**RUSS 3350**

**American and Russian Mass Cultures**

*Course description:*  
The course compares similarities and differences in contemporary American and Russian mass cultures. The concept of mass culture will be examined from a theoretical perspective with a special emphasis on the development of the contemporary democratic system. The course will analyze developments of different genres such as science fiction, fantasy, horror genre, dystopia and the youth subcultures as manifestations of differences in political and historical contexts in Russia and the U.S. The course will consider mass culture as an important source for understanding cultural differences in attitudes towards human life and individuality as reflected in these genres and movements in the American and Russian cultures. Students will demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the commonalities and differences between contemporary Russian and American cultures as two examples of contemporary global developments in mass culture.

The course will consider fiction, movies, the Internet and social media as its privileged sources.

**All reading, discussion and assignments in English.**

*Course objectives:*

Upon taking this course, students will be able to:

- Understand basic terms and problematics of cultural studies, literary criticism, and sociology

- Understand general trends in Russian and American mass culture

- Understand changes in attitudes to human life imbedded in these mass culture movements and genres

- Evaluate specificities of US and Russian mass cultures

Class attendance and participation is required.

*Required texts*

There is no textbook for the class; therefore a course reader will be available.

*Course requirements amd weighting in grade:*

Attendance and active, prepared participation in class discussion 30%

Compositions/essays (one/topic, approx. 1/week) 20%

Oral presentation 20%

Final 10-page essay (due during exam week) 30%

**Course Schedule: Readings and Assignments**

**Wk1:**

Concept of mass culture: pros and cons. “High culture”, “low culture”, “primitive culture”, “popular culture”, “youth subculture”, “youth movement”, “counter culture” and related concepts in the social science and humanities.

**Wk2:**

Mass culture as the XXth century phenomenon: Hanna Arendt, *"Mass Culture and Mass Media"*

**Wk 3:**

Who is the New Mass Man? José Ortega y Gasset,  *The Revolt of the Masses*

**Wk 4:**

Mass Culture or Cultural Industry? Teodor Adorno. *Culture Industry Reconsidered*

**Wk 5:**

Popular genres and mass culture: American fantasy and science fiction (*Games of Thrones*, fantasy drama television series, Tony Abbott, *The Secrets of Droon*, Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan,*The Strain*)

**Wk 6:**

American dystopia (William Gibson,*Neuromancer,* *Planet of the Apes,* (2011, film), Avatar (2009,film).

**Wk 7:**

Popular genres and mass culture: Russian fantasy and science fiction (Victor Pelevin, *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf, A Novel)*

**Wk 8:**

Russian dystopia (Vladimir Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*, Dmitry Bykov *Z/D* [excerpts])

**Wk 9:**

Problem of genre boundaries in contemporary fiction and film. (Thomas Pavel, “Literary Genres as Norms and Good Habits,” *New Literary History* 34, no. 2 Spring 2003)

**Wk 10:**

General discussion of popular genres’ differences in Russian and American fiction and movies of the last three decades. (Student presentations)

**Wk 11:**

Cultural specificity in the attitudes to human life and individuality as expressed in Russian and American popular genres (Student presentations)

**Wk 12:**

Youth movements/subcultures in American culture: Goths, Punk, Rock, Tolkien role playing games. Steele, Valerie; Park, Jennifer. *Gothic: Dark Glamour* (2008, New Haven: Yale University Press and the Fashion Institute of Technology New York). Katherine Ramsland, *Piercing the Darkness: Undercover with Vampires in America Today* (New York: HarperTorch, 1999).

**Wk 13:**

Youth Movements/Subcultures in Russian culture: Goths, Punk, Rock, Tolkien role playing games. Review of the recent debates in the Russian media related to Goths and Punk movements. Reflections of these debates in English-speaking media.

**Wk 14:**

Comparison of the major differences and similarities in attitudes to human lifeand individuality in American and Russian mass culture.

**Wk 15:**

Applicability of Hanna Arendt**,** José Ortega y Gasset**,** Teodor Adorno’s analysis for contemporary culture conditions

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| **ML PERFORMANCE GOAL #1: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION** | |
| **ML Learning Outcome 1 : Demonstrate oral and aural proficiency in the target language** |  |
| **ML Learning Outcome 2:** Demonstrate effective presentation skills in the target language |  |
| **ML Learning Outcome 3: Demonstrate writing proficiency in the target language** |  |
| **ML Learning Outcome 4:**  Demonstrate proficiency in comprehension of authentic written texts in the target Language |  |
| **ML PERFORMANCE GOAL #2: INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE** | |
| **ML Learning Outcome 5: Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of aspecific target-language country or region** | Students will engage, in discussion and writing, a broad range of authentic target-culture texts in various media, including fiction, film, historiography, video materials, and Internet sources. Students will cultivate in-depth knowledge of selected issues and terminology related mass culture in Russia and the U.S. |
| **ML Learning Outcome 6:**  Demonstrate the ability to analyze an issue from target-culture perspective(s) | Students will critically reflect on the role within mass culture played by various genres such as fantasy, sci fi, horror genre, and dystopia within Russian and American societies |
| **ML Learning Outcome 7:**  Demonstrate critical reflection on cultural complexity and context | Students will develop the ability to make sophisticated comparisons of Russian and American mass cultures and systems of values which underlie them. Students will develop cultural understanding by comparing attitudes to humanity in Russian and American cultural contexts. |