

HI3J7-30 Socialist Bodies: Dreams and Realities of the Physical in Soviet Russia

26/27

Department

History

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Claire Shaw

Credit value

30

Module duration

22 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This undergraduate final-year Advanced Option explores the history of the body in Soviet Russia from revolution to the collapse of the USSR, in light of revolutionary claims that socialism would bring about 'a higher social-biologic type, or if you please, a superman'.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

We will consider the utopian visions of the ideal socialist body, as they were disseminated in propaganda, literature and art. We will trace the means by which the Soviet state sought to bring these visions to life – through healthcare, education and physical culture – and how Soviet citizens responded to the new social, emotional and sensory regimes of the body. Yet we will also consider how ideological understandings of the ideal socialist body intersected with the messy realities of the physical in Soviet Russia, and consider the ways in which questions of sexuality, degeneration, disability and disease were reconciled with the dreams of a revolutionary utopia.

Seminars will draw on a range of sources, including programmatic texts by key theorists of the revolutionary body, films, literature and the visual arts, works of popular science and personal memoirs. The history of the Soviet body is a fast-growing field in the humanities; this module will allow students to engage and be part of this developing field, and to contribute to our understanding of Soviet history as an embodied experience.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Term 1

1. Mind/Body/Social: Revolutionary Understandings of the Physical [Introduction to History of the Body as a field; exploration of early revolutionary theorising on the intersection between mind, body and society in socialism]
2. The Machine Man and the New Soviet Person [Utopian dreams of the body in the early Soviet period, impact of technology/psychology on unfolding state policy to 'shape' bodies through healthcare, training]
3. The New Soviet Woman [Gendered dimensions of Soviet vision of the body; understandings of the female body as an 'obstacle' to socialist transformation]
4. Disease and Deviance in the Early Soviet Period [Behaviours/identities/physical states defined by Soviet state as 'parasites' on the Soviet body politic]
5. Sensory Regimes of Socialism [Attempts by early Soviet cultural practitioners to shape new, revolutionary ways of hearing/seeing/smelling/tasting/touching the world]
6. Reading Week
7. Acculturating the Soviet Body [Stalinist attempts to foster 'cultured' bodies through hygiene, consumption, fashion]
8. Bodies of the Five-Year Plan [How planned economy under Stalin sought to shape bodies through physical culture and labour practices; consideration of how industrial labour damaged bodies]
9. Stalinist Fantasies of Embodiment [How Socialist Realist texts, films and art promoted ideal socialist bodies in the 1930s]
10. Nikolai Ostrovskii and the Disabled Hero [The case study of Nikolai Ostrovskii's novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (1936), a Socialist Realist classic about a disabled man]

Term 2

1. Violence and the Body Politic during the Purges [The Purges as an embodied history: consideration of torture and violent death (or the anticipation of it) as a universal Soviet experience]
2. Bodies as Weapons in WWII [Soviet policy towards military preparedness; cultural depictions of military bodies; gendered experiences of the Eastern Front]
3. Marks of Trauma [Late Soviet attempts to come to terms with the twin traumas of the Purges and WWII; looking at bodily manifestations of these experiences (e.g. prison tattooing)]
4. Late Socialist Work, Rest and Play [Changing understandings of the ideal Soviet body under Khrushchev's Thaw: from labour machine to object of leisure]
5. Technological Utopias of the Body [The impact of the Scientific-Technological Revolution on

understandings of the body: from space habitats to prosthetics]

6. Reading Week

7. Pleasures in Socialism [The concept of pleasure (sensual/emotional) in late Soviet society; the impact of Cold War competition on understandings of luxury]

8. The Soviet-Afghan War [Soviet popular representations of Afghanistan veterans' crippled bodies as a crisis of socialism; discussion of Svetlana Aleksievich's *Zinky Boys* (1990)]

9. Ageing Soviet Bodies [The demographic crisis of the late Soviet period; popular responses to the 'gerontocracy' in the Kremlin (Brezhnev's ageing body)]

10. Reclaiming the Body during Glasnost [Impact of Gorbachev's reforms on Soviet view of the body; the 'epidemics' of drug use, prostitution and suicide as a rejection of Soviet socialism]

Term 3

1. Revision, long essay/dissertation meetings

2. Revision, long essay/dissertation meetings

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a systematic knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the Soviet Union envisaged the ideal socialist body, and the various policies it used to bring that body about
- Critically analyse and evaluate a broad range of primary sources (including literary, cinematic and visual texts) relating to the history of the Soviet body
- Effectively communicate ideas, and make informed, coherent and persuasive arguments, about the tensions between 'ideal' and 'real' bodies in the Soviet context
- Critically review and consolidate theoretical, methodological, and historiographical ideas relating to the history of the Soviet body.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

[Specific reading list for the module](#)

Subject specific skills

See learning outcomes.

Transferable skills

See learning outcomes.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Tutorials	4 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Private study	260 hours (87%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Seminar contribution	10%		No
Reassessment component			
1000 word reflective essay in lieu of Seminar Contribution			Yes (extension)
Assessment component			
1500 word essay	10%		Yes (extension)

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
3000 word essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
3000 word source-based essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback provided via Tabula; optional oral feedback in office hours.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
- Year 4 of UHIA-V104 Undergraduate History (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V9 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
- UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 3 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 4 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
- UHIA-VM14 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 3 of VM14 History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 4 of VM14 History and Politics (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology

- Year 4 of UHIA-VL17 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Intercalated Year)
- UHIA-VL16 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 3 of VL16 History and Sociology (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 4 of VL16 History and Sociology (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 4 of UHIA-VM15 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM12 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad)