-known writers such as Voznesensky and A. I. Solzhenitsyn. For publishing works outside the USSR which criticized the Soviet regime under pseudonyms A. D. Sinyavsky and Y. M. Daniel served prison sentences. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the first novel written by Solzhenitsyn, described prison-camp life; when published in 1962 its anti-Stalinist tone was politically acceptable. Solzhenitsyn's later works resulted in his 1974 exile from Russia.

In the 1980s the stories of T. N. Tolstaya were one example of the religious, even mystical, trends in literature. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn returned from exile in 1994, twenty years

after he had left. Censored during the Soviet period, the playwright M. Shatrov wrote scathing works on Stalin and pre-glasnost Russia.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1-Discuss the effects of the European literary movement 'sentimentalism' on 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature.
- 2- Discuss Utopian Socialism and Utilitarianism. How was it spread among the Russian intelligentsia? Who were the leading figures of this thought in Russia?
- 3- How can we characterize Russian literature at the age of Socialist Realism?
- 4- Discuss the response of émigré Russian writers to being exiled and living abroad as reflected in their works.

### **Reading**

- 1-*The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, Edited by Charles A. Moser, 1992.
- 2-*The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, Edited by Neil Cornwell, 2001.
- 3-*The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

### **Language**

During the period of the Empire, the ceaseless political upheavals such as the Russo-Japanese War, Bloody Sunday, the Revolution of 1905 and the First World War enriched the Russian lexicon with the inclusion of new revolutionary vocabulary. With the October revolution of 1917 numerous changes to the language occurred - the remaining superfluous Church Slavonic letters were eliminated in addition to other semantic transformations, some words were eliminated from active use, new words were introduced to the vocabulary, and a number of spelling and stylistic shifts were made. One of the characteristics of the Soviet period language policy was an extension in the use of certain words from narrow social circles to the language of the masses. A large number of these lexemes introduced into Russian at the turn of the century were words of foreign origin, and this political, economic, military, scientific and technological vocabulary that was imported from the West was adapted into Russian by the Soviets. The new Russian words injected into the lexicon of all the languages of the USSR gave the Soviets absolute control over the language and information.

**Russification:** Russian became the predominant language, and Soviet language planners tried to increase the influence of the Russian language so that all citizens in the Soviet Union could understand and communicate with one another and participate in the administration. With the development of a simpler and standardized spelling of the Russian language with its vast new lexicon, specifically through printed media in a growing number of public domains, the policy of Russification increased the literacy of the Russian speaking community in the Soviet Union.

### **Discussion/Questions**

What are the historical and socio-cultural factors that have played a role in the evolution of the Russian language?

### **Reading**

Worth, Deans S., "Language", *The Cambridge Companion Modern Russian Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky, 1998, pp.19-38.

### **Script**

With the reforms introduced by the Assembly for Considering Simplification of the Orthography were implemented by the Ministry for Popular Education in 1918, the new orthography was purged of all the old characters, and the authorities enforced the use of standard spelling and usage.

This new orthographic reform threw out, for example, letters like *ѣ*, and *ѣ* from the Cyrillic alphabet. A reform of Russian spelling carried out by Aleksey Shakhmatov, removed more letters from the Russian orthography; the letter *yat* (ѣ) was replaced with *e*, and the hard sign *yer* (ь) was dropped at the end of a word.

This orthographic reform was intended to increase literacy among native speakers of Russian and speakers of Russian as a second-language and to spread socialist ideology to the citizenry.

Increased Russification, compulsory Russian instruction, the obligatory replacement of Latin-based alphabets with the Cyrillic alphabet regardless of phonetic appropriateness, and the standardization of orthography were all imposed on all citizens of the Soviet Union to form a unified Soviet national identity. This Cyrillization process was completed in 1941. The Soviet Union was a multinational and multilingual entity, and many languages remained without writing. It was necessary to create new alphabets, but this was a major problem for people who did not yet know any script. Specifically, in Central Asia switching from the Arabic to the Latin, and then to the Cyrillic alphabet became a major factor in cultural orientation. After the centralized political system was firmly established, the policy of building a socialist system and spreading ideology in those countries led to the rise of the role of the Russian language and of the obligatory usage of the Cyrillic script.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Why did the Soviets give up the Latin-based Russian alphabet proposed by Lenin? Why did Latinization process fail? Why did the Cyrillic alphabet gain importance?

### **Reading**

Alpatov, Vladimir M., "Scripts and Politics in the USSR", *Studi Slavistici* xiv, 2017, pp. 9-19.

### **Folklore**

In the Soviet period individuals were allowed to create folklore, since it was regarded as the artistic expression of the masses. The preservation of Russian folk culture was promoted in Soviet rhetoric, and funds were provided for the promotion of folk music and dance. Despite the rhetoric and funding, there was no official policy to revive folk culture due to the fear that folk tales might contain subversive elements harmful to the socialization of children.

Folklore was initially regarded as a reactionary relic of the past in the years immediately following the revolution, and Soviet writing in the 1920s was dedicated to the promotion of communist ideals and values. As a result, folklore was viewed very negatively; Proletcult (Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organizations) leaders claimed that because folklore reflected *kulak* (wealthy farmers') attitudes it should be eradicated. The successor to Proletcult, RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) shared similar attitudes, also calling for the elimination of folklore. Despite the attitude of these organizations, in the late 1920s folklore began to be used as a means of self-expression among some Russians. Due to this interest in folklore, different groups worked in tandem in this period, producing some of the most important studies on Russian folklore.

In the 1930s the attitude towards folklore shifted further in parallel with the massive changes in Soviet society imposed by Stalin. Folklore was now seen as one more means to increase support for Stalin's programs. However, the true revival of Russian folklore emerged among academics in the Khrushchev era, with increased performances of folk dances and folk music following almost a decade later.

**Noviny:** An innovative form of folksong from the Soviet period was the *noviny*, "new songs", so called to distinguish them from the *stariny*, "old songs". Combining elements of historical songs, *byliny* and laments, *noviny* imitated traditional folksongs in many respects, but used themes from modern life as their subject matter. *Noviny* were composed to celebrate Soviet heroes of all types as well as Soviet civilian and military

leaders. These Soviet heroes and leaders are depicted as having the same degree of resourcefulness, courage and self-sacrifice as the traditional heroes of *byliny*, Alesha Popovich, Dobrynya Nikitich and Ilya Muromets. The Tatars of the *byliny* have been replaced by the “whites”, led by Idolishche (“the most monstrous idol”), as the opponents of the new heroes. Idolishche, symbolizing the tsar and his regime, is depicted as being cowardly, arrogant, gluttonous and cruel.

**Soviet Folktales:** In addition to creating Soviet folksongs, folktales based on Soviet themes were also composed. Centered on collective farm workers, Soviet military figures and civilian leaders, and workers, these new tales used very few of the traditional motifs, and Soviet tales of magic were generally intended to be understood allegorically.

**Letter-poems:** Following the enactment of Stalin’s first five-year plan in 1928, folklore studies came under increasing criticism and pressure since folklore was now regarded as expressing support for both the tsarist regime and capitalism. In place of the old epic poems, letter-poems addressed to Stalin began to appear in the mid-1930s. These letter poems were initially drafted by folk performers and professional poets, and then revised in subsequent meetings until a final version was agreed upon. This final version would be signed by tens of thousands of people and then sent to Stalin. Letter-poems were also composed to mark important occasions for workers or other professional groups in factories, cities or districts.

**After Stalin:** Russian folklore was freed the pressure and constraints that it had endured for decades when Stalin died in 1953. *Noviny* and the Soviet folktales came under withering criticism as pseudo-folklore, with no connection at all with genuine Russian folklore. The use of archaic imagery from *byliny* in contemporary *noviny* was deemed to be completely inappropriate and the Soviet folktales were branded as merely unsuccessful attempts at literature.

Eventually, folklore scholars were able to return to academic studies of folklore, and folk singers were under less official pressure than in previous years. However, folk singers were still expected to perform for the nation’s benefit, and in support of officially sanctioned social and political ideas.

The academic study of Russian folklore has enjoyed a revival since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with scholars now able to freely research all aspects of folklore, including previous banned topics such tales referring to or linked to the West. Many stories have been published in their uncensored forms, and folklore studies have been pursued in line with approaches common in the West. In addition, there has been an effort to return to the timeless and culturally significant of sources of pre-Soviet folklore.

## **Discussion/Questions**

1. What is the effect on a nation’s folklore when an authoritarian regime controls all phases of its creation, production, and, very often, its consumption?
2. Why was folklore, the reflection of a people’s worldview and historical experience, regarded with suspicion by both Soviet leaders in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Orthodox clergy in the 17<sup>th</sup>?

## **Reading**

Oinas, Felix, J., ‘The Political Uses and Themes of Folklore in the Soviet Union’, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Vol. 12, No. 2/3 (1975), pp. 157-175.

## **VISUAL ARTS**

### **Painting**

**Symbolism:** Across Europe and Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Symbolism had spread as both an artistic and an intellectual movement. In Russia Symbolism dominated the artistic scene for approximately two decades and two generations of artists. The first generation was active between 1890 to 1900, and the second, known as the Blue Rose Movement, from 1900 to 1910. Symbolist artists such as

Alexandre Benois, Konstantin Somov, Mikhail Vrubel and Mikhail Nesterov attempted evoke emotion or create a mood by using traditional elements of Symbolism or through their use of color. For these painters their art was an esthetic experience.

**Avant-garde:** Avant-garde is an umbrella term for a number of distinct, but closely related artistic movements that were current in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, among them Constructivism, Cubism, Cubo-Futurism, Rayonism, Neo-primitivism, Suprematism. Russian avant-garde artists did not simply mimic European artistic styles, they introduced their own innovations into them and in the process created new interpretations of these styles. Modern art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century would be profoundly influenced by a number of artistic movements pioneered by Russian artists.

**Constructivism:** Constructivism was established by Vladimir Tatlin in 1915 and was based on an emphasis of both an object's material properties and the space it occupied. Constructivist artists put their talents to use in the service of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, in particular by applying their artistic theories to the fields of advertising and fashion. Tatlin used paper, wood, metal or glass to create distinctive three-dimensional works that expressed his artistic vision. For him, the form of his works was dictated by the *faktura* (texture) of the material being used to create them.

**Cubism:** Cubism sought to depict forms through the use of basic geometric shapes – cubes cylinders, spheres and cones – and used color freely, without being restricted to depicting forms naturalistically. Although the subject of cubist paintings is still visible, it has been reduced to simpler forms, generally lacks depth and borders on being abstract. Cubism remained popular only up to the 1920s, but its influence on avant-garde art was deep. Wealthy collectors such as Shchukin and Morozov were responsible for introducing Russia to Cubism by purchasing Cubist works and then publicly displaying them in Russia. Among the most famous Russian Cubist painters were of Malevich, Popova, and Udaltsova.

**Cubo-futurism:** Cubo-futurism differs from Cubism in having more dynamic compositions that incorporate words or letters into them. Originally a French artistic movement, Cubo-futurism developed around 1910 in Russia and soon became one of the most influential movements in Russian art of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Inspired by *lubok* (Russian prints of popular stories with simple pictures) and traditional icons, two of the first Cubo-futurist artists, Larionov and Goncharova, merged elements of Russian folk art and modern French art in their effort to preserve Russian folk art.

**Neo-primitivism:** Founded by Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, Neo-primitivism was a short-lived movement active from 1907 to 1912. While Neo-primitivism took inspiration from a number of diverse sources, such as the *lubok* and peasant crafts, but icon painting served as the main source. Neo-primitive painters such as Tatlin, Kandinsky, Malevich, Goncharova, Chagall and Larionov incorporated a number of typical characteristics of icons – one-dimensionality, bold colors, lack of perspective, etc. – into their own works. Line and color were used to create harmony in compositions whose figures were often rendered in either an almost childish fashion, or distorted like figures in a dream.

**Rayonism (Luchism):** Another short-lived Russian artistic movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was Rayonism which combined Cubism's fragmented forms with Futurism's sense of movement and Orphism's use of color. Created by Mikhail Larionov, Rayonist works were produced primarily by Larionov and his companion Natalia Goncharova, and the movement came to an end when they emigrated from Russia. Paintings in the Rayonist style are characterized by a mass of slanting lines, generally painted in pure blues, reds and yellows, that represent beams of light that transit and converge across the plane of the canvas.

**Suprematism:** In 1915 Kazimir Malevich established the Suprematist movement. Malevich sought a means to express an artist's feelings without being limited to realistically depicting everyday objects' normal appearance. Since both objectivity and the concepts of the conscious mind were considered to be insignificant, Suprematist art utilized basic geometric forms such as rectangles, lines, squares and circles and a limited number of colors.

### Discussion/Questions

- 1-What formal characteristics separate Cubism from Cubo-Futurism?
- 2-Why did the avant-garde condemn modernism, particularly cubism?

### **Reading**

- 1-Leek, Peter, *Russian Painting*, Parkstone Press, 2005, pp. 19-226.
- 2-Bowlit, John, E., "Art", *The Cambridge Companion to Russian Modern Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Ryzhevsky, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 205-235.
- 3-Dyogot, E., "Russian Art in second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century", *Russian Culture*, 2012.  
[http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/russian\\_culture/21](http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/russian_culture/21)

### **Sculpture**

**Cubism:** By fragmenting and flattening perspective, Russian sculptors were able to create entirely new types of works in three dimensions. In his sculptures Alexander Archipenko presented several simultaneous views of a figure, creating negative space that presented novel perspectives on the human figure. Vladimir Baranoff-Rossine was noted for his use of color, applying the chameleon process or camouflage techniques in his works. Jacques Lipchitz was one of the most successful sculptors in embodying the principles of Cubism in his sculptures.

**Constructivism:** Constructivism was the product of the merging of the political fervor of the Russian Revolution with Parisian artistic movements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century both before and after World War I. Constructivist artists created works from industrial materials such as glass, metal and plastic. Using these materials Russian Constructivist sculptors such as Anton Pevsner, Konstantin Medunetsky, Alexander Rodchenko and Naum Gabo, in particular, created works that conveyed a sense of space without mass. Among other notable constructivist artists El Lissitzky was known for his non-objective sculptures, Ossip Nevelson for his interpretations of modern expressionism, and Louise Zadkine for her distinctive assemblage art.

**Kinetic Art:** Referring to art that either need motion to create its effect, or has perceptible motion in it, the Kinetic Art movement developed out of the Russian avant-garde. Naum Gabo's 1920 sculpture "Standing Wave" is considered the first work of the Russian Kinetic Art movement.

**Impressionism:** The first Russian Impressionist woman sculptor to be awarded the Paris Salon prize was Anna Semyonova Golubkina. She was especially known for her numerous sculptural portraits, including ones of Leo Tolstoy, Andrei Bely, Karl Marx and Alexei Remizov.

### **Discussion/Questions**

How do politics affect the existence of statues? Why are statues more often treated as dangerous, political objects unlike the paintings? Why makes statues so politically effective?

### **Reading**

Rice, Tamara Talbot, *A Concise History of Russian Art*, Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967, pp.189-213.

### **Architecture**

**Art Nouveau (Stil Modern):** Exploring the possibilities of metal, glass and new technologies in architecture, Art Nouveau strove to use natural, flowing lines that allowed all elements of the building – balconies, staircases and doors – to be both aesthetic and functional. In the years just prior to the Revolution a number of Art Nouveau buildings were built in St. Petersburg and Moscow, such as the Vitebsk Railway Station and the Hotel Metropol. Now the Maxim Gorky House Museum, the Ryabushinsky House designed by Fedor Shekhtel and the Yaroslavl Railway Station are also prime examples of Art Nouveau architecture.

**Constructivism:** A purely Russian style, Constructivism emerged in Moscow after 1917 as an offshoot of Functionalism. Constructivist architects took their inspiration from futurism, suprematism, and cubism and argued that efficient structures were beautiful structures. The characteristics, capacities and limits of construction materials defined Constructivist architecture, and the Shukov Radio Tower in Moscow designed by Vladimir Shukov is one of the most prominent examples of Constructivist architecture.

**Stalinist Architecture:** Stalinist architecture was heavily influenced by the political conditions of its era. Everything from the design stage, through procurement of building materials, construction and final use of the structure was under tight governmental and bureaucratic scrutiny. Architecture was expected to reflect Soviet political ideology, and the massive, monumental style favored by the Soviet government reflected both the Soviet Union's power the promises of Communism. The most prominent of the buildings from Stalin's era, among them the Moscow State University building, were tall structures built in tiers that became known as the "wedding cake" style.

**Modernism (Functionalism):** Following the First World War a new architectural style emerged that, in contrast with previous architectural styles, advocated simple structures that were unadorned to point of leaving structural elements of the building exposed and undecorated. Critics of Modernist architecture claimed that it lacked imagination and stifled architectural expression. In Russia, the projects for skyscrapers designed by N. Ladovsky and V. Krinsky are examples of this style.

### Discussion/Questions

1-Compare Soviet and Post-Soviet architecture and discuss the effect of this architecture on people. What ideals did these architectural styles attempt to convey?

2- Modern Russian cities have been constructed on the basis of repetition of known patterns and mass production, resulting in relatively small areas with high population density. What messages does modern Russian architecture convey with these standard structures in comparison to earlier periods? Does it have its own esthetic, or is it simply functional? Why have regional styles of architecture disappeared? Why has modern architecture become so uniform all over the world? Why have unique artistic styles been lost?

### Reading

Shvidkovsky, Dmitry, *Russian Architecture and the West*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, pp.357-412.

## **PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Dance**

The period in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century between the last works by Petipa and the ballets of Nijinsky, Gorsky and Fokine were a period stagnation and decline for Russian Ballet.

**Acmeism:** In the 1910s the esthetic elements of Acmeism – clarity of expression and compactness of form – could be seen Russian ballet productions staged in Paris. Mikhail Fokine's *Schéhérazade* and *Polovtsian Dances*, and the works of Vaslav Nijinsky's works all displayed a clarity of forms and a clear emphasis on the tangible world.

**Modernist Period:** The flight of numerous composers, dancers and choreographers from Russia after the revolution combined with lack of foreign artists entering the country left Russian ballet with no option other than develop it own talent. Russian ballet came to be known as Soviet ballet, and was isolated from outside influence. Although the Central Theatre Committee (*Tsentroteatr*) had assumed control over imperial theaters, including the Maryinsky (Kirov) and Bolshoi, in 1919, independent, experimental choreographers and dance troupes flourished in the 1920s. However, these independent groups and artists were all brought under state control in the early 1930s.

## **Neo-classical period:**

**Ballets Russes:** Despite its name, Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (1911-1929), never performed in Russia, instead it used Russian artists to bring its vision of traditional Russian dance merged with new choreography, modern design, contemporary music, and folk art. Two of its dancers, Vaslav Nijinsky and Anna Pavlova, would become household names. Just before the outbreak of World War I, Diaghilev began to collaborate with artists such as Braque, Cocteau, Matisse, Derain, Satie, and Picasso, as well as with Russian modernists such as Goncharova, Naum Gabo, and Larinov to stage avant-garde works.

**Balanchine:** Originally a dancer in the Mariinsky Ballet, George Balanchine defected from the Soviet Union while on tour in Europe in 1925 and joined Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. In 1933 Balanchine emigrated to the US, later becoming a co-founder of the New York City Ballet.

## **Discussion/Questions**

- 1-How were the Russian Avant-Garde and Diaghilev's Ballet Russes linked?
- 2-During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries what genre changes did Russian ballet pass through?

## **Reading**

- 1-Homans, Jennifer, *Apollo's Angels, A History of Ballet*, Ch. 9., Random House, New York, 2010.
- 2-Pritchard, Jane, "From the Russian avant-garde to Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes", *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 2016, Vol.36, No.3, pp. 219-229.
- 3- Sholl, Tim, *From Petipa to Balanchine, Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet*, Routledge, New York, 2005, Ch.1, pp. 1-16.
- 4-- Garafole, Lynn, "Russian Ballet in the Age of Petipa", *Cambridge Companion to Ballet, Edited by Marion Kant*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, Ch. 13, pp. 208-221.

## **Music**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the central themes of composers such as Sergei Vasil'evich Rachmaninov, Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky, Sergei Sergeevich Prokofiev and Dmitry Dmitrievich Shostakovich were liturgical and folkloric. Specifically, Mussorgsky in his historical operas *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*; Rimsky-Korsakov in his *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia*; and Prokofiev in his score to Sergei Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible*, used Russian folkloric and liturgical music combining the techniques of Western music and the Russian classical music tradition.

After 1917 musicians were subject to extreme pressure from the state to follow aesthetic standards determined by the government. State control over musicians was extended by Stalin in 1932 with the formation of the Union of Soviet Composers. This was a regulatory body whose mandate was to direct all musical activity for the government's own political purposes. One result was that all Soviet composers were compelled to follow very specific regulations concerning the types of music they produced and this also led to the permanent emigration of numerous music composers and musicians, such as Stravinsky, Rachmaninov, and the pianist-composer Nikolai Karlovich Medtner, to Europe and the United States.

## **Discussion/Questions**

Why did the Soviets introduce strict control over musicians during Stalin with the formation of the Union of Soviet Composers?

## **Reading**

Robinson, H., "Music", in the *Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, 1998, Ch.10, pp. 236-263.

## Theatre

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were only six Imperial theaters in Russia administered by the Directorate of Imperial Theaters, and all explicitly served Tsarist propaganda purposes. However, after the first revolution of 1905, the government was gradually easing restrictions on theaters. Theaters were not only sponsored by the Imperial government, there were also intellectuals who organized theaters for peasants and workers throughout the country, and a few touring troupes and eventually-amateur theaters organized performances for peasants and workers. In addition to the Tsarist government, in many provinces local *zemstva* (local administration) and factory-owners sponsored popular theaters. Theaters began to stage controversial and almost overtly political plays.

In 1909 a commission on village theater was set up under the protection of the Moscow Society of People's Universities as *The Section to Aid in the Establishment of Rural, Factory, and School Theaters*, and in 1915 the Section was joined by the *Russian Theater Society* (RTO). There was a blossoming of theatrical performances as official control of the arts relaxed. A number of private theaters appeared. One of them was Alexander Tairov's Chamber (Kamerny) Theater that opened their doors in 1914 after the end of the government's theater monopoly in 1882.

Shortly after the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917 they issued a decree of the Soviet of People's Commissars on 9 November 1917 that placed all the theaters under the authority of the arts section of the State Commission for Education, and all served as *agitprop* (agitation and propaganda) theater. The Soviets also opened a theater section (TEO) to monitor the theaters, and appointed Meyerhold as director in 1920, its repertoire was selected by the poet Alexander Blok, and the directing section was run by Evgeny Vakhtangov and Stanislavsky's friends.

Lenin, on 26 August 1919, signed a decree centralizing all the finances and nationalizing all theatrical property. They regularly distributed free tickets to the ordinary people to promote popular education, changing the predominantly urban character of earlier theater.

An experimental artistic institution, the Proletkult was founded in September 1917 by Alexander Bogdanov during the course of the war. Its stated goals were a total break with the bourgeois past, radically modifying existing artistic forms, rejecting all existing professional theater and promoting a new, so-called proletarian culture. However, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party approved a decree on 1 December 1920 which condemned both the institution as a duplication of services that competed with existing bureaucratic systems, like Narkompros, and its hostile idealist philosophy. As a result, Proletkult was integrated into Narkompros.

The full-scale Bolshevik offensive against the theater began during Stalin when all theaters were accused of having purely bourgeois, alien and hostile ideology. For the Soviets the theater should serve as a propaganda tool of Party's orthodox catch-phrases. The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party passed a resolution on April 23, 1932, the so-called *On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations*. There was a terror of persecution and intimidation of art experts and players, many of whom lost their positions, and theaters were closed.

When the Soviets began preparing for WWII, the state turned its attention to the previously condemned Russian past, and to increase patriotism, they used the Russian tsars, princes, military leaders and religion.

After the death of Stalin, the attitude towards theaters was suddenly changed with Khrushchev's Thaw period (1956-1964). Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party congress in 1956 introduced more freedom and humanism in the theater. During Khrushchev's period, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Days of the Turbins*, and *Flight*, the dramatization of his novel *The Master and Margarita* were staged; and three directors, Georgii Tovstonogov at the Gorky Theater in Leningrad; Anatolii Efros and Iurii Liubimov at the Malaia Bronnaia and Taganka theaters in Moscow directed outstanding plays.

Under Brezhnev, on the other hand, the majority of theaters favored safe plays, and, as a result, theaters played to half-empty houses, continuing to survive due to financial support from the Ministry of Culture.

Gorbachev's new and more liberal approach to the arts showed its effects, and there was a 50% increase in the number of theaters in Moscow in only two years (1986-1988). There were also a number of *Palaces of Culture* (club-houses attached to the factories), which provided auditoria for amateur and semi-professional groups to perform. The control of theaters was removed from the Ministry of Culture and handed over to the independent *Union of Theater Workers* established in 1986 which aimed at freeing all theaters from the Ministry's strict control, allowing theater companies to handle their own affairs, effectively abolishing censorship.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1- Why was theater was used as a weapon during Stalin's time?
- 2- Why did the theaters served as *agitprop* theater during the Soviet Union? Why did the artists' political inclinations compel them to subordinate art to ideology?
- 3- What were the motives behind the hostility of the Soviet government toward the creative theaters? What distinguishes the Soviet attitude from the Tsarist attitude against theater?

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### **Cinema**

Film was introduced into Russia via Europe. During the Imperial period in addition to foreign films, they began to produce Russian films began to be produced. Film became the most popular form of mass entertainment and was inexpensive and easy to produce for urban cultural life. Cinema came to be used as a very effective propaganda tool by the Bolsheviks and later became an important industry influencing the social and political history of Russia.

#### 1. PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

**Foreign films:** Russian filmmaking emerged as an offshoot of European films, introduced by Russian film enterprises that had connections with European film companies. The Lumière brothers introduced the first films in Russia in 1896 and their cameraman Camille Cerf produced his first short film in Russia. It was a recording of the coronation of Nicholas II at the Kremlin. Initially, foreign films predominated until the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several foreign companies, led by Pathe and Gaumont, shot short documentaries and also helped to create a film market in Russia. 90% of the films shown before World War I were foreign made and most of the production companies in Russia were foreign. The first Russian production company was not established until 1907. During World War I, the number of foreign films was reduced as a result of anti-German campaigns and Russian filmmakers began to produce more nationalistic films.

**Silent film:** Evgeny Bauer was one of the first film producers of silent films. He worked in the genres of social and psychological drama, and directed *Tears, After Death* in 1915 and *A Life for a Life* in 1916. Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold created his silent film *The Picture of Dorian Grey* in 1915, using his *biomechanical principles* of acting. There were other popular silent films based on folk tales. Film director Alexander Drankov began his career in Russia while he was working as a photographer for the *The Times* in London, and received most of his financial support and equipment from England in 1907. He produced his seven-and-a-half-minute, first Russian silent narrative film *Stenka Razin*, a tale of a Cossack hero in 1908. In 1913 new movie theaters were opened in the Russian Empire, 134 in St. Petersburg and 107 in Moscow. Film directors and screenwriters such as Aleksandr Khanzhonkov (who also created stop motion

animation) and Vasily Goncharov produced historical war films like *Defence of Sevastopol* in 1912. The main theme of these films was the struggle against foreign imperialistic powers and the strengthening of autocratic power for the Soviet Union's unity.

Literary classics also became the themes of silent films. Film director and screenwriter Yakov Protazanov produced a biographical film about Lev Tolstoy called *Departure of a Grand Old Man* in 1912, *Nikolai Stavrogin* after Dostoevsky's *The Devil* in 1915, *Queen of Spades* after Pushkin's tale in 1916, and *Father Sergius* after Tolstoy's tale in 1918.

Film director Vladimir Gardin named his film *Home of the Gentry* after Turgenev's novel. He co-directed with Yakov Protazanov a film *Natasha Rostova* in 1915 after Tolstoy's *War and Peace* character Natasha Rostova.

**Animation:** The first Russian animator, dancer and choreographer, Alexander Shiryayev, using a 17.5 mm Biokam camera, and his hand-made puppets in a toy theatre, recorded the dancers' movements creating first *stop-frame* animation in Russia. Polish-Russian director, Ladislav Starevich directed his animated silent film *Lucanus Cervus* in 1910.

## 2. REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

The Revolution in 1917 made significant changes in the film sector. At the beginning, films, having been considered an educational activity, were placed under the supervision of the People's Commissariat of Education headed by Anatoly Lunacharsky.

Films had to be created and transported to the masses. *Agitka* films which are characterized by their openly didactic content and direct verbal appeals to the audience, such as *Red Army Soldier, Who Is Your Enemy?*, *For the Red Banner* and *Toward the Bright Kingdom of the Third International* appeared to serve that purpose. They were agitational short films used to train illiterate masses and raise the morale of the Red Army during the Civil war.

Films produced during this era also contained anti-Tsarist themes. The first film produced was a religious film *Father Sergius*, which was based on Tolstoy's novel and was directed by Yakov Protazanov in 1918. In 1919, the film industry was nationalized and the world's first film school *Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography* (the VGIK) was opened in Moscow. On 27 August 1919, Lenin, by signing a relative decree, showed how important the art of cinema was for the newly formed Soviet state. It was in 1922 that state control over cinema production was imposed with the establishment of the official cinema controlling apparatus, the *USSR State Committee for Cinematography* (*Goskino*). From this time until the late 1980s film-makers in the Soviet era were bound to the state and cinema production was planned, financed, censored, and subject to censorship and bureaucratic state control. Cinema was proclaimed a means of propaganda, upbringing and education, with the result that all films become some manifestation of communist ideology.

The first documentaries were shot by two important Soviet directors and theorists, Lev Kuleshov and Dziga Vertov, who developed the "camera-eye" (*kino-glaz*) concept which records what is occurring live. Lev Kuleshov also was one of the founders of the world's first film schools, the Moscow Film School, and created a montage effect called the *Kuleshov Effect*. Dziga Vertov produced avant-garde films and documentaries, such as *Man with a Movie Camera* in 1929.

Trained as an architect, Sergey M. Eisenstein moved to cinema in 1924 and his *Strike*, which began as a documentary and presented a portrait of the inequalities of capitalist Russia, was shown in theatres in 1924. Eisenstein's silent film *The Battleship Potemkin*, released in 1925, depicted the mutiny of Russian sailors on the Potemkin during the first Revolution of 1905. Film director Vsevolod Pudovkin was another film director who produced a number of feature films depicting inner conflicts and the psychology of people who fought against Tsarist rule during the Revolution of 1905 as in the film *Mother* which was based on Mikhail Gorky's novel of the same name.

**Socialist Realism:** In 1934 Russia went through a cultural revolution when socialist realism was officially declared the only acceptable form of artistic expression. For Stalin, art had to reflect only the reality that had accepted by the Party, and the “heroic struggle of the world proletariat ... the grandeur of the victory of Socialism, and the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist Party”. With the consolidation of Stalinist power Soviet film came under almost total state control. For Stalin cinema provided him a window on cultural life and allowed him to control it. Just before World War II, in 1938 Sergey Eisenstein directed a historical drama film *Aleksandr Nevsky*, deliberately using this heroic historical event to associate it with the current political situation, creating Marxist heroes liberating the proletariat from fascist Nazis. His movie was supervised by Party officials, and it received the Stalin Prize. One year after World War II, another film, the first Soviet fantasy and color movie, *The Stone Flower* which depicted the creativity of the Ural miners against cruel landlords and social oppression and directed by Aleksandr Ptushko in 1946 won the Stalin prize.

**The Thaw:** The Soviet film industry received new impetus immediately following Stalin’s death during Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization period called “The Thaw”. The cinematographer Mikhail Kalatozov’s film *The Cranes Are Flying* marked a new beginning for Soviet cinema focusing on personal portraits of ordinary people who suffered from the stresses and cruelty of World War II, winning the Cannes Film Festival’s prestigious Grand Prix in 1958.

**The Stagnation:** After the brief period of “The Thaw” censorship was reintroduced “The Stagnation” occurred under Brezhnev with the film industry becoming more heavily bureaucratized. The Goskino began to hire veteran Communist Party officials who did not have any experience in film. Sergey Paradzhanov had several projects blocked and spent several years in prison on a charge of homosexuality. Aleksandr Askoldov’s *Commissar*, released in 1967, because it included strong themes of feminism and motherhood during the Civil War, was not released until 1987 and he was barred from the studios.

The most successful film maker in overcoming barriers and in challenging the socialist realist aesthetic was Andrey Tarkovsky, who directed the films *Ivan’s Childhood*, *Andrey Rublev*, *Solaris*, *Mirror* and *Stalker*. Tarkovsky gained a reputation at home and abroad after *Ivan’s Childhood*, which conveyed the human cost of war and did not glorify the war experience, and the film *Andrey Rublev*, which was based on the themes of artistic freedom, religion, political ambiguity, and the making of art under a repressive regime, received Prize in Venice 1962 and won at Cannes in 1969. Although Soviet officials attempted to place obstacles in the way of the film festival judges, they were able to obtain the film and it was shown in Russia only after major cuts.

There were World War II dramas internationally recognized released in the 1970s and the 1980s which depicted the cruelty of war such as *They Fought for Their Country* directed by Dergey Bondarchuk in 1975, and *At Dawn It’s Quiet Here* directed by Stanislav Rostotsky. Andrey Konchalovsky was the first film director to release World War II films in Hollywood such as *Maria’s Lovers* in 1984, *Runaway Train* in 1985 and *Tango & Cash* in 1989.

**Glasnost and democracy:** The Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers Union in 1986, leaving behind the heritage of socialist realism, introduced less strict policies into the film industry during the period of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika*. The Congress established a Conflict Commission to release previously banned films, and the members of the union established a film museum for the previously suppressed heritage; complete control over the production of films was lifted, and censorship was lessened. The central themes of Soviet films began to cover the problems of ordinary life for the Russian people, and two such films released in 1988. *Little Vera* depicted sexuality and alienation in Soviet society, and the thriller *The Needle* covered the struggle with mafia and drug addiction. Several Soviet films have received Oscars such as *War and Peace*, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* and *Dersu Uzala*.

### Discussion/Questions

1. How was the Russian film industry affected by the Revolution?
2. Under what conditions were films first made in Russia?
3. During the period of “The Thaw”, how much freedom did Soviet film makers have?

4. In what ways did Soviet films from the 1980s depict citizens' ambiguous feelings about the Soviet state?

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## **WORLDVIEW**

### **Religion**

The Bolsheviks, to clear the way for a new socialist society, changed the structure of the traditional patriarchal family, army and church associated with the tsarist regime. A major campaign against the Orthodox church began when the Orthodox church supported the Whites during the Civil War. Soviet law gave the State the legal right to supervise all religious activities.

From the Bolsheviks' perspective tsarist oppression and the Orthodox Church's conservatism together had combined to produce an utterly backward society that was intensely religious, agrarian, superstitious, peasant and illiterate. According to Lenin, religion served as opium for the Russian people, and was an obstacle to building socialism. A decree of February 1918 separated church and state, deprived churches of property and rights of ownership, and nationalized them. Intensive Soviet persecution of religious leaders and believers of all religious groups began.

**Militant Godless League:** The Militant Godless League was formed to conduct propaganda campaigns. The Godless League, formed in 1925 by Stalin, periodically ridiculed and humiliated religion and promoted atheism; and attempted to turn superstitious citizens into atheists.

**Living Church:** To further weaken the Orthodox church the Soviets supported the Living Church which was a reformist movement among the Russian clergy (Renovationist) to split the clergy and the Russian Orthodox Church (1922–1946).

There was an important change in the state's perception of religion under Stalin. During the Second World War, Orthodox identity and the church were used in official propaganda for the purposes of mobilization, and the state also restored the Patriarchate in 1943 as a propaganda agent.

Traditional socialist ideology was re-emphasized when Khrushchev came to power, leading to a new round of religious persecution. Numerous religious institutions and churches that had been reopened under Stalin during the Second World War were closed again.

Nevertheless, religious life continued to exist despite official restrictions, and when Gorbachev came to power approximately forty-five million people belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church. For Gorbachev and his government religious groups with their numerous followers represented potential allies in helping to carry out the extensive political, economic and social reforms that they envisioned

### **Discussion/Questions**

Why did religious tolerance end during the Soviet Union? How can we explain the shift that took place during WWII? Why did Stalin use the idea of Orthodox identity as official propaganda for purposes of mobilization?

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The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Ch.3: Religion: Russian Orthodoxy.

## Philosophy

**Bakhtin Circle:** As the Russian Revolution was being transformed into Stalin's dictatorship, the Bakhtin Circle examined the cultural and social issues that this process raised. While examining general social issues, they focused primarily on artistic creation the role of language in social conflict.

**Mikhail Bakhtin:** Philosopher and theoretician, Bakhtin was a literary critic and specialized in the philosophy of language. Regarding language, Bakhtin proposed that the development of language is dynamic, and both affects and is affected by the culture it is a part of.

**Dialectical Materialism:** Coined by the Russian Marxist Georgy Plekhanov in 1891, dialectical materialism became the official designation of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Dialectical materialism both rejects all forms of religious or supernatural belief, and asserts that empirical science alone is sufficient for understanding the nature of reality.

**Georgy Plekhanov:** Plekhanov, considered the father of Russian Marxism, began his activism with the Populists as one of the organizers of the Land and Freedom movement. However, his study of Marx and Engels' ideas while in Geneva convinced him that Marxism rather than Populism would shape Russia's future, since Populism called for an end to Westernization and an independent course of development for Russia.

**Vladimir Lenin:** By taking dialectical materialism and adapting its tenets to the realities of Russia in his time as well as the revolutionary activity of the Bolsheviks, Lenin came to be regarded as the father of Soviet dialectical materialism. For Lenin dialectical materialism was the most essential concept in "the philosophy of Marxism", the sum total of all ideas found in Marx and Engels' writings.

**Alexander Bogdanov:** An original thinker who wrote on the role of culture in creating a communist society, Bogdanov also sought to link all the sciences – physical, social and biological – by identifying the organizational principles of these sciences which he regarded as systems of relationships. Bogdanov set down his philosophical and economic ideas in a three-volume work titled *Empiriomonism*. However, Lenin viewed Bogdanov's ideas as a danger to dialectical materialism.

## Discussion/Questions

1. Why did Lenin not strictly follow Marxist principles? How did he interpret Marx? How did he combine Russian Narodism (Populism) with Marxism? Can we say that this departure from Marxist principles brought the end of the socialist regime in Russia?
2. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian thought was the first to embrace existentialism as a coherent set of new philosophical ideas. What is existentialism and why do you think that Dostoyevsky's novel *Notes from the Underground* would be regarded as an example of an existential novel?

## Reading

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## Science

Although Russian science before 1917 was still not at the level of science in the major Western countries, its development had been impressive, and at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian scientists in a number of

fields – physiology, mathematics, astronomy, soil science, and some branches of biology, physics and chemistry – had gained international prominence.

Nonetheless, a number of factors hampered the development of Russian technology and science in the era before the Russian Revolution. For example, industrial research remained extremely weak since both the techniques and the capital for Russian industry generally came from outside of Russia. Even strong domestic industries such as the machine and chemical industries frequently utilized foreign sources to conduct their research and development. Compared to industrial research, research conducted at Russian universities was more developed, but still relatively new.

To receive the best scientific education possible, graduate students from Russia had no choice but to study abroad, frequently in Germany. However, because many of the most talented students became involved in political activities during their studies and became part of the political opposition in the turbulent last years of the Russian Empire, scientific professionalism was weakened as was official support for science. Lengthy strikes and demonstrations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century effectively shut down Russian universities, and more than a hundred of Russia's most talented professors were removed from their positions by the minister of education in 1911. By this time the circumstances that the tsarist government found itself in made it unable to match the support other states were providing for advanced scientific education and research.

A number of educational reforms that would impact the future development of Soviet science were implemented during the brief period when democratic socialists and liberals held the reigns of power in 1917. Among these were professional societies free of state control, new forms of administering university faculties, the election by its members of the president of the Academy of Sciences, A. P. Karpinskii, a geologist.

After the Revolution, despite calls from the proletarian culture movement for the replacement of traditional science with a radically different form of science, Lenin remained skeptical, and, instead, believed that existing institutions of scientific and technical expertise should be maintained. During the years of the Cultural Revolution, 1928-1931, the Soviet scientific establishment underwent a period of extreme change, and many scientists involved in basic research feared that insistence on social relevance and strict ideology would have a negative impact on the field of theoretical science.

The Academy of Sciences survived the Cultural Revolution, but it had undergone a series of profound transformations. While most work in the natural sciences continued much as it had before, and some researchers were able to continue their work with little serious change, other scientists were less fortunate. Hundreds lost their jobs, and of these many were sent to prison. A system of censorship controls was imposed on Academy publications, and the Academy itself was no longer a politically neutral institution. The Academy of Sciences of the USSR that was formed in this way was the flagship of Soviet science.

### **Dialectical Materialist Scientists:**

A strong evolutionary viewpoint is a distinguishing characteristic of dialectical materialist scientists. However, for these scientists, evolution was not limited to Darwinian biological evolution, but extended to nonliving matter both prior to and after the emergence of life.

### **Lev Semenovich Vygotsky:**

Vygotsky, a famous Soviet psychologist, argued that both Marxist theories and societal influences were major factors in his theory of psychology. He established cultural-historical psychology, a theory of bio-social and human cultural development that remained unfinished at the time of his death, and was a well-known supporter of the "psychology of the superman, a novel theory of consciousness. In addition, he was the head of an intellectual group known as the Vygotsky Circle.

Other important scientists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who helped to revive interest in the question of life's origins were the biochemist Aleksandr Ivanovich Oparin, and the physicist V. A. Fock. Before this, Oparin and Vygotsky had both shared an interest in the relationship between science and Marxism.

Fock, on the other hand, made advances in the fields of quantum mechanics and relativity physics, unusual at a time the majority of Marxist thinkers had reservations about the theory of relativity. However, Fock's materialistic understanding of relativity was philosophically compatible with Marxist theory.

### **Stalin Period:**

During Stalin's rule dialectical materialism became a byword for the terrorizing of Soviet scientists. Defense of a scientific theory that had been labelled "bourgeois" or "idealistic" by one of Stalin's lackeys could lead to charges of political disloyalty against the scientist involved. The consequences of suspected political loyalty ranged from dismissal to prison sentences, or even execution in some cases. In this form, dialectical materialism not only crushed the creative elements in Soviet Marxism, it also became a tool for some Marxist scientists and philosophers to advance their own careers by denouncing their colleagues to the authorities for expressing "anti-Marxist" opinions. Stalin's purges had effectively broken most citizens' will to resist, with the result that by the late 1930s-early 1940s Soviet intellectual life was almost completely dominated by Stalin's system of controls.

### **Lysenkoism:**

Lysenkoism was perhaps the quintessential example of ideological dogmatism and political oppression during the Stalinist era. Named after its main advocate, Trofim Lysenko, Lysenkoism rejected both Darwinian evolutionary theory and Mendelian genetics. Supporting the theory of acquired characteristics advocated by Lamarckism, Lysenko's theory rejected natural selection, as argued by Darwin. In addition, Lysenkoism also advocated a technique called "vernalization" that was supposed to increase the chances of peasant farmers harvesting their traditional crops before the first frost. Although "vernalization" was a method that had been known to cultivators around the world for centuries, Lysenko's frequent claims that he was working to transform socialist agriculture for the benefit of the Soviet state earned him Stalin's support.

### **Natural Scientists:**

In the years following Stalin's death, scientists became the advocates of important social issues. They were able to take on this role due to their obvious importance to the Soviet government. In particular, nuclear physicists had earned great prestige by providing the Soviet government with nuclear weapons, and space scientists would be viewed in the same light when the Soviet Union became the first country to put an artificial satellite into orbit in 1957, and the first man in space in 1961.

International conferences became the venue for meetings between Western and Soviet scientists, where issues related to international peace and security could be discussed. At home, Soviet scientists carried out reforms of the Academy of Sciences, stressing greater emphasis on basic research; they established new research centers, among them the *Akademgorodok* in Novosibirsk; and sought ways to provide new opportunities for talented students of science to more rapidly expand their knowledge.

However, Soviet officials clamped down on intellectuals and their contacts with Western scientists after Khrushchev's fall in 1964, and even more so following the 1968 incursion by Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia to suppress the "Prague Spring". These changes can be illustrated by the career of Andrei Sakharov, who was highly regarded in the early Khrushchev years, and then came under increasing suspicion during the Brezhnev period. Sakharov was eventually denounced and exiled by the late seventies, but when Gorbachev came to power he was again in favor and even held an elected position.

**Andrei Sakharov:** A nuclear physicist who worked on the development of the Soviet hydrogen bomb while working at the Lebedev Institute, Sakharov eventually became an opponent of the Soviet regime. His calls

for civil reforms and civil liberties resulted in both official persecution and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1- Discuss the Soviet scientists, their effectiveness, research performance and social relations during Stalin's period. Why was the creative spirit of scientists destroyed by Stalin? Why were scientists who engaged in research labeled "idealistic" or "bourgeois" and their research ideologically suspect?
- 2- If substantial numbers of Soviet scientists had been permitted to participate in international scientific networks on a regular basis after Stalin's death, what potential difficulties could the Communist Party have faced as a result of this regular interaction with international scientists?
- 3- Why did Lysenkoism fail? How did the Soviet Union and its allies suffer under Lysenkoism?

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