
Review Article

Cultural History of Early Soviet Russia and Its Repercussion to Political History*

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Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004, 301 pp. ISBN 0801442192

Michael S. Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia*, DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003, 266 pp. ISBN 087580313X

James W. Heinzen, *Inventing a Soviet Countryside: State Power and the Transformation of Rural Russia, 1917-1929*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004, 297 pp. ISBN 0822942151

Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004, 315 pp. ISBN 0674013190

Elizabeth A. Wood, *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005, 301 pp. ISBN 0801442575

Culture was a no less important domain than politics and economy in sustaining power so far as the Bolsheviks were concerned. In "Not by Politics Alone," Trotsky argued that while the October uprising enabled the Bolsheviks to seize power by deposing "the rule of exploiters," "no such means exists, however, to create culture all at once."¹ Bukharin likewise recognised that the future of the Party and the state rested on the reconstruction of culture. He went on to say that "the cultural question" was the "central problem of the entire revolution."²

In the Party language that prevailed during the 1920s, *kul'tura* (culture) was comprehended not only in terms of artistic works but also in the sphere of

* Research for this review article was supported in part by grants from the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES); the Royal Historical Society; and School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester. I am grateful to these institutions.

1 Leon Trotsky, "Not by Politics Alone," in his *Problems of Everyday Life and Other Writings on Culture & Science* (New York, 1973), pp. 15-24 (p. 16). Originally published in Правда. 10 July 1923.

2 Cited in Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918- 1929* (London, 1997), p. 5.

everyday life and practice.³ The Bolshevik leaders also believed that creating new culture and a new Soviet man constituted an historical mission to be realised through sustained political struggle and economic improvement. “The cultural front” was thus regarded as the “third front” along with politics and economy. A Trade Union journal in the early 1920s ran an article with this title, in which the new culture of the proletariat was declared to be “a mighty weapon in building a new future Communist world” that would be achieved by applying all forces and energies.⁴ At the same time, Soviet citizens were not allowed to remain as “silent spectators” in the struggle to build a new culture, but were expected to participate in that process and to “display [their] own initiatives.”⁵

In spite of lofty slogans of the authority noted above, however, the creation and the institutionalisation of Soviet culture was not a straightforward process in which the Party and the state decisively took the helm.⁶ Nor was the Bolshevik culture homogenised simply “from above.” Robert C. Tucker was arguably the first historian to underline this point. Since the early 1970s, Tucker has maintained that Communist state-building is not carried out by “simply imposing a ready-made, new ‘communist culture’ upon the receptive (or non-receptive) populace.”⁷ In recent years, Tucker’s standpoint has been adopted by many historians, not least because of the profound influence of the “new cultural history” and the cultural turn upon the study of Bolshevik culture. In an influential statement, Foucault suggested that the making of the new political order is not enabled merely by the relocation of the power, but it is vital to shift “the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute level and everyday level.”⁸

3 See, for example, David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind*, p. 7; Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Introduction: On Power and Culture,” in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (London, 1992), pp. 1-15.

4 *Диаметр* X. Третий фронт // Профессиональное движение. 1923. № 1. С. 21-24.

5 *Вестник агитации и пропаганды*. 1920. № 3. С. 23.

6 The cultural organs of the Party and the state frequently claimed a shortage of capable staff in their departments. See Corney, *Telling October*, p. 130, and the appeal of the Communist Dramaturgy to the Central Committee in May 1921 “to send comradely Communists, artists, musicians, active artists” to improve its activities. Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (РГАСПИ), ф. 17 [ЦК КПСС – Учетно-распределительный отдел (1919-1925)], оп. 34, д. 15, л. 8.

7 Robert C. Tucker, “Culture, Political Culture, and Communist Society,” *Political Science Quarterly* 88:2 (1973), pp. 173-190 (p. 185). See also his *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* (Brighton, 1987); and “Lenin’s Bolshevism as a Culture in the Making,” in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), pp. 25-38.

8 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York, 1980), p. 6.

The five recently published monographs under review deal with the cultural history of early Soviet Russia. Each book is the product of extensive archival research and all of them address aspects of the cultural history of Bolshevik state-building and institutionalisation of the cultural front in early Soviet Russia.

This review essay will, in the first place, discuss each book in turn in relation to the study of cultural history. It will then explore the projects and the struggle by the Party and state to institutionalise the Revolution in the cultural sphere until the end of NEP and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1928. Finally, the paper will argue how a greater knowledge of cultural history can expand our understanding of “the workings of politics” in the formative stages of the Revolution.

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Since the early 1980s, historians of the French Revolution, following the theoretical advances made by Foucault, Derrida, and Bourdieu among others, turned to focus on “how narratives are constructed” in history, regarding “past narratives as a ‘telling’ mode of cultural expression.”⁹ Under this broad rubric, narrative, myth and collective and individual memory have inspired many conceptual discussions and empirical studies of other European states.¹⁰

There is thus a touch of surprise that the foundation narratives and myth-making of the Russian Revolution in the early Bolshevik era produced almost no detailed analysis until Frederick Corney’s recent monograph.¹¹ *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* traces how mythologizing

9 For example, Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990); François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1981); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984); Patrick H. Hutton, “The Role of Memory in the Historiography of the French Revolution,” *History and Theory* 30:1 (1991), pp. 56-69. The development of the cultural history is reviewed by Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: History, Culture and Text,” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (London, 1989), pp. 1-22. Quotes are from Karen Halttunen, “Cultural History and the Challenge of Narrativity,” in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (London, 1999), pp. 165-181 (p. 171).

10 Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, 1996); Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102:5 (1997), pp. 1386-1403; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London, 1975); Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (under the direction of Pierre Nora - 3 vols.) (New York, 1996-1998); George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Representing the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995).

11 Nina Tumarkin published a book as early as 1983 on the making of Lenin cult in early Soviet Russia. Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, 1983).

October was developed and contoured by the acts of the telling and re-telling by the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1927. During the Civil War, the narrative of the October uprising stressed the heroic episode of the storming of the Winter Palace which formed the centrepiece of mass spectacles accompanying anniversaries of the Revolution. In this period, the staging of mass spectacles was essentially left to avant-garde artists who were authorised "to make the audience experience [their] vision as part of [spectators'] memory." It was not unusual to narrate the Revolution without the story of the Bolshevik Party (pp. 66-90).

In order to advance the institutionalisation of the memory of October, Sovnarkom established Istpart (the Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Russian Communist Party) in September 1920. Local Istpart organs followed in subsequent years. Many Soviet citizens experienced the history of October through the events launched by the Istpart and the regime, such as mass spectacles, jubilee festivals, museums, films, questionnaires and at the "evenings of reminiscences" that became a form of collective remembering for active Party and non-party people. Producing a coherent narrative was pertinent to the legitimacy of the Party and the state, and each individual was expected to become involved in this process by conceiving a given collective memory of October and by engaging with and sometimes contesting others' memories as well.

Corney argues that an integrated narrative of October was not achieved until the tenth anniversary of the Revolution in 1927, although there were some signs of progress (p. 201). It was still a contested narrative, that is to say the memory of October was still in the course of production. The contested construction of collective memory signifies there are always various modes of memories among a given group, and one's memory is usually in conflict and entwined with others'. The multiplicity of memory was even more awkward in the incipient Soviet state. This perspective provides historians attempting to examine the creation of individual and collective memory in Stalin years with an excellent context.¹²

Nearly a decade and half ago, Steve Smith anticipated that a fresh approach to the Soviet history would be led by historians with readiness to "face up to the discursivity of history as a discipline, its subordination to the effects of language and writing."¹³ This reflected a growing postmodernist influence, especially the "linguistic turn," on the practice of history.

Michael G. Gorham and Matthew Lenoe are evidently prepared to take up this challenge. To be sure, the reconstruction of language and the Soviet-

12 Alon Confino warns historians about using "memory" in an uncritical sense. See Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History."

13 Steve Smith, "Writing the History of the Russian Revolution after the Fall of Communism," *Europe - Asia Studies* 46:4 (1994), pp. 563-578 (p. 568).

ization of the press at the early stage of the Revolution already produced a substantial number of works by contemporary observers of the early Soviet regime including René Fülöp-Miller and Alex Inkeles, and later historians such as Peter Kenez and Jeffrey Brooks in recent decades have delved into the way in which the Party and the state indoctrinated and disseminated their decisions and messages.¹⁴

Unlike previous studies on the field, however, their monographs demonstrate deeper perspectives in the study of the Soviet language and the press, especially in two respects: the use of interdisciplinary methods for examining the socio-cultural mechanism by which the voice of the Party-state prevailed by the middle of the 1930s; and elucidating the process in which ordinary people and rank and file Party members came to politicise themselves.

Employing literary and linguistic perspectives as well as cultural studies, Gorham's *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia* examines the shift of dominant "language culture" during the first decades of the Soviet state. This was simultaneously a struggle of Bolsheviks to bridge the "communication gap" between Party activists and Soviet citizens.¹⁵

Gorham acknowledges in his introduction that "the narratives and the voices used to articulate them are largely cultural constructs and that who we are is largely defined by how we write and speak" (p. 6). The book then focuses on the contestation of the language model by linguists, literary critics, and political leaders. The engagement of ordinary workers and peasants – *rabkory* (worker correspondents) and *sel'kory* (village correspondents) – in the middle of the 1920s entailed a further twist, as Gorham puts it: "if the [worker and village] correspondents were, on the one hand, to serve as the 'voice of the people' with whom they lived and worked and, on the other, to bring the Party and its idea closer to the *narod*, in which language were they to communicate: the colloquial language of the people, or the ideologically 'conscious' language of the state?" (p. 79) This was a big dilemma for the Soviet language-builders in the mid-1920s between the ideal "proletarian" voice and the "real voice of the people" (pp. 67-68).

On the other hand, Lenoë claims that the currently prevalent postmodernist interpretations of cultural practice are prone to overlook the importance of social hierarchy and differentiated responses to the official message. Instead, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*

14 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000); René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism: An Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia* (London, 1927; reprinted in 1965); Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia: A Study in Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, 1950); Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, 1985).

15 Gorham highlights the communication gap by quoting the column of a Moscow worker newspaper in 1926: "He's speaking incomprehensively – must mean he's a Bolshevik" (p. 22).

adopts the “production of culture” approach that highlights “the context within which human beings create particular cultural objects,” arguing that this approach enables to examine “where that [cultural] artifact fits into political and social hierarchies, and who uses for what” (pp. 3-4). The use of this methodology leads Lenoe to conclude that the Soviet status groups and hierarchies in the 1920s and early 1930s represent, and were developed by, the multi-tiered agitation and propaganda systems of the period (p. 253).

Both authors also shed light on how ordinary Party members and non-party activists came to internalise the language of the Party-state and to politicise themselves through diverse processes. As for the 1920s, this has been hitherto little discussed among historians, though it is of immense significance.

Lenoe asserts that letter-writing to newspaper editors was an important path to becoming politically active for young aspiring workers and villagers alike. Ivan Sergeevich Eroshenko, a villager in the early twenties of Kharkov in Ukraine, wrote to *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* in 1925 thanking the editors for letting him learn essential knowledge and opening a way for a politically conscious life. In this letter, Eroshenko pleaded with the editors for a map of Moscow and travel to the central editorial office in Moscow that would “arm [me] with knowledge, and send me back to the countryside for the struggle with darkness and primitiveness” (pp. 73-74). Like Eroshenko, many young active provincial citizens who had been passive newspaper readers at the beginning became political activists and local correspondents through participating in reading circles and writing letters to editors.¹⁶

Gorham cites the study published during the First Five-Year Plan by the contemporary linguist, Afanasii Selishchev [“O iazyke sovremennoi derevni,” *Zemlia Sovetskaia* 9 (1932), pp. 120-133]. Selishchev described how villagers with a mastery of the language of the Party-state were empowered in the political, social and everyday practices of rural life. A mastery of the language of authority displayed “progressiveness,” and that language came to dominate the “official public discourse and interaction.” All the same, provincial villagers often retained traditional colloquial speech manners within the private sphere (Gorham, pp. 130-131). In this sense, the adoption of the language of the Party-state was due to pragmatism. For local Party activists, it was for promotion and self-education; for non-party citizens, the use of official language was the only means to make effective appeals to the local administrators; and for the linguists and other professionals, their survival depended upon it (p. 139).

Although the two authors take different approaches, both make an invaluable contribution not only to the study of language under the early Soviet regime, but also the identity-construction and politicisation of the Party and non-Party citizens of the period.

16 On the letter-writing to the officials, see also *Лившин А.Я., Орлов И.В. Письма во власть, 1917-1927: Заявления, жалобы, доносы, письма в государственные структуры и большевистским вождям.* М., 1998; *idem Власть и общество: диалог в письмах.* М., 2002.

The theatre of the early revolutionary years has long attracted attention from historians of the Revolution and art historians. One reason for such enduring interest in the revolutionary theatre is that many central leaders, Anatolii Lunacharskii among others, were explicitly inclined to make use of the potential of the theatre to influence the thought and behaviour of a large audience – and ultimately, the population as a whole.¹⁷ René Fülöp-Miller observed that “the revolutionizing of the theatre soon became one of the most important branches of Soviet propaganda, and, like all Bolshevik measures, was at once provided with an elaborate ‘ideological basis’.”¹⁸ In the first years of the Revolution, there was also an exceptional situation in which the avant-garde activists attracted state-sponsored support for their experimental stagings in the official and semi-official theatres.¹⁹

A revolutionary form of theatre as distinct from traditional plays and those in the pre-Revolutionary years emerged during the Civil War – the so-called “agitation-trials.” Elizabeth Wood’s *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* is the first comprehensive study focusing on the agitation-trials that became a series of educational and entertainment performances in the early years of the Revolution and evolved to “a form of spectacle that demeaned both its subjects and its audience” as well as “a form for the public branding of crimes and misdemeanors” from the middle of the 1920s (pp. 2, 203).²⁰ Wood labels the agitation trials “among the most elaborate secular, semipolitical rituals the world has ever seen” (p. 212), and they were designed to make the audience active supporters of the regime and participants in the state-building project.

The particular merit of Wood’s book is not only that it sheds light on the hitherto neglected political and cultural practice of the theatrical form, but also that it explores the role of “mid-level cultures agents” in the course of the agitation trials. The “mid-level agents” included the political instructors of the Red Army, activists in the trade unions and Komsomol, and medical experts all of whom played a central role in organising the agitation trials. By redirecting the trial from a “mock” to a real one, and by shifting the focus from entertainment to propagating a “correct understanding” of political and everyday issues, the

17 For the early years of Lunacharskii’s engagement with transforming the theatre, see, for example, Театр и революция // Вестник театра. 1920. п/а. С. 1-3; К вопросу о революционном репертуаре // Вестник театра. 1920. № 49. С. 3.

18 René Fülöp-Miller and Joseph Gregor, *The Russian Theatre: Its Character and History with Especial Reference to the Revolutionary Period* (New York, 1968; original London, 1930). See also, Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, especially the chapter entitled “Theatricalized Life.”

19 Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-garde Aesthetics*, translated by Charles Rouble (Basingstoke, 1993) scrutinises the avant-garde artists’ involvement in the Soviet theatre.

20 Richard Stites discusses the agitation-trials in his article, “Trial as Theatre in the Russian Revolution,” *Theatre Research International* 23:1 (1998), pp. 7-13.

mid-level agents sought to empower themselves. Wood argues that after 1925 the agitation trials sought to highlight “correct” answers in Bolshevik terms and this ultimately led to the creation of numerous “little Stalins” among local authorities (p. 10).

Whereas Wood is concerned with the mid-level Party and state agents who came to act within official lines, her attention to the action and reaction of “individual” reminds us of the need not to oversimplify the institutionalisation of the political and cultural fronts during the 1920s. James W. Heinzen’s studies on the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture (Narkomzem) – the institution charged with “modernising” the Soviet countryside – explores the issue of individual and institutional autonomy during the 1920s. *Inventing a Soviet Countryside: State Power and the Transformation of Rural Russia, 1917-1929* argues that Narkomzem and its leaders represented the concept of *vedomstvennost’*, that is institutional self-efficiency, autarky or self-interest. This concept indicates how “the leaders of state agency often acted in the interests of ‘their’ organisation, ‘their’ staff, or ‘their’ constituency, ignoring or contradicting the instructions of superiors or the concern of peers in other institutions” (p. 5). At the beginning of the NEP, the leaders of Narkomzem criticised the coercive and military means of food requisitioning employed by the People’s Commissariat of Food Supply (Narkomprod) during War Communism. For them, it was imperative to employ persuasion, education and a scientific approach to restore state agriculture after the Civil War and the famine. The Narkomzem leaders identified themselves as the “only source of culture in the village” who could promote rational and scientific modes of production among the peasantry (pp. 53-59).

By underlining the existence of autonomy and institutional cultures within Soviet organs, Heinzen also challenges the dominant view that a total subordination of the state to the Party bodies was accomplished under NEP. Alexander P. Smirnov led Narkomzem from the spring 1923 and he represented *vedomstvennost’* in the state agency. At times, Smirnov accused Party leaders of lacking experience and knowledge of agriculture, and maintained that any appointment and transfer of local Narkomzem cadres should not be authorised without his permission. Smirnov attempted to recruit and promote non-communist specialists to the central posts of Narkomzem under his own patronage, although it was apparently at odds with the Party’s line according to which non-communists were seen as “untrustworthy.”²¹

21 The Party Central Committee decree of November 1925 prescribed that every single transfer and appointment of the local Party bodies must be conducted through Orgraspred (the Organisation and Assignment Department), and any appointment and removal of officials of local Party organs by themselves were no longer possible. Коржихина Т.П., Фигатнер Ю.Ю. Советская номенклатура: становление, механизмы действия // Вопросы истории. 1993. № 7. С. 25-38 (С. 27). For an overview of the development of the *nomenklatura* system, see T.H. Rigby, “The Origins of the Nomenklatura System,” in T.H. Rigby, *Political*

Heinzen's focus upon the *vedomstvennost'* of Narkomzem contributes to our understanding of the complex reality of Soviet organisational culture during the 1920s. As Ronald Grigor Suny points out, our perception of culture has been expanding (or deconstructing) especially since the advent of the cultural turn, and culture is now understood as a practice, or "a field of play with its borders far less clear than in earlier imaginations, its internal harmonies less apparent, in which actors and groups contend for position and power, sometimes in institutions, sometimes over control of meaning."²² The intra-institutional struggles and contestations, such as over how to restore the economy and how to conduct the promotion and appointment of individuals, were therefore not simply political struggles, but struggles over the crucial cultural sphere.

As Heinzen demonstrates, the state organs were not simply subsidiary bodies of the Party. Not a few Soviet individuals at cadre levels were acting for "their" interest and their own institutions, and even opposed the Party-state line. Moreover, even the leaders of lower Party and state organs who were appointed to their positions were not always subordinate to the central control: they were no less important "autonomous actors" in the politics of the 1920s.²³ As Stephen Cohen suggests, the autonomy of the regional leaders in 1920s had a profound influence on central Party-state politics: "machine politics alone did not account for Stalin's triumph" and the lower Party officials were "not his [Stalin's] mindless political creatures, but important, independent-minded leaders in their own right."²⁴

In addition, "informal power resource" including the personal network ties between central and regional leaders and among regional elites deserves attention.²⁵ The informal network was also deeply intertwined with the formal network system such as the appointment, promotion and transfers of cadres in lower and local organisations, and ultimately with the selection of the central leadership at the Party Congress in Moscow.²⁶ During the 1920s the Bolsheviks

Elites in the USSR: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev (Aldershot, 1990), pp. 73-93.

22 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Back and Beyond: Reversing the Cultural Turn?" *American Historical Review* 107:5 (2002), pp. 1476-1499, available on-line <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/107.5/ah0502001476.html> (par. 23). (Accessed 30 October, 2007).

23 Gerald M. Easter, *Reconstructing the State: Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, 2000).

24 Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (London, 1974), p. 327. One of the recent works in accordance with Cohen's standpoint is James Harris, "Stalin as General Secretary: The Appointments Process and the Nature of Stalin's Power," in Sarah Davies and James Harris, eds., *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 63-82.

25 Easter, *Reconstructing the State*.

26 An important concept to understand the political mechanism of the 1920s is "the circular flow of power" proposed by Robert V. Daniels in the 1970s. Later historians have adopted the concept as a crucial element of Party history in the 1920s. Most officials in provincial and lower Party organs were appointed by the Party Secretariat in the 1920s, and those

had not yet established a stable ruling structure throughout the country, and, as Heinzen's study attests, intra-institutional conflicts were recurrent during the period. The informal power resources provided the capacity to control the nascent state and the base on which to construct the formal structure in the following decades. The personal ties appeared to have been more than a mere "patron-client" relationship, in which centre-regional leaders were mutually dependent, but also encompassed "peerlike relations without mutual obligations."²⁷ It was also utilised as a means of information exchange between central and regional leadership, and of monitoring the practice of the regional organisations. The use of informal resources and personal ties as a means of rule signifies the multiplicity of power at "minute and everyday levels" beyond the government. But this raises the question as to how Bolshevik practices institutionalised the cultural front and how they were exercised.

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William H. Sewell, Jr. insists that "cultural uniformity" can never be achieved even in authoritarian states, nor do leading actors and institutions often seek to achieve it. Instead, their approach is:

"not so much to establish uniformity as it is to organise difference. They are constantly engaged in efforts not only to normalise or homogenize but also to hierarchize, encapsulate, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize, or marginalize practices and populations that diverge from the sanctioned ideal. By such means, authoritative actors attempt, with varying degree of success, to impose a certain coherence onto the field of cultural practice."²⁸

Bolshevik cultural policy in the NEP years was indeed "to hierarchize, encapsulate, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize, or marginalize practices and populations." For instance, most Party members' access to printing facilities was strictly restricted from the middle of the decade. At the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1927 the Opposition handed a long statement to the Central Committee, with a request that it be circulated among the delegates of the forthcoming Congress, demanding a drastic reconstruction of the Party machinery.

officials controlled the selection of delegates to the Party Congress at the local Party meetings. At the Party Congress in Moscow, those selected delegates voted for their supporting leadership in the selection of the Party Central Committee that assumed responsibility for nomination of the General Secretary as well as Politburo and Orgburo. The General Secretary in this way could establish a mechanism to consolidate the Party's control and his authority. See Robert V. Daniels, "Soviet Politics since Khrushchev," in John W. Strong, ed., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin: The Transition Years* (London, 1971), pp. 16-25 (p. 20). A useful discussion of the concept is provided by Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 144.

²⁷ Easter, *Reconstructing the State*, pp. 27-30.

²⁸ William H. Sewell, Jr., "Concept(s) of Culture," in Bonnell and Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, pp. 35-61 (p. 56).

The Central Committee rejected the demand as a breach of the ban on factions agreed at the Tenth Congress in 1921. Those who attempted to publish it from underground were arrested by the OGPU.²⁹ At a lower level too, Lenoë demonstrates that reporters from Party and Soviet journals and newspapers were prevented from attending any kind of Party conference or meeting. As early as 1925, even a journalist from *Pravda* was unable to interview regional Party officials (pp. 108-110). A textbook for agitators published in 1928 affirmed that the “language of the party” spoken by the Communist leadership was the “only appropriate form in which to articulate its ideas” (Gorham, pp. 122-123).

According to one’s own interest, circumstance, imperative and moral as well as ideology to be sure, the Soviet citizen acted on, reacted to and interpreted Bolshevik practices to impose “a certain coherence” on the cultural front.³⁰ In analysing this, Gorham and Wood largely adopt the concept of “speaking Bolshevik” proposed in Stephen Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, which examines how and why ordinary Soviet citizens willingly or reluctantly came to act within (or beyond) the framework set up by the regime in the 1930s.³¹ Indeed, there is a dearth of literature on the aspects of “speaking Bolshevik,” resistance, and the issue of Soviet subjectivity in the study of the 1920s compared to the extensive discussion of these topics among historians of the Stalin period.³² It is hoped that the monographs reviewed above will be followed by a substantial discussion by historians of the 1920s on these issues and further consideration of the extent and practice of Soviet individual and institutional “autonomy.”

Having reviewed recent contributions of cultural history of early Soviet Russia, it is now worth asking if this development can be utilised in the study of other spheres of early Soviet Russia and the Bolshevik Party. Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests the studies of the 1920s have shed little light on how a greater knowledge of everyday practice and cultural history can help us understand “the workings of politics,” as distinct from society.³³ Smith also insists that political history needs to be “rejigged along new axes.”³⁴

29 Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 142-143; Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (2nd ed.) (London, 1970), p. 309.

30 See, for example, the articles by Fitzpatrick in *The Cultural Front*.

31 Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995). See, especially chapter 5, “Speaking Bolshevik.”

32 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford, 1994); Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, 2003); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford, 1996).

33 Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Politics as Practice: Thoughts on a New Soviet Political History,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5:1 (2004), pp. 27-54, especially pp. 37-39.

34 Smith, “Writing the History of the Russian Revolution,” p. 574.

It is undeniable that the political history has been “out of fashion” in recent decades.³⁵ Fitzpatrick articulates the starting point for a new political history with inspiration from the new cultural history so as to “recast” the issues developed by cultural historians into the political spectrum.³⁶

Take Istpart, for instance. Corney notes that the arrangement of exhibitions and museums displaying the history of October and the Party became one of the main tasks of Istpart throughout the 1920s (p. 117). The Party’s central newspaper *Pravda* took note of the special exhibition of the Party’s history to the delegates attending the Party Congress.³⁷ What, then, was displayed at the exhibitions arranged by Istpart for the participants of the Party congresses and conferences, as well as Comintern congresses, all of which convened a vast number of delegates with a variety of cultural and social backgrounds? What aspects of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state were emphasised in those special exhibitions? How did their content change over the decade? How did the regional party leaders and foreign Communists visiting Moscow *conceive* the exhibition of the Party history and internalise it? Did it affect viewers’ engagement with the political activity thereafter? If there existed no single “collective memory” of October among Party and non-Party citizens by the end of the decade, how did they legitimise the Party and the state created by the October uprising?

Furthermore, we can also cross-examine the important issues, unchallenged for decades, on the politics of the 1920s, such as the development and institutionalisation of the political machinery, the decision-making process and internal Party discussion, the process by which Stalin assumed the reins of power and so on.

How did the rank and file of the Party membership and non-Party people *experience* the evolving political mechanism, i.e. bureaucratisation, development of the *nomenklatura* and constraint of free discussion at local and central official gatherings? Was there any *resistance* or expressions of *disquiet* in the course of that political institutionalisation? Did the local Party membership recognise that their promotions or transfers affected politics at the centre? How did they interpret the agenda and discussion lists set by the Party’s Central Committee in advance of the central congresses and conferences? How many of them identified and understood the nature of the ongoing leadership struggle in the mid-late 1920s? How did these reactions and interpretations differ according

35 Fitzpatrick, “Politics as Practice.” On the other hand, the leading figure of the new cultural history François Furet himself reproached cultural historians’ obsession with their search for new “fashionable” topics. Cited by Hunt, “Introduction: History, Culture and Text,” p. 9.

36 Fitzpatrick, “Politics as Practice,” p. 38.

37 At the time of the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, see *Правда*. 11 марта 1921. С. 4. For the Fifteenth Congress (1927) participants, there was an organised tour to the Museum of the Revolution, and the Museum of Lenin as well as to Lenin’s mausoleum. See *Правда*. 2 декабря 1927. С. 4.

to class, nationality and gender?³⁸ It might have been impossible to raise these questions when conventional political history was in the ascendant in the historiography of the Soviet Union. But it is certainly important and feasible to discuss them at present, and this would give wider perspectives to the historiography of early Soviet Russia.

Foucault's late works sought to investigate cultural practice through the "prism of technologies of power," not confined to the state or other authorities, but rather imbricated in the everyday cultural practice of the people.³⁹ Important contributions by cultural historians now enable us to re-analyse the "working of the politics" in the 1920s through the prism of cultural history and cultural practice.

38 For discussions of "perceptions" and "experiences," see Daniel Wickberg, "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New," *American Historical Review* 112:3 (2007), pp. 661-684. My PhD dissertation in progress is designed to examine the experiences of the Party Congress delegates in the 1920s as well as organisational and administrative aspects. Junya Takiguchi, "Orchestrating the Bolshevik Party Congress, 1918-1927: A Political and Cultural Study of the Delegates and the 'Architects'," Ph.D. dissertation in History (University of Manchester, in progress).

39 Margaret R. Somers, "What's Political or Cultural about Political Culture and the Public Sphere? Toward an Historical Sociology of Concept Formation," *Sociological Theory* 13:2 (1995), pp. 113-144 (p. 133).