This course examines the major ideas of the Russian literary philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, paying specific attention to aesthetic concerns. The full evolution of Bakhtin’s thought is covered from his early proto-existentialist works through his later theories of language, including all of the thinker’s central concepts: consummation, dialogism, heteroglossia, the chronotope, carnival, and speech genres. Discussions will alternate between close readings of Bakhtin’s texts and the analysis of works of literature, film, and contemporary art that address Bakhtinian questions such as self-other (author-hero) dynamics, the persuasiveness of alien discourse, metaphoric representations of time, and the politics of grotesque realism.

Readings and other materials:

Assignments from Bakhtin will come from the various translated volumes of his works, most of which are readily available in online bookstores. Page spans of assigned excerpts will be posted on CourseWeb two weeks in advance of every assignment.


English-language editions of the four novels for the course should also be readily available:


Unless otherwise indicated, films and videos should be viewed at home or in the media library (when available):

Vito Acconci, Undertone and Theme Song (http://www.ubu.com/film/acconci.html)
Darren Aronofsky, Pi
Liisa Roberts, What’s the Time in Vyborg? (a viewing will be scheduled outside of class)
Peter Greenaway, Drowning by Numbers
Evgeny Yufit, Suicide Warthogs and Woodcutter (DVD-6148 – 6150)
Requirements and grading:

- Attendance, preparedness, and active participation in class discussions. (20%)
- Five short essays (3-4pp) raising a significant question or elaborating a central concern of Bakhtinian theory in light of one of the artistic works analyzed in the course (essays are due by the class period in which the artistic work is discussed). (50%)
- Leading the discussion during one of these weeks (your essay must be completed a day in advance and will be assigned reading). (10%)
- A 20-minute presentation contextualizing some aspect of Bakhtinian thought within the Western theoretical tradition, comparing Bakhtin to a thinker of your choice (see suggestions below). There will only be time for six presentations, so students may be asked to work in groups. Before your presentation, you must assign a brief reading to the class. (20%)

Suggested final presentation topics:

Henri Bergson (time-consciousness, memory, laughter)
Edmund Husserl or Maurice Merleau-Ponty (phenomenology)
Martin Buber (I-Thou dialogism)
Georg Lukacs (genre and history, novelistic realism)
Walter Benjamin (negativity and transcendence, messianic time, the storyteller)
Jacques Lacan (mirror relations, discourse of the Other)
Michel Foucault (disciplined bodies and the grotesque)
Jacques Derrida (language and responsibility, the play of signification, parody)
Homi Bhabha (time and the nation)
Giorgio Agamben (ambivalent/suspended limits of power)
(Nietzsche, Simmel, Cassirer, Auerbach, Levinas, Gadamer, Habermas, de Man, Kristeva, Ranciere, etc)


Schedule of Assignments

week 1: (Jan 10)
Bakhtin’s biography and intellectual context
“Art and Responsibility”

week 2: (Jan 17)
NO CLASS

week 3: The Ethics of Aesthetics (Jan 24)
*Toward a Philosophy of the Act*
“Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”

week 4: Discussion 1 (Jan 31)
Sophie Calle, *Double-Game*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*

week 5: The Crisis of Authorship (Feb 7)
*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creative Work* (1929)
Notes from the 1940s

week 6: Discussion 2 (Feb 14)
Vito Acconci, *Undertone* and *Theme Song*
Darren Aronofsky, *Pi*
week 7: The Linguistic Turn: From Dialogue to Heteroglossia (Feb 21)
“Discourse and the Novel”

week 8: Discussion 3 (Feb 28)
Liisa Roberts, What’s the Time in Vyborg?
(See also: Sundell, Margaret. "1000 words: Liisa Roberts; Talks about what's the time in Vyborg?" Artforum International 42.7 [2004] and project website—http://www.auditorium.vbg.ru/)
Virginia Woolf, The Waves

SPRING BREAK

week 9: “Time Takes on Flesh”: The Chronotope (Mar 14)
“Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel”
Bildungsroman essay

week 10: Discussion 4 (Mar 21)
Peter Greenaway, Drowning by Numbers
Discuss chronotopicity of works from previous weeks

week 11: Carnival: Laughter through Tears (Mar 28)
Rabelais and His World
Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1963)

week 12: Discussion 5 (Apr 4)
Paul McCarthy, Sauce
Evgenii Yufit, Suicide Warthogs and Woodcutter
Andrei Platonov, Happy Moscow

week 13: Linguistics of the Utterance; Discussion 6 (Apr 11)
“The Problem of Speech Genres”
Vladimir Sorokin, The Queue
Ilya Kabakov, The Communal Kitchen

week 14: (Apr 18)
Final Presentations

week 15: (Apr 25)
Final Presentations

Academic Integrity:
Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh’s Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Disabilities:
If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the Disability Resources and Services no later than the 2nd week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.