THE FUTURE IS NOW: REVOLUTION AND UTOPIA
IN EARLY SOVIET CULTURE

Princeton Global Seminar in St. Petersburg, 15 June – 24 July 2009

Prof. Serguei Oushakine and Prof. Devin Fore

Description:

The political revolution of 1917 was not the climax of the Bolshevik agenda, but only a point of departure for a more radical program to completely restructure social relations and modes of human experience. Out of this crisis emerged a period of cultural experimentation that was unprecedented in the modern era. This course examines a variety of the utopian projects that flourished in this period. At the same time that we will study the famous artistic avant-gardes whose influence continues to the present day—Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Production Art, and early Soviet Cinema—we will also investigate the everyday contexts that gave sense to these movements: the establishment of communal life, the modernization of experience and sensation, the reorganization of the relations between the sexes, the creation of new codes of conduct, the explosion of the mass media, promethean construction enterprises, the Stalinization of culture, and other topics. Motivating all of these inquiries will be a single question: How can we understand the experiences and self-definition of the new Soviet subject? Our inquiry will be supplemented by excursions into the city of St. Petersburg, a weekend trip to Moscow, and a trip to the Solovki island, the place where the Gulag Archipelago started.

Provisional schedule of the day:

9:00-10:30 - Russian language
11:00-1:00 - Lecture
2:00pm - Film showings, as needed; possible community service on Thursdays.

Requirements:

1. Class participation 30%
2. Weekly response papers 30%
2. Final project due September 2009 40%

Syllabus

WEEK 1

THE END OF EMPIRE (Oushakine)

Katerina Clark, “Imperial Petersburg, 1913,” in Clark, Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution.


Film: Agony (Dir. Elem Klimov, 1984).

City tour: St. Peter and Paul Fortress: graves of the last Russian tsar.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE FUTURE (Fore)


THE POWER OF UTOPIA (Oushakine)

Leon Trotsky, Russian Revolution (excerpts).

City tour: Smolny (the headquarters of the revolution); the cruiser Aurora.

THE MODERNISM OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT (Oushakine)


WEEK 2

ORGANIZING SPACE (Oushakine)


Film: Volga-Volga (Dir. G. Aleksandrov, 1936).

City tour: visit a kommunalka

TRANSFORMING CULTURE (Oushakine)


Film: TBA

0.10: MALEVICH AND TATLIN (Fore)


Margit Rowell, “Form/Faktura: Tatlin,” in October no. 7 (Winter 1978).


FORMALISM IN SEARCH OF MOTIVATION: RODCHENKO (Fore)


“1921” and “1928,” in Art Since 1900, ed. Hal Foster et al.


WEEK 3

IN-CORPORATING ART: LISSITZKY (Fore)


Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” in October no. 30 (Fall 1984).

PHOTOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES (Fore)

Victor Burgin, “Photography, Phantasy, Function”
Osip Brik, “From the Painting to the Photograph” and “The Fixation of Fact,” in Photography in the Modern Era, ed. Christopher Phillips.

SOVIET VALUES: THE BASICS (Oushakine)

Leon Trotsky, Problems of Everyday Life: Creating the Foundations for a New Society in Revolutionary Russia (selections).

PRODUCTION ART AND THE CULTURE OF THE OBJECT (Fore)

Boris Arvatov, “Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing,” in October no. 81 (Summer 1997).
Christina Lodder, “The Object and the Constructivist Micro-Environment,” in Lodder, Russian Constructivism.

Weekend trip to Moscow.

WEEK 4

FROM PRODUCTION TO REPRODUCTION (Fore)

Sergei Tret’iakov, I Want a Baby

EMBODIED SOCIALISM (Oushakine)


Film: Hammer and Sickle (dir. Sergei Livnev, 1994).

BIOMECHANICS (Fore)

Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold on Theatre (selections from chapter 5 on biomechanics), ed. Edward Braun.


Film: The Magnanimous Cuckold (1983 reconstruction of Meyerhold production)

Soviet Subjectivity: Creating a New Self (Oushakine)


Anton Makarenko. Road to Life (An Epic of Education)(selections).


Week 5

The Prosthetic Eye: Dziga Vertov (Fore)


Film: Man With A Movie Camera (dir. Dziga Vertov)

Film Language: Sergei Eisenstein (Fore)


Film: Battleship Potemkin (dir. Sergei Eisenstein)

Revolution as Ritual (Oushakine)


Vladimir Tolstoy, Irina bibikova, and Catherine Cooke, Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia 1918-33 (selections).
THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED (Oushakine)


Tour: the Solovki island (the place where the first Gulag camps were established).

WEEK 6

CULTS OF PERSONALITIES (Oushakine)


Film: Ivan the Terrible (dir. Sergei Eisenstein).

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR (Fore)

Viktor Shklovskii, The Third Factory.

THE SOCIALIST ARCHIPELAGO (Oushakine)

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich.
Oleg Khlevniuk, The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror (selections)

REALISM AFTER THE AVANT-GARDE (Fore)

Evgeny Dobrenko, “Socialism as Will and Representation” in Dobrenko, Political Economy of Socialist Realism.