

The University of Chicago, Department of History, Fall 1998

## STALINIST CULTURE

Dr. Vadim Volkov

10 weeks, 11 lectures, 9 discussion sessions, Hist 139

1. Conceptions of culture in different traditions of social thought. Culture as meanings, symbols, values, material / spiritual products, etc. Culture critique and cultural studies.
2. Historical interpretations of culture and civilization. Max Weber, Norbert Elias, and Michel Foucault on disciplinary practices. Culture as self-discipline and self-consciousness.
3. Russian and Soviet definitions of culture and its conceptual history. An overview of the early-Soviet culture and its components. Major studies of Stalinist culture.
4. How Russia became “the reading country” (chitaiushchaya strana). Popular literacy and the Soviet powers in the 1920s. Reading practices in the 1930s: from folklore to high literature.
5. Popular culture, mass culture and the carnival. “1936 – the year of carnivals”.
6. Practices of civilization. How to become civilized: the idea and practice of kul’turnost’, 1935-38. The functions of kul’turnost’ in Stalin’s Russia.
7. Forms of self-discipline and self-control. The cultural logic of the Stakhanovite movement. The cult of the hero. The conquest of the skies as mass practice.
8. Culture and the personality cult. Symbols of Stalinism. The cultural technologies of Stalin’s personality cult.
9. Boundaries, differences, and divisions: public / private; collective / individual; formal / informal, etc. Their structuring force and civilizational significance. Public and private in Stalinist culture and society.
10. Continuation. The individual and the collective; formal and informal spheres in the Soviet society. The privatization and individualization of life.
11. Concluding remarks. Was there a unified cultural logic of Stalinism? The general and the particular features of Stalinist culture in comparative perspective.

### Evaluation

Two essays, one mid-term, one final, 2500 to 3000 words each. Students are encouraged to invent an essay title of their own; alternatively, they can select one from the list below.

The mid-term essay will cover topics 1-6; the final 1-11. Mid-term essay topics should be agreed by 10<sup>th</sup> November, essays due in by 12 o'clock 17<sup>th</sup> November. Final essay topics should be agreed not later than 8<sup>th</sup> December (but preferably on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December); deadline for submission Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> December 12 o'clock.

Some suggestions for essay topics:

- The early-Soviet culture was as much a field of resistance as it was the instrument of domination of the party-state. Do you agree?
- Explain the centrality of culture to the building of socialism
- Did mass literacy facilitate social control or did it enable critical attitudes?
- What is socialist realism?
- How can one explain the high authority of the writer in the Soviet society?
- Cultural revolution betrayed: reflect on the mass popular culture and entertainment of the 1930s
- Did Bakhtin refer to Stalinist culture when he explored the world of Francois Rabelais?
- Compare the interpretations of kul'turnost' given by different authors (Dunham, Fitzpatrick, Boym, Volkov) and give their critical account
- Using a concrete personality, assess the role of heroic individuals in Stalinist culture
- Explain Stalin's personality cult, its origins and its functions
- How did it happen that socialism that started from a rejection of private life gradually admitted and supported its existence?
- Assess the significance of the informal and 'shadow' sphere of the Soviet society

#### Readings for discussion sessions

\* - Compulsory reading

#### **Session 1, 13 October**

- \*J. Alexander (Ed) *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*. Cambridge, 1990, Introduction;
- S. Hall "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms". In N. Dirks et al (eds) *Culture / Power / History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. Princeton, 1994;
- I. Davies *Cultural Studies and Beyond*: London, 1995;
- \*M. Weber *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. NY, 1958, p. 155-183
- \*N. Elias *The Civilizing Process*. Volume One, *The History of Manners*. Oxford, 1994, p. 3-7, 42-67;
- \*M. Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. New York, 1977, p. 135-169

#### **Session 2, 20 October**

- \*C. Kelly and D. Shepherd (eds) *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. Oxford, 1998, p. 1-21;
- \*S. Fitzpatrick *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca, 1992, p. 1-15;
- V. Dunham *In Stalin's Time: Middle-class Values in Soviet Fiction*. Cambridge, 1976, p. 3-38;

H. Gunther (ed) *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, 1992;  
A. Gleason et al (eds) *Bolshevik Culture*, 1985;  
N. Timasheff *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*. New York, 1946, p. 192-240;  
R. Tucker *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, New York, 1977

### **Session 3, 27 October**

\*V. Volkov "Limits to Propaganda: The Soviet Power and The Peasant Reader in the 1920s". In J. Raven (ed) *Non-Commercial Uses of Print in Comparative Perspective*, 1998 (manuscript);  
E. Dobrenko *The Making of the State Reader*. Stanford, 1997;  
\*F. Miller *Folklore for Stalin*. New York, 1990, p. 3-24  
R. Robin "Popular Literature of the 1920s: Russian Peasants as Readers. In S. Fitzpatrick et al (eds) *Russia in the Era of NEP*. Bloomington, 1991;  
P. Kenez *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*. Cambridge, 1985

### **Session 4, 3 November**

\*T. Adorno "Culture Industry Reconsidered". In J. Alexander (Ed) *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*. Cambridge, 1990;  
\*R. Stites *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*. Cambridge, 1992, p. 65-97;  
\*R. Robin "Stalinism and Popular Culture". In H. Gunther *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, 1992  
J. von Gelden and R. Stites *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia*. Bloomington, 1995, p. 215-327  
M. Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, 1984, Introduction, p. 1-57;

### **Session 5, 10 November**

\*C. Kelly and V. Volkov "Directed Desires: Kul'turnost' and Consumption". In C. Kelly and D. Shepherd *Constructing Russian Culture*. Oxford, 1998, p. 291-313;  
\*S. Fitzpatrick "Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste. In *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca, 1992, p. 216-237;  
\*V. Dunham *In Stalin's Time: Middle-class Values in Soviet Fiction*. Cambridge, 1976, p. 41-58  
S. Boym *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Harvard, 1994

### **Session 6, 17 November**

\*K. Clark *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Chicago, 1985, p. 3-24, 114-155;  
\*L. Siegelbaum *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 210-246;  
R. Stites *Revolutionary Dreams*, NY, 1989, p. 145-164;  
M. Walzer *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study of the Origins of Radical Politics*, NY, 1968 (Conclusion);

### **Session 7, 24 November**

- \*N. Tumarkin *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*. Cambridge, 1983 (selected pages);
- \*V. Bonnell *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*. Berkeley, 1997, p. 168-187;
- B. Groys *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton, 1992, p. 56-74;
- C. Lane *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case*. London, 1981;

### **Session 8, 1 December**

- \*J. Weintraub and K. Kumar (eds) *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on A Grand Dichotomy*, Chicago, 1997, Introduction, p. 1-42
- \*O. Karkhordin "Reveal and Dissimulate: A Genealogy of Private Life in Soviet Russia". In J. Weintraub and K. Kumar (eds) *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on A Grand Dichotomy*, Chicago, 1997, p. 333-364;
- \*V. Dunham *In Stalins' Times: Middle-class Values in Soviet Fiction*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 3-38;
- V. Shlapentokh *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People*, NY, 1989;
- A. Inkeles and R. Bauer *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in A Totalitarian Society*, Harvard, 1959;
- S. Boym *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Harvard, 1994;
- M. Buckley "The Untold Story of *Obshchestvennitsa* in the 1930s, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1996, Vol. 48, # 4, p. 569-586;
- N. Timasheff *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*. New York, 1946

### **Session 9, 8 December**

- \*A. Ledeneva *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 11-38;
- \*S. Fitzpatrick "Blat in Stalin's Time", *Bribery and Blat in Russia*, Ed. by S. Lowell and A. Ledeneva, London, 1999 (manuscript);
- J.P. Willerton *Patronage and Politics in the USSR*, Cambridge, 1992