PRZEGLĄD RUSYCYSTYCZNY
2007. ZESZYT 4 (120)

Richard J. Walker
Grinnell College, USA

RE-IMAGINING THE MASSES: TOWARD A POLITICS OF RUSSIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Saint Petersburg: the Imperial Gaze Westward

Rising from the delta where the Neva River empties into the Baltic Sea, Saint Petersburg can be likened to a living mausoleum,[1] memorializing the ambivalence of Russia's territorial and continental identity and the subsequent struggles over Russia's cultural identity. Russia's gateway to the west arose not as an organic city, but as an act of sheer will, a realization of Peter the Great's imperial dream — a dream that often turned nightmarish, as so skillfully rendered in Puskin's depiction of the November 7, 1824 flood in *The Bronze Horseman*.[2]

Throughout the city's history floods plagued Saint Petersburg as the western waters of the Baltic threatened to overtake and drown the imperial capital. Ultimately, it was not the waves, but the 1917 Revolution that ended the imperial dream — the government, relocated to Moscow, no longer peered through the 'window to the west' and specters of the iron curtain loomed on the horizon. In Saint Petersburg, the pre-Soviet threat surging from the West continued and only under an aging Soviet regime was a plan approved to turn the tide: the Saint Petersburg Flood Facility Complex, approved in 1978 and on which construction began in 1980.

---

[1] Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin writes: "[Saint Petersburg] is on the borderline between existence and non-existence, reality and phantasmagoria, always on the verge of dissipating like the fog and vanishing. [Saint] Petersburg […] is on the threshold." (167) Taking Bakhtin's characterization in light of the tragic history of flooding, Saint Petersburg appears between life and death — a city whose roadways and sidewalks, circulators of the living, became canals during floods, at times circulating corpses exhumed by the tides.

[2] Here we point our reader's attention to the rich history of representing Saint Petersburg. See, for example, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Gogol's *The Nose* for Petersburg as literary space and *Saint Petersburg: Russia's Window to the Future, The First Three Centuries* by Arthur L. George and V. O. Kluchevskii's 5-volume *A History of Russia* for Petersburg as historical space.

This project was advanced by the Brezhnev administration, whose rule marked a period of relative stability preceding the eventual rise of Gorbachev and the fall of the USSR. Kirill Kobrin argues in his accompanying article that, like Britain in the Victorian Era, the stable veneer of the Brezhnev period conceals powerful societal transformations, albeit in a germinal form. In one sense, the timing of the Saint Petersburg Dam project can be read as an autumnal attempt at repelling the western cultural currents beginning to infiltrate the Soviet Union. Indeed, as *perestroika* began transforming Russia through western-style reforms, construction on the dam system halted. A symbolic repellent of the western currents became ineffective as Russians experienced unprecedented freedom of expression and Russia as a whole faced a new flood: the influx of western commodities and cultural productions. Amid these newly arrived images and messages from the West, the struggle over Russian identity emerged with renewed vigor and, for the first time in Russian history, what we would call 'popular culture' appeared.

The rise of popular culture within the Russian context cannot be viewed as a simple extension or territorial expansion of Western popular culture. As evidenced through numerous examples within these collected articles, Russia's relationship to Western popular culture remains contentious. Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy points out in "Man in Black: Putin. Power. Image," that even the category 'popular culture' does not directly translate and appears in Russian as 'mass culture' *(массовая культура)*. The usage of the phrase 'mass culture' does not indicate paucity of the Russian language; 'popular culture' *(популярная культура)* can be literally translated, yet is not used. A conceptual distinction separates these categories and highlights the differing evolutions of Russian and Western mass-distributed cultural productions. By examining the Russian trajectory toward contemporary cultural productive practices, we gain insight into the historical movement away from mass culture, the political implications of this contemporary culture and the grounds for labeling these practices under the rubric of 'popular culture.'

Subversive Gestures: Murmurs of Popular Culture in the Soviet Context

While the majority of the subsequent articles address 'major' elements of what, in contemporary parlance, is popular culture (e.g. film, popular literature and music), Boris Briker looks back to the 1930s with an analysis of anti-Stalinist jokes. The subject matter of this article differs significantly from the other papers and presciently underscores several problematics within the study of Russian popular culture. Unlike the other cultural materials analyzed herein, "political jokes in Stalinist Russia belong to folklore," rather than popular culture because of their illegality. (Briker) Due to the censorship apparatus, supported by the threat of the Stalinist State, reprinting any such jokes proved impossible within Russia and

even carried consequences when reprinted from without.[3] The surviving records of these jokes inside Russia result from individuals' documentation of the jokes, though some volumes of jokes transported by 'displaced persons' appeared abroad. Volumes of these jokes would be printed in Russia, but mass produced volumes appeared only within the last 15 to 20 years. (Briker)

The study of anti-Stalinist humor as an aspect of Russian popular culture problematizes the conflation of 'popular culture' with 'mass culture.' These jokes necessitate the differentiation of 'mass' from 'popular' culture, as the jokes' creation and circulation attests to an underground productivity of a populace that lacks the support of mass production and distribution systems. Taken synchronically, this humor presages the future place and functionality of popular culture, and yet remains a distinct antecedent. Popular culture in Russia does not yet exist, but intimations of its presence can be heard.

The sonorous cacophony of popular culture begins to resound following the Khrushchevian *Thaw* in Anatoly Vishevsky's "Timur Shaov and the Death of the Russian Bard Song." The Bard's Song was born amid the phase change of de-Stalinization under Krushchev and died with the rise of "the political freedoms of contemporary Russia." (Vishevsky) Vishevsky differentiates this song from the synonymous Author's Song, arguing that the latter preceded Stalinism and followed the end of the Soviet era. While the post-Soviet Author's Songs evolved from a Soviet heritage, they provide neither the hope nor escape from the contemporary situation that defined the Bard's song genre. The Bard's songs functioned as a countervailing melody to the metanarrative of the Soviet state and its musical embodiment in the mass song. Within the Soviet context, the Bard's song was the song of the rebel seeking to overcome the State, that "final barrier to happiness." (Vishevsky)

The easing of Soviet political repression signaled the death of the metanarrative from which the Bard's songs derived their content — hope was no longer possible as the Soviet political system fell. There could be no definitive end to the present state; there was no longer an outside upon which a sense of hope and escape could fixate. Further, the underground distribution networks, consisting of performances in apartments and tapes circulating within small, homogenous enclaves, lost their necessity. The Bard's songs surfaced from the underground and could be distributed widely, leading to larger audiences. The mass event now superceded the intimacy of the apartment performance.

Against this backdrop emerged the contemporary Artist's songs as exemplified by the work of Timur Shaov, a playfully post-modern poet. Through his use of intertextual allusion, historical amalgamation and ironic humor, Shaov constructs

[3] In his article, Briker relates the anecdote of a foreign journalist who printed an anti-Stalinist joke in *The Saturday Evening Post* and was subsequently expelled from Russia.

a lyrical world marked by the destruction of distinctions between the 'high' and 'low' culture. The mythological, hallucinated heroism of the shepherd's drunken state ends with his return to everyday life. This hope-less play finds many corollaries in the post-modern popular culture of America, notably in the works of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo and the inimitable Weird "Al" Yankovic, announcing the arrival of what can finally be called Russian Popular culture.

The absence of hope in the Artist's songs surprisingly aligns with the spirit and credo of Socialist Realist art. As Marina Balina notes, officially "Soviet *life* was already better," rendering hope irrelevant, rather than impossible as in Shaov's contemporary Artist's songs. Within this perfected present, what possible role could the fairytale *(сказка)* possibly have? Following a lengthy debate within the party, the fairytale re-emerged, albeit in an inverted form: in the Soviet fairytale the ordinary triumphs over the extraordinary. Only the return to the Soviet Union could provide the attainment of true happiness, as demonstrated in Balina's study of *The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino*.

Multiple versions of Buratino have emerged over time and across various media, enabling the comparison of the narrative changes across the different historical productions and presenting an evolving picture of Soviet media. Originally, the story only alluded to the USSR as the land of happiness, while the first film adaptation of 1939 explicitly stated this localization. However, the television musical of 1975 admits of a visual rupture in the solidity of this narrative, with the final scene of the film indicating that the realization of happiness did not occur and remained indefinitely postponed. (Balina) Additionally, the musical alluded to contemporary events and satirized lines from the earlier versions of Buratino, challenging the Soviet system in ways previously impossible. With the airing of this musical, critical perspectives on the Soviet Regime began to surface within 'mass culture,' clearing a path to what we can only call 'popular culture.'

Similar ruptures did not, however, appear across the entire spectrum of Soviet media. The kernels of popular culture and concomitant engagements with post-modernism sprouted most fruitfully in the soil of children's mass culture. As Balina notes, under the Soviet system the children's genre received greater leniency from the censors, allowing authors to publish works that would be unacceptable in other genres. Larissa Rudova's examination of Grigorii Oster's oeuvre, which spans Soviet and post-Soviet times, provides another example of the subversive elements allowed into Soviet children's culture, as well as the freedoms provided in post-Soviet media.

Under the Soviet system, official critics viewed Oster's published pieces with suspicion. Through this period Oster maintained his creative career by writing screenplays for children's cartoons with protection from censors and critics "because most bigwigs of the cultural establishment were grandfathers and regularly watched [Oster's] cartoons along with their children." (Quoted in Rudova) From

early in his career, Oster's subversive style implicitly challenged authority and utilized a post-modern aesthetic sensibility. The works of Oster again lead to an examination of the interconnection between postmodernism and popular culture within Russia.

Addressing this relation, Rudova cites Aleksander Genis, who adjusts the western postmodern formula of "avant-garde plus pop culture" to "avant-garde plus socialist realism" for the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. Due to Socialist Realism's status as the official aesthetic practice under the Soviet system and the inability of popular culture to flourish within such a vertically integrated structure, we arrive at a paradoxical position from a western perspective: postmodernism in Russia precedes popular culture. The history and stylistics of the unofficial art movement known as *sots* art, which decontextualized and subverted traditional Soviet symbolic practices and motifs through juxtaposition and recombination in novel forms, supports this thesis.

Arising during the 1970s, *sots* art existed necessarily on the margins of Soviet society and the associated artists never succeeded at publicly exhibiting their works in Moscow during the Soviet regime. (Tupitsyn, 5) This failure is not due to lack of effort, as several artists attempted an open-air exhibition on September 15, 1974, later termed the "Bulldozer exhibit," only to have the government intervene with bulldozers, police and water cannons. The threat of government intervention restricted *sots* art showings within Russia, though several gallery exhibitions were organized in New York in the mid-1980s. (Andreeva, 62) Only in 1992 after the end of the Soviet era did an officially sanctioned *sots* arts exhibit occur in Russia — ironically in the Lenin Central Museum in Moscow.

Erik Bulatov's painting "Danger" *(«Опасно»)* provides a superlative example of *sots* art, its post-modern tendencies and the threat such works presented to the Soviet narrative. "Danger" depicts a representational idyllic pastoral scene foregrounded by renderings of the signifier "danger" on a three dimensional plane, suggesting a pyramid whose apex and vanishing point lay at the center of the painting, below the background's horizon. The foreground signifier "danger" refers to a general theme of Socialist Realist art: the people must be vigilant at all times.

This theme of eternal vigilance, often noted through the use of imperatives and the sanctification of 'heroic' deeds (such as the tale of Pavlik Morozov related by Rudova), loses its monologic credibility when mobilized by Bulatov. The organization of spatial elements creates the phantasmic appearance of 'danger' projecting from a point internal to, yet never present within the landscape. The lack of structural relation between the two signifying planes prevents their collapse into one, unmasking the artificiality of the foreground's attempted overcoding of the background. These overlapping representational planes enact a dialogue without resolution, as the painting offers no narrative to unify the foreground and the pacific background. The play between the two scenes of the painting creates an intermi-

nable oscillation between differing regimes of representation: art and propaganda, the individual and the state, tranquility and paranoia. No centralized meaning or narrative emerges to take the place of the Soviet narrative thus disrobed.[4]

Thus, we see that while popular culture was not available as a catalyst to developing postmodernist tendencies in Russia, the Socialist Realist mass culture, with its socio-political teleology, myopism and authoritarianism, worked to produce similar results when utilized by the avant-garde. As long as the vertical structure of Socialist Realism prevailed over the artistic landscape in a legally and militarily enforced way, the horizontal structure necessary for popular culture could not come into being.[5] The rise of postmodernism and the work of Grigorii Oster helped to pave the way for the opening of the artistic-productive sphere and the freedom necessary for recursive relationships between the populace and cultural productions.

Individual subversive artistic acts do not indicate that Soviet mass media never mirrored everyday life and was never voluntarily taken in by the populace. Instances of popular appropriation do appear within the purview of everyday life, as indicated by Balina's observation of the prevalence of Buratino merchandise and the "highjacking" of this image by the world of adults. Additionally, some degree of recursion occurs in cultural productions of the "late Soviet Victorianism" and, specifically, television series depicting Sherlock Holmes. Kobrin analyzes what these series and their popularity from the 1970s until 1986 tell of Soviet culture at that time.

The "late Soviet Victorianism," as Kobrin titles the period from the Brezhnevian 'stagnation' to the beginning of *perestroika* under Gorbachev, shares many traits with Britain under Queen Victoria, and finds its cultural expression in the production of numerous television programs based upon Victorian literature. Television programming during this period, like other forms of artistic production, had to adhere to standards of 'high' culture. Kobrin writes, "these films were dramatizations of popular books, mostly foreign *classics*." (Emphasis added) The popularity of Victorian literature during the 'stagnation,' can be explained by similarities such as stability, hard-coded norms, and gradual political and ideological changes which would eventually manifest as an upheaval of the contemporary political system. However, perhaps the most

[4] For further examples of *sots* art see the art of Ilya Kabakov and also Vitalii Komar and Alex Melamid.

[5] By the terms vertical and horizontal, we refer to the organization and delimitation of production as presented in Tom Peter's *Thriving on Choas*: *Handbook for a Management Revolution*. A vertically structured environment controls production via a hierarchy, with production orders being issued from the top, then transmitted through intermediary stages to the bottom, where production occurs. By contrast, a horizontally structured environment does not control production, but responds to demands for production issuing from the market and issues production orders from the production line.

salient characteristic responsible for the popularity of the Sherlock Holmes serials lays in the production of and relation to the 'Other.'

The 'other,' as presented in Kobrin's analysis is dominantly aligned along two poles: the other of the 'East,' whose absent presence is marked in the biographies of many characters recently returned from India, and the other of woman. The structurality of the men's world of drinking, fighting and gaming in Victorian (and by implication Soviet) society depends on the simultaneous presence and absence of woman, her role restricted to asexual caretaker who ensures the perpetuation of this world, but does not engage in its internal play. Woman, within this late Soviet Victorian world, is reduced to a servile function in order to neutralize the danger she poses, namely that of trapping a man by the hearth and exposing the fundamental instability of the men's world. "The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play." (Derrida, 279) Ultimately, Holmes and Watson's world crumbles under the influence of woman, as Holmes reacts to Watson's marriage by expelling him from the apartment and later delivering a monologue depreciatory of women. To recognize woman as an active subject-position would ensure disaster for Sherlock Holmes' deductive world and the late Soviet men's world, both of whose structural integrity relies on her non-position as center and ground of these worlds.

With the onset of *perestroika* and *glasnost,* the censorship apparatus of the Communist Party relaxed, allowing significantly freer popular expression than previously possible. Under these conditions, a popular culture began to emerge, representing and imagining the populace sans an ideological restraint on content. Embryonic expressions of popular culture, as we have seen, existed prior to the Gorbachev era: "[A]llusions to the contemporary way of living" abounded within the Late Soviet Victorianism (Kobrin) and Buratino proliferated across the Soviet landscape in the form of "waffles, pencils, names of children's clothing stores, parks and playgrounds and cafes" (Balina). Popular appropriations of official Soviet culture and the emerging ruptures in the censorship apparatus presaged the eventual fall of the Soviet system.

Naming the Other: From Soviet Mass Culture to Post-Soviet Popular Culture

Taking the Wikipedia definition as her starting point, Nepomnyashchy identifies four fundamental aspects of popular culture: open accessibility, minimal subordination to an institutionalized cultural hierarchy, the prevalence of choice and at least some recursion between production and consumption. Under the Soviet system mass culture arguably failed to meet any of these standards, leaving popular culture

confined to ruptures within mass cultural production and to acts of appropriation and creation within the underground. The fall of the Soviet Union eliminated the censorship restraints and allowed for the emergence of a 'western-style culture market' and the rise of popular culture amid the ashes of Soviet mass culture. The transformation allows for a truly popular culture that reflects, rather than conceals, actual Russian society and the tastes of the people.

Like the phoenix of Phoenician mythology, post-Soviet popular culture displays thematic and conceptual continuities with Soviet mass culture. For example, while Soviet mass culture nominally espoused gender equality, the late Soviet Victorianism evoked a men's world antagonistic to women. (Kobrin) A similar description arises in Hélène Mélat's "Order and Disorder in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture," which examines several financially successful contemporary Russian thrillers and their sequels. The initial films present an androcentric world, replete with men's solidarity through violence, moral ambiguity, and eschewal of responsibility, which can be likened in kind to Victorian drinking, fighting and gaming let loose from the men's club. Indeed, as Mélat notes, the male protagonist's irresponsibility and attempted escape from the demands of the hearth set in motion the plot of *Night Watch* and its sequels. A lack of direction and a Raskolnikovian approach to individualism permeate these films, constructing an image of a gender and society in crisis.

While the 'other' of woman retains several characteristics displayed in Soviet era media, the generalized 'other' as foreigner emerges prominently from behind the proscenium. Gone are the times of censor-induced reference by allusion, as the foreigner receives a directly referential nationality. The state-supported class dialectic unfurled in Buratino's quest to liberate puppets from the evil capitalist Karabas Barabas, evolves into a nationalist geo-political dialectic, with Russia cast as the bringer of order and stability to a post-modern world turned on its head. While this message resonates with the earlier already-arrived Soviet messianism, the message did not originate from a totalitarian organ. Rather, the message reflects the workings of popular culture, the consumption of material and the consequent reproduction effected by consumer-responsive markets.

The post-Soviet heroes in *Brother* and *Antikiller*, confined in the first films of each series to domestic matters, now expand their scope internationally. The Russian man redeems himself, fights for country and justice and achieves success legally. In doing so, the Russian hero positions himself at the top of an international hierarchy: he fights Chechen terrorism supported by foreigners, rescues a Russian prostitute from her black American pimp and bests Ukrainian Mafiosos. Further, this rehabilitation extends beyond the simple 'abstract' figure of the Russian man, culminating in the redemption of the secret service agent. The strength, moral certitude and youth of the agent represent Russia and its capability to save the world. (Mélat)

The opposition between Russia and the Western/American Other receives further treatment in "Aesthetics Versus Politics: *Night Watch* as the Cold War Echo" by Marina Abasheva. The film *Night Watch* and its sequel *Day Watch* (both blockbusters by Russian standards) utilize myriad techniques borrowed from contemporary American cinema, most notably in the realm of special effects. However, the relation to American cinema hardly admits an unmitigated admiration: the 'Light' characters clearly hark back to Soviet Russia, while the 'Dark' evince Western-influenced Post-Soviet Russia. The Dark, drinkers of human blood, embrace Western consumerism, as seen in their choice of dress, cars and living arrangements, while the Light reflect more austere Soviet practices. Director Bekmambetov appropriates aspects of Hollywood cinema, yet creates a film with a "latent, yet distinct anti-West and anti-American orientation." (Abasheva)

Both product and criticism of popular culture, *Night Watch* contains numerous references to contemporary and Soviet life. Although the film takes place in the Moscow of 2004, the Moscow presented is a "Soviet Moscow," replete with landmarks and spaces of the Soviet era. (Abasheva) Thus, the space at stake within the film is a Soviet space, put in jeopardy by the effects of democratization and Western consumerism. The portrayal of the 'cultured' Light as readers of books and the 'profane' Dark as consumers of Western culture extends further the critique of Post-Soviet consumerism. This resuscitation of high/low, light/dark cultural distinctions within the film, mirrors Bekmambetov's characterization of the film as an "explosive mix of the 19th Century Russian literature and American comic strips" in the art house genre. (Quoted in Abasheva) Cultural distinctions antithetical to post-modern popular culture come to the fore, signaling the renewed importance of national-patriotic binaries as a defining aspect of Russian popular culture.

Following the thread of a nascent nationalism, Galina Aksenova examines the 2006 television miniseries *Dr. Zhivago* from the standpoint of the series' production. Aksenova embarks on this path noting that the quantification of popular reception remains a difficult task, as competing media entities provide differing viewership figures and no overarching body exists, which can provide reliable data. Thus, an objective analysis of audience reception remains plagued with uncertainty, highlighting a fundamental problematic of the study of Russian popular culture. What can be stated definitively is that the series aired on NTV (a subsidiary of state-owned oil giant Gazprom), assuring a large distribution network and, thus, the possibility of a large audience.

From this national stage, director Proshkin sought to answer the questions "Who are we? Where are we from? Where are we heading," ultimately claiming that the series "is about love as well as a sense of God and motherland." (Quoted in Aksenova) The series grapples with similar questions of identity and otherness as the aforementioned films. Searching for a sin upon which to hang Zhivago's fate, screenwriter Arabov isolates the protagonist's relationship with the women Tonya and Lara, neglecting the abandonment of his children as a source of guilt.

(Aksenova) The hierarchy of man over woman secures the integrity of this signifying world and propels the plotline, while the question of the hearth remains unaddressed and forgotten.

In true popular culture fashion, the hegemony of the men's world does not extend uniformly across the entire territory of Post-Soviet culture, as the highly popular sitcom *My Fair Nanny* indicates. This series, as analyzed by Stephen Hutchings in "Laughter at the Threshold: *My Fair Nanny* and the Struggle over Taste," occupies a problematic position as a site of conflict in the battle over post-Soviet taste.

In contradistinction with the American series *The Nanny*, upon which *My Fair Nanny* was originally based, the Russian series derives much of its comic element from identity shifts, rather than verbal barbs. These very shifts and their relations to taste become emblematic of much of the web forum debates surrounding the series. As viewers attempt to locate the 'proper' reading of the series, the ensuing discourse evidences battles over taste and interpretation and makes recourse to high/low distinctions in the search for the 'identity' of the series.

Hutchings identifies three dominant readings of the Ukrainian Nanny Vika's bad taste *(пошлость)* that appear on the web forums. The first, utilized most often by male commentators, involves the identification of Vika's taste with the viewers' taste, thereby unveiling the viewers' bad taste. The second accuses Vika's belittlers as elitist, claiming her taste as "part of her feisty honesty." The third reading invokes the anti-Western orientation seen in *Night Watch* and *Antikiller*, claiming the show as a critique of post-Soviet, western-style consumerism. The arrival at a nexus of contemporary Russian responses to the rise of popular culture helps to illuminate the relationships established between product and consumer and the struggle to find a national identification in post-Soviet Russia.

The Case of Putin: Do the Clothes Make the Man?

Russian President Vladimir Putin's domestic popularity consistently confounds detractors in the West, many of whom view his policies as attempts at an authoritarian consolidation of power. Indeed, much circumstantial evidence points to governmental intervention in business affairs as a nationalist-autocratic power move by the Putin Administration. Government-owned Gazprom took over the critical NTV television station in 2001, while, in 2004, government-controlled Rosneft acquired Yuganksneftegaz, a subsidiary of oil giant Yukos, via what appeared to be a purchase by proxy.[6] Both of these takeovers stemmed from tax evasion charges,

[6] Baikalfinansgrup purchased Yuganksneftegaz at auction on December 19, 2004. Rosneft, in turn acquired Baikal, incorporated December 6, 2004, on December 22, 2004. The brevity in this chain of events suggests Baikal was created as a shell company in order to distance Rosneft from the purchase of Yuganksneftegaz.

levied at companies with personnel openly critical of the Putin administration. More recently, Gazprom acquired a majority stake in the Sakhalin-II energy project following the government's revocation of an environmental permit, the reinstatement of which occurred immediately after the acquisition. These economic activities evince the 'strong hand' and willingness of the Putin administration to stand up to western interests, which correlates to many of the images and ideals presented here in the articles on contemporary Russian popular culture.[7] Putin has positioned himself as a "reliable, self-assured man," who is "strong by spirit" in the words of one female voter. (Quoted in Nepomnyashchy)

Moving to the intersection of popular culture and presidential politics, Nepomnyashchy asks "what can President Vladimir Putin's clothes tell us about Russia today?" Putin's clothing marks a stark departure from his predecessors and presents a sleek, fashionable look, replete with designer labels and expensive accoutrements. However, as noted in Nepomnyashchy's title, Putin's wardrobe is that of a 'Man in Black.' Given his immense popularity, election to multiple terms as Russia's president and 'immortalization' on designer T-shirts, Putin presents a fascinating case of image construction in politics and its resonance with popular culture.

Putin's image stands at a threshold between Soviet and post-Soviet culture. His wardrobe, valued in 2001 at half a million dollars, beckons to western consumption standards, while at the same time Putin "resemble[s] the 'new man' the Soviet system hoped to create: athletic, healthy and clean cut at the system he was to underpin." (Nepomnyashchy) It bears further noting that prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin worked for the KGB in East Germany. As Nepomnyashchy notes, Putin's wardrobe indicates both government functionary as well as secret police agent and spy, a vocation which, as aforementioned, has shed the negative connotations of the Soviet era and been redeemed within popular culture. In this double role as both Soviet and post-Soviet, black seems the perfect color to create a smooth surface that prevents overcoding within one sphere or the other. We may say similarly that Putin's wardrobe places him at the interstice between the populace and popular culture. The shapeless appearance engendered by the black 'cloak' allows Putin's image to function as a virtual screen onto which the Russian people may project that image manifested so prominently within Russian popular culture — a strong leader for a strong Russia. The West will not impose its will upon the Russian people; the Baltic waves from the west will not inundate Saint Petersburg. The Saint Petersburg Dam, work on which was halted for over 15 years, is scheduled for completion in 2008, Putin's final year in the presidency.

[7] Both of the energy transactions resulted in majority ownership shifting from Western Companies to Russian ones. Anglo-Dutch firm Royal Dutch Shell formerly owned the majority stake in the Sakhalin-II project. Prior to the tax evasion charges levied at Yukos, word circulated that CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky and others planned to sell their shares to American oil firm Exxon Mobil. (Yukos-Exxon)

Bibliography:

Andreeva — Andreeva, Ekaterina. *Sots Art: Soviet Artists of the 1970s-1980s*. East Roseville, 1995.

Bakhtin — Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, 1984.

Derrida — Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago, 1978.

Tupitsyn — Tupitsyn, Margarita. *Sots Art*. New York, 1986.

Yukos-Exxon — "Gov't Sees no Obstacles to YUKOS-Exxon Deal." http://www.rusnet.nl/news/2003/10/08/print/businesseconomics_02_3446.shtml (Last consulted on September 20, 2007).

Ричард Уокер

ПРЕДСТАВЛЯЯ СЕБЕ МАССЫ ПО-НОВОМУ.
К ВОПРОСУ О ПОЛИТИКЕ РУССКОЙ ПОПУЛЯРНОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ

Резюме

Статья является обзорной вступительной статьей к сборнику. В ней автор рассматривает и детально анализирует статьи авторов сборника, а также делает попытку привести их к «общему знаменателю», выявляя связи и параллели и связывая разные по подходу и темам статьи вопросами массовой и популярной культуры. Автор также пытается определить разницу между этими двумя терминами в связи с их проявлениями в современной русской культуре.

Richard Walker

WYOBRAŻAJĄC SOBIE MASY PO NOWEMU.
Z PROBLEMATYKI POLITYCZNOŚCI ROSYJSKIEJ KULTURY POPULARNEJ

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi rodzaj wprowadzenie do całości prezentowanego tu materiału. Autor analizuje w nim poszczególne prace, a także podejmuje próbę sprowadzenia ich do "wspólnego mianownika", ukazując związki i paralele tych różnych metodologicznie i tematycznie studiów. Usiłuje także określić relacje między polami problemowymi polityki i kultury popularnej oraz ich relacji w rosyjskiej kulturze.