

EXTENDED CALL FOR PAPERS

7TH ANNUAL ALEKSANTERI CONFERENCE

REVISITING PERESTROIKA – PROCESSES AND ALTERNATIVES

November 29 - December 1, 2007

The Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland

The political foundation for the reforms of *Perestroika*, whose outcome was to seal the fate of the USSR, was laid in Mikhail Gorbachev's "basic theses" presented to the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1987. Twenty years down that road which led to the demise of an entire way of life and the re-constellation of the international system, Helsinki's *Aleksanteri Institute* is hosting an intellectual forum to revisit this era of dramatic changes. The central aim of the 7th Annual Conference is to reassess the perestroika epoch, its causes and effects, while considering alternative perspectives and paths not taken.

This call for papers is an open invitation for panels, papers and suggestions for innovative formats, such as debates on new key publications, round-tables or film presentations. It is addressed to scholars and advanced graduate students from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including the social and political sciences, cultural studies, the arts and humanities, law and economics.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS (in alphabetical order):

[Marietta Chudakova](#)

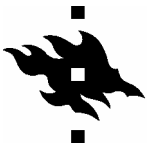
Professor at the Gorky State Institute of Literature, Moscow; member, European Academy; former member of Boris Yeltsin's Presidential Council; expert on Soviet literature and literary archives; international authority on Mikhail Bulgakov.

[Boris Groys](#)

Professor of Philosophy and Media Theory at the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe; [Global Distinguished Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies, NYU](#); Visiting Professor 2006-7, [Courtauld Institute](#).

[Boris Kagarlitsky](#)

Director, [Institute of Globalization Studies, Moscow](#); Fellow and co-ordinator of the TNI Global Crisis project at the [Transnational Institute](#); former Deputy to the Moscow City Soviet (1990-93); former dissident and political prisoner; author and political figure.



Jutta Scherrer

Directeur d'études, L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris, Centre d'études du monde russe, soviétique et post-soviétique and Centre d'Etudes Interdisciplinaires des Faits Religieux; fellow and member of editorial, funding and scientific committees in France, Germany, the United States and Russia.

Alexei Yurchak

Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley; author of the book "Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More".

Elena Zdravomyslova

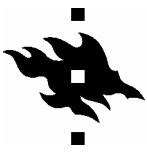
Co-director of the Gender Studies Program, the European University at St. Petersburg; Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and Sociology, EUSP, St. Petersburg.

A WIDE SCOPE FOR DEBATE

As a process of world-historical dimensions, the political characterization of perestroika has been the source of intense controversy. In the early 1990s, the dominant interpretation held that the failure to reform the Soviet system meant (old) Russia's return from "socialist experiments" to a universal path of development – one which all modern societies must inevitably follow. Other viewpoints maintained, however, that the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of a new Russian "liberal capitalism" was the result of deliberate political decisions implemented at the expense of others. In retrospect, reassessments of historical contingencies reveal potentials which indicate possibilities for very different outcomes.

The question of "alternatives" in Russian and Soviet history raises the important theme of the *unrealised promises* of the perestroika era: the idea of a humane and democratic society, the "New Thinking" in international relations and a fresh approach to the problems of the age. These ideas might be called the utopian moment in perestroika. They contrast sharply with the dystopian economic reality of the early 1990s, as well as with the more recent resurgence of illiberal outlooks and also the non-market economic models which have found favour in the current political cycle.

The 7th Aleksanteri Conference sets out to grasp these developments in their complexity and contradiction. We hope that by furthering debates within various disciplines and across their multiple combinations we may encourage not only a more balanced assessment, but a deeper re-evaluation of the perestroika period. It goes without saying that the relation of perestroika to its



precursors as well as its present-day significance and popular legacy are within the scope of these research questions. The direct relation of the perestroika process to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, leading to the end of the Cold War, means that contributions concerning Eastern Europe as well as global repercussions are also very much welcome.

To stimulate topics for debate and the formation of panels, please find below some questions indicating the wide, multi-disciplinary scope sought by the conference.

REVOLUTIONS and PROCESSES:

Was perestroika a revolution? Or was it a counter-revolution? What role did ideas and cultural movements play in perestroika, its pre-history and aftermath? What were the significance of capitalism and liberalism as concepts, and which other ideological paradigms were available to the intellectual imagination?

Did perestroika have an ecological impulse following or even preceding Chernobyl? How significant a factor was nationalism in the demise of the Soviet Union? How did the war in Afghanistan and the political movements in Eastern Europe affect Soviet thinking and decision-making?

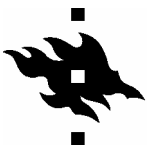
Could the Soviet economy have survived without major reform, and if so, for how long? Were economic reforms within the confines of the socialist system inevitably doomed to failure? How did other external factors, such as the global energy market and Reagan's SDI influence Soviet economic policy?

What happened to Soviet institutions in these transformations, including especially teaching institutions? How, and by whom, was the shift from the communist value-system in matters of ideology, religion and ethical values affected? Was this merely a destructive or also a constructive process?

ACTORS and AGENTS:

One of the most inspiring events of the epoch was the resurgence of grass-roots political movements and civil society institutions, which brought forth new actors and demands. Which groups or traditions (re)emerged, which survived and which were neglected or 'written out of history' during the perestroika era?

Women as a group were among the new social forces to be mobilised. Previously altogether marginalised or repressed individuals and collectives, such as sexual minorities, various artistic and religious subcultures and even



certain categories of those previously branded mentally ill, finally received public rehabilitation and recognition.

However, did practices and customs genuinely see a transformation in all fields of life – from the Kremlin to the kitchen table? Confronted with unemployment and poverty in the later perestroika period, was there not rather a *de facto* trend towards pre-revolutionary models of gender-relations and families? How was the role of women transformed? In what way was the re-emergence of traditional male role-models related to the catastrophic demise of social justice and equality – one of the corner-stones of Soviet propaganda that seemed to have disappeared off the agenda? What hope was left for political inclusion and egalitarian thought?

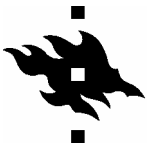
As to further social actors, how did the fast-changing developments affect different sectors of industry and social stratification? What was the role and legacy of trade unions, the *Komsomol*, the *nomenclatura* and other collective actors? How did workers experience and evaluate the demise of the ‘proletarian state’? What changes were wrought in the daily life of ordinary citizens?

In the cultural realm, which artistic groups took the initiative in the perestroika era, and why did they gain ascendancy? Did various “parallel” and “underground” intelligentsia cultures cease to exist? What were the new discourses, sensibilities and institutions engaged by the arts and popular culture?

GENERATIONS and PERCEPTIONS:

Perestroika brought a new restless, even lawless generation to the forefront. Nevertheless, the era was presided over by an older generation which had come of age in the Thaw period and which was inspired by highly moral intelligentsia leaders, such as Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn. This raises the question of what kind of new peer groups were formed and what sort of “generational consciousness” evolved around the processes at stake. How did people from different age groups or with different mind-sets and “mental affiliations” evaluate the events, changes and new ideas that were being debated in society? How did they view each other? Further, what were the values taught to the next generation, the youth growing up at this time?

Looking at the intellectual elites, how was the former “underground” transformed by *glasnost*? What relevance did the distinctions between “official” and “unofficial” play in the cultural life of the perestroika era? How was the legacy of this distinction transformed by the generation that came of age during the perestroika period?



Perestroika itself “revisited” many historical events of the country’s past: by rehabilitating suppressed figures and previously marginalized groups, by opening archives, by giving public exposure to long censored texts, art works and other forbidden material. How did perceptions of history itself change? How did this affect various groups’ self-consciousness as the revelations about the Soviet past became part of a common and public heritage?

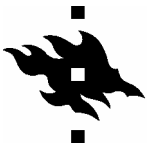
Finally, although it is obvious that perceptions of the significance of perestroika differ considerably, how does current academic research see the overall historical balance? How does research evaluate the proportionate importance of economic, military and ideational factors in giving the lead to the “New Thinking” and radical reforms in the Soviet Union of the late 1980s? What were the most important lessons of the era? Indeed, how do various socio-cultural positions *today* assess the events of 20 years ago? What could the analysis of the perestroika era give to a sociological or socio-philosophical theory of modernisation, and in what way might this inflect the future?

THE ANNUAL ALEKSANTERI CONFERENCE

This *Aleksanteri Conference* will be the seventh in the series of annual, multidisciplinary, international conferences organized by the *Aleksanteri Institute*. The Aleksanteri Institute, the Finnish Centre for Russian and Eastern European Studies, is affiliated with the University of Helsinki. It operates as a national and international centre of research, study and expertise pertaining to Russia, the countries of the former Soviet Union and post-socialist countries in Europe, with a focus on the social sciences and the humanities.

Aleksanteri Conferences have attracted broad interest among researchers and policy-makers in a wide variety of disciplines, both in Finland and abroad. These have included top decision-makers and other actors interested in the development of post-socialist countries. During recent years the Conference has had around one hundred participants.

Participants and observers who do not wish to give a paper are also welcome to take part in the 7th Annual Aleksanteri Conference. Registration is required (see below).



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

This call for papers is an open invitation for panels, papers and presentations from scholars and advanced graduate students from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. All submissions should be in the working languages of the conference, which are English and Russian. Unfortunately no translation can be provided.

The conference will be comprised of plenary sessions with keynote speakers and panels and is open to suggestions for innovative formats. Standard panel proposals, however, should consist of a chair, three papers and a discussant.

All submissions should be sent via the conference website:

<http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/conference2007>

Panel Discussion Board

To facilitate the process of forming panels, the conference is hosting a dedicated **Panel Discussion Board** open to prospective participants. After registering for a login, ideas for panels can be suggested and discussed before submitting them to the Organising Committee via the website. It is found at <http://ldap.aleksanteri.helsinki.fi/conference2007/index.php>

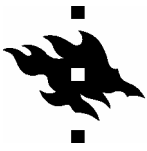
Pre-circulation and Publication

The Aleksanteri Institute plans to publish an edited, English language volume based on the presentations as well as selected papers from the working groups. We thus encourage participants to write and submit a 15-25 page article, in addition to the oral presentation for the conference. The papers will be circulated among participants and discussants prior to the panel in question. Participants will have the opportunity to revise the paper prior to the planned publication. Further information on the editorial issues will be provided at a later stage by the Conference Coordinators.

THE ALEKSANTERI CULTURAL FORA

Parallel to the academic conference, participants and guests will enjoy a new international series of cultural events – artistic, documentary, archival, literary and cinematic. See the website for the 6 fora already confirmed: http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/conference2007/cultural_fora.htm

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE AND DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS:



Please submit all the below information through the forms on the conference website: <http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/conference2007>

*Proposals for panels (circa 500 words): **June 1, 2007***

*Abstracts for 15-20 minute papers (circa 300 words): **June 1, 2007***

*Notification of acceptance: **July 2, 2007***

*Online Registration by **November 1, 2007***

*Conference: **November 29 - December 1, 2007***

If you encounter great difficulties in using the website, submissions are also accepted in other formats. E-mail:

[Aleksanteri Conference <free-aleksconf@helsinki.fi>](mailto:free-aleksconf@helsinki.fi)

TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION:

Participants are requested to make their own arrangements for travel and accommodation and cover the costs related to participation. For Helsinki hotels and tourism information, please see <http://www.hel2.fi/tourism/EN/matko.asp>.

For updated information, as well as access to a *General Discussion* board which may be used to discuss such practicalities, please consult the website.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE:

Markku Kangaspuro

Head of Research, Head of Organizing Committee, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Suvi Kansikas (Conference Coordinator)

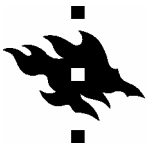
Researcher, Conference coordinator, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Vesa Oittinen

Senior Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Pekka Pesonen

Professor of Russian Literature, Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures, University of Helsinki



Aino Saarinen

Senior Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Ivor Stodolsky (Conference Coordinator)

Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute & Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures, University of Helsinki

Support Committee

Ulla Hakanen, Researcher, Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures, University of Helsinki

Tomi Huttunen, Assistant, Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures, University of Helsinki

Jussi Lassila, Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki & University of Jyväskylä

Katja Ruutu, Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Suvi Salmenniemi, Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Sanna Turoma, Researcher, Department of Slavonic and Baltic Languages and Literatures, University of Helsinki

Elna Viljanen, Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Additional and updated information will be found at the conference website:

<http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/conference2007>

In case of difficulties or questions you cannot resolve after having consulted the website and the discussion boards, please contact the Conference Coordinators at

[Aleksanteri Conference <fcree-aleksconf@helsinki.fi>](mailto:fcree-aleksconf@helsinki.fi)