



**RUSS 430**  
**High Stalinist Culture 1**  
**Fall 2022**

T/Th 11:35 am – 12:55 pm  
680 Sherbrooke West Room 491

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Office hours in-person:  
Tuesdays 1:30 – 2:30 pm  
Wednesdays 10:00 – 11:00 am  
or by appointment (email, in-  
person, Zoom)



Aleksandr Deineka, *Stakhanovites* (1937)

**Credits:** 3

**Prerequisites:** Permission of the Department. Conducted in English.

**Course Description:** Novels, films, art and architecture, the pageantry, rhetoric and routine of the Stalinist 1930s-1940s. Issues include socialist realism as an aesthetic doctrine, utopian blueprint, target of parody, amalgam of a submerged avant-garde and state-controlled pop culture, precursor of the postmodernist simulacrum, self-proclaimed international style and/or uniquely Russian twentieth-century project.

**Cross-cultural reach:** This seminar will debate the following premise: of the totalitarian projects of the twentieth century, Stalinist culture was the most expansionist and possibly the most totalitarian. It pursued totality across the entire cultural field, its many media, art forms, genres and levels of high and low; it proposed to reshape the world and the human psyche. I invite you to challenge or build on these assumptions from within and/or outside the Soviet context; our class readings and discussions will give you the key terms and concepts to reach your own, informed conclusions. Certainly, the intensity, institutionalisation and transparent contradictions of Stalinist culture offer fertile grounds on which to interrogate totalitarian culture as a whole.

**Learning outcomes:** By the end of this course you will be able to form and articulate your own opinions on or reactions to the totalitarian project of High Stalinism. You will be familiar with some of the core texts of this project, and will have acquired the basic terms in which they are most commonly debated.

**Required Texts:** Available at Le James, the McGill University Bookstore, 680 rue Sherbrooke ouest.

- Course pack RUSS 430 / 620 High Stalinist Culture 1 / 2
- Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Fyodor Gladkov, *Cement*, trans. C. Ashleigh. Evanston ILL: Northwestern University Press, 1994
- Viktor Pelevin, *Omon Ra*, trans. Andrew Bromfield. New York: New Directions, 1998.
- Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg. Evanston ILL: Northwestern University Press, 1994.

**Required Films:** Available at the Reserves Desk in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library. Note the **required screening dates** for each film. The films are also accessible via open source online sites; URLs for each have been provided in the relevant Content Units on MyCourses.

- Sergei and Georgii Vasil'ev. *Chapaev* (Lenfil'm, 1934). PN1997 C3977. Must be seen **by 27 September**
- G. Aleksandrov, *Circus* (Mosfil'm, 1936). Must be seen **by 14 October**
- Sergei Eisenstein, *Ivan the Terrible: Parts I and II* (TsOKS/Alma Ata, 1944-46). PN1997 I77 2001. Must be seen **by 20 October**

**Reserve List:** Available at the Reserves Desk in the Humanities and Social Sciences Library, under this course number. Note that these are *supplementary* texts, intended primarily to help you prepare for your team project and final paper.

- Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995. DK 510.32 E67 1995
- Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). Available as an eBook.
- James von Geldern and Richard Stites, ed. *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. DK 266.4 M38 1995
- Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990). NA6868.5 N37 G6413 1990
- Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934*. Evanston, ILL: Northwestern UP, 1999. BH 201 G88 1999.
- Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. N6988 G7613 1992
- Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2002. NA 1188 P313 2002.
- Abram Terts, *On Socialist Realism*. New York: Pantheon, 1960. PG 2975 S513

**MyCourses:** All students registered in this course have automatic access to its online site, listed under RUSS 430 High Stalinist Culture 1. The general address is [www.mcgill.ca/mycourses](http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses). I will be adding and/or updating course materials (fact sheets, reading guides, powerpoints, etc.) throughout the term or you to download and bring to class. Please check *regularly* before *each* class. Class announcements will be posted on the course home page. The discussion board will be open for your use: you may, for example, share internet discoveries, or comment (thoughtfully and respectfully, of course, on ongoing discussions).

**Course Structure and Rationale:** Apart from a brief survey of late nineteenth-century precursor concepts, classes will concentrate on Stalinism as a cultural construct at its formative peak in the middle third of the twentieth century. We will trace specific components, paradigms and paradoxes of “socialist realism” through canonical works in the various arts of the 1930s and 1940s. A constant point of reference will be the controversial relationship between the revolutionary élan of the Russian avant-garde in the 1920s and the more conformist Stalinist years. Postmodernist parodies of socialist realism from the 1980s will also be considered.

In order to maintain a common focus, the cult of Stalin (replaced here by a depersonalised image of the leader), the purges, the Terror, the war theme and trends analogous to Soviet socialist realism in other national cultures will remain peripheral to our main discussions during the term; students particularly interested in these issues are warmly encouraged to incorporate these issues in their team presentation projects and/or end-of-term papers (aka Take-Home Exam).

**Target Topics:** the socialist realist aesthetic in literature, the graphic arts (painting and posters), film, architecture [music, photomontage and sports performance may be explored by interested students in their end-of-term papers, more specific topics in this field are available upon request]. Students are also encouraged to explore parallel concepts and exemplars in cultural traditions outside the Soviet Union.

- collectivism / *sobornost*’ or communality
- ‘spontaneity’ vs. ‘consciousness’
- leadership / the narod (common folk, sometimes taken to mean the peasantry with or without the proletariat) / the intelligentsia / the hero of socialist labour
- utopia (lofty and universal goals) vs. *byt* (mundane material reality, the daily grind) / philistinism
- machine and steel imagery / ‘reforging’ or re-shaping the ‘new man’ and ‘new woman’ into ideal representatives of *homo sovieticus*
- socialist realism revisited: Groys—the fruit of tacit collaboration with the avant-garde it supposedly destroyed; Clark—return to the two-world thinking of the Russian *fin de siècle*; Paperny—part of a recurring alternation between dynamic and static turns in Russian cultural history; Epshtein—Russia’s version of the postmodern condition *avant la lettre*
- socialist realism parodied: *sotsart* of the 1970s and 1980s

**Polling:** We’ll be using in-class polling to jump start discussions, compare opinions, gather feedback – in a word, to keep things truly interactive. For on-campus classes you’ll need to bring your personal devices (smartphone, tablet or laptop) and make sure they are charged. To participate in polling sessions, you *must* first register for an account by clicking on Register Your Account at [www.mcgill.ca/polling](http://www.mcgill.ca/polling) and log in with your McGill username and password. Follow the prompts to agree to the terms of use and create your account.

For more information, please visit the Getting Started for Students section at [www.mcgill.ca/polling](http://www.mcgill.ca/polling). For any technical problems contact the IT Service Desk: <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/get-started-it/need-help>. If you do not have a phone, tablet, or laptop to use to respond to polling questions, please contact me immediately in order for appropriate arrangements to be made.

To maintain a safe and respectful classroom environment, please ensure that any polling responses you submit are appropriate and relevant to the question asked. Please note that unless the poll is labelled as anonymous, your responses are identifiable to the instructor. Please see the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).

**Evaluation Method:** (see explanations below)

Short essay (29 October)	20%
Oral presentation (25 or 27 October)*	30%
Required postings (see below)	15%
Take-home exam (requested for 15 December)	25%
Attendance and participation	10%

Grade	Percentages
A	100% - 85%
A-	84% - 80%
B+	79% - 75%
B	74% - 70%
B-	69% - 65%
C+	65% - 60%
D	54% - 50%
F	49% - 0%

Note that I also use ‘in-between’ grades, for example A-/B+ to indicate a grade between A- (80%) and B+ (75%) which comes to 77.5%.

**Short Essay:** (5-7 pp., 1250 to 1750 words) Suggested topics to posted in the General Course Information module on the MyCourses site for our course. Students will be asked to trace and contextualise a specific

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\* To be confirmed after the end of the add/drop period.

concept, image set or period trend in the featured literary work for this course, the novel *Cement*. If you prefer (and you are encouraged) to write on a text/topic of your own choosing, please consult with me in order to ensure that your essay allows you to reflect the goals and rationale of this course, as well as the page-length requirements of this assignment. Assistance in shaping your ideas, in locating and compiling a good bibliography cheerfully provided by the instructor. Evaluation criteria will include research effort; structure, clarity and persuasiveness of the argument; observance of formatting formalities and originality.

**Oral Presentation:** (20 minutes, with 2 or 3 partners, to be determined after the add/drop period). Topics will be posted on MyCourses in the Administration module; they include an ‘open topic’ of your own choosing, subject to consultation with the instructor. One-page point-form outline required by 18 October. You *must* choose a different topic, text, trend or concept from that discussed in your short essay. A section of the Discussion board on our MyCourses site has already been opened to help you get an early start on proposing a topic and/or recruiting partners. Written synopsis (5-7 pages, 1250 – 1750 words) by your group as a whole is due within one week of receiving feedback from the instructor.

**Required postings:** (500-750 words). Three out of five topics opened on the MyCourses discussion board at 9:00 am on various dates throughout the term (see Target Term Schedule). You must make one original posting per month; **no more than one posting is permitted per month**. Once opened, postings will remain open for the rest of the term, until 9:00 pm on Monday 05 December, the last day of term. This way your fellow students will have the opportunity to respond; these **responses, voluntary, will count toward your general participation mark**. Evaluation criteria will include the depth and relevance of your three required postings and their balanced distribution throughout the term.

**Take-home exam** (requested for 15 December, to be confirmed by the University timetable office). A longer essay, 7-10 pages (1750-2500 words). Topics to be distributed on the last day of class; the aim will be to allow you to trace a course concept or theme in a variety of media as represented by course materials studied over the term and enhanced by your own research.

**Attendance, participation and assignment due dates:** Regular attendance and timely submission of assignments are essential, not only to your success in this course, but to our group dynamic as a whole. After the drop/add period, unexcused absences (without a doctor’s note or short email explaining a family emergency, for example), will count against you: **half a grade point will be deducted for every two unexcused absences** within the attendance and participation category. Out of courtesy to your fellow classmates (and me!) late arrivals cannot be tolerated. Extensions on assignments will not be granted unless my written permission is requested *in advance*. Your participation will be evaluated on the basis of your contributions to class discussions, and response to your fellow students’ postings on the Discussion board of our MyCourses site.

If you at any point feel overwhelmed by your academic work and/or would like to develop your time and workload management skills, please consult [Student Services](#).

### **Class structure and etiquette**

Required readings for each class are given in the Target Term Schedule – you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss, raise or answer questions on them. The Target Term Schedule also lists materials (fact sheets and slideshows or powerpoint presentations) for you to download, print and bring to each class. These will be updated on a regular basis throughout the term; ideally you should check on the morning before each class.

Class time will alternate between my presentation, your questions/answers as described above, and, time permitting, small group discussions. I hope to foster a spirit of discussion and debate. For this reason, you are encouraged to interrupt with questions and comments of your own, but please allow me the option to either answer on the spot or invite you for further discussion outside of class, including your open contributions to a dedicated forum on our MyCourses Discussion board.

In order to foster a friendly and focused atmosphere in our discussions, I must ask you to limit your use of mobile computing devices in class. Let us agree that no audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in

class without the explicit permission of the instructor. These devices are not to be used for voice communication without the explicit permission of the instructor.

**Administrative notes:**

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)
- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures. For more information, see <http://mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>.
- L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).
- Work submitted for this course may be checked with text-matching software within MyCourses.
- Since polling records may be used to compute a portion of course grades, **responding as someone other than yourself is considered an academic offense**. During class, possession of more than one response device or using the credentials of another student will be interpreted as intent to commit an academic offense. Please refer to McGill's policy on Academic Integrity and Code of Conduct. <http://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism>  
<http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>
- Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of [copyright](#) can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.
- As the instructor of this course I endeavour to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Student Accessibility and Achievement, 514-398-6009.

Here's wishing you an enjoyable and productive term!



**Target Term Schedule**  
Subject to revision pending class size

<b>Date</b>	<b>Unit / Readings<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Download</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
Th 01.09	<b>1: Introduction</b>	Course Outline Target Term Schedule Questionnaire Fact Sheet 1: Introduction Slideshow 1: Introduction	
T 06.09 Th 08.09	<b>2. Socialist Realism – Literary Doctrine</b> “Party Policy” (1) “Decree on Reconstruction” (2) Zhdanov (3) Charter of USW (4) Clark, “SR in Soviet Literature” (5) <b>Clark</b> , “Distinctive Role” 3-26	Fact Sheet: SR – Literary Doctrine Slideshow: Revolutionary Romanticism	<b>Return questionnaire</b>  Post 1: Key feature of SR
T 13.09	<b>3. Precursors &amp; Periodisation</b> Chernyshevsky (6) and (7) <b>Clark</b> , “Positive Hero” 46-67	Fact Sheet: Precursors Slideshow: Precursors	
Th 15.09	<b>4. Avant-garde</b> “Slap in the Face” (8) Malevich (9) Punin (10) Groys (11) Paperny (12)	Fact Sheet: Avant-garde Slideshow 1: Malevich Slideshow 2: Tatlin	
T 20.09	Bogdanov (13) and (14) Lenin (15) AKhRR (16) and (17) <b>Clark</b> , “What SR Is” 27-45	Slideshow 3: Mayakovsky, Agitprop	
Th 22.09	<b>Featured Work: <i>Cement</i></b> <b>Gladkov</b> , <i>Cement</i> (the novel) <b>Clark</b> , “Prototypical Plot” 159-76	<i>Cement</i> : Reading Guide Slideshow	<b>Submit short essay outline (optional)</b>
T 27.09	<b>Featured Work: <i>Chapaev</i></b> Discussion of the film	<i>Chapaev</i> : Screening Guide Film: Fact Sheet	Film <i>Chapaev</i> on Reserve or open source link on MyCourses  Post 2: <i>Chapaev</i>
Th 29.09	<b>5. Poster Art</b> <b>Clark</b> , “Heroic Age” 136-55	Poster Art: Fact Sheet Slideshows 1 and 2	<b>Submit short essay</b>
T 04.10	<b>6. New Person</b> Galina, “Chkalov” (18) Stakhanov (19) Atwood & Kelly (20)	Fact Sheet: Heroes & Enemies Slideshow: Heroes	
Th 06.10	Gastev (21) Kirillov (22)	Slideshow: Enemies	<b>Declare oral presentation topic</b>
<b>T 11.10</b>	<b>Fall Reading Break</b>		

<sup>1</sup> Numbers in brackets refer to texts to be found in the Course pack. Items without numbers in brackets have been uploaded to the relevant modules on MyCourses. Authors’ names in **red font** refer to books under separate cover.

Th 13.10	<b>[Makeup Day] – CLASS CANCELLED</b>		
F 14.10	<b>7. Film</b> Discussion of <i>Circus</i> “Ever Higher” (23) “Song of the Motherland” (24) Shumyatsky (25) <b>Clark</b> , “Ritual Sacrifice” 177-88	Fact Sheet: Film Slideshow: <i>Circus</i>	<i>Circus</i> on Reserve or open source link on MyCourses  Post 3: <i>Circus</i>
T 18.10	<b>8. Leader</b> Maiakovskii, “Lenin” (26) Trotskii, “Lenin” (27) Perrie (28)	Fact Sheet: Leader Slideshow 1: Lenin Slideshow 2: Stalin	<b>Submit oral presentation outline</b>
Th 20.10	<b>Featured Work: <i>Ivan the Terrible</i></b> Discussion of the film	Fact Sheet: <i>Ivan the Terrible</i>	<i>Ivan the Terrible</i> on Reserve or open source link on MyCourses  Post 4: <i>Ivan the Terrible</i>
T 25.10	<b>ORAL PRESENTATIONS</b>		
Th 27.10	<b>ORAL PRESENTATIONS</b>		
T 01.11	<b>9. Painting</b>	Painting: Fact Sheet Slideshow 1 Slideshow 2	Receive term paper topics
Th 03.11	<b>10. Architecture</b> Cooke (29) Khlebnikov (30) Paperny (31)	Fact Sheet: Architecture Slideshow: Architecture 1	
T 08.11	Paperny (32)	Slideshow: Architecture 2	
Th 10.11	<b>11. Byt</b> Doroshin (33) “Life’s Getting Better” (34)	Fact Sheet: Byt Slideshow: Byt 1	<b>Submit term paper outline (optional)</b>
T 15.11	Ilf & Petrov (35) <b>Clark</b> , “Great Family” 114-35 Fitzpatrick (36)	Slideshow: Byt 2	
Th 17.11	<b>Featured Work: <i>Foundation Pit</i></b> Stites (37)	Fact Sheet: <i>Foundation Pit</i> Slideshow: <i>Foundation Pit</i>	Post 5: <i>Foundation Pit</i>
T 22.11	Brodsky (38)		
Th 24.11	<b>13. Sotsart</b> <b>Pelevin</b> , <i>Omon-Ra</i>	Slideshow: Sotsart	
T 29.11	Epstein (39)		
Th 01.12	SUMMARY		Discussion prompt – Key issue of SR as reflected/parodied in <i>Omon-Ra</i>
M 05.12	NO CLASS		Discussion Board: all required posting sections close at 9:00 pm
Th 15.12	Tentative date for <b>TERM PAPER</b> formulated as a <b>take-home exam</b>	Subject to approval by the University Timetabling office.	