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## **Feature**

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### **The Second World War in Russia Today**

By Professor Richard Overy

For years after 1945 the Soviet victory in the Second World War was used as a central element of Soviet identity. The triumph over Fascism confirmed the strength of the revolutionary state, while anti-Fascism showed that the Soviet Union had been right in the 1930s to alert the world to the threat posed by the Fascist states. The annual celebration of Victory Day became as important, if not more important, than the annual celebration of the November revolution. The post-war generation could remember the struggle against Hitler, but there were far fewer who could still recall the events of 1917.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 placed the memory of the war in an

awkward position. To celebrate it still meant endorsing a Stalinist past that the new Russia was trying to forget; to play it down was to set aside an important source of national and community identity. In both Russia and in the West, the fall of the old order also alerted historians to the possibility of investigating how it really was in the Soviet Union during the war. This meant raising difficult questions that fifty years of Soviet history had set to one side.



Part of the Mamayev Kurgan memorial complex,  
Volgograd (SCRSS Photo Library)

The 1990s saw a growing openness towards the construction of a more historically authentic version of the Soviet past. This meant tackling the thorny question of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, the Soviet invasion of Finland, the Katyn massacre, Stalin's failure to prepare fully for the German attack and

the Soviet treatment of its own people during the struggle to mobilise everything for the war effort. It also meant examining the dimensions of the Great Terror of 1937–8 and the motives that drove it. Western scholars, now allowed (limited) access to Soviet archives, pioneered much of the research and writing on the most difficult questions, and this material was in turn fed back to Russian historians and journalists interested in what the West had to say.

Over the past ten years or so that openness has started to fade once more. The sense that the Soviet past is still important in the construction of a public history has produced a more polemical approach to issues that are regarded as clear cut outside Russia. There are interesting examples. In the West there has been a failure for a long time to acknowledge fully enough the role of the Soviet Union in defeating Hitler. Though many books in the past fifteen years have corrected that imbalance, Russian historians can still be sensitive to the failure to acknowledge fully the sacrifice made by the Soviet people. At a conference in Budapest in November last year, organised by the European Network on Remembrance and Solidarity, the Russians present argued for the highest figures of Soviet casualties (Boris Sokolov suggested well over forty million dead) and ignored any suggestion that some of those losses, perhaps quite a large number, were self-inflicted by the Stalinist system.

On the issue of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet war on Finland there continues today a refusal to discuss either fully. At another conference in Moscow in 2010 on the Nuremberg Trials, one speaker talked about Finnish aggression as justification for the invasion; the German–Soviet Pact continues to be viewed, as it was at the time, as a product of British and French pusillanimity in the face of Fascism and an opportunity to liberate the population of eastern Poland from reactionary rule. This is not altogether wrong. Britain and France *did* fail to search for a serious agreement with the Soviet Union and left Stalin very narrow options. The hostility evident in the Cold War era pre-dated 1939 and coloured

much of the West's attitude to their Soviet ally even during the war.

It is not difficult to understand why Russia feels sensitive about the many issues now raised by historians. At the conference in Budapest one Russian delegate asked why people were always trying to find negative things to say about the Soviet Union and to forget the positive. On the question of the Gulag there is not much to be argued about and excellent work has been done on understanding the growth and function of the camp system by Russian scholars as well. But in public memory the camps play a much smaller part than they do in the West. Attempts to analyse Soviet and German camps together as case studies of strategies of exclusion have been rejected; the law in Russia now regards such a comparison as historical defamation.

It is important to see that the Soviet Union was not the same as Hitler's Germany, but for the young generation in Russia, coming to terms with a post-1990 identity, the extreme public sensitivity to criticism of the Soviet war effort and of Soviet policy may contribute to a more thorough rehabilitation of Stalin and the Stalinist legacy. At the Lenin Museum outside Moscow, which I visited last summer, the booth that sells guides and souvenirs has small metal figures of Stalin and Zhukov, but none of Lenin.

Does this matter? There are many Britons and Americans who are not very honest about their past and fiercely defensive about the surviving myths from the war. No country enjoys having its dirty washing hung out in public. In the Russian case, the Stalin years and the war effort were not one long dark saga; the achievements were remarkable and the post-war Soviet commitment to economic growth, education for all and comprehensive welfare must look very attractive to many ordinary Russians today (though Russian memory culture focuses much less on this). The exceptional sacrifices of the Soviet community legitimised the place that the war has played in Soviet and Russian public history, and the

memory of those who died merits continued acknowledgement.

There are also young Russian scholars willing to engage critically with their past. The memory of the war years in modern Russia is not monolithic and engagement with that past will continue to promote debate and argument. The West needs to be more tolerant of Russian sensibilities. In the end, German armies invaded the Soviet Union, not Britain or the United States. Defeat of Hitlerism remains a central Soviet achievement, warts and all.

*Richard Overy is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He is the author of more than twenty-five books on the Second World War and the European dictatorships. His most recent book is 'The Third Reich: A Chronicle'. His book 'Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia' won the Wolfson History Prize in 2004. His keynote address at the conference 'Loneliness of Victims' is available through the European Network for Remembrance and Solidarity – please email office@enrs.eu.*

designs, book and record covers, book illustrations and children's books from the SCRSS's unique archive. The exhibits show the continual artistic influence of the Russian and Soviet modernists throughout the Soviet period. The exhibition is open daily except Sunday 26 February. Admission is free. *Note: On Friday 2 March the exhibition will also be open from 6pm for visitors attending Ralph Gibson's lecture. Normal admission fees apply for the lecture.*



Plate by Boris Grigor'yev (1886-1939) in *Zhar-Ptitsa* magazine, published Berlin 1923 (SCRSS Library)

## SCRSS News

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### Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the SCRSS AGM will take place at 10.30am on Saturday 19 May at the Society's premises. The meeting is open to SCRSS members only. The deadline for motions and nominations of members for election to the next Council is Friday 27 April. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member. Agenda available from early May.

### Next Events

**Friday 24 February – Friday 2 March 11–3pm**  
**Exhibition: The Arts of Russian and Soviet Modernists from the SCRSS Archives**

An outstanding collection of posters, photographs, theatre and architectural

**Friday 2 March 7pm**

**Lecture: Ralph Gibson on *The Russian Presidential Election 2012***

Following Russian parliamentary elections in December 2011, the political focus now shifts to the presidential election on 4 March 2012. Two days ahead of this important election, for which Vladimir Putin remains the leading candidate representing United Russia, Ralph Gibson of RIA Novosti, Russian News & Information Agency, considers the context, the candidates and the key issues. *Note: See also Ralph Gibson's article 'New Era in Russian Politics' on page 7 of this issue.*

**Saturday 19 May 10.30am**

**Event: SCRSS AGM**

Open to SCRSS members only. Refreshments will be served and the meeting is followed by a lecture (see below).

**Saturday 19 May 2pm**

**Lecture: John Riley on the *Film Society***

Film historian John Riley repeats his fascinating illustrated talk on the UK's first film society (1925–39). Established by a group of left-wing intellectuals, it aimed to show films of 'high quality' with little chance of commercial distribution in the UK, including Soviet titles refused certification by the BBFC. *Note: Admission is free to SCRSS members who have attended the AGM. For all other members and non-members normal admission fees apply.*

**Saturday 16 June**

**Event: Russian and Soviet History Seminar**

The SCRSS is planning a special one-day seminar aimed at teachers of A-level Russian history and undergraduate students. Four lectures by leading academics will cover aspects of the Russian Revolution, the Second World War, Soviet art and culture. Further details will be confirmed later in the spring on the SCRSS website and via our email circulation list.

*Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees for films and lectures: £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members). For all other events, see details above.*

## **Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News**

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### **Remembrance Sunday 2011**

Last November over 150 people gathered in the autumn sunshine to mark Remembrance Sunday at the Soviet War Memorial. The Mayor of Southwark, the Russian Ambassador and local MP Simon Hughes addressed the participants. HE Alexander Yakovenko emphasised one lesson that transcended the horror and tragedy of the war: "It was the lesson about ordinary people – and the lesson was that they were

not ordinary. The real war heroes have not been the generals and the politicians, but the soldiers and sailors and nurses – those who taught us to endure hardship, to show courage, to believe in ourselves, to stick together." He concluded: "We must always remember the great sacrifices nations made many years ago to ensure the clear blue sky above our heads and a peaceful future for our children." Gilles Catoire, the Mayor of Southwark's French twin town of Clichy-la-Garenne, joined the ceremony for the second year running. *Note: you can find more information on this and other ceremonies at local news website [www.london-se1.co.uk](http://www.london-se1.co.uk).*

## **RAF Veteran Flies onto the BBC**

Veteran RAF pilot Eric Carter, a member of RAF 151 Wing which travelled on the first wartime convoy to Murmansk in August 1941, found himself on BBC television in mid-January following his visit to a museum in Stoke-on-Trent. Newspaper coverage focused on his being prevented from sitting in the cockpit of a Spitfire for reasons of health and safety. The BBC's *The One Show* picked up the story and arranged for Eric to visit the Imperial War Museum Duxford and sit in one of its exhibits. John Serjeant interviewed him about his wartime experience. Both the *Daily Mail* and the BBC mentioned Eric's connection with Russia and, on behalf of the Russian Embassy, Soviet Memorial Trust Fund Trustee Arthur Matikyan was shown in front of the Soviet War Memorial talking about the historic bond between Britain and Russia. For a more complete history of the RAF 151 Wing's deployment in 1941, see the Atoll Productions DVD *Hurricanes to Murmansk* ([www.atollproductions.co.uk](http://www.atollproductions.co.uk)).

## **Next Events**

**Wednesday 9 May 11am**

**Event: Victory Day Ceremony**

Further details will be sent out on the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund mailing list in due course and included on the SCRSS

website's Events page. To be placed on the mailing list, please send your details to the Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or email [smtf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:smtf@hotmail.co.uk).

*The Soviet War Memorial is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum), Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ. For more information about the memorial, visit [www.scrss.org.uk/sovietmemorial.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/sovietmemorial.htm).*

## Feature

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### Law, Rights and Ideology in Russia

By Professor Bill Bowring

The usual response, if the words 'Russia' and 'ideology' are put together, is to think of Marxism-Leninism or Scientific Communism. And part of my forthcoming book *Law, Rights and Ideology in Russia* will, as I show below, explore the relationship of the ideology of the USSR to law and rights.

In fact, ideology, as the system of ideas legitimating Russia's statehood and development, has much deeper roots and has taken a wide variety of forms. The ideology of the Putin regime and the ideas of 'sovereignty' and 'sovereign democracy' developed by the regime's chief ideologist, Vladislav Surkov, have, as I explore below, surprising foundations.

A constant thread in Russian ideology is that of 'messianism', the idea that Russia has a special or sacred task of saving the world. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, there was a growing tendency to refer to Moscow as the 'Third Rome'. In 1510, during the reign of Henry VIII of England, the Russian Orthodox monk Filofey composed a panegyric letter to Vasily III (1479–33) in which he warned: "And now I say unto Thee, take care and take heed, pious Tsar: all the empires of Christendom are united in Thine.

For two Romes have fallen, and the Third exists and there will not be a fourth. Thy Christian Empire, according to the great theologian, will not pass away [...]." Moscow thus became, symbolically, the 'Third Rome' and the 'Second Jerusalem', inheritor of both the Roman Empire and the Christian Church.

The double-headed eagle was the symbol of the late Byzantine Empire, and symbolised the unity between the Orthodox Church and the Empire. It was adopted by Ivan III when he married the Byzantine princess Sophia Paleologue, whose uncle Constantine was the last Byzantine Emperor. It is the state symbol of Russia today.

One of the factors that precipitated the Crimean War was the Russian Empire's claim to lead and protect the Christians of the Ottoman Empire, to reclaim Hagia Sophia in Istanbul as the 'Mother Church', and to re-establish Constantinople as the capital of Orthodoxy connecting Moscow to Jerusalem. Part of the reason for the downfall of Nicholas II in World War I was his ambition, egged on by Rasputin, to reclaim Constantinople for Orthodox Christendom.

Soviet ideology, too, had more than a trace of messianism: Soviet leadership of the Third International was intended – at least at first – to save the world from capitalism.

In the twentieth century the project of 'Eurasianism', first mooted by Count Trubetskoy in the White emigration after 1917, has become an important source of the ideology of the Putin regime. Aleksandr Dugin (born 1962), now Professor of Sociology at Moscow State University, started as a propagandist of 'Russian fascism' and was deeply engaged in occultism. He summed up his 'Eurasianism' in 1997 as follows: "In principle, Eurasia and our space, the heartland Russia, remain the staging area of a new anti-bourgeois, anti-American revolution [...] The new Eurasian empire will be constructed on the fundamental principle of the common enemy: the rejection of Atlanticism [...] and the refusal to allow liberal values to

dominate us.” Eurasianism is intended to unite the traditional religions of Russia – Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism – in common opposition to Western materialism and consumerism. Dugin speaks and publishes regularly in the Russian media, and Putin and others in the elite use his rhetoric.

So, it is no surprise that many of the leading legal philosophers of Russia have been motivated by religious concerns. One of the most influential to this day is Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900). His objective was the unification of all Christians, followed by a messianic Kingdom of God on earth, with political motivation under the Russian Tsar.

There are two other important sources of ideology affecting law and rights in Russia. First, it may come as a surprise to learn that the first full professor of law in Russia was Semyon Desnitsky (1740–89). He was sent to study at the University of Glasgow from 1760 to 1767 at the time of the Scottish Enlightenment, attended lectures by Adam Smith, successfully defended his doctorate on civil and church law, and was Professor of Law at Moscow University from 1767 to 1787. He was the first to teach in Russian – his colleagues all taught in German – and brought with him from Scotland a passion for Roman law. He translated William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* into Russian. As a result of his inspiration, the academic discipline of law in Russia has remained strong to the present day.

Second, Marx and Engels both exerted great influence. Marx mastered the Russian language in his later years and entered into correspondence with the Russian Narodniks, including Vera Zasulich. In his letter to her of March 1881 he took very seriously the role of the Russian peasant and the ‘rural commune’. Marx wrote: “Theoretically speaking, then, the Russian ‘rural commune’ can preserve itself by developing its basis, the common ownership of land, and by eliminating the principle of private property which it also implies [...] It can gain possession of the fruits with which capitalist

production has enriched mankind, without passing through the capitalist regime [...]”

Engels was the primary influence in relation to law. The article he wrote with Karl Kautsky in 1887, ‘Juridical Socialism’, was the touchstone for the Russian social democrats. Engels emphasised that the world view of the bourgeoisie was the ‘juridical world view’. He endorsed the dominant theory of legal positivism and saw law as an instrument of class domination. This view was taken up by Georgy Plekhanov and other social democrats and, after the 1905 Revolution, provoked a spirited response by the Russian ex-Marxist, liberal and religious legal theorists in the famous collection *Vekhi* (*Landmarks*, recently republished in paperback), in which writers such as Peter Struve and Bogdan Kistyakovsky argued for liberal values. Lenin denounced *Vekhi* as “an encyclopaedia of liberal renegacy”. In the early Soviet period there was a strenuous theoretical battle between Yevgeny Pashukanis, who held that law, like the state, must wither away under socialism, and Peter Stuchka, for whom the USSR must develop specifically socialist law. This became the USSR’s position, although the legal codes of the USSR were, in fact, based on German models.

In the present day, Vladislav Surkov (born 1964) emerged as the pre-eminent ideologist of the Putin regime (although he has been moved recently from the President’s Administration to become a deputy prime minister). He is responsible for the doctrines of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘sovereign democracy’. In 2006 a collection entitled *Sovereignty* appeared, edited by the ‘young conservative’ Nikita Garadzha, with essays by Putin, Medvedev, Surkov and others. The key essay in this collection is ‘Sovereignty as a Political Choice’ by Aleksandr Filippov, the chief Russian translator and exponent of the Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt. Indeed, the whole collection is infused with Schmitt’s decisionistic ideas. Surkov and his circle have strongly influenced senior figures in the judiciary, especially Valery Zorkin, the chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation. His speeches and

articles make frequent reference to 'sovereignty' in the special sense given to it by the Putin regime. Their main targets are liberalism and what is seen as the Western conception of human rights.

*Professor Bowring is a barrister and Director of the LLM/MA in Human Rights at the School of Law, Birkbeck, University of London. His new book 'Law, Rights and Ideology in Russia' will be published by Routledge in 2013. His book 'The Degradation of the International Legal Order? The Rehabilitation of Law and the Possibility of Politics', published by Routledge in 2008, will appear shortly in a Russian-language edition to be published by Novoye Literaturnoye Obozreniye.*

## Feature

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### New Era in Russian Politics

By Ralph Gibson, RIA Novosti

Amidst claims of widespread vote rigging and counter-allegations of faked evidence and foreign interference, the elections for the State Duma in December 2011 sparked unprecedented reaction across Russia. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Moscow and other cities in the biggest demonstrations seen in Russia since the early 1990s.

The ruling United Russia party was officially declared the winner with 49.32 per cent of the vote and a simple majority of the 450 seats in the lower house of the Russian parliament. Only three other parties crossed the seven per cent barrier to gain any seats – the Communist Party (19.19 per cent), A Just Russia (13.24) and the Liberal Democrats (11.67). And though one of the key demands of protesters was for a re-run of the Duma election, the focus has now shifted to the presidential election on 4 March. In a bid to increase voter trust in the election process, Vladimir Putin, currently prime minister and leading candidate for president representing United Russia, has

ordered the installation of web cameras at all 94,000-plus polling stations nationwide.

### Second Round

One of the key aims of Putin's opponents is to force a second round of voting, which is triggered when no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the ballot in the first round. Several opinion polls around the new year period showed Putin's level of support below this figure. If a second round is required, it would be the first time since 1996, when incumbent President Boris Yeltsin defeated the Communist Party's Gennady Zyuganov.

### Candidates

Zyuganov is running once again and, in a sign of the changed political climate, signed a pact with the radical Left Front movement led by Sergei Udaltsov. This is the first time one of Russia's long-established opposition parties has openly co-operated with a movement such as Left Front, one of a growing number of confrontational groups outside of the political mainstream. In addition to Vladimir Putin, also likely to be on the ballot paper will be Vladimir Zhirinovskiy from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), A Just Russia's Sergei Mironov, billionaire businessman Mikhail Prokhorov, veteran liberal Grigory Yavlinsky and Irkutsk Governor Dmitry Mezentsev. The last three submitted to the Central Election Commission the minimum two million signatures required to enter the presidential race. The leader of the unregistered Volya party, Svetlana Peunova, handed in just 234,000 signatures and said she would push for an investigation into the other candidates' signatures since "it is impossible to collect two million signatures without fraud". Under Russia's current election rules, candidates proposed by major parties are not required to collect signatures.

### Democracy

The pace of political developments since the Duma election has been swift. President

Dmitry Medvedev has proposed re-introducing elections for regional governors and the simplification of complex election legislation. Several candidates have proposed abolishing the threshold for parties to gain seats in the Duma. A civic group, the League of Voters, has been set up by several prominent Russian public figures to defend the rights of voters. Its founders, including rock musician Yuri Shevchuk and popular novelist Boris Akunin, have promised to stay away from politics, stressing that their initiative was purely civil, and described the coalition members as "people who don't have political ambitions". The League is planning to mobilise thousands of monitors at polling stations on 4 March. Meanwhile, more protests, led by figures such as lawyer Alexei Navalny, are planned prior to the election date.

## Putin's Manifesto

In a lengthy article in the newspaper *Izvestiya* in mid-January, presidential hopeful Vladimir Putin laid out the basis of his election platform. He emphasised his track record following his appointment as prime minister under Boris Yeltsin in 1999 when "the most reputable experts and many international leaders foresaw one future for Russia: bankruptcy and break-up". With roughly 57 per cent of Russians aged between 25 and 35 with a higher education, he identified Russia's main challenge as "learning to exploit the 'educational drive' of this younger generation". Despite the protests, it seems that, without a single opposition candidate anywhere close to him in popularity, he is likely to be given the opportunity to put the themes of the article and policies outlined on his election website (Putin2012.ru) into practice as the next president of Russia.

## Sources

Russia Profile: [russiaprofile.org](http://russiaprofile.org)  
Moscow News: [themoscownews.com](http://themoscownews.com)  
RIA Novosti: [en.rian.ru](http://en.rian.ru)  
Official Site of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation (for *Izvestiya* article): [premier.gov.ru](http://premier.gov.ru)

# Conference Report

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## Utopia: Russian Art and Culture 1900–1989

By Christine Lindey

The organiser of *Utopia: Russian Art and Culture 1900–1989*, the Courtauld Institute of Art, had invited academic papers to "investigate the subject of utopia and dystopia in the pre- and post-Revolutionary periods and the intersections with philosophical, social, artistic and literary themes". Despite its title most papers concentrated on the Soviet Union, rather than on Russia, and dystopia dominated their content.

Although largely focused on art and architecture, we also heard about film, literature, psychology, philosophy and social geography. Held in two parts over two and half days, this major conference attracted contributors mostly from British universities, including Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Oxford, Sheffield and Bristol, but also from the USA, Sweden and Greece. Ten papers were from the Courtauld Institute itself. Some scholars, including John Bowlit, Christina Lodder and Brandon Taylor, were eminent experts on Russian and / or Soviet art and architecture whose publications have long formed the bedrock of Western scholarship. Recent newcomers included several alumni of the Courtauld Institute who originated from ex-Soviet republics. A sprinkling of speakers from outside academia provided refreshingly imaginative outlooks.

The majority of the audience of about seventy at *Part 1* and 150 at *Part 2* were students, although many other people with a professional interest in the subject also attended.

The programme for *Part 1: 1900–1930* consisted of eight papers. It included John Milner's exploration of the theme of dandyism in Mikhail Larionov's futurist works; Daniel Bird's discussion of the



influence of Marxist psychology and linguistics on Eisenstein's two unrealised projects *The Glass House* and *Capital*; and Robin Aizlewood's consideration of *Utopia and the Conceptualisation of Time in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Philosophical Thought*. Unfortunately, Natalia Sidlina's presentation of new archival material relating to Naum Gabo's project for the Palace of the Soviets was cancelled.



Self-portrait by Kazimir Malevich, 1908 or 1910–11  
(SCRSS Library)

One of the highlights of *Part 1* was the curator / filmmaker Lutz Becker's fascinating account of Kazimir Malevich's little known interest in film. The artist wrote seven essays on the subject and discussed film with Sergei Eisenstein and Hans Richter. Malevich wrote an 'artistic-scientific' scenario for the latter but the film was never made. Becker traced this manuscript and reconstructed the film in 1972. He treated us to a screening: basic geometric shapes flickered and faded to be replaced by others in a manner reminiscent of Richter's experimental films.

In *Part 2: 1930–1989* eighteen papers were heard and the conference ended with a visit and reception at the Royal Academy's *Building the Revolution* exhibition. Evgeny Dobrenko contested the view of Stalinist

socialist realism as monolithic by demonstrating that dynamism in stylistic forms in all the arts continued into the 1930s, only to petrify in the Stalinist post-war years. Mark Bassin investigated the ambivalence of representations of nature in the Stalinist era and pointed out the stylistic diversity in landscape painting from various national homelands. Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov explored the sociological phenomenon of gift-giving to leaders by Soviet communities and organisations in the Stalinist period. Mike O'Mahony studied the signification and representations of Soviet aviation in film, mass media and art. Richard Pare spoke about Moisei Ginzburg's late architecture, while Sarah Wilson discussed 1970s and 1980s Moscow conceptualist art.

Highlights included Lodder's challenge to orthodoxies about 1930s socialist realist architecture, in which she pointed out that aspects of 1920s modernism continued within the return to classical values. She contrasted the well known classical facade of Boris Iofan's Soviet Pavilion at the Paris 1937 exposition with its interior by Nikolai Suetin. Rarely reproduced photographs showed its Art Deco-like sleek lines and unadorned surfaces inspired by his teacher Malevich's abstract architekton models.

Bowl's masterful exploration of the struggles of modernist artists to adjust to the new cultural policy of socialist realism in the mid-1930s centred on the production and reception of a single painting by SB Nikritin, *The Old and the New* (1935). Maria Tsantsanoglou's inspired study of the Icarus myth in Soviet art as a symbol of the desire "to transcend human limits" ranged from Tatlin's human powered flying machine to Deineka's painting *Nikitka the Serf as the First Russian Flyer* to Ilya Kabakov's installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*.

The level of expertise and scholarship was high from contributors, as well as from the audience, and some fascinating new information was presented. Not least Milner's convincing thesis that Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* was intended to span the Neva river in

Petrograd and Bowlt's interjection that a full-scale version is soon to be built in Las Vegas.

Welcome too were signs that some members of mainstream academia are now taking aspects of socialist realism seriously, and recognising that it was a method, not a monolithic style, whose interpretation was continuously discussed and whose practice changed over space and time. Some of its practitioners, including Aleksandr Deineka and Martiros Saryan, are now accorded aesthetic value in the West. About time too, anyone familiar with the contents of the SCRSS Library may be tempted to add.

However, these approaches were in the minority and usually qualified by asides denigrating the Soviet 'regime'. The overall assumptions remained traditional Cold War ones: praise for early Soviet avant-garde art, but hostility to Marxism and post-1932 Soviet culture.

Muireann Maguire's examination of Russian émigré writers' uses of dystopian visions of Soviet Russia in their horror fiction introduced us to "relatively obscure" authors such as Georgii Peskov. Without censure, she explained that Peskov was a White Russian who had fought against the Bolshevik army and later joined the Wehrmacht in World War II. He wrote blockbusters about the destruction of the Soviet Union and of the resulting utopia of a Russian Empire returned to aristocracy and feudalism. She cited Peskov's "authoritarianism" as an ironic mirror image of "the Stalinist dictatorship".

While the level of scholarship was impressively meticulous, almost all the papers ignored the social and political context of their subjects. For example, Maria Starkova's exploration of *Militarism in Children's Periodicals of the Early USSR* aimed to demonstrate that these publications helped to "manipulate" the creation of "the ideal archetype of the New Soviet Person". Showing images of young pioneers playing anti-bourgeois war games, she drew complacent laughter from the audience. Yet the need to prepare future

Soviet citizens against the ever present threat of military invasion from their Fascist neighbours went unmentioned, as did the fact that the majority of young readers in these inter-war years were the first in their families to be literate or, indeed, to see any children's literature.

Dobrenko differentiated between 1930s representations of Stalin as active and interacting with the people, as opposed to post-war ones of him as a contemplative, solitary figure, using this to demonstrate that this later phase presented "stasis". Yet he ignored the unbelievable scale of psychological, emotional and material losses endured by the Soviet population during the intervening war years which may well have created the psychological need for the idealisation of a stable war-time leader.

Although the time span was wide, we heard little about the progressive cultural climate of the post-1956 thaw years in which Soviet artists rediscovered the muted modernism of late 1920s and 1930s Soviet art. An exception was David Crowley's paper on *Cybernetics in Eastern European Art in the 1960s*.

It is to be hoped that more mainstream scholars will discover this progressive era of Soviet socialist realism and that more will view the entire period of Soviet art and culture with greater empathy for its achievements.

## Charity Report

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### Caring for Terminally Ill Children in Belarus and the Former Soviet Union

By Daryl Ann Hardman

Among the negative news about Belarus in the Western media, there is one bright spot: Belarus has the most advanced system of care for terminally ill children in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Belarus'

enlightened attitude to the chronically and terminally ill is thanks in huge part to the fantastic work done by one of its leading NGOs, the Belarusian Children's Hospice (BCH).

BCH was founded in 1994 and in 2011 cared for 206 children and their families in their own homes. It works with children who have all types of diseases. In recent years it has been seeing many babies born to women affected by Chernobyl radiation 26 years ago; these babies have strange life-limiting syndromes.



One-year-old Ksenia being cared for at home

Maps showing the international children's hospice scene have vast empty spaces in Eastern Europe and the FSU. With one exception: eight red blobs in Belarus represent the Belarusian Children's Hospice and its seven satellites. Russia has tragically few blobs. In Russia terminally ill children are mostly cared for on hospital wards, cut off from their home surroundings by bleak hospital walls and technology. The good news is that BCH is now able to respond to pleas from neighbouring FSU countries, including Russia, and is starting to export its model of children's palliative care. For eleven years our organisation, Friends of the Belarusian Children's Hospice

(UK), has been raising money to cover BCH's staff salary bill and help to buy and renovate its buildings. Two years ago we initiated and set up BCH's own fundraising department in Minsk, which now brings in 50 per cent of BCH's running costs. Our aim is to help BCH eventually become financially independent.

BCH has developed from three beds in a hospital to a leading charity in Belarus recognised by the state. Most of BCH's young patients are cared for at home, so its medical teams make regular home visits. BCH has its own small in-patient department for crisis and respite care. It also has a holiday site in the countryside where hospice children have free holidays under specialist care. There are counselling and bereavement sessions for families.

I would like to tell you about my visit to one of BCH's young patients last October. Ksenia, just over one year old, has spinal muscular atrophy and is not expected to live more than two years. If it were not for BCH, Ksenia would be lying in the intensive care department of a hospital for the rest of her short life. Luckily, Friends of BCH was able to send her a portable ventilator, so she has moved back home where her mother cares for her. This means Ksenia gets constant love, care and stimulation. Her parents have given permission to use photographs of Ksenia as a way of expressing their gratitude for the support they have been given.

Friends of the Belarusian Children's Hospice (UK) relies totally on donations for its work. We are a voluntary organisation and take no commission from donations. If you can support us, we would be very grateful.

BCH in Minsk is happy to receive visitors from the UK at any time. Please let us know if you would like to arrange to visit.

### Contact Details

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# Reviews

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## **Building the Revolution: Soviet Art and Architecture 1915–1935 (Royal Academy of Arts, London, October 2011–January 2012)**

In the early twentieth century progressive Russian artists and architects hotly debated how to modernise their society. Socialists such as Kazimir Malevich, Liubov Popova and Moisei Ginzburg argued that cultural change could not be divorced from political and social change. Welcoming the 1917 Revolution, they joined other workers in building the new workers' state.

During the hardships and shortages of War Communism (1917–22) artists focused on speculative research and revolutionary art education, where they forged modernist theories of form following function. Declaring that photography had made painted representations of the visible world redundant, in 1915 Malevich had already exhibited paintings consisting of pure geometric squares, oblongs and circles. In 1919 he gave up painting to create futuristic architectural models and drawings that explored the essence of form and volume. As head of Vitebsk Art School he spread these ideas via his UNOVIS group. It inspired designers, engineers and architects, including El Lissitzky and Nikolai Suetin.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Tatlin, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Popova and other artists teaching in Moscow's innovatory art schools formed the equally influential constructivist group. Renouncing the bourgeois concept of the artist as individual genius, they saw themselves as artist-engineers exploring the bare bones of visual phenomena as a basis for modern, efficient designs. By taking art into production they would improve the material, cultural and spiritual life of workers and peasants.

Popova's *Spatial Force Construction* (1920–1) crackles and buzzes with the dynamism of modern radio waves. Boldly defined

diagonal lines intersect concentric segmented circles, painted onto exposed plywood using paint mixed with marble dust to create a lumpy graininess reminiscent of poured concrete. All movement and energy, her painting evokes industrial processes and materials rather than the sable-brushed canvases favoured by the bourgeoisie. Photographs and photomontage designs of her portable stage sets show how she developed practical designs from her investigations into materials and form.

The circles and triangular lattice of Vladimir Shukov's 1922 steel Radio Tower – still in working order – perfectly echo the forms in Popova's constructivist paintings, while its construction demonstrates the rational principle of form following function.

After the Civil War, despite continuing shortages of food, fuel and materials, structures were built for the social and industrial needs of the young USSR. Architecture, that most directly social of all the visual arts, would improve the cultural and working lives of the people.

Novel types of buildings conducive to social inter-action and co-operation were invented. Workers Clubs and Children's Palaces included theatres, reading rooms and sporting facilities. Numerous public canteens, crèches and laundries liberated women from domestic drudgery and freed them to participate in creating the USSR.

New factories provided air, light and rational organisation of space for the workers. Democratic relations between manual and brain workers were encouraged by housing them in the same buildings. Semen Pen's Palace of the Press, Baku (1932), housed editorial offices and printing presses, while its roof terrace and wide balconies provided fresh air and sunshine.

Communal facilities such as laundries, dining halls, kitchens and reading rooms were included in housing complexes. Ginzburg's Narkomfin Communal House (1930) is an example. Designed along rational principles, it floats on pilotis; its horizontal banded windows sweep across

the facade providing maximum light and air, behind which wide, heated corridors offer tenants the opportunity to interact; its planned roof garden aimed to promote good health.

Stripped of the curls and curlicues of past styles, the beauty of the new buildings depended on basic geometric forms used with sensitive attention to proportion, scale, composition and planning, born of the buildings' function.

Since 1993 Richard Pare has been photographing Soviet avant-garde buildings. His large photographs are works of art in themselves. Composed according to constructivist principles, their curves and angles recall the paintings and drawings that had originally inspired the architects.

He is passionate about the urgent need for preservation, so his photographs show evidence of decay. He also stresses the need to respect the buildings' original intention. Of Moscow's *Izvestiya* building (1927–9), he says: "the building is still there but it may as well not be; gigantic advertising hoardings obliterate the top storeys and the ground floor public reading room is franchised to multinational fast food outlets."

Unfortunately, the story ends with the usual line that meaningful Soviet culture was killed by Stalin, so that the modernist revival in art and architecture, which lasted for three decades after Khrushchev's mid-1950s thaw, goes unmentioned. However, the Royal Academy's exhibition catalogue and explanatory leaflet are informative and largely free of the anti-Soviet sniping.

Exhibitions about architecture are often worthy but dull. But by exploring the *dialogue* between art and architecture, and by representing the buildings with black and white period photographs below Richard Pare's stunning colour ones, the curators have created an inspiring entity that is informative, intellectually stimulating and aesthetically gratifying.

*Christine Lindey*

Note: The above review first appeared in *The Morning Star* in November 2011.

## **The Art of Revolution**

**By John Callow, Grant Pooke & Jane Powell (Evans Mitchell Books / GMB Union, 2011, ISBN: 978-1-901268-60-7, Hbk, 96pp, £30.00)**

This handsomely produced volume celebrates the rescue from oblivion of a book, pamphlet and poster collection of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The archive was in limbo from 2005–8, then rescued by Paul Kenney of the GMB. The union paid for the first stage of preservation and "useful materials" have been transferred to the Marx Memorial Library.

This volume is far from the usual art-oriented collections, its sub-title (*How Posters Swayed Minds, Forged Nations and Played Their Part in the Progressive Movements of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*) is carefully chosen, and it includes posters from Britain, Germany and about twenty pages from Czechoslovakia. The end papers have two visually glorious posters – one of the First of May, the other a panoramic landscape of the successful socialist state. The four main chapters contain detailed commentary on the illustrations and a comprehensive narrative text on the events accompanying the pictures.

Chapter 1 contains the expected Russian revolutionary posters, but out of ten illustrations I had only seen two before. The peasant attacking the kulak gopher and caterpillar in the name of the co-operative (1925) is particularly striking. The commentary here is quite soft, but it is difficult to forget that the elimination of the kulaks, tantamount to genocide, came not very long after this. It is touching to see that the posters, some of them quite tattered, have not been artificially restored, but appear as found, some with sticky labels attached. Chapter 2 has seventeen illustrations showing the Soviet experience in more realistic styles, again nearly all new. These include photomontages on

industrialisation, agriculture and the build-up of the military. The most stunning image is the stylised May Day parade (1935) with the sky full of planes bearing the names of the political elite of the time. Curiously, *Voenno-morskoi* and *Voenno-vozdushny* are translated as 'War Navy' and 'War Air', when they are just the adjectives for 'Naval' and 'Air Force'. This chapter also describes the 'Bolshevisation' of the arts in a way that runs counter to received wisdom on the subject, although the authors do note the high cost of this policy. Chapter 3 on the Great Patriotic War has fourteen illustrations. Some are more familiar, but the number of 'TASS Windows' was something new for me. These follow on from the 'ROSTA Windows' of the Civil War period, some of which were famously produced by the poet Mayakovsky. They are in a vivid cartoon style and very strong in their impact. The last chapter is almost entirely on Czechoslovakia and shows how closely Czech artists followed their Soviet models, although some educative content has been added.

This complex work fills in lesser known areas and will reward repeated careful study.

Andrew Jameson

### **The Cinema of Alexander Sokurov Edited by Birgit Beumers & Nancy Condee (IB Tauris, 2011, ISBN: 9781848853430)**

Sokurov's career has had a strange trajectory: from having his work banned, he is now an art house favourite, finding funding – albeit often outside Russia – for films that are by no means obvious hits.

He is phenomenally prolific: over fifty features and documentaries. The TV series *Leningrad Retrospective* (1990) lasts 788 minutes and in the same year he made another couple of short documentaries and a feature!

His international breakthrough came with *Mother and Son* (1997), a minimalist

painterly story of a woman dying in the company of her adult son. From then on Sokurov produced a series of popular art house films, including the famous single-shot *Russian Ark*. *Faust* completed a tetralogy about the power (or rather disempowerment) of Lenin, Hitler and Hirohito.

This first English-language book about him is welcome not only for the twelve essays by international academics, but also for translating several Russian reviews of Sokurov's work and interviews with some of his collaborators.

Sokurov's documentaries are sometimes seen as an adjunct to the fiction films, so it is good to start with three essays on them. Jeremy Hicks looks at Sokurov's use of long takes and how he initially conceals important information to remind viewers of the importance of careful viewing. Eva Binder studies the portraits of famous people, including the role of the sometimes misleading narrator (usually Sokurov himself). Sabine Hängsten studies Sokurov's minimalism: the long unedited shots, often static camera and unusual visual textures bring his work closer to painting or literature – Sokurov has said he prefers both of them to cinema.

Next come three essays on Sokurov's early fiction films, particularly *The Lonely Voice of a Man* and *Days of Eclipse*. Julian Graffy sees these as inhabiting several 'borders': not only in being set in Turkmenistan, but also by being something between film and other media. Intertextuality and cinema's relationship to other arts are also discussed by Nariman Skakov and Robert Bird. These three add up to a chapter that looks at Sokurov's own ambivalent view of cinema.

Mikhail Lampolski takes a psychological view of the controversial quasi-sexual imagery in the family films, particularly *Father and Son* (2003), and the power tetralogy's infantilisation of leaders – a theme examined from the perspective of cinema theory by Stephen Hutchings. Meanwhile, Denise Youngblood examines Sokurov's

relationship to historical interpretation in the power tetralogy.

*Russian Ark* gets two essays. José Alaniz looks at the film in relation to a long-standing concern of Soviet art – the role of the masses – and Sokurov’s apparent fear of it. Beumers’ close reading draws fascinating conclusions from the many facts that would escape anyone not very well acquainted with the Hermitage. Turning again to the *Alexandra* (2002), Condee posits the film as an interesting moment where allegory meets specific political concerns.

Sokurov’s output is so enormous that no single volume could cover everything and the book concentrates on certain films, but gratifyingly not always those which have already attracted attention. Hence the book gives a complete view of his approach to cinema, and is valuable in itself and as an accompaniment to those films available on DVD and the wider selection shown at the recent BFI retrospective.

*John Riley*

## **The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars**

**By Richard Overy (Allen Lane, London, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-713-99563-3, Hbk, 521pp, £25.00, 43 b/w illus)**

In 1941 the poet Hubert Nicholson wrote that “the twenties were post-war, the thirties were pre-war”, so summing up the collective anxieties of this era. Arguing that this sense of disquiet was widely shared, the historian Richard Overy explores how it was constructed and with what results, and concludes that pessimist outlooks in most humanities and sciences fed into political events in a symbiotic manner.

He investigates the phenomenon via a range of disciplines encompassing history, philosophy, psychology, medicine, biology, economics, sociology and literature. Avoiding political history as such, he explores the era’s ideological

preoccupations in chapters dealing with the peace movements, ‘utopian politics’, the international spread of Fascism and critiques of capitalism.

Explaining that “dissecting mentalities is a little like cutting mist with a knife”, Overy wisely focuses only on the British experience, given his wide research base. Indeed, its impressive range forms the most original aspect of this book. The trajectory of ideas are traced from their origins in the ‘cultural elite’s’ lecture notes, diaries, letters and publications in learned journals to their dissemination and discussion among the wider public via translations, radio broadcasts, letters of protest, public meetings, specialist organisations, reading circles and mass publishing (for example, Victor Gollancz’s Left Book Club).

Drawing on archival research from unfamiliar sources such as the British Medical Association’s Mental Deficiency Committee, the Peace Pledge Union, the Hampstead Ethical Society and our own Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR permits Overy to convey the period’s concerns, such as eugenics, psychoanalysis and Marxism, in a rare and vivid manner.

There is humour too, for example Beatrice Webb’s advice on calming the “morbid excitement” of sexually aware teenage girls with “plenty of homemade bread, cake, porridge and puddings”, and a hard bed next to an open window, winter and summer.

Chapter 7, *Utopian Politics: Cure or Disease?*, pairs Communism and Fascism as equally extremist ideologies that unleashed “an orgy of collective violence”. Exploring the British fascination with Germany and the Soviet Union, Overy concedes that by the later 1930s public opinion always favoured the USSR, particularly for its commitment to “international peace, social reconstruction and economic reform”. Yet he peppers his well documented account of British enthusiasm for the USSR with frequent references to the country’s then rarely discussed mistakes, such as forced collectivisation and political purges. He

argues that “the apparently wilful deluded blindness” of major thinkers such as the Webbs, Bernard Shaw, JD Bernal and D Pritt was a manifestation of the British longing for a “promised land”, fuelled by a disgust with the failings of their own society rather than a desire for a “Soviet Britain”. For most Britons, he concludes, “utopian politics [...] were disease rather than cure”.

Overy’s stance is that of a moderate liberal and, despite the wide range of sources, little account is taken of working-class opinions or organisations. His expertly constructed narrative bursts with useful quotations, statistics and information to provide a vivid insight into the mores and fears of British society, particularly that of middle England.

*By Christine Lindey*

## Listings

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### Events

#### **Russian Maslenitsa Festival in London**

19–26 February: The largest celebration of Russian culture, art, music and food outside Russia, culminating in a day-long, free spectacular in Trafalgar Square on Sunday 26 February.

### Russian Language

#### **Russian Classes at the Abbey Centre**

34 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London SW1  
Russian language classes at all levels, taught by native Russian speakers: Tuesdays and Thursdays 6–9pm. For further details, email [charles0207@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:charles0207@yahoo.co.uk).

#### **Seminar for Teachers of Russian Language**

Latymer School, Edmonton Green, Enfield, London. Saturday 17 March 10–4pm. The seminar is organised by the Russian Teachers’ Group. For further details, email Fiona Wright ([fiona\\_wright@btinternet.com](mailto:fiona_wright@btinternet.com)).

## Tourism

### **Moscow Travel Guide**

[www.simplymoscow.org/](http://www.simplymoscow.org/)

Tourist information for visitors on city breaks or longer holidays.

### **Russian National Tourist Office**

70 Piccadilly, London W1J 8HP, Tel: 020 7495 7570, Email: [info@visitrussia.org.uk](mailto:info@visitrussia.org.uk)  
16 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LH, Tel: 0131 550 3709, Email: [edinburgh@visitrussia.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@visitrussia.org.uk)  
Web: [www.visitrussia.org.uk](http://www.visitrussia.org.uk)

## Theatre

### **Arcola Theatre**

Studio 2, Arcola Theatre, 24 Ashwin Street, London E8, Box Office: 020-7503-1646, Web: [www.arcolatheatre.com](http://www.arcolatheatre.com)

28 March–28 April 8pm, matinees 3pm on 7, 14, 21 & 28 April: *A Warsaw Melody* by Leonid Zorin (translated by Franklin D Reeve). Staged by Belka Productions, this is a warm and charming tale of love behind the Iron Curtain, directed by acclaimed Russian director Oleg Mirochnikov. Tickets: £16 (£12 concs); £10 on 28 & 29 March.

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