



RUSS 620
High Stalinist Culture 2
Fall 2022

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

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Office hours:
Tuesdays 1:30 – 2:30 pm
Wednesdays 10:00 – 11:00 am
or by appointment (via email)



Erik Bulatov, *Krasikov Street* (1977)

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: Permission of the Department. Conducted in English and/or Russian. Where available, URLs for the original Russian texts in open source online sites have been posted on the MyCourses site for this course.

Note: This course is offered in tandem with RUSS 430 High Stalinist Culture 1. It shares the same course pack as RUSS 430. Most class meetings will coincide with the RUSS 430 timetable (T/Th 11:35 am – 12:55 pm); five or six separate but *short* conference meetings will be held, possibly over Zoom, to discuss designated grad readings and accommodate research presentations. Their final number and timetable will be determined before the end of the add/drop period, after we have had a chance to compare timetables and research goals.

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 avantgarde 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.

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

- Course pack RUSS 430 / 620 High Stalinist Culture 1 / 2¹
- Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd 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* text, intended primarily to help you prepare for your team project and final paper.

- Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973. eBook.
- 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
- 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, now listed under RUSS 620 High Stalinist Culture 2. The general address is www.mcgill.ca/mycourses. I will be adding and/or updating course materials (fact sheets, reading guides, powerpoints, etc.) throughout the term for 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 avantgarde in the 1920s and the

¹ Readings from the Course Pack, required texts and supplemental materials are indicated on the Target Term Schedule under the relevant dates for the RUSS 430 section. Additional grad seminar readings have been posted in a separate folder on the MyCourses site.

more conformist Stalinist years. Postmodernist parodies of socialist realism from the 1980s will also be considered.

As part of its research component, this course will require graduate student participants to design, in consultation with the instructor, an individual term project incorporating their primary research profiles.

Target Topics: the socialist realist aesthetic in literature, the graphic arts (painting and posters), film, architecture [music and photomontage 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 avantgarde 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

Conceptual contexts (to be finalised after discussion with all graduate participants)

- **ideology, power, authoritarian discourse**
- **avant-garde / socialist realism**
- **alternations**
- **carnival**

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 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. 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)

Context review parts 1 and 2 (weeks 5 and 13 of term) ²	15%
Research presentation (week 9 of term)	25%
Required postings (see the Target Term Schedule)	15%
Research paper (15 December, designated as a Take-Home Exam)	35%
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%.

Context Review (15 minutes, week 5 of the term; written follow-up in essay style, 1300-1800 words, due within one week of receipt of my feedback.) In order to promote the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary outreach of this course, you will be asked to declare (week 4 of term) and describe a theoretical base and/or major monograph (see the Course Bibliography for suggestions) that allows you to bridge between your primary research profile and the unique perspective it opens up for you on the Soviet socialist realist project of the 20th century. Suggested readings will be drawn up upon consultation with the instructor.

We will return to the alternative contexts chosen by our group in the 13th week of term, applying them to other 'texts' (literary and in other media) discussed in class.

Research presentation: (25 minutes, week 9 of term). Declare your preliminary choice by or before 06 October, and meet with me to discuss your no later than 18 October. An outline is required in the 8th week of term. Written synopsis (5-7 pages, 1250 – 1750 words) due within one week of receiving feedback from the instructor.

Required postings: (1000 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.

Research paper: (15-20 pp, 3750-5000 words). Declare your topic **no later than 01 November**. Outline due **08 November**. Evaluation criteria will include the depth and specificity of your response to the course themes and materials, your own individual research, the originality and persuasiveness of your argument. The final submission falls due on the date officially designated as the take-home exam for this course. I have requested 15 December, pending approval by the University Time Tabling office; please submit via the MyCourses Site.

Attendance, participation and assignment due dates: It is assumed that at the graduate level, regular attendance is a sine qua non. Exceptions can be made during the weeks when separate grad seminar meetings

² As indicated above, separate (and short!) grad conference meetings will be held during the term. On the Target Term Schedule at the end of this outline, you will find them designated by week as opposed to specific dates. Their actual time, date and meeting place will be finalised at the end of the drop/add period.

are to be held. Your participation mark will also depend on evidence of your careful reading and challenging of course materials in class discussions. Sharing information on your web discoveries of relevance to our course themes, responding to discussion posts by other students will also count very much in your favour.

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/).
- 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

Week	Class meeting	Unit / Readings ³	Read <i>before</i> class	Assignments
1	Th 01.09	1: Introduction	Course Description Target Term Schedule Questionnaire Fact Sheet 1: Introduction Slideshow 1: Introduction	
2	T 06.09 Th 08.10	2. Socialist Realism – Literary Doctrine “Party Policy” (1) “Decree on Reconstruction” (2) Zhdanov, “Soviet Literature” (3) Charter of USW (4) Clark, “SR in Soviet Literature” (5) Clark , “Distinctive Role” 3-26	Fact Sheet: SR – Literary Doctrine Slideshow: Revolutionary Romanticism	Return questionnaire Post 1: Key feature of SR
	Week 2 grad⁴ seminar	Introduction to our grad seminar		
3	T 13.09	3. Precursors & Periodisation Chernyshevsky (6) and (7) Clark , “Positive Hero” 46-67	Fact Sheet: Precursors	
	Th 15.09	4. Avantgarde “Slap in the Face” (8) Malevich (9) Punin (10) Groys (11) Paperny (12)	Fact Sheet: Avantgarde Slideshow 1: Malevich Slideshow 2: Tatlin	
	Week 3 grad seminar	Overview – Ideology, power, authoritarian discourse	Epstein, “Relativistic Patterns” Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel”	
4	T 20.09	Bogdanov (13) and (14) Lenin (15) AKhRR (16) and (17) Clark , “What SR Is,” 27-45	Slideshow 3: Mayakovsky, Agitprop	
	Th 22.09	Featured Work: <i>Cement</i> Gladkov , <i>Cement</i> (the novel) Clark , “Prototypical Plot,” 159-76	<i>Cement</i> : Reading Guide Slideshow	
	Week 4 grad seminar	Grad seminar: Avantgarde / Socialist Realism	Gutkin, “Emergence” and “Road”	Declare context review topic

³ 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. Articles in **green font** refer to Grad Seminar Readings posted on MyCourses.

⁴ We will set a specific time and date for these shorter (one-hour) meetings once we have had a chance to meet and/or exchange emails to coordinate our schedules in the first week of classes.

			Groys, <i>Total Art</i>	
5	T 27.09	Featured Work: <i>Chapaev</i> 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	5. Poster Art Clark , “Heroic Age” 136-55	Poster Art: Fact Sheet Slideshows 1 and 2	
	Week 5 grad seminar	Setting context		Present context review
6	T 04.10	6. New Person Galin, “Chkalov” (18) Stakhanov (19) Atwood & Kelly (20)	Fact Sheet: Heroes & Enemies Slideshow: Heroes	
	Th 06.10	Gastev (21) Kirillov (22)	Slideshow: Enemies	Declare research presentation topic
	Week 6 grad seminar	Alternations	Lotman & Uspensky, “Binary Models”	
7	T 11.10 Th 13.10	Fall Reading Break – CLASS CANCELLED [Makeup Day] – CLASS CANCELLED		
	Fr 14.10	7. Film Discussion of <i>Circus</i> “Ever Higher” (23) “Song of the Motherland” (24) Shumyatsky (25) Clark , “Ritual Sacrifice” 177-88	Fact Sheet: Film Slideshow: Circus	<i>Circus</i> on Reserve or open source link on MyCourses Post 3: <i>Circus</i>
8	T 18.10	8. Leader Maiakovskii, “Lenin” (26) Trotskii, “Lenin” (27) Perrie (28)	Fact Sheet: Leader Slideshow 1: Lenin Slideshow 2: Stalin	Consult instructor on preparing your research presentation.s
	Th 20.10	Featured Work: <i>Ivan the Terrible</i> 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>
	Week 8 grad seminar	Carnival	Emerson, “Coming to Terms” Groys, “Totalitarizm karnavala”	Submit outline of your research presentation
9	T 25.10	ORAL PRESENTATIONS		
	Th 27.10	ORAL PRESENTATIONS		
	Week 9 grad seminar	GRAD RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS		
10	Th 01.11	9. Painting	Painting: Fact Sheet Slideshow 1 Slideshow 2	Declare research paper topic
	Th 03.11	10. Architecture Cooke (29)	Fact Sheet: Architecture Slideshow: Architecture 1	

		Khlebnikov (30) Paperny (31)		
11	T 08.11	Paperny (32)	Slideshow: Architecture 2	Submit research paper outline
	Th 10.11	11. Byt Doroshin (33) “Life’s Getting Better” (34) Ilf & Petrov (35)	Fact Sheet: Byt Slideshow: Byt 1	
12 13	T 15.11	Clark , “Great Family” 114-35 Fitzpatrick (36)	Slideshow: Byt 2	
	Th 17.11 T 22.11	Featured work : <i>Foundation Pit</i> Platonov , <i>Foundation Pit</i> (novel) Stites (37) Brodsky (38)	Fact Sheet: <i>Foundation Pit</i> Slideshow: <i>Foundation Pit</i>	Post 5: <i>Foundation Pit</i>
	week 13 grad seminar	Context review part 2: texts and contexts		
	Th 24.11 T 29.11	12. Sotsart Pelevin , <i>Omon-Ra</i> Epstein (39)	Slideshow: Sotsart	Discussion prompt – Key issue of SR as reflected in <i>Omon-Ra</i>
	Th 01.12	SUMMARY.		
	M 05.12	NO CLASS	Discussion Board: all required posting sections close at 9:00 pm	
	Th 15.12	Submit research paper		