

Title: The Dynamics of the Sublime in *Kanal imeni Stalina*: Reforging the Soul in Stalin's Image

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This paper will discuss the sublime as an aesthetic category in *The Stalin White Sea-Baltic Canal: History of the Construction, 1931-1934*. As an early attempt to define the method and style of Stalinist cultural production, the collective writings in *Kanal imeni Stalina* provide an opportunity to examine the power dynamics of Stalinism at the moment when the culture was crystallizing.

Using the theoretical frameworks of the sublime established by Wieskel, Guerlac, and Ram, this paper seeks to establish a model of Stalinist ideological and spiritual conversion that relies on a sublime experience. As this study demonstrates, *Kanal imeni Stalina* is primarily concerned with the reforging of prisoners' souls, rather than the construction of the canal. The narratives of reforging rely heavily on apostolic models from Christian scripture to enforce ideological conversion. Repeatedly, the Chekists convert the prisoners via speeches inspired by Stalin's vision of the future as transmitted to them by others. The oral presentation of this vision causes prisoners to experience what Kant would call a dynamical sublime that erases the previous self and then replaces it with the surplus of meaning experienced during conversion. The barriers between the message of Stalinism and the individual who hears it vanish. The fear inherent to the experience of the sublime is absent because, unlike conventional works of Socialist Realism, *Kanal imeni Stalina* is told from a post-conversion point of view.

#### Bibliography

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