This course is grounded in the idea that we are all immersed in cultures that we use and enjoy, but that also influence our ideas about gender, sex, race, ethnicity, and class. Historically, such cultural constructions have also served to divide individuals, nations, and regions. Such divisions are at the core of this class, which examines how culture is and has been theorized. This class will take that into consideration, examining how culture is theorized, constructed, and then practiced in the experiment of the Soviet Union, with the understanding that rhetoric surrounding the Soviet Union has long been shaped by the West’s ideological opposition to its tenets, resulting in its exclusion from popular discourse.

Our study of cultural objects and projects includes films, novels, historical documents, magazines, television, clothing, and food, although it is certainly not limited to these. Over the course of the semester, we will investigate (1) the role played and work done by cultural objects in creating and maintaining Soviet culture and (2) why the Soviet Union had a vested interest in theorizing, constructing, and practicing a unique, entirely new culture. This approach is meant to be interdisciplinary, using
multiple access points to provide a foundational understanding of the discipline of cultural studies.

**Course Objectives**
By the end of the semester, you will have:
1. Developed the tools to read and interpret a cultural text.
2. Learned how to perform a close reading of a text.
3. Learned how to engage critically with a text in discussion.
4. Fulfilled the University of Minnesota’s Writing Intensive Course and Liberal Education requirements.

**Course Materials**
*Absurdistan* by Gary Shteyngart, available at the bookstore in Coffman Memorial Union. ISBN-10: 9780812971675


*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams, available at the bookstore in Coffman Memorial Union. ISBN-10: 0199393214

Course Reader, available at Paradigm Course Resources

A note on books: please feel free to buy used copies from AbeBooks or Amazon, just make sure they are the correct edition so we can reference the same page numbers during class.

**Additional Resources**
I highly recommend becoming very familiar with these two websites and using them for cultural and historical context:
http://soviethistory.msu.edu/
https://www.calvertjournal.com/

**Assignments and Grading**
**Participation and Attendance, 20%**
As this class will lean heavily on discussion in small groups or with the whole class, active participation is an important element of your grade. This means not just coming to class regularly and being fully present, but also practicing active listening, being attentive, and contributing to a productive and respectful classroom environment. A small portion of the participation grade is dependent on you attending office hours early in the semester so I can get to know you, your needs, and your expectations (and
vice versa). You may have two unexcused absences, any more than that will result in lowering of the participation and attendance grade. As always, absences resulting from illness can be excused with a note from Boynton Health Services (please don’t come to class if you are ill).

**Presentation, 20%**
Fortunately for us, esteemed scholars Robert Bird and Katerina Clark will be visiting campus this semester. You are required to go to either Bird or Clark’s talk and submit a two-page summary via Canvas. Extra credit will be available for those who attend both presentations.

**Object Analysis assignment 20%**
This assignment is intended to help you develop applied cultural analysis skills. Using an object from Russia/Soviet Union, you will craft a short three page report that introduces, contextualizes, and analyzes your object in concert with at least one critical source from class. You may turn in the assignment at any point before the end of class on Wednesday, March 28th. Additional information about this assignment will be posted on Moodle in the beginning of the semester, and a list of objects will be posted to Canvas.

**Midterm paper 20%**
This four-page paper will answer one of three proposed questions. The thesis of this paper, while short, should clearly outline the critical approach or argument you are making in your paper. This is not a report or review of a text or object; it is an opportunity for you to take on a topic from class that you feel needs deeper exploration or evaluation. The basics of critical writing and additional details for this assignment will be introduced in class.

**Draft and Final Paper  20%**
Your final paper will follow a similar format to the midterm paper, except you will turn in a draft mid-April and receive feedback. The final six page paper is due May 9th. The grade for this assignment is contingent on turning in a detailed proposal and successfully integrating my feedback into the final draft.

**Class and University Policies**

**Assignment Formatting**
Please submit all assignments with your name, the date, and the name of the assignment in the top left of the page, double-spaced, stapled, one inch margins, page numbers, footnotes, and size 12 Helvetica font. Follow the Chicago Manual of Style for formatting. Please print double-sided.

**Grading**
Assignments will be graded in accordance with the University of Minnesota grading policy:
A: outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
B: significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
C: meets the course requirements in every respect
D: worthy of credit even though fails to meet fully the course requirements
S: satisfactory (equivalent to a C- or better)
F (or N): failure (or no credit); work either (a) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (b) not completed, with no agreement between the instructor and the student that the students would be awarded an I (“incomplete”).

**Technology**
As this is a class that is based on classroom conversation and scholarly discussion, it is important that we are able to focus on communicating clearly and respectfully with each other. Part of that is not allowing screens to stand between us as we discuss and debate readings. Therefore, phones, laptops, and tablets are not to be used in class unless you have a documented disability. All assignments and readings should be brought to class in hard copy.

**Email**
Please feel free to contact me by email about concerns that arise in class throughout the semester. Your detail is appreciated; the more clear and succinct the message, the better I am able to assess your question or concern and craft an appropriate response or schedule a meeting. Please address your email with some sort of greeting, and sign your name. I will do my best to respond to emails within 36 hours; please keep this timeline in mind when writing to me during the final days or hours before an assignment is due.

**Late Work Policy**
Late work will not be accepted. If for some reason you require an extension due to illness or extenuating circumstances, please speak directly to me as soon as possible.

**Disability**
I am committed to the success of all students. If you have a disability accommodation/a documented disability, please let me know early in the semester so we can make sure all accommodations are in place and fully accessible to you. If there is anything else I can do to assist you, please let me know. The University of Minnesota is committed to providing all students equal access to learning opportunities. Disability Services is the campus office that works with students who have disabilities to provide/arrange reasonable accommodations. Students registered with Disability Services, who have a letter requesting accommodations, are encouraged to contact the instructor early in the semester. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability (e.g. psychiatric, attentional, learning, vision, hearing, physical, or systemic), are invited to contact Disability Services for a confidential
conversation at 612-626-1333 or ds@umn.edu. Additional information is available at ds.umn.edu and at 180 McNamara Alumni Center.

Inclusivity
Sexual harassment, xenophobia, racism, sexism, classism, et cetera will not be tolerated. While the classroom is designed to foster dissent and disagreement, these things will not be tolerated in any form.

Scholastic Dishonesty
From the University’s “Student Code of Conduct”: “Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using course materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, misrepresenting, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.” Any scholastic dishonesty will result in a failing grade on that assignment and possible further steps.

| CSCL 1301W fulfills the Liberal Education core requirement in Arts and Humanities: Humanistic Studies |
| As such, it will specifically address the substance of these requirements, via the following questions: |
| • How can humanistic texts and practices be ‘read’? How can we validate an interpretation? Why is interpretive, critical work important in the first place? |
| • How does Cultural Studies, as an interdisciplinary and reflective practice, fill gaps and make connections that might be missed in traditional disciplines? |
| • In what senses can it be said that all cultural activity is historical, i.e., that it both shapes and is shaped by its moment in time? The notion of “historical contingency”—that all cultural artifacts are rooted in specific times and places, and are thus embedded in the political and discursive struggles of the moment—is axiomatic in Cultural Studies and will form part of all of our discussions. |
| • From what subject positions do we produce and interpret culture?—for example, as women or as Americans; gay or straight; black or white, or ‘Other’? How do subject positions affect how we encounter ‘other’ cultures? |
| • How is identity formed or influenced through the production and consumption of cultural texts? |
| • How do different genres of cultural production accord with different places, times, and purposes? |
| • Specifically: how have race, gender and sexuality served as intertwined systems of difference in the US, structuring large parts of our social and cultural dynamics? |
| • What kinds of socio-political critique are made possible by, and appropriate for, different cultural products and practices? |
| • In any given text, which relations of power, prestige or privilege are challenged or supported? |
| • How does this course contribute to the making of informed citizens and active participants—rather than passive observers—in the nation and world? Put differently: What are the ethical dimensions of our study? How can we imagine and work toward a better world? |

This course is open to undergraduate majors and non-majors; there are no prerequisites

Class Schedule

Ideological Foundations
Tuesday, January 22
Syllabus, introduction to the Soviet Union and Cultural Studies.

Thursday, January 24
*Keywords*, “Ideology”, “Capitalism,” “Labor,” and “Communism.”

Tuesday, January 29
CR: *The Russian Revolution* by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Section 2. *Keywords*, “Revolution.”

Thursday, January 31
*The Communist Manifesto*, sections I and II
*The April Theses*  

Sex/Gender
Tuesday, February 5
*Keywords*, “Sex.”

Thursday, February 7
*Keywords*, “Family.”

Culture/Industry
Tuesday, February 12
*Keywords*, “Culture” and “Industry.”

Thursday, February 14
Mass culture close reading activity.

Everyday Life
Tuesday, February 19
CR: “Introduction” from *The Practice of Everyday Life* by Michel De Certeau  
*Keywords*, “Ordinary.”

Thursday, February 21
CR: “Into Production!”: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism” by Christina Kiaer.

**Tuesday, February 26**
CR: Excerpt from *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1* by Henri Lefebvre

**Thursday, February 28**
*Keywords*, “Community.”
Online: http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/

**Friday, February 29**
Object Analysis due via Canvas by 5:00 pm

**Tuesday, March 5**
*Keywords*, “City.”

**Thursday, March 7**
CR: Excerpt from *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes.
*Keywords*, “Myth.”

**Tuesday, March 12**

**Thursday, March 14**
Short film in class.

**Tuesday, March 19**
Spring Break

**Thursday, March 21**
Spring Break
Art and Aesthetics

Tuesday, March 26
*Keywords, “Art.”*

Thursday, March 28
Screening: *Revolution: New Art for a New World*

Tuesday, April 2
CR: “Revolutionary Photography” by Christina Lodder.
Screening: *Man With A Movie Camera* by Dziga Vertov

Thursday, April 4
CR: Excerpts from “Third Course in General Linguistics” by Ferdinand de Saussure.
In class: Selected poems by Vladimir Mayakovksy, Osip Mandelstam, and Danil Kharms.

Friday, April 5
Midterm due by 5:00 pm via Canvas.

Tuesday, April 9
*Keywords, “Aesthetic.”*  
Online: http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1934-2/socialist-realism/

Thursday, April 11

The End
Tuesday, April 16
Screening: *The Event* by Sergei Loznitsa

Thursday, April 18
*Absurdistan*, Chapters 1 through 5.
Friday, April 19
Draft due by 5:00 pm via Canvas.

Tuesday, April 23
Absurdistan, Chapters 6 through 16.

Thursday, April 25
Absurdistan, Chapters 17 through 27

Tuesday, April 30
Absurdistan, Chapters 28 through 38.

Thursday, May 2
Class wrap-up.

Friday, May 9
Final Paper due by 5:00 pm via Canvas.