

Call for Papers

COMPLAINTS:

Cultures of Grievance in Eastern Europe and Eurasia

March 8-9, 2013
Princeton University

Program in Law and Public Affairs
Program in Russian and Eurasian Studies

Complaints are one way that the powerless and the dispossessed communicate their disagreement, dissatisfaction, and resentment to the powerful and the dominant. As a legal genre, a communication tool, and a narrative structure, complaints have a long history in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, from the peasants' petitions to the Russian tsar to the dissidents' letters to the party committees and from the complaint books in Soviet grocery stores to denunciation reports to the secret police. This conference plans to examine the genre of complaints in the public culture of Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

In his *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin*, John Borneman reminded us that legal petitions in East Germany were in fact a form of legal privilege, a politically legitimized framework of public discourse that "allowed the citizenry a licit means of responding to and interrogating the economic and political structure." Nancy Ries in her *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* pointed out another important aspect of complaints: their formulaic structure and repetitive reproduction turn them into "ritualized discourses" through which realms of politics, economics, and law are navigated and negotiated.

The conference *Complaints: Cultures of Grievance in Eastern Europe and Eurasia* will build on a diverse scholarship on public criticism and dissatisfaction by bringing together an international and interdisciplinary group of researchers. We invite proposals from scholars in a range of disciplines including law, history, anthropology, sociology, politics, philosophy, psychology, art and literary criticism that would explore the ways through which frustrations and discontent were expressed in Eastern Europe and Eurasia and that would examine what happened to those grievances. In particular, we are interested in interdisciplinary studies that trace the emergence and development of cultures of grievances - those ritualized discourses in which responses to the authorities are merged with their interrogation.

Some questions the papers might address include: Who complains? How do those who complain constitute the audience for their complaints? What sorts of indignities provoke complaints? To whom are complaints addressed? What do complainants seek - compensation, apology, recognition, change? Are complaints framed as legal petitions, collective demands, or poetry? Which institutional avenues are used for channeling complaints - courts, officials, friends, popular culture? How and why has the culture of complaining changed across time? What kinds of assumptions about authorities, citizenship, and responsibility constitute cultures of grievance in the region? How much is law implicated in the cultures of grievance? What have been the narrative and stylistic conventions through which a critique of the political, economic, and legal structures have been conveyed? What happens to those who complain?

We are interested in submissions that examine complaints, grievances, denunciations, claims, reclamations and demands from within a variety of disciplinary or multidisciplinary perspectives, including legal, historical, ethnographic, literary, political or sociological forms of analysis. The papers should pertain to Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia so that we can work across a

manageable set of cultures and histories. All methodologies - interpretive, ethnographic, qualitative, quantitative - are welcome. Advanced graduate students are encouraged to submit their proposals.

The organizing committee will explore the possibility of publishing focused clusters of papers as special issues of academic journals.

Please send your abstract (300 words) and a short CV (2-3 pages) to lapa@princeton.edu by December 1, 2012.

Those selected to give presentations at the conference will be contacted by the end of December 2012. Final papers will be due no later than February 21, 2013, and they will be posted on the conference's website.

We will be able to offer a number of travel subsidies for participants of the conference.

Organizing committee:

- Kim Lane Scheppelle, Director, Law and Public Affairs Program, as well as Woodrow Wilson School, Sociology and Human Values, Princeton University
- Kathryn Hendley, Law and Political Science, University of Wisconsin, Madison as well as Law and Public Affairs Fellow, Princeton University
- Michael Gordin, Director, Fung Global Fellows Program, as well as Department of History, Princeton University;
- Irena Grudzinska Gross, Slavic Languages and Literatures, Princeton University;
- Serguei Oushakine, Director, Program in Russian and Eurasian Studies as well as Anthropology and Slavic Languages and Literatures, Princeton University.