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**The Russian
Revolution
reshaped
everything:**

Art & Aesthetics

- Art education in transformation
- Global ambitions captured in one day
- Building for men of the future
- The legacy in literature – the void

also in this issue

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

editorial

Revolutionary principles

In October 2017, one hundred years since the revolutionary era in Russia, we devote a special section to touch on certain aspects of the impact this disruptive event had on art, film, literature and aesthetics.

In this special section we explore the relationships between art, aesthetics and moving images that existed during the Soviet period and the revolution itself as a political, historical and social event.

Nostalgia is not a significant aspect of revolutionary times, by any means. The establishment of a new order is at the heart of the post-revolutionary years, not to mention the extermination of traces or reminiscences of pre-revolutionary Russia.

Mikhail Evseyev presents archival findings on the problem of the reform of art education in the first post-revolutionary years. He writes that art was secondary to the economy and ideology, and in the eyes of the new government art needed to concentrate not on the mastery of old techniques, but on the manifestation of the new revolutionary principles.

IN ANOTHER THEMATIC article, Irina Seits discusses the dehumanization of living space in the post-revolutionary decades in Russia. Constructivists experimented with new forms of spatial organization that profoundly changed people's everyday lives, pushing them to gradually become less individuals and more bricks in the joint project to build a new tomorrow.

The Russian Revolution cut through history. It implied change on many levels, including perspectives on time. For a while, only now and tomorrow mattered.

In this issue, however, we also dig into the past. In a feature article, Anna Kharkina presents insights into how the Open Society Archive (OSA) has struggled over the years to gather and spread information about documents and archival findings, such as those from Hungary during WWII. Facts that are not always welcomed have nevertheless been brought forward by OSA.

In her essay, Yuliya Yurchuk also examines the widespread paranoia about monuments and the protests they arouse. Clashes occur over representations of the past and can easily escalate. It is precisely this force of the past and its relation to the contemporary that revolutionary Russia was well aware of and was determined to handle and suppress.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION affected individual lives. Here, in an interview with Gustaf Nobel, the great-grandson of Ludvig Nobel, Alfred's elder brother, we learn about one family whose destiny was changed.

Read also about two female revolutionary heroes; Maria Bochkareva and Larissa Reisner. Or the destiny of the avant-garde artist Nikolai Punin, who was sent to Gulag for Anti-Soviet activities. ❌

Ninna Mörner

in this issue



The faith of the Nobel family

“ I think my father was traumatized by those experiences, even though he was only four years old. **Page 72**



Female soldiers of the Revolution

“ Bochkareva's battalion was one of fifteen different female units established in Russia in 1917. **Page 90**



feature

- 4 **Open Society Archives.** Playing an activist role, *Anna Kharkina*
- 8 **The KGB building in Riga.** Story of fear, *Rosario Napolitano*

essays

- 12 **Memory work.** US and Ukraine, *Yuliya Yurchuk*
- 18 **Gender.** Neo-authoritarian discourses, *Sabine Hark*

commentaries

- 28 **Estonia branding.** *Abel Polese & Emilia Pawlusz*
- 31 **Truck drivers in protest.** *Ekaterina Tarasova*
- Election.** Czech Republic, *Riikka Palonkorpi*

reviews

- 82 **Roma feminist activism.** *Madina Tlostanova*
- 85 **Europe faces Europe.** *Jussi Lassila*
- 87 **The Arctic region.** *Ingmar Oldberg*
- 90 **Norm-breaking female soldiers.** *Gunnar Åselius*
- 93 **Transnational families.** *Aija Lulle*

conference reports

- 26 **Bakhtinian theory. Art protest in Mordovia, Russia.** *Ninna Mörner*
- 73 **The legacy of the revolution.** *Aliaksei Kazharski*
- 96 **The peace of 1617.** *Thomas Lundén*

interview

- 74 **The Nobel family and the Russian Revolution.** *Irina Seits*

theme

Influences of the Russian Revolution in Art and Aesthetics

- 33 **Introduction.** *Irina Seits & Ekaterina Kalinina*

peer-reviewed articles

- 35 **Becoming tools for artistic consciousness of the people. The higher art school and independent arts studios in Petrograd (1918–1921).** *Mikhail Evseyev*
- 45 **Revolutionary synchrony: A Day of the World.** *Robert Bird*
- 53 **Mickey Mouse – the perfect tenant of an early Soviet city.** *Irina Seits*
- 63 **The inverted myth. Viktor Pelevin's Buddhas little finger.** *Tora Lane*

exhibition

- 70 **Russian art 1917–1932.** *Helene Carlbäck*

colophon

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The records of the Donald and Vera Blinken Open Society Archives' extensive collection is now available through the CEU Library catalog.

ARCHIVING THE PAST, DEFINING THE PRESENT

OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVES, BUDAPEST

by **Anna Kharkina**

A series of interviews with the Open Society Archives' (OSA) employees, which I conducted while staying at the archive as a recipient of the Visegrad Scholarship in summer 2016, took place before the conflict between the Hungarian government and the Central European University (CEU), of which the OSA is a part, came out into the open. Nevertheless, even then it was obvious that the CEU is a special place in contemporary Hungary's political landscape and that it made things uncomfortable for those in power. The conflict was in the air, though as yet unexpressed. The aim of my stay at the OSA was to study the functioning of an independent archive: how it establishes cooperation with other archival institutions, which professional standards it follows, and, and how it defines its aims and policies. I tried to approach these questions from different angles depending on who I was interviewing, but one question seemed to re-appear during all of the interviews: how does the archive position itself in relation to the current political authority, which tries to undermine the democratic ideas that the CEU and the OSA stand for? How does it evaluate and react to the situation around it?

The foundation of the OSA goes back to 1995, as a realization of an idea that an archive with documents related to the communist history of Central and Eastern Europe should be present where people speak the languages of the region. Financially supported by George Soros, the archive was able from the very beginning to be totally independent of the influence of any local

The article is based on interviews with the Open Society Archives' employees in July 2016: Iván Székely, Senior Research Fellow; István Rév, Director; Csaba Szilágyi, Head of the Human Rights Program; Nóra Bertalan, Public Relations Officer; András Mink, Research Fellow; and Robert Parnica, Senior Reference Archivist.

state authorities. According to the agreement with the US government, the archival materials are owned by the US but deposited at the OSA for a period of 50 years. István Rév, a Hungarian historian and former dissident under the Soviet regime, became academic director of the archive (he still holds this position, leading the archive for more than 20 years). The professional basis and routines for the archive were established by Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Acting Archivist of the United States (1993–1995) and US National Archives archivist with a long career record. Peterson previously was director of the Open Media Research Institute (OMRI) in Prague, an analytical office for analysis of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, with its headquarters in Washington. After the OMRI was closed, she was asked to become the professional leader of the newly established OSA, which took over OMRI's archive as well as the archive of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute in Munich.

Being an archive in *between* political systems and different organizations, the OSA's funding sources create interesting challenges for the archival representation of history as well as for

the employees. In the interview, Rév recalled that the research potential of the archive was not clear to him from the start: “In the beginning I was doubtful about the importance of the material of Radios’ propaganda machinery.” According to Rév, the archive’s owner, the US government, also had doubts because it considered Soros to be a dubious public figure and it was reluctant to accept that the position of academic director of the archive was offered to Rév, whose father was a communist party member. As a consequence of this, only the research materials of the RFE/RL archive were transported to Budapest, and the corporate part of the archive of the archive remained in the Hoover Institution Library & Archives. Rév testified that initially communication with RFE/RL Research Institute in Munich was difficult, and several documents were removed before the archive came to Budapest. He takes this with professional wisdom: “This is a fate of archives. Archives are looted, bombed; it is part of the history.” In addition, the relation with the Hoover Institution was colored by a scandal. Some documents from the Hungarian government offices were stolen and sold to the Hoover Institution by a Hungarian politician. Rév, highly critical of this fact, published several articles criticizing both sides of the deal.

NOW, AFTER MANY years of work, the OSA has demonstrated significant research potential and has been actively used by many researchers studying the Cold War period. Relations with the Hoover Institution have gone from tense to friendly and an agreement was signed that entitles the OSA to receive documents from the Hoover Institution’s part of the RFE/RL archive. The documents are sent to Budapest, where they can be digitized and made accessible to European researchers, while the originals are returned to the Hoover Institution. The employees of the archive call the OSA “the archive of copies” because they are more interested in information than ownership of original documents. The OSA’s only real concern is that researchers can access the information, which is difficult to obtain otherwise because it is scattered across many different countries, and local archives also often have more restrictive access policies to their materials. Though independent, the OSA strictly follows international archival standards, “much more than other archives of the region”, as Rév notes. He continues: “This is a real archive with public, research, and teaching programs, and it takes researchers and its own social intellectual role seriously”.

Although the primary interest of the OSA was the heritage of the Cold War and communism, it soon extended its interests to include human rights archives. The first was an archive on the Yugoslav wars, including documents of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Initially, interest in this archive was based on its relation to the aftermath of communism, but later it was realized that “it was a document of hu-



István Rév, academic director of the OSA.

man rights”, and this subject was accepted as a part of the OSA’s key activity. The OSA started to be approached by human rights organizations such as the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the Index on Censorship, and Physicians for Human Rights. As Iván Székely explained, the human rights organizations often have limited resources for archiving documents related to their activities, so they are interested in preserving them in a professionally established but independent archive.

From the outset, OSA employees took an active position towards the documents they were in charge of. They did not want to wait until researchers came to them as many other archives do, but were keen to promote and exhibit documents, to inspire others, and to show the research potential of the archive. This is how Galeria Centralis, the OSA’s exhibition space, and numerous public programs started. The archive felt obliged to react to the local political environment and take a role as an intellectual commentator on what was happening in Hungary. In addition, the OSA sees itself as an archive with in-house research: its employees often have an academic background, and part of their duties is to work with the archive as researchers and to publicly promote the results of their research.

Being an archive of the Cold War, with material reflecting the history of a competition between two ideologies/regimes, it cannot avoid being dragged into a new round of international tensions, although the border now is defined less by geography and the type of economic system and more by relations to the ideals of democracy. It lies in between such dichotomies as human rights vs. security, global vs. local, open vs. protected. Therefore, a moral choice between these two sides has become an important part of current politics, both for individuals and institutions. The position of the OSA’s director is: “What we have here matters. Our programs are not just historical; they have relations to today. To put it in a somewhat

“ALTHOUGH THE PRIMARY INTEREST OF THE OSA WAS THE HERITAGE OF THE COLD WAR AND COMMUNISM, IT SOON EXTENDED ITS INTERESTS TO INCLUDE HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES.”

melodramatic way – matter of facts matters. We try not to be didactic, but we are not a value-free institution”.

I asked Rév whether it feels as though the archive plays the role of a dissident in today’s Hungary. He answered that “the OSA has always been marginal. The CEU has always been in-between – partly Hungarian and partly American – and the OSA has had a special relation with other Hungarian archives and institutions; others like to work with us, but they keep their distance”.

ACCORDING TO ANDRÁS MINK, the identity of the OSA has not changed during the years of its existence, but the political context has, and it is just natural to be in opposition. A few interviewees noticed that it has become more problematic to be visible. The Hungarian regime is trying to take ideological and administrative control over cultural institutions, and cooperation with other archives on an institutional level is becoming more and more difficult, although it is still possible through inter-personal networks. Because of the political pressure on state cultural institutions, the independent OSA has become more and more isolated. Mink summarized: “We are alien in this regime”.

Csaba Szilágyi continues this thread: “We have certain values. When they come into confrontation with power, we act as an activist archive.” In a society where anti-Semitic moods are re-emerging, the OSA carried out a project, “Yellow-Star Houses”, which raised the people of Budapest’s awareness that in 1944 under the Hungarian race laws, 220,000 Jews were relocated into so-called yellow-star houses – before the establishment of the ghetto – so that “everyone could see who was Jewish and where they lived”.¹ It was a reaction to Fidesz’ attempt to re-write history: “Yellow-Star Houses was a painful but liberating project”, as Nóra Bertalan defined it. During the project, the OSA employees and volunteers managed to list more than 100 yellow-star houses. It is no surprise that information about this project did not reach the official media. Bertalan remarks that state control had become more active in the previous six months (the interview

took place in July 2016). “I can see how things are changing and how they put labels on Soros. I am aware that there are people who do not like what we do professionally”.

Another example of the OSA’s activist projects relates to the Syrian refugee crisis. When the Hungarian government chose a “zero refugee” strategy, the archive hung a note on its doors: “Immigrants are welcome here”. As the interviewees noted, the OSA is a private institution and can afford to do things that other cultural institutions cannot because they are state funded. The price to pay is the silence of the official media.

Simultaneously, not all OSA employees agree with this activist role of the archive and see the necessity of focusing only on traditional archival work. Some I have talked with said that the archive has become overpoliticized, and it is too difficult to keep several balls in the air with so many projects at one time. They note the necessity of keeping a distance from the local political situation and being more international. Although most of the archive’s previous projects were on the history of the region, the OSA is more and more interested in organizing projects with international partners such as the Goethe Institute or Instituto Cervantes, but this is also a sign of the shrinking opportunity to act within the context of the local political arena. In the current political situation in Hungary, the international context and support for the OSA from international organizations will play an increasingly important role in the functioning of the archive. It is important, as Mink said, not to fall into provincialism: “If we lose interest in the international context, the world loses interest in us. My greatest fear is to be marginalized. One can do a lot by being isolated, but not by being mariginalized”.^x

Anna Kharkina, PhD in history, is a participant in the research project “Transnational Art and Heritage Transfer and the Formation of Value: Objects, Agents, and Institutions”, CBEEs.

reference

¹ See <https://yellowstarhouses.culturalspot.org/home>



Yellow star above the entrance of Kossuth Lajos Square 18.



Pedestrians in Budapest reading anti-Jewish regulations.

A gallery that explores a dark past

THE YELLOW-STAR HOUSES GALLERY explores the history of the Hungarian yellow-star houses, a network of almost 2,000 apartment buildings where 220,000 Budapest Jews were forced to live for half a year, from June 21, 1944. Both the houses and their residents were forced to display the yellow star.

After World War II in Hungary, the Holocaust, the murder of half a million Hungarian citizens, and the history of the Budapest yellow-star houses remained taboo subjects for two generations — in public and even within families.

On the 70th anniversary of this forced mass relocation, the OSA documents why and how the yellow-star houses were created, who lived there, what life and death were like in the Budapest of 1944, and how this is remembered in 2014.

THE YEARS OF FEAR

THE KGB BUILDING IN RIGA

by Rosario Napolitano

As we know, Latvia, as well as Lithuania and Estonia, was not only invaded once, but three times. The first time was by the Soviet Union from 1940 until 1941, the second by Nazi Germany from 1941 until 1944, and the third and last time again by the Soviet Union from 1944 until 1991. In these 51 years, the “soul” of the *Stūra Māja* also changed several times and in different ways. The purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the *Stūra Māja* [Corner House] of Riga and how the building was used is in the focus of this article. I have also conducted interviews, with both the former Latvian KGB Chief Edmunds Johanson, as well as the former Latvian dissident Leo Hiršsons.

The origin of the building

Located on Brīvības iela 61 (on the corner with Stabu iela, hence the name Corner House) the building was designed by architect Aleksanders Vanags (1873–1919) in 1912 after he had obtained his certification as an architect in Saint Petersburg. In the same year, Vanags traveled a lot with his wife, seeking to learn new architectural techniques.² In Berlin, he was pleasantly surprised by the “Adlon” Hotel, built in 1907 by Lorenz Adlon and he wanted to create the same project in Riga with the aim of attracting more tourists. After Berlin, Vanags also visited Italy, choosing to pass through Rome, Venice, and Naples before he returned to Germany, this time to Munich.

In 1919, seven years after the completion of the Corner House, Vanags was arrested on March 18 in Jelgava along with 21 others and condemned as a member of the Counter Revolutionary Movement. Vanags was executed the next day, along with the 21 others, after having dug his own grave. He is buried in Riga Meža Kapi with his daughter Daina Rasmane.

The Corner House was finished in 1912 and consists of six floors. It had a variety of different uses from 1912, such as apartments and stores, while from 1919 the Lat-

vian Revolutionary War Committee was located there.

From 1920 until 1940, the Corner House was the location of the emigration office, the border guard, the Latvian anti-alcoholism organization, and the headquarters of the newspaper *Jaunā Balss* [The New Voice]. It was primarily a state property, a sort of social building.

The first Soviet occupation

From August 1940, after the first Soviet occupation, the “soul” of the Corner House radically changed, as did the social and cultural life of all three Baltic countries.

The first prominent Corner House victim was General Ludvigs Bolšteins of the Latvian Guards Organization. Bolšteins, who was in charge at that time with an office in the Corner House, decided to commit suicide on June 21, 1940, after receiving the news of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic country.

In fact, from November 1940 until June 1941, the Corner House was the building where the Cheka (Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage, founded by Vladimir Lenin in 1917) operated in Riga. But the Corner House was not the first Cheka office

in Riga: the first one was in Alberta iela 13.

Forty-four cells of various sizes were built in the Corner House from 1940 (ten of those cells are in the abandoned basement, which is no longer accessible for tourists). The three elevators in the building date back to the period before the first Soviet occupation.

During the first Soviet occupation, the building was the place of interrogation, torture, and incarceration of Latvian citizens, who the occupying regime considered to be opponents of the Soviet system.

The first people incarcerated were border guards, because they were standing in the way of Soviet troops during the occupation.

The years of terror started. The same happened in the current Genocide Center Building in Vilnius that was used in the early of 1940s as the office of the Soviet repression.

A post box was located in the first check point of the KGB building with a guard in the same room. The post box was accessible for everybody, enabling anyone to deliver letters or documentation of people whose activities made them suspect. This post box was used during both Soviet occupation periods. After delivering a letter, the person who deposited it was interrogated by the KGB. The rewards offered by the Soviet regime for these informants were very tempting: it could be a monetary payment, special access to shops to get more food or goods, or even an apartment. An apartment was very desirable and was considered one of the primary targets for informants. At a time when up to five families of different social classes were often perched together in the same *kommunalka*,³ each in different room, with one toilet and one kitchen, a new apartment was like winning the lottery.

Another stimulus for collaboration with the Soviet government could also be a new car or a promotion at work.

The German interregnum

From 1942 to 1944, the Corner House was the place where the *Nacionālā Sardze*⁴ documented Cheka operations during the previous year. The man responsible for the project was Jūlijs Bračs, a history teacher who worked with several students, thanks to whom the huge amount of documents and files meticulously compiled by Cheka were revealed. Bračs was arrested in 1943 by the Germans because his organization was looked upon with suspicion by the Nazi regime and considered “too” Latvian; one hypothesis is that Bračs and his helpers were producing anti-Nazi propaganda in the building. Bračs was released several months after his arrest and decided to leave the country for Germany in the summer of 1944, one year before the Soviet Union invaded Latvia and the other Baltic States for the second time.



The second Soviet occupation

During the second Soviet occupation from 1944, the Corner House at Brīvības iela 61 was returned to its original former use as the KGB building, and Riga Central Prison was moved to Matisa iela 3.

The process of Sovietization started in the Baltic countries between 1944 and 1945, but it was only in 1955–1956, after Khrushchev took power as the new Secretary of the Communist Party, that the last group of partisans was destroyed by the KGB, who had adopted a different strategy.

The KGB officers had several targets: including religious movements, anti-Soviet and anti-Russian organization members, foreign intelligence agents, people who were taking part in illegal anti-Soviet agitation or trying to leave Latvia for other countries, and artists who were against the canons of socialist realism that glorified the values of communism and the emancipation of the proletariat. One of these cases was the Latvian poet Knuts Skujenieks who spent six months of his life in the KGB building and was then sentenced to six years in a labor camp in the Ural Mountains.⁵

Other prestigious victims were members of the armed resistance, and in particular Latvian national partisans.

In fact, the Latvian national partisans were one of the reasons for why that the process of *Sovietisation* in Latvia, but also in Estonia and in Lithuania (the last Lithuanian partisan killed in battle was commander Ananas Krūjēlis on March 17, 1965),⁶ was so slow.

IN THOSE YEARS, the Soviet regime decided to destroy the partisan movements from within, so they used infiltrators to discover them and find out who they should arrest. There were several cases in which a partisan member killed or betrayed his own comrade. After the arrest, those presumed guilty were forced to undress and consign to the guards all the potentially dangerous objects that could endanger their lives and those of other prisoners.

Then the accused were taken to the interrogation room. The interrogations carried out by KGB agents always started with a normal conversation and simple questions, then they totally changed their behavior and became very rude and violent to

the prisoners, who were often punched and beaten until they signed a confession.

After Stalin's death in 1953, physical torture, which was very common at the KGB building, was replaced by psychological torture. Prisoners were crammed into small cells, often 20–25 people at a time (generally in the biggest cell) and in the majority of cases the room remained illuminated for 24 hours a day, serving to disorient the prisoners.



The prisoners were fed three times per day, and the meals were exclusively prepared in the kitchen located in one part of the basement. The “menu” was always the same: a piece of bread with coffee in the morning and fish soup or just soup with vegetables, at best, for lunch and dinner, but the quality and cleanness of the food were below normal standards.

One curious space in the KGB building is the metal room in one part of the basement, built in the late 1950s as a bomb shelter in case of a possible nuclear attack.

Between the end of World War Two and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, around 30,000 KGB agents and informers worked in Latvia – many of them Latvian. Most of the chairmen in the KGB building were Russian, but there were some exceptions.

One of these was Edmunds Johansons⁷ (1936–2017), the second to last KGB officer who operated in Stūra Māja from the mid-1960s until 1991. He was preceded by seven others: Semjons Šustins, Alfons Noviks, Nikolajas Kovaļčuks, Jānis Vēvers, Langins Avdjukevičs, Boriss Pugo (Secretary of the Latvian Communist Party from 1984 to 1988), and Bruno Šteinbriks; the last chairman of the KGB in Latvia was Jānis Trubiņš, who succeeded Johansons just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Trubiņš is currently working as Head of the Transport Division of the Central Market in Riga.

Johansons earned his degree in Moscow in 1960, then decided to move to Latvia and started to work for the KGB in the mid-1960s. Almost 5,000 agents throughout Latvia worked with him, and a remarkable number of secret informers collaborated providing detailed reports of suspicious people in exchange for small favors (such as money or a promotion at work).

In another part of the building Leo Hiršsons⁸ was held, and he

was the last prisoner in the KGB building and the last dissident in Latvia. Leo Hiršsons is the son of Hermans Hiršsons, considered to be one of the first Latvian partisan, but who did not join any official group. Hermans Hiršson started his working career in a circus in Kuldīga (a small city situated 150 km from Riga) before moving to Liepāja before the war started. In 1943 he was captured by Nazi German soldiers and sent to prison in Germany until 1945, when he escaped and came back to Latvia. His son Leo was born just 10 years later.

At the age of 27, Leo moved to Riga from Liepāja where he started to work in the cinema industry as an actor and stuntman. He was arrested in November 1989 and released after six months, on May 4, 1990. At that time he was working as a stuntman in the cinema industry, and he lived illegally to avoid arrest.

THE REASON FOR Hiršsons' arrest was that he did not register his work material at the specific offices. The KGB did not find any kind of connection with anti-Soviet organizations (he was also the member of Latvian Social-Democratic Party⁹), but Hiršsons had joined some dissident movements that had links with Sweden because it was totally impossible to create an anti-Soviet movement in the Baltic at that time. Hiršsons went to Sweden several times, and then met with leaders of Latvian communities who helped by printing a production of the underground magazine *Sociālemokrāts* (Social Democrat). The other illegal magazines made in Sweden were *Brīvība* (Freedom), and *Auseklis* (Auseklis is the name of a Latvian god).

When Hiršsons came back from Sweden in 1989, he was accused by the KGB of espionage. The situation was made worse by the fact that Hiršsons was the bodyguard of the Latvian dissident Lidija Lasmane-Doroņina, who had been sent to Siberia for his dissident activities in Latvia.

On November 24, Hiršsons was arrested after his home in Gustava iela 610 was searched by KGB agents. He spent the first two weeks in isolation in Riga Central Prison, and was then brought to the KGB Building where he was held for almost six months. He was sentenced for being a member of a terrorist group. Hiršsons was released on March 16, 1990, exactly 12 days after Latvia proclaimed its independence.

According to the most recent data, almost 200 people were killed in the KGB building; the prisoners were sent to the execution room, a large quiet space next to the yard, where they were

shot in the head. They were loaded onto a big truck with other dead bodies and buried in a common grave outside Riga. The majority of the killings happened in 1941, after which prisoners were killed in Riga Central Prison (until 1953–1954).

Conclusion

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Latvian State Police worked at the Corner House from 1992 until 2008; they also utilized some offices, which are located both in the basement and from the second to the sixth floor, spaces that are currently not accessible for the public.

The building was only opened to the public in 2014, which was 24 years after Hiršson left his cell. It is now is a museum and exhibition space.

Thanks to this decision, at the same time the KGB Building was unlocked, opening up almost 70 years of history.

Since the building opened to the public, there have been different ideas of how to use it, such as a location for scary adventures or refurbishing it to create new apartments or even a hotel. ❌

Rosario Napolitano, PhD Student in International Studies, University of Naples "l'Orientale".

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MONUMENTS AS REMINDERS AND TRIGGERS

A CONTEMPORARY COMPARISON BETWEEN MEMORY WORK IN UKRAINE AND THE US

by Yuliya Yurchuk

On August 12, 2017, the US was shocked by the tragedy that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia. In the mayhem of white-nationalist groups' protests, a 32-year old woman, Heather Heyer, was killed. The groups of racists had gathered that day to impede the removal of a statue to the General of the Confederacy Robert Lee (1807–1870). White racists waved Confederate flags, and some of them used Nazi symbols. Among the extremists were representatives of different radical right-wing groups, including the alternative right and the Ku-Klux-Klan. In the middle of the protests, one of the extremists drove his car into the crowd. More than nineteen people were injured, and one – Heather Heyer – was killed.¹ The young man who drove into the crowd is a supporter of Nazi ideology. It is worth mentioning that he was inspired with Nazi ideology by history lessons at school.²

A lot of Americans were also shocked by the response from the president, Donald Trump. He refused to make any clear accusations and talked instead about the

responsibility of “many sides.” This was interpreted by journalists in many media as equating perpetrators and victims.³ The day after the President's speech, the White House issued an “explanation” of what Trump really meant. This clarification claimed that Trump considers any violence unacceptable. The clarification came out too late, however. Moreover, the explanation did not come directly from the President, but from his administration. The President's reaction left many questions

about what the current President of the USA considers acceptable and unacceptable: The same president who, just a couple of weeks before the tragedy in Charlottesville, called on the world to unite in the fight against “Muslim terrorism” after the terror attack in Manchester.⁴ But when a race crime happened on home ground, Trump could not say anything concrete. Trump's speech, however, was positively interpreted by neo-Nazi groups who understood the President's words as approval for their actions.⁵ Even during the protests, the racists were shouting: “Heil Trump!”⁶

abstract

There are parallels in discussions about monuments in Ukraine and the USA. The reminder of the Soviet past (or in the American context, of the Confederacy) is an abject that is difficult to assimilate. On the one hand, the abject is our unwillingness to see the past and accept it; on the other hand, for those who associate themselves with this past, this is the threat of castration because through the negation of a given past a certain group is cast out from the space of representation. That is why it is questionable whether a monument can be inclusive at all. Which memory does the monument recall? Which past is castrated when a new monument is built? Which groups are fighting for recognition and representation? Which groups lose this right? These questions confront researchers and memory workers and are discussed in this essay.

KEY WORDS: memory studies, monuments.



Monument to Bandera in the Western Ukrainian town of Ivanovo-Frankivsk.

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Why monuments to Confederate heroes?

In the Southern states of the USA there are many monuments to the Confederacy. The most popular hero among them is General Robert Lee. He was originally from Virginia and was known to be a talented military leader. Lincoln offered Lee the command of his army, but Lee refused because he could not go to war against his native state. Instead he became a general in the army of the Southern states. As we know, the South was defeated. Immediately after the war, the main approach to dealing with the past in the USA was reconciliation: there were attempts to avoid speaking about the differences between the states, instead promoting the main discourse “e pluribus unum.” In a way, the reconciliation between the South and the North happened thanks to “forgetting” about the slave-trade and the common responsibility of all the states (not only the South) for this.

Later, towards the beginning of the 20th century, the situation changed. The Southern states accepted a revisionist narrative of the war: the narrative of the “Lost Cause.” This narrative stressed the courageous fight of the South; even when everyone understood that the war was lost, the Southerners wanted to fight to the end. It was a question of pride and honor. This narrative also emphasized that the Civil War was not really about slavery: It was rather about constitutional ideals.⁷ In the 1920s many monuments to the Confederacy were built. At that time, Ku-Klux-Klan activities were revived and the enforcement of the

Jim Crow segregation laws was strengthened. In a way, the revival of the memory of the Confederacy ran parallel to the revival of right-wing nationalism in the USA. General Lee was commemorated on an anniversary coin, five postage stamps, and a range of monuments. In the USA, only Lincoln is commemorated in a similar way.⁸ It is worth noting that General Lee was against any monuments to Civil War heroes because he thought that monuments would hinder reconciliation and would lead to conflicts in society.⁹ What is happening now (the calls to stop commemorating Confederacy heroes) reflects shifts in attitudes about race and reconciliation in society.

THE MOVEMENT AGAINST monuments to the Confederacy started long before the conflict in Charlottesville. In the spring of 2017, four monuments to the Confederacy were dismantled in New Orleans, the last of which was also a monument to General Lee. The events in New Orleans were mentioned in many media because of the speech by the mayor Mitch Landrieu.¹⁰ At that time some commenters criticized the supposedly excessive safety measures in New Orleans.¹¹ The monument in Charlottesville was also discussed in the spring. In April a ban was issued on dismantling this monument. It was stated that six more months were needed before making the final decision.

The characteristic feature of the discussions against the Confederate monuments, including the monument to Lee, is that both the Confederacy and Lee were transformed into racist



The United Daughters of the Confederacy at the Confederate Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia, U.S., on June 5, 1922.

icons. Present day racists and neo-Nazis appropriated the memory of the Confederacy and associate themselves with the cause. They announce that the Confederacy embodied “golden times”, which chimes well with Trump’s discourse “to make America great again.” In this way the “lost greatness” is associated with revisionists’ narrative of the “Lost Cause.” Trump’s speech after the Charlottesville tragedy only strengthened the anger and fear of many Americans who see that the USA is moving further and further to the right when the government openly approves white racists.

The Mayor of New Orleans has spoken on similar topics. He said that in a changed society, Americans cannot commemorate the heroes who they commemorated in the past because many people of New Orleans today see the past as a humiliation. When they pass by the monument, they see every day the reminder that people who adhered to a racist ideology and who approved slavery are still respected¹² (e.g. General Lee is known to have been cruel to slaves and he was explicitly racist when he spoke about Afro-Americans not being human). The Mayor’s speech is also interesting from the point of view of memory researchers. Mitch Landrieu proposed exchanging the monuments to the Confederacy for more inclusive monuments that would address the victims of slavery, lynching, and inequality.¹³ In the Mayor’s view, this could lead to better understanding and reconciliation in the community.

Memory, reconciliation, and the struggle for recognition

Discussions and tensions about the legacy of the Confederacy demonstrated once again how the past can be a powerful political resource and how views of the past depend on the ever-changing conditions of the present. Sometimes the heroes of past centuries cannot remain the heroes of the present because society has changed. There are powerful interest groups inspired by human rights rhetoric who struggle for recognition of the suffering of those groups in the past. In this way, the past becomes a decisive tool in the politics of recognition, where memory is pre-



Hundreds of marchers rally at the Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, on September 16, 2017.

sented as “the right to remember.” As a result, memory politics includes on the one hand the potential for liberation and representation of suppressed and silenced experiences; on the other hand, memory can also be manipulative because it is related to the groups who have more power.

Memory can also become one of the main resources for reconciliation. Researchers of memory say that it is not possible to speak about reconciliation as long as the wounds of the past are not healed.¹⁴ For this reason, recognition is the first step towards reconciliation between different groups. But reconciliation and recognition are difficult to reach because there must be a clear evaluation of the crimes and acceptance of guilt by the perpetrators. The perpetrators of the past are often no longer alive, nor are the victims. Instead there are the subsequent generations who are often not related either to victims or perpetrators. Often the next generations are united because of the common ideology or their common beliefs in some ideals of justice (that is why much is said about historical justice, whereas retribution bears rather a symbolic meaning).

Something similar happened in Ukraine during the process of decommunization. This process started not in 2015 when the “Laws on Decommunization” were adopted, but much earlier in the 1990s when Ukraine started to distance itself from its Soviet past. A more appropriate term would be de-Sovietization, as Tetiana Zhurzhenko notes.¹⁵ The process of de-Sovietization is marked by society’s interest in topics that were taboo in the USSR. It should however be stressed that the similarity in tendencies of memory politics does not mean that the Confederacy and the Soviet past are somehow comparable. They are not. The similarity only concerns the memory work. The main imperative in both cases is that memory is promoted as the main instrument in reconciliation. When the Director of the Institute of National Remembrance spoke about the Decommunization Laws in Ukraine, he also spoke about reconciliation (of those who adhere to Soviet memories and those who support the new ways of remembering promoted in post-Soviet Ukraine).¹⁶ Interestingly, in both cases politicians and memory entrepreneurs refer to monu-



Statue-monument “Mother Motherland” in Kyiv.



Monument to Poles killed by the UPA in 1943–1945, Przemysł, Poland.



The Holocaust memorial monument at Babi Yar in Kyiv, where Nazi troops murdered more than 33,000 Jews in September 1941.

ments. It seems that those who support the dismantling of the monuments think that getting rid of the monuments squeezes out the past represented by these monuments from the space of one’s identification.

IN SUCH A GESTURE of memory work (and the work of those who shape memory politics) the monument, like the past that it represents, becomes what Julia Kristeva calls an abject.¹⁷ The abject is understood as something that evokes horror because it can threaten the existence of the whole system of meanings and knowledge about ourselves. It is the reminder about our own past that we want to forget. A vivid example of an abject is the dead body that horrifies us because it reminds us of our own death.¹⁸ The abject “lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.”¹⁹

In this sense the reminder of the Soviet past (or in the American context, of the Confederacy) is an abject that is difficult to assimilate. It reminds us about something we want to forget. The abject is related to our strong wish to repress, to cast out the past from the space of identification. In such a gesture we say “it is not us,” we turn our backs on it and try to forget it.²⁰ On the one hand, the abject is our unwillingness to see the past and accept it; on the other hand, for those who associate themselves with this past, this is the threat of castration because through the negation of a given past a certain group (who associate themselves with this past) is cast out from the space of representation. That is why it is questionable whether a monument can be inclusive at all. Which memory does the monument recall? Which past is castrated when a new monument is built? Which groups are fighting for recognition and representation? Which groups lose this right? These are the questions that confront researchers and memory workers.

“THE DEFENDERS OF CONFEDERACY MONUMENTS (OR IN THE CASE OF UKRAINE, COMMUNIST MONUMENTS) SPEAK ABOUT THEIR CULTURAL VALUE.”

Here we see again the parallels in discussions about monuments in Ukraine and the USA. The defenders of Confederate monuments (or in the case of Ukraine, communist monuments) speak about their cultural value. In this way, culture becomes the main argument when all other arguments are exhausted. When one is in a situation where political meanings are outdated, when part of society is no longer proud of the past because this past is associated by them with everything negative, then culture comes to the rescue. The monuments are defended as the “national” heritage, which one has no right to ruin because the heritage is a value per se. Nevertheless, heritage is not a neutral term. Political interests often stand behind the arguments of the defenders of monuments in the same way as they do in the case of those opposing the monuments.

The process of heritage formation is complex. In an open democratic society, this process has to take place via open public discussion where the question of memory is discussed publicly. But such an ideal situation is hard to achieve. In most cases monuments are built on the initiative of a certain group, who start speaking in the name of the whole nation. In the end, the heritage becomes the “national” heritage. Here we see again an interesting parallel between Ukraine

and the USA: the monuments to the Confederacy were propagated by a limited number of interested persons (mostly from the association United Daughters of the Confederacy),²¹ but now the supporters of these monuments speak about the “national” heritage. In a similar way, the monuments to Soviet heroes were built by specific people at specific times. It is hard to speak about these monuments as the part of a national heritage because their construction was not discussed in open debates.

A similar situation is seen in the building of post-Soviet monuments dedicated to war-time Ukrainian nationalists, particularly

the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Stepan Bandera. These monuments are initiated by specific groups and often financed by private initiatives, but they are presented in the public space as the wish of the whole nation. Of course, the monuments are not the results of national referenda; they are not the wish of the whole nation or even of the majority. Such referenda are not in fact needed. But what is needed is a common understanding that each monument and each renaming of the street or town is the victory of some group that got the upper hand over their opponents at a specific point in time. As a researcher who has spent a long time studying Confederate monuments said, “Private initiatives have colonized public space”; what is now considered as national is a result of lobbying by a very limited number of people.²² This is the same conclusion to which I came when I studied the monuments to OUN and UPA in Ukraine.²³

The situation when the monuments rapidly succeed one another also presents a risk of a particular nature. When the public sees that the “parade of heroes” changes with such a rapidity, they may fear that the new heroes won’t last long. In my conversation with one of the professors of the military university in Kyiv, he said that some of his students, who come from the war currently going on in the East of Ukraine, are afraid to take the official status of veteran because they are afraid that with a change of power, their own status could radically change as well. Of course, it is too early to jump to any conclusions based on one conversation, but it does show the peculiarity that the rapid changes of the monuments can inflict.²⁴

IN WESTERN EUROPE (with some exceptions, of course) the politics of regret became one of the central approaches in memory politics.²⁵ In the politics of regret, the focus is shifted from heroism to mourning the victims and taking responsibility for the suffering inflicted. In Ukraine a similar practice is established in the commemoration of Holodomor, for instance, when the victims take the central position in the memory culture. However, in Ukraine the focus is not only on the victims but also on demands that guilt be recognized. That is why active emphasis is placed on the perpetrator’s identity, presented as a general image of everything Soviet. In this process there is a concrete differentiation into “us” and “them.” The fact that there were perpetrators among “us” is mostly kept quiet. In this way, the memory becomes an object about which it is difficult to speak. Similarly, the memory of Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists is presented as exclusively positive and heroic while the crimes inflicted by nationalists are not mentioned, although a lot of historical studies in Ukraine and abroad show that Ukrainian nationalists collaborated in the Holocaust. However, this historical knowledge is squeezed out of the public memory (e.g. in urban spaces). Russian propaganda that names everything directed to sustaining Ukrainian sovereignty as “fas-

cist” only fuels these tendencies to repress this knowledge, since any critical remarks about some members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in Ukrainian public space is sometimes seen as “anti-Ukrainian” and the critics are labeled traitors.

The past is worth speaking about not only when it is glorious, but also when it is difficult because it can warn against repeating the tragedies. The main European slogan in the memory of the Second World War – “Never again” – serves as such a warning. In Ukraine, the Institute of National Remembrance has also taken steps towards the Europeanization of memory since 2014. Directly after the end of the Euromaidan protests, the Institute proposed the wording “Never again” as an official slogan in celebration of the Day of the Victory over Nazism. When the war in the East of the country started, though, the slogan became outdated as the very thing that was never to be repeated – the war – is actually being repeated in the country.

REFLECTING ON THE situation in Ukraine when many monuments were dismantled in the havoc of decommunization, and bearing in mind how people in a quite different context lost their lives in clashes about a monument, it is difficult to avoid reflecting on the meaning of monuments and the position of historians in debates on the past. Perhaps, in approaching a difficult memory, it is worth taking clear positions and not being afraid to oppose some disputable commemoration because we may risk being treated as traitors, separatists, etc. In applauding Ukrainian heroes who adhered to ideologies that were far from democratic, we create conditions where it is easier to step back from democratic values and ideals. In either being afraid of the past and fleeing from it or over-idealizing it, we create a fetish that has a strong potential to influence our present and our future. When the past is not discussed openly and under safe conditions, then

the grounds for clashes grow and tragedies such as that in Charlottesville happen. With respect to the Ukrainian situation, Viacheslav Likhachov, a researcher of the rightist movement, noted, “neo-Nazi symbols ... are becoming common in society – they are associated with “heroic defenders” and not with the hooligans who attack the people on the streets. The rightist conservative protective discourse is natural in such conflicts, and it creates a basis for spreading the ultranational ideology.”²⁶ This shift in the perception

of radical ideologies presents important questions to both politicians and researchers. In this regard, the discourse about the responsibility of “many sides” cannot be accepted when we talk about hate crimes. A clear differentiation of victims and perpetrators is needed. But the problems begin when this differentiation is purely along the lines of nationality or race. The truth is that these groups can be divided according to only one principle: those who suffered from hateful ideology and those who preached those ideologies and committed the crimes.

Finally, is it necessary to reevaluate the monuments? Prob-

ably, yes, because the times are changing as are the ideals. The idols of the past that symbolized heroism and patriotism can become the symbols of racism, hatred, and violence. That is why it is necessary to reevaluate and revise them. But this revision has to be open to the public, and the leaders of the country cannot speak about the responsibility of “many sides” as that places victims and perpetrators on the same level. It is necessary to direct attention and efforts to stop hateful ideologies spreading if we want to live in a democratic society where the rights of individuals are respected. When people are killed because of monuments, we have to understand that monuments are not simply “stones in space.” Perhaps in place of the monument to General Robert E. Lee it would be more appropriate to construct a monument to the victims of the clashes in Charlottesville, with a clear message that society condemns such crimes and will do everything possible to prevent them. The fact that a white American woman became the victim of white racists shows that the borderlines are not found in “race” or any other social construct but in hateful ideologies of whichever political color. ❌

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GENDER – MERELY A “SOCIAL FACT”?

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEO-AUTHORITARIAN US/THEM DICHOTOMIES

by Sabine Hark

“One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.” Simone de Beauvoir wrote this in her epochal work *The Second Sex*.¹ Perhaps more than any other sentence, this famous dictum captures what can be considered as the momentum of second-wave feminism in the Western world. De Beauvoir was convinced that neither “biological” nor “psychic or economic” factors determine the shape “that the female person assumes in society”.² In the sense of the existential-philosophical premise that essence results from existence, de Beauvoir understood the existence of women as *post-essentialist*, as we would say today; that is, as a “social fact”, created by society (Emile Durkheim),³ “woman” is a social invention.

“If a girl appears to us to demonstrate gender-specific behaviors long before puberty and sometimes even in early childhood,” concludes de Beauvoir, it is not because “obscure instincts drive her to passive, coquettish, and maternal behavior”.⁴ On the contrary, almost “from the beginning” other people intervened “in the child’s life” and irrefutably drummed into her what her calling should be.⁵ It is the whole of civilization⁶ that turns a woman into a – dependent – woman. In saying this, de Beauvoir was not denying those differences that we have learned to understand to be “natural” or

“biological”. For her, separation of the sexes was a “biological occurrence, not a feature of human history”.⁷ Certain differences between man and woman would “always exist” – this was her often repeated conviction.⁸ What was important for this radical thinker on the topics of freedom and equality was, on the contrary, to show that these differences do not determine the inescapable fate of women and therefore do not decide what their position in society should be. And so women are not destined from birth to be “women” – and therefore destined to subservience or “otherness”.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR wrote *The Second Sex* about seventy years ago, a few years after the end of the Second World War. To be sure, she asked herself even then whether there “was really a

abstract

That gender cannot be reduced to an ahistorical fact is a widely researched insight of multidisciplinary gender studies. In theory as well as in political practice gender is thus generally understood as a post-essentialist, reflexive, and contingent concept. Against this backdrop the essay asks for the German context in what way and with which intentions, neo-authoritarian discourses and movements explicitly not only reject, attack and defame gender as concept, but also reclaim it. I will argue that under the cipher ‘anti-genderism’, a discourse has been formed that can first be described as a neo-fundamentalist discourse and that is secondly explicitly used to construct racist, neo-authoritarian us/them-dichotomies. The so called anti-gender forces become thus identifiable as the element of a dispositif, which is at the core and subject to further clarification of anti-democratic nature.

KEY WORDS: gender discourses, gender studies.

problem”⁹ that would justify writing a feminist book of this kind. Maybe “enough ink had flowed” already in the “debate on feminism”.¹⁰ After all, it was not even clear whether “women even exist,” or perhaps, whether “every female person [...] must of necessity be a woman”.¹¹ However, anyone who takes notice not only of the disputes about academic gender studies that have been raging for about the past ten years, but also of the battles against a “gender ideology” or “gender theory” that is supposedly undermining

the founding principles of Western culture not only in Germany, but also in countries such as Poland, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, France, and Italy, cannot avoid ascertaining that clearly enough ink has not flowed, nor have de Beauvoir's deliberations lost any of their explosive force. Her central tenet, that woman is a social construct, and gender therefore a "social fact", is still likely to cause irritation and confusion and lends itself therefore more than ever to an affectively highly charged politicization of various provenance. Regardless, under the term that US sociologist Erving Goffman once coined, with critical intent, a term that has mutated into the contentious concept "genderism",¹² a noteworthy Europe-wide alliance-in-spirit has come into being to fight this "gender ideology," which is purportedly as questionable as it is destructive of the founding principles of society.

Dispossession

Intentionally, the spokespeople of this alliance in spirit reverse the meaning of Goffman's concept of "genderism" to its opposite, namely, to be a form of ideological totalitarianism that wants to force "us" all under a gender dictate. What's more, the concept of "gender ideology" has been deployed by neo-reactionary forces as a metaphor for the claimed insecurity and unfairness produced by the current socioeconomic order and is turned into a resource for the construction of an antidemocratic us/them dichotomy framed by racism. We can speak here of a form of "discursive dispossession", to use an expression coined by the sociologist Ursula Müller,¹³ even though it should be said that neither gender nor the concept of genderism belongs exclusively to Gender Studies. This is what it is vital for us to understand – precisely this discursive dispossession, the exploitation of gender for the generation of anti-democratic us/them dichotomies. The paradox that this concept, gender, which stands possibly like few others for an attitude of reflexive contingency – one that is supremely democratic – can be taken into service for the staging of an emotionally charged and increasingly racist opposition between "the people" and "the establishment" seems to me at present to be symptomatic of dynamics that extend far beyond the field of gender in the political and social arena.

Anti-Genderism: Alliance in spirit

If I speak of an alliance in spirit here, I am referring to a Europe-wide network, a loose but increasingly stable collection of more or less personally and/or institutionally linked persons, organizations, movements, and institutions. It includes, among others, the Vatican and major segments of the Catholic Church, religious and lay conservative NGOs, and evangelical Free Churches, as well as nationalist, right-wing parties such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany, *Front National* (FP) in France, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreich* (FPÖ) in Austria, the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* in the Netherlands, and *PiS* (Law and Justice) in Poland. In their party programmatic they all expressly oppose gender or "genderism", and they all maintain more or less strong connections with the current social movements in the racist, anti-democratic, and authoritarian spectrum, for example, with the *Identitären* or the Dresden-based movement *Pegida*. Moreover,

movements such as *La Manif pour tous* in France, which first mobilized against same-sex marriage but soon turned into a protest against the more general threat of "gender theory" being taught in schools, as well as neoconservative intellectuals, journalists, and writers, and even some feminists, have to be counted among its partisans.

What unites this alliance is first and foremost a common enemy figure – the aforementioned "gender ideology" or "gender theory". Further, a common and widely used tactic among members of these more-or-less loosely connected forces is the evocation of hyperbolic and fear-arousing discursive images such as the "end of civilization as we know it" if the "gender ideologies" succeed. Increasingly, and as already mentioned, they also invoke us/them dichotomies such as "we-the-people" versus the "gender-lobby in Brussels" or Gender Studies professors at German universities and abroad. What they mean by "gender theory" is deliberately never clearly defined and remains slippery. Hence gender ideology functions as an empty or free-floating signifier that can be shaped in radically different, even opposing ways, able to match different interests and political goals. Consequently, it can represent everything and anything, from aiming to destroy masculinity and femininity and the allegation that gender theory proclaims the freedom to choose one's own gender and sexual orientation, even "several times a day", to the reverse claim that Gender Studies wants to impose gender roles. Various it is also made to stand for the endorsement of LGBTIQ rights, from marriage equality and sex education to reproductive and adoption rights and Pro-Choice arguments, and even a ban of heterosexuality.

IN SHORT, "gender theory", by implicitly suggesting that there is a coherent body of scientific work known as such, becomes a synonym for some kind of conspiracy, aiming at nothing less than a cultural revolution in which biological facts about men and women will be denied and an indeterminate fluidity of gender will be promoted. In this context, "genderism" is constructed as a totalitarian project of social engineering similar to other totalitarian projects such as communism or fascism. Hence "anti-genderism" serves at least a threefold function. First, the forces gathered under this umbrella term can present themselves as the saviors of ordinary men and women, of Western civilization, and of mankind. Second, "anti-genderism" fulfills the function of symbolic glue for an otherwise quite heterogeneous spectrum of neo-reactionary forces. Third, it serves as a cover-up of a much bigger attempt to change the values underlying European liberal democracies. As such, "anti-genderism" is not just a feminist or gender issue, but the signal of a threat to liberal democracy itself – a Trojan horse carrying forces determined to end democracy "as we know it".

The mobilization of an us/them opposition between the people and the establishment, which is central to neo-reactionary politics, is essentially played out on the field of gender and sexuality, when they say for example that the Brussels gender-diktat is controlling the totalitarian reeducation to produce the "sexualized gender person". For example, the right-wing Catholic

journalist Gabriele Kuby promotes her book *Die globale sexuelle Revolution: Zerstörung der Freiheit im Namen der Freiheit* [The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom] on her personal homepage as follows:

"In this book you will read what we are no longer allowed to say about the UN and the EU as controllers of the sexual revolution; major reeducation to produce the sexualized gender person; the political rape of language; the epidemic of pornography; the homosexual movement; sex education in schools and kindergartens; the slippery slope to totalitarianism in a new guise."¹⁴

To understand the extensive reach of this paradox, that is, that although gender as emblem of the experience of contingency can have its meaning reinterpreted as the sign of a position that denies contingency – indeed, as the sign of totalitarian dominance – it is necessary now to call to mind, as briefly as possible, the thoughts of Goffman and others on gender and genderism.

Gender as a category of knowledge

The sociologist Goffman understood gender quasi as the prototype of a social category and classification. Goffman writes: "In all societies, initial sex-class placement stands at the beginning of a sustained sorting process whereby members of the two classes are subject to differential socialization."¹⁵ Without doubt "genderism" here is a concept of sociological critique. "It is not", Goffman explains, "the social consequences of innate sex differences that must be explained, but the way in which these differences were (and are) put forward as a warrant for our social arrangements, and, most important of all, the way in which the institutional workings of society ensured that this accounting would seem sound."¹⁶ Thus gender here is no longer nothing more, but also nothing less, than a social classification, a defining frame, in which practice is put into effect. "And insofar as natural expressions of gender are natural and expressive," Goffman argues in *Gender Advertisements*, "what they naturally express is the capacity and inclination of individuals to portray a version of themselves and their relationships at strategic moments – a working agreement to present each other with, and facilitate the other's presentation of, gestural pictures of the claimed reality of their relationship and the claimed character of their human nature."¹⁷

ACCORDING TO THE US historian Joan W. Scott, gender points to the fact that we are dealing with "perceived differences between the sexes" that are based on knowledge.¹⁸ Gender "is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences".¹⁹ If *sexual difference* can be seen only in the body, as a function of our knowledge, it cannot be the causal basis from which the so-

cial organization of human cohabitation can be derived. In this connection Scott strictly advocated rejecting the established and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historiography and the deconstruction of the constraints of gender difference. With this she developed de Beauvoir's recognition that "woman does not exist," making the production of the sexual difference itself the object of the analysis. Instead of asking about the situation of women, as Scott said somewhere else, we should investigate the processes of this differentiation. In doing this we would not assume that differences "that regulate our social relationships have always been or will always be the same".²⁰

With this Scott moves the question of the ontology of gender into the field of knowledge. For we do not understand this question – or we understand it as little as, say, the question of "race" or sexuality – unless we take into consideration that the knowledge of those nature- and life-sciences that have designed the modern program of the heteronormative gender binary have for a long time been a part of this ontology. Thus it is imperative, according to Scott's argument, to analyze how the difference is produced and to decipher which components were brought into which sort of causal chain here with the result that gender and gender difference appear to be founded inescapably on biology.

Here the suggestion of the scientific researcher Donna Haraway that we should investigate how sexual difference itself is produced ties in directly. In *Gender for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of Words* (1986), Haraway suggests learning to understand sex and gender as instances of two different but very interconnected systems of knowledge. And a very important part of this is to give back to what presumably was given naturally, and therefore is without history – and this is probably sex, above all – its history and its mediality, its origins, even from science and economics, from technology and culture, from ideologies and practices. But that means nothing other than giving sex, just like gender, a material ontology – and this is the kernel of the post-essentialist paradigm in Gender Studies.

A connection of this kind between the ontology of sex and gender and systems of knowledge and institutional constructions such as family and relations, the conditions and manner of production, engineering and technology, juristic practices and media discourses, pictorial traditions and literary imaginations, and power systems and types of government, makes it impossible to postulate a nature preceding culture and history that is not of itself also the product of an articulation – the result of a contingent causal chain, of heterogeneous practices, materialities, phenomena, discourses, and knowledge – that itself contributes to the production of culture and history.

There is thus no direct path, and certainly no unilateral path, from sex, that is, what we commonly call biological or anatomical sex, to gender – the socially created or constructed sex.

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Rather, it is precisely the other way round: sex has always been *gender*, as Butler's famous and much discussed thesis in *Gender Trouble* (1999) points out. And that is again nothing other than the elaborated version of the sentence that stood at the head of the second wave of feminism: de Beauvoir's insight from 1949, that we do not come into the world as *women* but *become women*.

How a vocabulary of critique became synonymous with totalitarianism

While Goffman, Scott, and Haraway focused on connections among individual sexualized behaviors, institutional conventions, power relationships, and types of government, as well as types of knowledge, the representatives of the self-named Anti-Gender-Allianz employ de Beauvoir's insight, as we have seen, to mobilize against a supposedly totalitarian "gender ideology", so-called genderism. If I may repeat myself, supposedly this ideology either forces notions of gender roles onto people or intends to make people abandon such notions, and, all in all, aims to rob society of its natural founding principles – gender binary and heterosexuality. In Germany, discrediting the academic discipline Gender Studies as "excess", "ideology", "pseudo-religious dogma", or "anti-" or "pseudo-science" plays an important role – a discourse that in the meantime can also be found in the field of feminism itself; for example, see Alice Schwarzer and the feminist magazine *Emma* that she publishes. The discussion is about "gender madness" and "gender flim-flam"; Gender Studies wanting to force on us its crude and dangerous ideology, which is out of touch with reality; how "gender women" are seeking the spotlight; their illegitimate usurping of professorships; and also the fact that Gender Studies ignores both scientifically proven and objective facts and "healthy human understanding".

There are numerous deliberate reversals and affective mobilizations, systematically produced misunderstandings and red herrings, and attempts to defame and discredit. Yet those who are leading the defamatory discussion understood completely what the term *gender turn*, introduced by Goffman, Scott, Haraway, and others, implies, that is, a post-essentialist understanding of gender. On the other hand, equating the insight that gender, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for example, argued, is not nature but the "result of a historical work of perpetuation"²¹ with an anti-academic approach is intentionally misleading.

AT FIRST GLANCE, equating things in this way may indeed seem absolutely logical, insofar as a naturalistic and scientific notion of knowledge must deny a post-essentialist paradigm outright as unscientific. In and of itself, this is neither a new criticism nor one that calls for an urgent reaction. However, what makes it current for science and also socially relevant is the fact that (and

how) the discrediting of this specific notion of anti-science is linked right across Europe to right-wing populist-fundamentalist rhetoric and dynamics. For – and this is what is really problematic here – the criticism of anti-science becomes powerful only as an element of a dispositif that is in essence, and subject to further clarification, of an anti-etatist or possibly populist nature.

In regard to Gender Studies, this newly revived, purportedly anti-state populism comes up on the one hand with a mobilization, not only rhetorical, against indoctrination controlled ostensibly from above – either by the Brussels EU bureaucracy or the state, or even just the gender professors – and on the other hand with the demand that the academic discipline – Gender Studies – be "socially beneficial", and, implicitly, immediately comprehensible for all taxpayers in terms of both content and method. In addition, the presumption of the religious, delusional, or even totalitarian character of Gender Studies is ubiquitous. Again and again an identical set of assertions is presented, which all have in common the premise that Gender Studies are not a science. They are pseudo-science, ideology, dogma, religion, worldview, or hocus-pocus. On the whole, what science is exactly is not explicit, at all elaborated, or backed up by sources. Rather, it is understood overwhelmingly as mundane, commonplace, in a seemingly undiscerning positive sense – as an objective examination of facts (preferably understood as "natural") that are inherently the way they are. An examination that everyone should

be equally capable of carrying out, independently of prior knowledge or other context. Because, they say, Gender Studies has neither accomplished this nor appears to seek to do so in the future, it has so far presented no kind of "knowledge" in the sense of objectively presented facts. Therefore, according to the possibly circular argument, in the case of Gender Studies we are not talking about science.

Despite this, according to one of the repeated accusations, Gender Studies is disproportionately influential at universities and colleges – a

genderization of universities has taken place²² – and the huge squandering of public resources is being denounced. Systematically, the impression is being given that millions, even billions, of public monetary resources are flowing into a political ideology that not only is disguised as science, but in addition is trying to indoctrinate the young people at university. The alliance is frequently up in arms because like "pigs at the trough" the "genderistas" and "female professors" are getting fat "through the universities, financed by the hard-earned money of us all".

However, these tricks have little in common with the actual conditions at German universities, as the following figures make clear. In 2013 about 35,000 professors were teaching full-time at universities and colleges in the Federal Republic of Germany. This includes all salary grades. Of these approximately 35,000,

only about 150 are partly or fully engaged in Gender Studies or gender research. That is about 0.4 percent of the total number of professorships. Anyone who so wishes can believe that this 0.4 percent is an emerging or already completed "genderization". And it is not entirely implausible that there are those who would make such an argument. Unperturbed by these numbers and facts, "gender-critical" authors claim in response that Gender Studies is part of a feminist *raison d'état*, or perhaps, part of the "gender lobby".

This argument – that Gender Studies is part of a *raison d'état* – is an important example of rhetorical discrediting. It can be linked in many ways to the populist arguments and reasoning of anti-statism, that is, of a critical attitude toward the state as it is touted in libertarian-conservative and right-wing contexts. Thus calling Gender Studies a *raison d'état* is systematically coupled with nationalist and anti-European attitudes or, as the case may be, formulations, especially with reference to the code word "Brussels". As early as the summer of 2006, Peter Lattas wrote this in the *Junge Freiheit*:

"The average citizen generally does not learn about the tireless actions and weavings of the lobbyists and ideologues in the Brussels Eurocracy until it is too late. [...] The concept [gender] originated in the feminist Lesbian movement and is based on the assumption that 'gender' is not determined by biology but is a social concept and therefore can be changed. In this view heterosexuality is not a normal state but a contrived notion that is passé and must be vanquished."²³

From anti-feminism to anti-genderism

In itself this is indeed not new. For criticism of the supposedly natural sexual ranking is as old as this ranking itself. For a long time, essentializing has indeed been the core element in the strategy deployed against gender: nature has been and continues to be the privileged bulwark against history, politics, and sexual democracy. More than a few people have always been of the opinion that feminists, queers, and others were going too far with their questioning of the natural order of things. Conversely, as Claudia Honegger has shown in *Die Ordnung der Geschlechter: Die Wissenschaften vom Menschen und das Weib*,²⁴ it is precisely the natural sciences, newly emerging in the nineteenth century, especially anthropology, medicine, gynecology and anatomy, that increasingly claimed dominance for the truth realm of gender and claimed to be able to decipher the essence of the gender difference, while in fact they were pursuing in particular the "biologization" of femaleness. Not least, they offered the modern age a handy answer to its dilemma, that having asserted that all people are naturally equal, be able to justify the (not only) political inequality of women. The unambiguous message of this program, which is still having its effect today, is that what we can become in terms of gender and what social conventions result from this is predefined by nature.

Scientifically transforming and naturalizing gender differ-

ence in this way was to prove to be an enduring method of interpretation. It provides up to this day a powerful and updatable archive of truth that has been updated again and again so as to respond to shocks in the asymmetrically organized architecture of genders and society. Thus it is a long shadow that the myth of the naturalness of the relation of the sexes has cast on all questions relating to the positioning of gender ranking in the social context. With the term sameness taboo, the US cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin (now legendary), back in the early days of feminist theory, interpreted this to mean that *men* and *women* must always be distinguished and may not on any account be perceived as identical.²⁵

WHY IS IT NEVERTHELESS relevant in both analytical and political terms to grapple with changes? Because something has changed. In contrast to the historical precursors of anti-feminism, today's attacks are not expressed principally as general objections to feminism and the political notion of equality. The argument is not that women cannot have equal rights because they are inherently different, but that although women and men have equal rights, they are inherently and fundamentally different. Therefore, today people are mobilizing against an academic concept – gender – instead of feminism (and this can indeed be viewed as a historic breakthrough) and are rearticulating feminism in a specific way. This new feminism, which is being positioned to oppose gender, is essentially founded on naturalistic, familial, or religious – which usually means Christian – principles. And it claims that it is closer to healthy common sense, to the daily practice and experience of women and men than the denounced "gender ideology" of Birgit Kelle, Gabriele Kuby, and others,²⁶ which, according to the continuously fed phantasm, was conceived in Berkeley, implemented in Brussels, taught in German colleges and universities, and sets the rules. In addition, this specific articulation of feminism plays a not-insignificant role in the production of what with Stuart Hall we can call a workaday consciousness colored by racism – that knowledge with which people seek to validate their societal conditions and the boundaries that they draw, as well as the political and social battles in which they are placed, and which serves as a guideline for their actions.

According to Volker Zastrow, head of the politics section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the disastrous evocation of a dystopia of state-ordered egalitarianism indifferent to gender difference took the place of anti-feminist feelings of resentment and the questioning of universal equality (based on the law of nature). In 2006 he wrote that this contradicted the "feelings of most people, the religions, and scientific research" and that it was therefore legitimate to rebel against it:

"And finally this brings us to the theoretical crux of the 'gender' concept. For it in no way means the existence of social gender roles and their characteristics: a banality that feminist classics such as Betty Friedan tied in to. Rather, ultimately 'gender' claims that there is no such thing as biological gender. It claims that the divi-

sion of newborn babies into boys and girls is arbitrary; they could just as well be divided according to quite different viewpoints, such as big and small. Therefore there is an ultimately powerful assignment of identity right at the beginning of existence: the ‘heterosexual matrix’. This rather philosophical hypothesis contradicts the most fundamental perception and feeling of most people, religions, and scientific research.”²⁷

The battle lines drawn up here by Zastrow became an established approach and can still be found in various contexts all across Europe today. For example, the Catholic Church in Poland claims to be developing a “new feminism” that takes a stand against the “dangerous gender nonsense,” as Bożena Chołuj was able to demonstrate.²⁸ And here at home, for example, the “Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden” (Association of Evangelical Free Churches) is turning against discrimination against women, which they say represents “fertile ground for ideologies,” and then immediately warning of the danger that comes from questioning the “natural” nature of the accepted gender difference and for which “gender ideology” is made responsible, as Barbara Thiessen has clearly shown.²⁹ A thoroughly surprising ecumenical movement is appearing here.

So to all appearances, wherever the offensive questioning of gender justice and equality do not seem to be politically opportune, where the perpetuation of gender inequality is increasingly dependent on context-specific conditions, and the “eternal difference” is no longer available routinely, without ado, as a resource for justifying inequality, the loudly proclaimed scientific emphasis of, as always, natural gender differences becomes, or is made, relevant. In order to gain control over the genuine erosion in gender relations, which ultimately also indicates the extent to which strong feminist movements have invaded our society’s gender ranking and deep-rooted patriarchal structures, “scientific noise” is once again produced, the arsenal of biologically based truths is opened, and it is far less possible to deny the gender binary.

As Irene Dölling has shown, the production of many different interpretations of gender, which are constantly being updated, has always been among the cultural techniques that generate this everyday consciousness.³⁰ Consequently, Dölling finds that the interlaced hegemonic gender and heteronormative family discourses of the modern age function particularly well for this purpose. For they represent a form of negotiation about society, about its self-concept, about the legitimization of in- and exclusion, and about inequalities, negotiation that directly addresses individuals and their immediate relationships. This is precisely where the neo-reactionary feminism of Birgit Kelle and Marine Le Pen, of Gabriele Kuby and Frauke Petry, ties in. The significant thing about their feminism is that unlike the historical precursors of anti-feminism it does not primarily present itself as a

general refutation of feminism and the idea of equality. Kelle and Kuby, Petry and Le Pen present themselves as feminists, not as anti-feminists, but indeed as the only ones who still defend the successes in the area of gender equality during the Enlightenment against the approaching Islamic Middle Ages. Therefore, as a rule, the argument is not that women cannot or should not be able to have equal rights because they are by nature different. Rather, it claims that women and men have equal rights and yet by nature are fundamentally, essentially, and clearly different ontologically. And, accordingly, it is precisely this ontologically authentic difference that feminism must take into consideration.

IF IT IS ALSO TRUE, when seen in this light, that the asymmetrically organized inverse structuring of male-universal and female-special, and also the everyday theorems of binary gender identity, determined the political, cultural, social, and symbolic architecture of modern societies right up to the present day, then it becomes clear what is at stake here, and to what extent. That the asymmetrically organized gender binary, just like the ubiquitous, heteronormatively framed family-based concepts of sociality, have recently come under the pressure of legitimization, as ultimately perhaps is demonstrated by the debates held all over the world on allowing lesbian and gay couples to marry. The notion that men and women “by their very nature” have different talents and that therefore various different paths should be open

to them and different jobs available to them, that he is the man and she the woman, she belongs at the stove and he at the stock exchange, has in any case substantially lost plausibility. The effort that must be put into the division of the genders that supposedly lies in the “nature of things”, a division that must be understood as normal, natural, and therefore inescapable, and that, as Bourdieu (2005) demonstrated, is present equally in objects, the social world, and bodies, and also functions as a

systematic schema of perception, thinking, and acting – in short, what we can, with Edmund Husserl, describe as a “natural approach or doxic experience”, is all the greater.

However, conversely that means nothing other than that feminist intervention has in fact adjusted the truth realm of gender, which for more than two hundred years, since the beginning of modern science, has been aligned with the naturalizing of gender. The fact that statements about gender can be considered to be scientifically “true” statements only insofar as they reside within the framework of a heteronormative dichotomy that is interpreted as natural, organized in a contradictory way, and founded on heteronormative principles, lays claim to its validity even into the present day life sciences, as feminist life-science research has shown. Regardless of this, feminist and gender-critical theory has succeeded in transforming *gender* into a critical tool, that is, in transforming it into a concept that does not make any statement about “what” sexual difference is but permits the articulation of hierarchies of power – and the questioning of them.

Conclusion

Let us attempt a conclusion here. What I hope I have been able to demonstrate here is that gender is apt to upset and disrupt everyday certainties. This is proven by the violent, hate-filled attacks that Gender Studies has been subjected to for more than ten years now. But even more, I also wanted to demonstrate that *gender* is used by neo-reactionary forces to disturb and confuse and to orchestrate a new antagonism, a new us/them opposition – “the people ‘against’ the establishment”. Therefore far more than the reputation of Gender Studies is at stake. For the attacks do not aim just to harm academics and their academic work, to discredit the interdisciplinary field of gender research and denounce it as unscientific. At stake is also the explicit discrediting of science and the university as a place where reality is questioned and negotiated unconditionally, as a part of an open, democratic society that can view things from many different perspectives. This open, democratic society is itself at stake.

Moreover – and this is my last point – anti-genderism is not only an element of an authoritarian, neo-reactionary disposition that aims to undermine constitutional, democratic principles (scientific freedom). Rather, gender here is being mobilized in a very specific way to justify racist or anti-Islamic policies of exclusion. All over Europe today we are witnessing xenophobic, nationalistic parties, but also neoliberal regimes, increasingly using concepts of equal rights to claim that male Muslim citizens – and non-Western male migrants in general – are not capable of respecting the rights of *women* and LGBTIQ. This kind of mobilization by nationalistic and xenophobic parties, as well as by national-conservative regimes, of gender, sexuality, and a concept of female emancipation is certainly one of the most significant aspects for characterizing the current political situation. As I hope I have shown, in the objectives and rhetoric of neo-reactionary parties and movements, the battles against sexual diversity, and against the whole supposed “gender delusion”, are closely connected with empty rhetoric and policies in favor of equal treatment that are clearly encoded as xenophobic and racist.

The question, however, is how we should react to these dynamics and policies in terms of both science and politics. Doubtless it is right not to enter into a discussion of veridiction, that is, to determine rules that regulate what is a true or false statement in relation to gender. But we should also not allow ourselves to become involved with the framework created in the minds of some members of the alliance, a framework of self-victimization and self-heroization, and we should refuse to operate within this sort of framework. Of this I am sure, that we as feminist academics must also dare to give self-critical answers to the political challenge of the neo-reactionary seizure of democracy. ✕

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Bakhtinian theory in postcolonial and postsocialist space

The workshop “Bakhtinian Theory in Postcolonial and Postsocialist Perspective” was organized to link with the publication of the special section on “Bakhtinian theory in a postcolonial and postsocialist perspective” in *Baltic Worlds* (number 1, 2017). Also present at the workshop were the artists Lusine Djanian and Alexey Knedlyakovsky, both former members of Pussy Riot (see text beside).

Yulia Gradskova (the workshop’s organizer) finds that Bakhtinian concepts have proven to be productive in explaining the ways in which social, political and cultural forces intersect and affect each other, particularly during periods of transition. Such transitions could include colonial struggles for independence, oppressed populations’ right to self-determination, the disintegration of the state and its system of governance, and large scale migration. Bakhtin’s work describes certain important facets of the operation of authority and violence within a culture and the ways in which such forces may be opposed and undermined. Yulia Gradskova underlined the need to see Bakhtin in the time and context in which he lived. Stalinism and the totalitarian system affected him.

IRINA SANDOMIRSKAJA, professor of cultural studies, CBEEES, Södertörn University, set the agenda in her introduction on how to read Bakhtin. There is a fragmented Bakhtin, she suggested. What we have is bits and pieces of a theory that never come together – although Bakhtin tried to connect his ideas into a totality, the task was never to be completed. Such an outcome can perhaps be understood



Yulia Gradskova (right) and artists Lusine Djanian and Alexey Knedlyakovsky.

as a symbolic image of the times he lived in – a shattered, worried Europe. We always read Bakhtin in one edited form or another, concluded Irina Sandomirskaja, and we will never find the authentic Bakhtin. As a former Gulag survivor, he was furthermore an expert at hiding his identity.

Madina Tlostanova, professor of postcolonial feminisms, Tema Genus, Linköping University, returned to the matter of space and locality. Bakhtin stresses the importance of being outside and the role of the other, which fits well in a postcolonial perspective and application. Leung Wing-Fai, lecturer in Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King’s College London, UK did present an analysis of the time and space of a Chinese migrant, the “she” in Guo Xiaolu’s Works. “She” leaves the past and China, life occurs in the present, and the future is in the UK. Yet she is always an outsider and looked upon as the Chinese she no longer identify herself as. To apply Bakhtinian theory on an individual level seems bold, but also opens up for new perspectives.

More information on the workshop, the full list of speakers, and of course the special section on Bakhtinian theory is to be found at the *Baltic Worlds*’ website. ✖

Ninna Mörner



Alexey Knedlyakovsky with a poster on Nadezda Toloknnikova.

Art in protest.

Lusine Djanian and Alexey Knedlyakovsky at the Bakhtin workshop shared their experiences from the art protest in 2013, in the Russian Republic of Mordovia, the historical place for those serving sentence or being exiled. And it was in this region where Bakhtin spent many years of his life when he was not allowed to live in Moscow. The protest was a direct action to support the demands of Pussy Riot-member Nadezda Toloknnikova, who was serving her sentence in prison for the action in the Moscow Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The letter Toloknnikova sent from prison became widely known. She wrote about the horrors of everyday life in the colony and the exploitation of the prisoner’s work by the administration of the colony.

“It is important to notice that her case is not particularly unique, it rather reflects ordinary practice in prisons in Russia: tor-



Artist Lusine Djanian is painting Toloknnikova’s portrait on a large cube.

Pussy Riot in Mordovia, Russia

tures, psychological pressure and work under exploitative conditions,” Lusine Djanian notes. “At the end of September 2013 we got to know that Toloknnikova had announced a hunger strike. Next morning we all jumped in the car to go to Mordovia, 1,250 kilometers away.”

THE ARTISTS HAD simple “weapons”, pencils, paint and paper. Lusine Djanian describes how she painted on everything she could to gain the attention of the administration, media, the broader public.

“Our tactic showed its effects already during the first days. The media got a nice picture from the place and started to distribute information on our demands. Also our action provoked a response from the prison administration. They came out and tried to intervene. They seemed very puzzled and nervous.

“They were filming what we did, and

also they started an account on twitter in order to follow what kind of information we were distributing.

The next move was to expand the attention they were getting, so they put on an artistic performance.

“I put on one of the coats that the prisoners of that colony produce and started to draw a large portrait of Toloknnikova on a red background. Unofficially the Russian prisons are divided into ‘red’ zones (where the administration has all power) and ‘black’ zones (where the administration shares power withinmates). All prison colonies in Mordovia are ‘red’.”

The prison administration stole their banners and attempted to attack Lusine Djanian and even run over Alexey Knedlyakovsky with a car.

“The administration of penitentiary institutions of Mordovia were not ready for such performance and art actions, and



The painted cube is placed in front of the administration of penitentiary institutions of Mordovia.



The responses on the art protest became an artistic performance.

they started to make mistakes, so we soon transformed them into art objects”.

Lusine painted a big portrait of the head of the colony, Kupryanov, and quoted his threats towards Toloknnikova there. The portrait could be seen by the inmates, and this informed them of the actions that were taking place. Kupriyanov became a laughing stock.

The artistic action lasted four weeks. The results were that Toloknnikova was transferred to another colony. The Head of the prison colony, Kupryanov, was also transferred to another region. The inmates got their salaries raised.

Today the two artists Lusine Djanian and Alexey Knedlyakovsky are seeking asylum in Sweden because they can no longer perform as artists in Russia and fear for their own safety. ✖

Ninna Mörner

Nation branding: Tourism brochures and the idea of an Estonian nation

While nation building can be regarded as the efforts of an elite to amalgamate the population of a given territory, nation branding has recently emerged as an important element to promote a country at the international level and make it attractive for tourism, investments, or any other similar purpose. Reversing this tendency, Estonia seems to have reached a significant degree of overlap between the two. Indeed, the Estonian nation-branding strategy has also served to highlight values that are perceived as proper for a hypothetical Estonian nation.

The nation-branding strategy of Estonia has tended to emphasize that the country as a place with peaceful and friendly people who feel a strong attachment to the Estonian soil and have a special relationship with nature. However, Estonia also acknowledges the role of technology and has managed to embed the concept of technology with that of nature in its nation-branding, thus mixing modernity and tradition in a unique way. Is such a mixture viable and applicable elsewhere?

“We are what we pretend to be,” wrote Kurt Vonnegut in his novel *Mother Night*, thereby unveiling an idea with an importance that goes well beyond fiction. Indeed, pretending to be someone or something that is nothing but a projection of ourselves is a leitmotiv in human life, whether it be performed by an individual or by a larger entity such as a society or state.

Think of Herzfeld’s *Cultural Intimacy*, and the way in which he encountered a discourse among the Greeks to deny the tradition of breaking dishes at a wedding. He was told that such a practice was obsolete, anachronistic, or simply unmodern, and that it would belie the thirst for modernity his interlocutors wished Greece to be permeated with. However, by deny-

ing that discourse, they did not necessarily deny the tradition or reality. Rather, they tried to modify, or distort, the way in which that tradition was perceived by people who they saw as alien to their context, ultimately in order to be able to modify their own perception. By doing this, they widened the territory on which they moved, and they were ultimately able to make use of a double standard. Herzfeld’s interlocutors could claim to have an attachment to the parts of their tradition they viewed as positive, while denying other parts when they wished to build a discourse that confirmed their modernity. In other words, they tried to construct an official narrative that helped others to believe what they wanted them to believe.

Our work on Estonia deals with the construction of perceptions about that country. Distorting reality and selling a new image are things that humankind has done for centuries. However, that does not diminish the importance of the phenomenon. After all, throughout the post-Soviet regions, it has become relatively common to label the Soviet period as negative, and to construct a narrative of “us” against “them” with the Soviet Union (and now possibly Russia) in the role of the conqueror. Evidence is produced that the Soviet period somehow “interrupted” some natural course of history – the path to civilization of a given people – and stopped the “return to Eu-

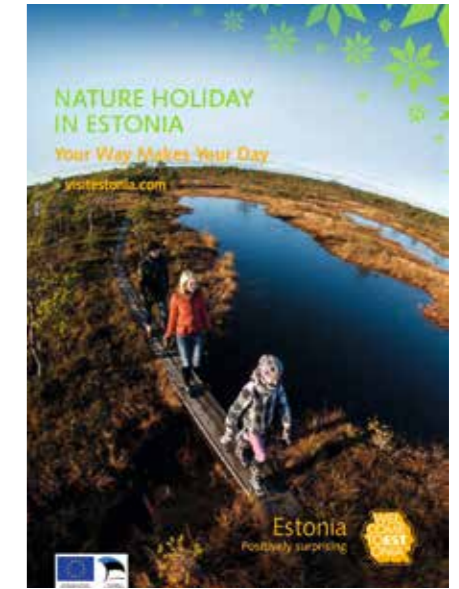
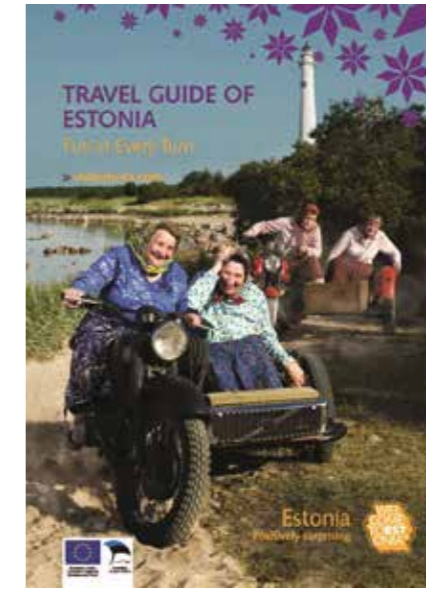
“DISTORTING REALITY AND SELLING A NEW IMAGE ARE THINGS THAT HUMANKIND HAS DONE FOR CENTURIES.”

rope” of a given country, thereby freezing it into a condition from which it has only recently emerged. Look at the occupation museums that have been constructed and celebrated in Latvia, Estonia, and (more recently) Georgia. These tend to perpetuate a narrative of “the good” versus “the bad”, while celebrating values such as pursuing liberty, fighting oppression, and celebrating nationhood and national narratives.

In our latest article,¹ we examined the way in which Estonians have been constructing a complex, comprehensive, and unique vision of their own country through tourism brochures. Intense debates have been deliberating the boundaries and definitions of Estonian identity and non-Estonians (such as ourselves) are often looked at with suspicion for allegedly being unable to understand the complexity of the country.

WE HAVE, HOWEVER, developed an opinion and a vision that, even if not universally acceptable, can at least provoke further debate and prompt us to reflect, at a local and global level, on the meaning and function of nation branding in today’s world. In the case of Estonia, we identify the genesis of this strategy with the branding campaign that was developed in the early 2000s to introduce Estonia to the world. Developed by Enterprise Estonia,² this campaign used the slogan “Welcome to Estonia” and envisioned a quickly and peacefully transformed country. In this way, it tried to send the message that Estonia was now ready for foreign investment and was no longer a Soviet country.

The field of action of this approach, in which we convince others in order to convince ourselves, has been gradually expanding. Think of *l’École Republican et les petites patries*³ and its attempts to create an impression of France as a single unit, unified by the French language, by



Tourism brochures published by the Estonian tourist board.

the traditions of moving teachers around, and by the construction of an official French narrative that was to be adopted in each region and that eventually created the impression of “La République”.

Schools have been a traditional site of nation building and are widely studied as such by scholars from a number of disciplines. Monuments, museums, and national holidays have helped people to decide when and what to celebrate, but have also served a hidden agenda that tries to sell each invented tradition⁴ as unique to a given people, context, or country, almost as though the tradition is arriving through a divine route. Given that nationalism remains a major force throughout the world, there is little doubt of its capacity and its potential to influence people.

The Estonian strategy adds some new elements to school-based identity building, and it has been boosted by a fortunate coincidence – Estonia’s victory in the 2001 Eurovision Song Contest put Tallinn, the host city for the next year, under the spotlight. The capacity of Estonia to take advantage of this opportunity, however, was notable, as not all of Eurovision’s contest winners have been able to capitalize on their victories or at least not to the same extent as Estonia.

Indeed, few countries have been able to ride the wave of popularity for so long. In 2008, a massive campaign titled “Estonia: Positively Surprising” gave continuity to the main marketing concept of “Introduce Estonia” that had been presented slightly earlier. This time, the country credited itself for its accessibility and readiness to be part of the globalized world by indicating that it was dealing with all the major issues most Western countries were dealing with: business, immigration (especially of a highly qualified skilled workforce), and domestic and international tourism, the latter of which was possibly considered to be the most important area of application (as well as being the main focus of our research) given its large potential. Although it was mostly positive, the campaign’s message was also injected with some negative elements, and it portrayed the period of Soviet occupation in a relatively bleak light, as having led to the country’s isolation from the main arenas of politics and business.

In this way, we can identify a tendency to use national symbols beyond the sole goal of nation building, and this tendency for *nation branding* has been widely used to promote nations (or countries) at the national and international level. Across the world, consultants are being paid mil-

lions to come up with slogans that attract people and convince them to visit, invest, or buy property in a particular country.

INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, while tourism can be associated with nation branding – for example, by “selling” monuments, culture, and traditions to people wishing to discover them – the use of tourism in terms of its nation-building function have been relatively limited. However, Estonia was able to merge the two strategies of nation building and nation branding in order to construct, or perpetuate, an “imagined geography” of the nation, in addition to the country, and to reaffirm the “European-ness” of Estonia, which, despite its Soviet period, has a Scandinavian language, a culture rooted in German Protestant work ethics, and, extremely importantly, a “Nordic” climate. This idea of the Nordic in Estonia can be found in many places, two cases from our personal experience can provide a colored picture. In a recent message distributed to the Tallinn University staff, it was reported that in a survey on the knowledge of English as a second language, Estonia ranked second among the Nordic countries. Estonian students’ skills were tested against those of Norwegians, Swedes, and other Scandinavian counterparts, with no men-

tion of the other two Baltic states or of any other Eastern European country. Another significant sign of “Nordic-ness” was a mention, in one section of the innovation and business center MEKTORY, that “for Nordic countries, heating capacity is vital for the population” (i.e., leaving the reader to understand that Estonia is one of these Nordic countries).

It would be difficult to compare the success of Estonia in this respect with that of other Eastern European countries. Estonia has been a frontrunner in the use of nation branding, at least compared with other countries in the postsocialist region. However, those countries have been able to construct narratives and create conditions to attract a number of investors, visitors, and expats, and being able to do so is not a new phenomenon. Back in the 1990s, Ernest Gellner⁵ noticed that the Estonian National Museum had the greatest number of items per national inhabitant in the world. Something like 4,000 items were stored in the museum for each inhabitant of the country. This number is greater, by far, than the most nationalistic and ambitious attempts that have been made elsewhere to celebrate a nation.

For one thing, looking at Estonian tourist brochures gives one the impression that the country is strewn, not to say flooded, with monuments and natural beauties that compete in number and quality with those of the most important cultural destinations of the world. The slogans are catchy and the printing and paper are of first class quality; the variety of possible destinations in Estonia seems endless, in spite of the relatively small size of the country.

ANOTHER WAY OF branding Estonia has been by emphasizing its “natural” ties to Scandinavian key words such as “soul” and “heart” in a way that recalls a romantic idea of a state being kept together by strong sentiments. This perspective helped to forge the slogan “Estonia: The best-kept secret of Scandinavia.” (This title comes from a tourist brochure, *Enterprise Estonia*, in the “Introduce Estonia” marketing concept for tourism.)

It is also possible to say that branding changes our public spaces. One example

is the airport terminal, where seats are covered with fabrics that resemble the traditional patterns of the Muhu islands. Another example is found at cafes and restaurants, where the menus depict what Estonian food is (or should be). A third example is found in mentions of the country’s over-digitalization, as Estonia was the first country to introduce e-governance into virtually all aspects of its citizens’ lives. Such examples reproduce and remake ideas about Estonian identity. Identity making is a never-ending process that happens all around us, and we often take part in it without even knowing it.

These considerations have been the basis of our intellectual path. We started out by looking at the way in which nation building uses tools other than those that have traditionally been used, and we claimed that the current analytical tools are insufficient to assess the ever-increasing complexity of the nation-building strategies in postsocialist and post-Soviet spaces.⁶

We then looked at the way in which the nation and the “national” (including national narratives) are constructed and performed in the everyday. However, in the course of our recent research project, which led to a few books on this topic, we have seen that the list of tools that can be used is virtually endless. Indeed, cinema, large-scale events with hundreds of thousands of attendants, cultural initiatives, or even food narratives can be used to construct identity in a path that goes from traditional nation building to nation branding.

Our research path has brought even us deeper, through an exploration of choral singing and imagined traditions. It led

“ESTONIA HAS BEEN UNIQUE IN ITS CAPACITY TO BUILD A CONSISTENT, COMPREHENSIVE, AND RELATIVELY CONVINCING NARRATIVE.”

to the completion of a PhD project on this topic, and then continued through the preparation of two books.⁷ We have looked at the way in which identity is promoted and built across postsocialist spaces through the use of mundane elements that reproduce and confirm identity through the reconstruction of the everyday life of the citizens of a country.

Estonia has been unique in its capacity to build a consistent, comprehensive, and relatively convincing narrative that merges the elements of nation building and nation branding. This country has been depicted as peaceful and small, with people who live close to nature and who have a special relationship with its soil, forests, sea, and rivers; at the same time, Estonians are portrayed as contributing their hard work to make Estonia a global leader in technology and e-government. Interestingly enough, these two “faces” of Estonia seem to contrast with one another. The first presents “Estonian-ness”, while the second suggests that Estonia is European, and is “going global” in order to dialogue with the major actors of the world.

HOWEVER, FEW OF the world’s major actors seem to notice – or care – about Estonia’s message so far. In a mix of idealism, ambition, and naivety, the national discourse in Estonia and the official narratives of the country are injected with anything that can be regarded as a positive quality and that may boost the image of the country. Although many of these narratives formally target foreigners, a second function can be seen in such a careful branding of the country and its nation. It is ultimately a very human strategy to provide the world with a given picture of oneself, in order to eventually convince oneself that this version is the true one.

To be critical of the work done here, one might consider that not enough space has been allocated to the discussion of ethnic issues. However, as in other cases that we have studied (Polese and Horak 2016), this omission may be seen as contributing to a de-ethnized discourse that helps to make the Estonian identity slightly more civic than it is at present (at least officially).

What will be the next step for Estonia, now that its 100-year anniversary celebrations have begun in 2017? Time will reveal the new frontiers of nation building through branding, and we look forward with interest at Estonia, being confident that it will surprise us (hopefully in a positive way) and offer further food for thought to academics working with the concept of nation building. ✕

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Protest of truck drivers in Russia. The sign says: “Rottenberg is worse than ISIS”.

Lessons from anti-“Platon” protests in Russia

On March 27, 2017, long-distance truck drivers started all-Russian protests against the “Platon” system, the new system of collecting fees for using the federal roads, and these protests lasted for several weeks, depending on the region. These protests as well as earlier protests in the autumn of 2015, when the system was launched, are interesting in a number of ways and might provide several insights into contemporary civil society and the potential of social mobilization in Russia.

After the protest actions that took place in the autumn of 2015, it was announced that fees would be reduced until April 2017 when they would be raised to the level initially planned. That is why protests against the “Platon” system were organized again in late March 2017. Among other actions, the drivers organized camps, putting their trucks along the federal roads, and stopped operating delivery orders. The protests were meant to demonstrate that the drivers consider the “Platon” system unfair because it would take a significant part of their income; in particular, self-employed drivers who own their trucks would suffer the

most from the fees. Another reason given for perceiving the system as unjust is a lack of clarity regarding how the collected funds will be used. The “Platon” system is not entirely state run, but it is operated by a company. Truck drivers are concerned about potential corruption because of that. The protesters seemed to emphasize the significance of their work – without truck drivers there will be no one to deliver goods, and therefore some minimal conditions for profitability of their labor have to be ensured, otherwise it does not make sense for them to run their business. The mass scale of the protests was important because such action could only work if the supply of trucks was observably limited on the market. Obviously far from all actors in the market took part in the protests, but the protesting truck drivers seem to insist that their absence from the market was visible and effective.

FIRST OF ALL, and most importantly, the protests against the “Platon” system both from 2015 and 2017 seem to demonstrate that the potential for social mobilization is wider in present-day Russia than it is perhaps usually considered to be. While

the potential for social mobilization does not seem to be an often researched theme for the obvious reasons of unpredictability, various social protests and demonstrations from the last six years have presented a different portrait of a typical protester than the blue-collar laborer. Although it is sometimes reported that various groups of citizens took part in a demonstration, the portrait of a middle-class, middle-aged city dweller with a job in the creative industry, educational sector, or other sector that requires a high educational level, or a student, is now the most prominent type in the media's protest representation. A typical example of this would be the demonstrations *For Fair Elections* that took place in 2011–2012, and the follow up demonstrations on Bolotnaya square, that have been called the protests of angry middle-class citizens. The anti-“Platon” protests demonstrate that a protester may differ from the cliché and that the working class can mobilize as well.

Second, the paradigm of collective action, one of the most frequently-used approaches to understand mobilizations nowadays, which argues that there may be many grievances in societies but resources and political opportunities are needed to mobilize them, does not seem to contribute to understanding the

nature of these protests. This approach can hardly provide an explanation for the anti-“Platon” protests because political opportunities or resources seem to be limited, if any exist at all. The agenda of the protesters is of an economic and materialistic nature, and therefore anti-“Platon” protests can be more readily explained through the framework of the classical Marxist understanding of labor movements. This is an interesting observation because this framework is rarely used analytically nowadays, particularly in the Russian context.

It would not be fair to say that collective actions organized by the working class do not take place in contemporary Russia at all. There have been protests regarding closures of industrial enterprises in the towns where these enterprises are the only employer apart from the service industry (so-called “mono-towns”). Another example is strikes organized at automobile factories with the involvement of trade unions. However, these protests involve local issues, and they take place in the localities of these specific towns or factories without extending much further. The anti-“Platon” protests therefore seem unique in their scale.

Third, a distinctive feature of the anti-“Platon” protests is mobilization across regions that has remained relatively

decentralized, using bottom-up organization rather than being led by leaders from the center, although there are leaders at the federal level as well. After the earlier protests, the organization *Associations of carriers of Russia* was created. However, this observation of a bottom-up approach would need to be verified before it can be stated with certainty. If it is confirmed, then it opens up quite an interesting field for analysis: how could protests of this kind be organized in such a way?

THESE OBSERVATIONS have been made through monitoring the situation with the anti-“Platon” protests through media outlets that have published short interviews with the protesters, among other types of material. A comprehensive study could possibly highlight some shortcomings in these observations. However, at this point, the protests against the “Platon” system seem to demonstrate that the potential of protest mobilization in present-day Russia is higher than is often assumed and can even occur in the part of society that does not often appear in the news headlines. ✕

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Baltic World's Election Coverage

Elections in the Czech Republic

THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS in the Czech Republic were held in October 20–21, 2017, and 200 members of the Chamber of Deputies were elected. Nine parties made their way to the Parliament. That so many parties passed the election threshold, is the most fragmented result. The clear winner was – as had been predicted – the ANO movement (29,64%). The other two major winners of the elections were the Pirate Party and the extreme right-wing SPD that both made their way to the parliament for the first time ever. The biggest winners of the elections were thus the Anti-Establishment Parties and their candidates.

The success of the populist parties will

need a thorough analyses. The Czech Republic is doing well on the European scale. Yet many local commentators on politics have noted that people do not trust in politics and feel frustrated. There are many social and economic problems affecting the everyday life of the citizens. The corruption has again increased in the recent years. However, among the most discussed themes during the election campaign were immigration and Islamic terrorism even though there are only a few Muslims in the country and only a handful of immigrants (12) were accepted to the country as a result of the refugee crises of 2015.

Moreover, the leader of the ANO move-

ment and the most probably next Czech Prime Minister Babiš is currently facing fraud charges in a case involving the misuse of EU subsidy a decade ago. Andrej Babiš is the second richest man in the Czech Republic, he owns a significant share of the local media and business.

Several local reporters are worried of the future of liberal democracy in the hands of an oligarch anti-establishment prime minister. ✕

Riikka Palonkorpi

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Note: Read the whole commentary on www.balticworlds.com/elections.

BALTIC WORLDS

Special section

Introduction.

Influences of the Russian Revolution in Art and Aesthetics

In October 2017, the world marks centenary of Russian Revolution. It is hard to overestimate its consequences both in Russia and worldwide, as it had a significant influence on further political, social and economic development globally. The Revolution also affected cultural and artistic stances in Russia and in the world for many decades ahead.

Avant-garde artists met both the February and October Revolutions with great praise and enthusiasm and developed a new visual language to translate the Revolutionary ideals. The dismissal of the Avant-garde by the state officials in the 1930s revealed the complexity of relationship between the state and the artists as well as the conflict between the ideas of Russian modernism and the events that came after the Revolution. Apologists of the Avant-garde always claimed the universality of their working methods and the independency of their aesthetics

from any political parties. They argued for the Revolution as a liberating power, and they inevitably faced disappointment in those reforms to which they were

contemporaries and witnesses. Meanwhile, their aesthetics were proclaimed by the state as nearly counter-revolutionary and their working methods – formalist and abstractive – as detached from reality, and thus they were deprived of their legacy.

The art of the Avant-garde that developed around the time of the Revolution has become a hot topic for discussion again, and the artistic and literary method of Socialist realism that proved its sustainability and legitimacy through the Soviet era is being re-evaluated and re-interpreted within the frames of modernist and post-modernist aesthetics. Today, the Revolution has become a trademark, a brand and a cultural hallmark that translates multiple memories and emotions, and its utopian ideals that were materialized in artistic practices still inspire new readings and translations. By launching this special issue, we called on scholars to rethink the relationships between art



ILLUSTRATION: KARIN SUNVISSON

that existed in the time of the Russian Revolution and those political events that influenced its destiny and to reflect on the reforms in media, literature, urban space and aesthetics that Russia was going through in the post-revolutionary decades.

Overview of the contributions

Mikhail Evseyev opens this issue with an analysis of the reorganization of the Higher Artistic School that was initiated immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in order to make art education accessible to the masses and to promote art as an important tool for the social transformations in the Soviet state. As a result of the reform, the Higher Artistic School of the Imperial Academy of Arts of St. Petersburg was transformed into the Free Art Studios (Svomas) that in its short existence became the platform for the production of iconic works of Avant-garde art such as Tatlin's model of the monument to the Third International. The Svomas managed to educate a whole generation of Avant-garde artists thus achieving its goal of providing education to the wider public, which "seems unique and unexpected in light of the grandiose socio-economic shifts of those turbulent times and considering the violent conditions of the Civil war" (Evseyev, this issue).

Robert Bird investigates the journalistic documentary project *A Day of the World*, authored by the writer Maxim Gorky and the journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov. The ambitious project aimed to collect all of the news published across the globe on a single day – September 27, 1935 – in one illustrated volume. Bird tells the story of this project as well as of its international and cross-media networks, inevitably revealing the tensions within the socialist aesthetics "between documentary and fiction, between publicity and intimacy, and between revolutionary time and the aberrant temporalities of individual experience" (Bird, this issue).

Irina Seits provides a closer reading of Walter Benjamin's essays *Experience and Poverty* and *Moscow*, by juxtaposing the records of his visit to Russia in 1926–1927 with her own reflections over the nature

of the transformations in the urban space of an early Soviet city. By using the dystopian image of Mickey Mouse as the desired inhabitant of modernity introduced by Benjamin in "Experience and Poverty" Seits provides an allegorical and comparative interpretation of the substantial changes in the living space of Moscow that were witnessed by Benjamin.

TORA LANE CONTRIBUTES in this issue with her reading of Viktor Pelevin's *Chapaev i Pustota* (transl. as *Buddha's Little Finger* or *Clay Machine Gun*), by situating her analyses within the contemporary debates on realism and simulacra. She claims that Pelevin, in his story about the period of the civil war, "allegedly undermines the hegemony of the totalizing Soviet Narrative" through his use of post-Soviet language and post-modernist style of narration (Lane, this issue). Yet Tora Lane questions if Pelevin is really able "to open up for a non-totalizing narrative about Russian political history. On the contrary", she continues, "the Soviet myth of Chapaev lends itself to the totality of the private myth" (Ibid).

THE CONTROVERSIAL LEGACY of the Russian Revolution sparks interests in various corners of the world, which can be seen in the number of commemorative events such as international conferences, art exhibitions, and film and book releases. The most prominent exhibition that has attracted attention and raised debates in the mass media throughout Europe – "Revolution. Russian Art 1917–1932" at the Royal Academy of Art in London – is reviewed by Helene Carlbäck. ✖

Irina Seits

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contents

33 Introduction, Irina Seits & Ekaterina Kalinina

peer-reviewed articles

35 Becoming tools for artistic consciousness of the people. The higher art school and independent arts studios in Petrograd (1918–1921), Mikhail Evseyev

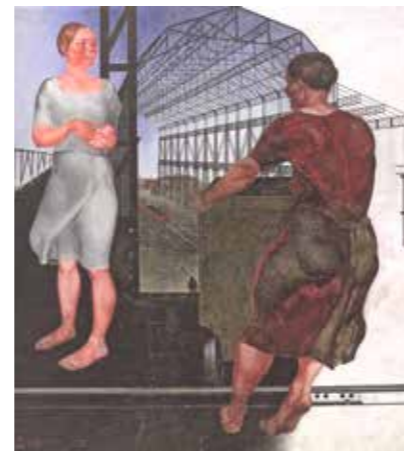
45 Revolutionary synchrony: A Day of the World, Robert Bird

53 Mickey Mouse – the perfect tenant of an early Soviet city, Irina Seits

63 The inverted myth. Viktor Pelevin's *Buddha's little finger*, Tora Lane

exhibition

70 Russian art 1917–1932, Helene Carlbäck



Russian Art 1917–1932

“The painting can be positioned in the context of the public aim of liberating women from an outdated femininity.”

Page 70

Becoming tools for artistic consciousness of the people

The higher art school and independent arts studios in Petrograd (1918–1921)

by **Mikhail Evseyev**

abstract

In the present article, the main principles of the reforms in Revolutionary Russia in the sphere of art are analyzed through the example of the reorganization of the Higher Artistic School of the Imperial Academy of Arts of St. Petersburg into the Free Art Studios (Svomas). The studios were to become a tool for the transformation of the surrounding reality and for the development of the artistic consciousness of the people. The intended result of those transformations was the complete spiritual and material harmonization of society, while the perfection of artistic interpretation was to be replaced with the perfection of social living. The modest and delicate approach of the new government to the sphere of artistic education, including the close attention and appreciation to the Avant-garde trends in art along with the propagation of the accessibility of art and artistic education to the underprivileged classes seems unique and unexpected in light of the grandiose socio-economic shifts of those turbulent times and considering the violent conditions of the Civil war. The research presented here is based on the archival materials and is one of the very first publications on the problems associated with the reform of artistic education in the first post-revolutionary years.

KEY WORDS: Art education, Avant-garde, Petrograd.

On October 26, 1917 – the first day of Russia's socialist Revolution – the Second All-Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies issued a decree on the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Government – the Council of Peoples' Commissars ("Sovnarkom"). Its leadership was assumed by Vladimir Lenin.

In order to set things in the new way and create a functioning system, which would allow the richness of Russian cultural inheritance to be equally shared and spread among the people, a new department had to be put in place, a department that fully reflected the Republican form of enlightenment. That Department was known as the Commissariat of Peoples' Enlightenment, which oversaw the elementary ("the unitary labor") and higher-education schools, research projects, the protection of historical and cultural heritage, the establishment of museums, art and architecture, theatre and cinema, music and literature. Considering the outbreak of the Civil war and the overall political situation, the Peoples' Enlightenment was justly dubbed "The Third Front", for it began the long struggle to awaken the yearning for knowledge and education among the population. The first commander of the "Narkompross" (the Russian abbreviation for the Commissariat of People's Enlightenment) was the

writer, teacher, and professional revolutionary Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky.

The number of tasks that lay before Lunacharsky and his Commissariat was so great that even their simple listing exceeds the size and format of this article, thus we take a look at a mere drop and its reflections to perceive the main principles of those reforms that were carried out in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917.

Mission: create a need for art among the people

One of the main themes of the cultural socialist policies in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution was the enlightenment and education of the people. Without awakening the demand for art in the people, art could not become an organic part of individuals' lives and thus become the means for the world's transformation. The Revolutionary epoch gave birth to numerous art concepts, including art as the instrument of life-building (*zhiznestrojenie*); as the means of transformation of the material environment, of the biosphere, and of the artistic perception of life; and as the means of accomplishing the total spiritual and material harmonization of society. Such harmonization could be completed on the level of the social being, and the perfection of living itself would thus eliminate the necessity of art as the perfected interpretation of reality.

The Commissariat believed that only if the aesthetic consciousness of the half-literate peasants were raised to an adequate level could there be any hope that art could become an instrument of knowledge and a true social force. This was to be achieved through the elimination of so-called "graphic illiteracy", the preservation of cultural and historic monuments, the creation of a chain of museums throughout Russia, and the promotion and support of traditional folk art – the art of the masses.

In this striving for the total elimination of "graphic illiteracy", the problem of pedagogical personnel was especially urgent as there was a great demand for artists who were capable of not only painting traditional works for the "luxury of the others", but who could see the new reformed reality in their dreams, as Vladimir Mayakovsky stated: "the streets – our brushes, the squares – our palettes".¹

The poetic dreams were to be realized on the basis of the very heterogeneous human material and in the face of the very scarce resources and dire conditions of the ongoing Civil war.

New art schools, centers, projects, teachers, and constructiv-



The Free Studios (*Svomas*) in the building of the Academy of Fine Arts, Petrograd, 1920s.

ists were badly needed. The institutional organ that was tasked with managing this highly complicated and complex process was the Departments of Fine Arts of the Commissariat of Peoples' Enlightenment supported by the advisory colleges on the business of art and artistic production that were established in all regions of the country. Those departments employed both professional artists and art scholars who had the unprecedented opportunity to manage both creative and administrative functions.²

The total reformation of the Higher Art School

It all began in Petrograd, the former capital of the Russian Empire and the cradle of the Revolution. The first step was the reform of the Higher Art School, which originally was part of the Ministry of the Imperial Court (before 1894) and from 1894 to 1918 was a part of the Imperial Fine Arts Academy (which was, again, subject to the same Ministry).

The Fine Arts Academy was disbanded by a special decree of the Sovnarkom (Council of Peoples' Commissars) on April 12, 1918.³ The Higher Art School was preserved, but reformed, in accordance with the new requirements of the Republic. In reforming the Higher Art School, the Fine Arts Department of the Narkompros (Commissariat of the Peoples' Enlightenment) sought to create a liberal school that would become a true cradle for the country's artistic life.⁴

The Petrograd State Liberal Art Studios – as the reformed Higher Art School was now called – became a federation of autonomous studios that shared the same organizational and financial structure.⁵ The creation of such a federation was not, in fact, an innovation. Independent art studios, led by individual professors, had been the basis of the Higher Art School when it was formally separated from the Fine Arts Academy during the 1894 reform. Those independent studios, on a certain level, inherited some fundamental principles of Renaissance-era schools, with the visual method of training artists. Yet the Higher Art School (from 1894 onwards) was basically separated into two different courses or levels.

The first level (known as the "Classes") taught the basics of the profession. The second level (the "Studios") was aimed at forming the artistic method of the students. The school lacked inner unity, being governed by two separate branches of the administration – the Art Council (responsible for the classes) and the Professors' Council (overseeing the Studios). This proved to be a great flaw for the Higher Art School. For example, the professors of the nature class remained clueless about what they were preparing their students for⁶, and the principles of the Liberal Art Studios found no proper implementation or development. Thus the attempts at creating a new art school failed. Its methodology found no proper grounds for further development, and it badly needed other conditions in order to function.⁷ This is why such an outstanding Russian artist as Ilya Repin had a complete right to say: "I am sick

at the mere thought of continuing, no matter what happens [...] Supporting this accursed, state-owned registration office of art is far beyond reprehension".⁸ "I am leaving the administration [...]", he wrote, "I cannot take it anymore."⁹

In 1907 a number of the Higher Art School professors called out for its reform. The majority thought it was necessary to take the 1894 reform further – to liquidate the classes, encourage the development of the studios, and give necessary freedom of ac-

SOURCE: CENTRAL STATE ARCHIVE OF CINEMA-, PHONO- AND PHOTO- DOCUMENTS, ST. PETERSBURG

tion to the professors in developing their educational programs and methods. “There was even an idea put forward that each professor should be given a right to personally provide students with a certificate on the completion of their studies at the studio, instead of the Academy’s diploma, and the very length of the studies was to be established by the supervising professor of the studio”.¹⁰ Thus, the Higher Art School was turned into an association of independent studios, where the final stage of professional education was to be completed after students finished their studies in provincial art schools, private studios, or had sufficient experience of self-training. The conglomerate of independent studios – as a base for the new school – was put forward as the favored model by the Commission that was responsible for the reform of the Fine Arts Academy in the summer of 1917.¹¹ “Since I was a member of the Commission and personally took part in all of its meetings,” wrote the artist and art critic V.A. Denisov in 1921, “I can rightfully say that all of the basic principles, established by the Commission, became the foundation [...] for free state art studios.”¹²

The basic principles of the liberal Higher Art School

“The Conditions” of the Svomas were passed at the Conference of Petrograd and Moscow Art Students in April of 1918.¹³ The students called for the foundation of the federation of autonomous studios, and their requests were taken into consideration by the Fine Arts Department of the Commissariat. The text of the Conditions is known from the reports written by the head of Narkompross’s Fine Arts Department D.P. Shternberg. The main aim of an independent studio’s educational program was to provide the students with specialized art training, allowing them to gain proficiency in accordance with their individual inclinations. The apprenticeship was free of charge and lasted for five years.¹⁴ The studios accepted students who were 16 years of age at any time of the year they entered regardless of their gender or citizenship. No diplomas of previous educations were requested, and no entry competitions or examinations were held.¹⁵ Classes took place in the evenings, which allowed students to combine studies and work. The basic principles of the application instruction, passed by the Arts Collegiate¹⁶, on August 8, 1918, directly coincided with the Sovnarkom Decree “On Higher Education Application” (passed on August 2, 1918).¹⁷ The fact that no possession of previous experience or specialized training was requested from the applicants of 1918 and in the following few years obviously created substantial difficulties for the education process. The situation became even more complicated because the studios themselves were in the process of reorganization. But that was the only possible way to liberalize art schools at that time, and the road to art was finally opened to the wide public of underprivileged social classes.¹⁸

The administration of the Svomas and the organization of their educational programs was taken on by an elected Council of Supervisors and the Commissar of the Fine Arts Department of the Narkompross. The studios were divided into the follow-

ing three types: studios with an elected supervisor, studios without a supervisor, and studios with a supervisor appointed by the Fine Arts Department of the Narkompross. Students, organized into groups of 20 on the basis of their artistic inclinations, had the right to choose their supervisors. If the studio was entirely dedicated to a concrete specialization, the number of students was not restricted. The experimental studio that had no supervisor allowed its students to work independently, providing them with the necessary materials and a designated area in an “artistic setting”. The third type of studios – whose supervisors were appointed by the Fine Arts Department – were tasked with examining the educational programs and were to introduce new artistic trends to the Svomas.

All the studios welcomed first of all young masters. Students were bound to work with the chosen supervisor. They had the right to change their supervisor, but no more than once a year. Each artist had the right to offer his candidacy for the supervisor’s post, and the two-year term of the supervisor could be terminated if his studio was not visited for over three months.¹⁹

The theoretical grounds of the Svomas program

The Arts Collegiate developed the theoretical grounds of the Svomas program, which sought to stimulate the artistic and sculptural perception of the world.

“A tested, attentive eye has opened and will open a boundless, enormous world of natural phenomena, which remains hidden for most people.²⁰ Because of this perception and an artist’s ingenuity,²¹ these phenomena – as stated in the program – have found their reflection in artworks. But the great masterpieces reveal themselves only to a highly cultured eye. This is why the main goal of the artistic development is the comprehensive training of the eye, its perceptive powers and ingenuity as well as of the conscious choice of forms of artistic expressions.”²²

The students were given a chance to decide for themselves which directions in artistic life were the most vibrant and creative, and this was achieved through the students’ right to elect those artists as their supervisors who seemed to them the most talented and capable of giving the desired forms of art education.

The opening of the Svomas

At the opening of the Svomas on October 10, 1918, A.V. Lunacharsky gave a speech where he said: “I personally think that this small festive event, at which we’re all gathered, fully reflects the spirit of the Socialist Revolution”.²³ Other presenters talked about the tasks of art. “Up till now [...] 9/10 of what we did was the destruction of the old forms of art. Now [...] we enter the path of creation [...] The broadest horizons are opening before you [...] We need our houses, streets, gardens, and bridges to reflect true artistry. You must bring beauty into the homes, so



The Petrograd Collegiate on the Affairs of Arts and Artistic production of the Department of Fine Arts of the Commissariat of the People’s Enlightenment. 1918-1919.

that every child lives and develops in an artistic atmosphere”.²⁴ However, 20 days after the Svomas’ official opening, the Presidium of the Council of Supervisors already saw the need to send the following decision to A.E. Karev, the commissar of the Petrograd State Independent Art and Education Studios: “We ask you to issue an order right from today to stop the enrollment of new students to all faculties, since the designated commission – after inspecting our building – came to the conclusion that our facilities are unable to take in more people. Enrollment must be stopped temporarily”.²⁵ It seems that there were more than enough people willing to study in free schools (by September 16 there were 817 applicants,²⁶ and by the end of 1918 their number reached the maximum – 1,305).²⁷ Before its reform, the Higher Art School encompassed 10 studios with 365 students;²⁸ after the reform, the Svomas expanded to 29 studios with 762 students (as of October 1918).²⁹

The new academic approach called for new methods

In January 1919, the Arts Collegiate raised a very important question regarding the teaching of art history in the studios. The former method of teaching with its listing of archaeological, formally-aesthetic, chronological, and biographical data was completely outdated and could not, in the opinion of the Arts Collegiate, be retained in the new school. A new academic and theoretical approach was needed, but art history as a science was not yet equipped with such a method, even though it proved capable of its reception.

A commission to develop a new method of art history teaching was formed,³⁰ but nothing is known on the course of its work. However, in July 1919 the Arts Collegiate issued a decree introducing lecture courses on the history of artistic styles, the history of art forms, and the sociology of art. All of these became

an integral part of the Svomas’ educational programs. The latter course on the sociology of art was personally taught by A.V. Lunacharsky, who officially enrolled as a professor of the Svomas.³¹ The introduction and development of new courses could probably be ascribed to the aforementioned commission. The program of the history of art forms course included:

- 1) The historiography of art (from Plato and Aristotle to modern materialist concepts).
- 2) The history of art, with the main focus on the historic method and the evolution of artistic forms.
- 3) The analysis of the origins of

various elements of artistic forms (color, shape, space, composition, and material) and their historic evolution.

- 4) The history of the origins and developments of fields of arts.
- 5) The history of the artists’ introduction of new materials in their arsenal (stone, wood, metal, parchment, paper, canvas, reinforced concrete, and paints) as well as the history of technology of art.³²

THIS PROGRAM CLEARLY represented an innovative spirit and shows the methodological historicity and wide range of knowledge and information that were offered to the students.

D.P. Shternberg’s decree on the establishment and increase of the hours dedicated to the study of nature in the studios³³ contradicted the usual misconception that reformers of the artistic education declared war on “naturalism” and disregarded the interest in the depiction of the human body as a “prejudice of the bourgeoisie”.³⁴ It was in 1921 when the alumni of the former Academy, now charged with the Svomas reform, followed their new dean’s first decree with a severe reduction of the hours given to drawing from nature. “Instead of studying nature, we were forced to look at plaster cast models. That caused some students to leave the Academy. I was among them,” remembered artist B.G. Kreitzer.³⁵

The results of the first year of reforms

In order to develop a proper education plan, the Fine Arts Department created a special commission that united the Arts Collegiate and the Svomas’ supervisors.³⁶ Complex questions were constantly raised, including the requirements for graduation from the studios and the issuing of diplomas,³⁷ the development of an autonomous educational plan for architecture,³⁸ the organization of a monument-painting studio, the introduction of courses on the technological aspects and materials for sculptors,

visual education for painters, topography for landscape artists, etc.³⁹ In July of 1920, the Arts Collegiate, in response to a request from the Student Conference, decided to organize a joint architectural class that was mandatory for all architecture students before their admission to the independent studios.⁴⁰

During one of the Supervisor Council's Presidium sessions, D.P. Shternberg said that the reinstatement of the Professors' Council would not be tolerated because it posed a direct threat to the autonomy of the students, and the Fine Arts Department would never concede to it;⁴¹ however, a Board of Academics was nevertheless soon established because the students proved unable to handle all of the issues that came up in the routine life of the Svomas.⁴²

On the first anniversary of the Petrograd State Free Art and Educational Studios, on October 10, 1919, the *Art Life* newspaper wrote:

“The results of the first year might not be as grand as the studio founders expected.

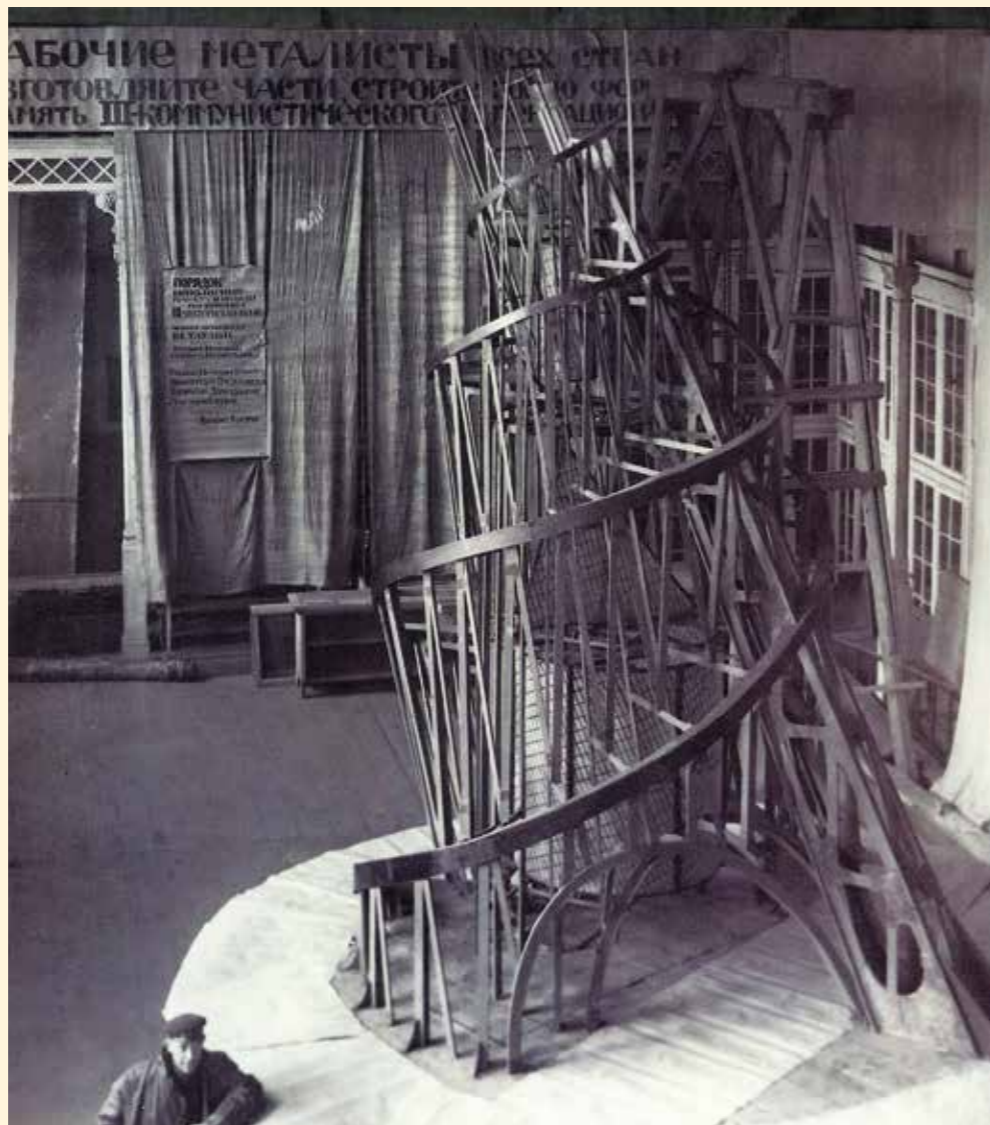
Like all higher education schools, the studios went through a very difficult year, in the face of the hardship that the whole country was living through. Nevertheless, the studios undertook a great amount of creative work. Students were liberated from the suffocating boundaries of old academism and left free to explore the world of art. Of course there were some mistakes, but no new enterprise was ever free from them.”⁴³

Sometimes the studios had to be closed due to heating or power outages;⁴⁴ sometimes they were emptied due to military mobilization; and sometimes academic life came to a standstill, for example, when both the supervisors and the students had to paint posters for the “Propaganda Windows of the Russian Telegraph” (the so-called “ROST windows”).⁴⁵ Provisional troops, consisting of artists, went on expeditions to get bread for the capital cities. Such inconsistencies in the program compelled D.P. Shternberg to write:

“We were dreaming of tubes of paint, reproductions, and paper. We tried to solve the painful question of the students' attendance⁴⁶ with the decree on monthly registration of the students.⁴⁷ All students must work. There cannot be any exception – neither for the ‘left’, nor for the ‘right’. Those who miss classes discredit our new deed.”⁴⁸

Yet in comparison with other Petrograd colleges and universities, which were almost empty, the retained an almost normal form of academic life, as was highlighted by the aforementioned article in *Art Life*.⁴⁹ “The former academic Korovin told me,” noted A.V. Lunacharsky at a meeting of the SKSO Council Commissars⁵⁰, “that the artistic life was blossoming in those higher education facilities, which previously were seen as death traps for any form of talent.”⁵¹

Svomas students actively participated in the life of revolutionary Petrograd. For instance, during the course of the night of January 18 to 19, 1919, the students and supervisors of the Free



The Model of the monument to the Third Communist International in the space of the former Mosaic studio in the building of the Svomas (Academy of Fine Arts). 1920. V. E. Tatlin is standing next to the Model.

SOURCE: CENTRAL STATE ARCHIVE OF CINEMA, PHOTO- AND PHOTO-DOCUMENTS, ST. PETERSBURG

Studios were commissioned by the Petrograd District Military Commissariat No 71 to paint a colossal 500 square meter mourning poster in memory of Karl Liebknecht and Rose Luxemburg.⁵² In February of the same year, students decorated the library-train *Books—to the People*, which was sent to the frontline by the Union of Communes of the Northern Region.⁵³ The task of decorating Petrograd before the Second Comintern Congress was also undertaken by the Svomas.⁵⁴ Many more examples could, of course, be mentioned.

Wishing to improve the economic conditions of the students, the Fine Arts Department organized an Art Labor Bureau at the Svomas. The Bureau accepted commissions for posters, portraits of revolutionary leaders (paintings and sculptures), banners, decorations, monumental sculptures, and graphic works, and it supplied the schools and clubs with lecturers and teachers capable of teaching painting, drawing, and sculpture classes.⁵⁵ The students welcomed the organization of the Bureau, calling it “the long-expected liberation of art from any pressure of consumers and patrons” and “a sufficing and necessary help from the State”.⁵⁶

In November 1919, the first exhibition of the Svomas students' works was opened, and in the first two months it was visited by several thousand people. In October 1920, a second exhibition followed. The best works were purchased by the State.⁵⁷ In December of 1920, the Latvian-born painter P.A. Vikhvellin, the talented disciple of landscape artist A.A. Rylov, was the first one in two years of the Svomas' existence to be awarded with the official title of “Artist”.⁵⁸

The “lefts” and the “rights” at Svomas

There was a lot of deliberation on the “left-wing dominance” in the Art School during the Narkompross Fine Arts Department's era, probably in reference to N.I. Altman, V.D. Baranov-Rossine, A.E. Karev, K.S. Malevich, and V.E. Tatlin. However, such a perception could hardly be supported by documentary evidence if one were to examine the list of studios established as part of the Svomas movement in 1918 and led by the non-leftist masters such as A.A. Andreeva, V.V. Belyaev, L.N. Benoit, I.Y. Ginsburg, V.I. Dubnetsky, G.R. Zaleman, L.A. Ilyin, D.N. Kardovsky, V.I. Kozlinskii, V.A. Kosyakov, V.V. Lishev, A.T. Matveyev, O.R. Munz, K.S. Petrov-Vodkin, A.N. Popov, I.A. Puni, L.V. Rudnev, A.A. Rylov, V.E. Savinskii, I.A. Fomin, E.Y. Stalbeg, L.V. Shervud, and V.I. Shukhaev, as well as the separate studios without supervisors.⁵⁹ The list itself suggests that the numbers were not in favor of the “left-wing” artists.

Another subject of criticism was the creation of special studios that were “appointed” to the Svomas by the Fine Arts Department. These were seen as being lobbied for by the Department to eliminate the possibility for unexpected results.⁶⁰ Although there was initial opposition, this was one of the means through which modernist Russian art made its way into the Svomas. The Fine Arts Department introduced new supervisors, offering the students the chance to meet and accept them. Through the appointment of Avant-garde supervisors, the students were, in fact, introduced to a new form of conceptual

art that was radically different from the late academism and “*peredvizhnik*” realism of the masters who had been teaching at the Academy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and that the students who had started their studies before the Revolution and who had continued their training during the reforms were accustomed to.

It was natural that it took some time to digest the artistic projecting and constructivism of V. Tatlin and K. Malevich as well as to digest the Avant-garde art methods of N. Altman, K. Petrov-Vodkin, and V. Kozlinsky. But the historical times demanded such changes and demanded new art. And even if a supervisor were to be appointed, it was still impossible to tie up students to him because they still possessed freedom in choosing the studio they would attend. The supervisors, as was said before, were removed from the office if their studios were not visited for more than three months. Such was the case with Y.P. Annenkov, appointed as the painting studio supervisor in April of 1919 and sacked from his position in June 1920 because no one attended his studio.⁶¹ But that precedent was rather exceptional. The results of the voting for supervisors, which took place in September 1918, were not surprising, even though not a single student wished to take classes with N.I. Altman, only two joined V.E. Tatlin's studio, and an incredible number of 99 chose L.N. Benoit as their supervisor.⁶² L.N. Benoit was well known because the students enrolled before 1918 were continuing their classes, while V.E. Tatlin, N.I. Altman, and L.A. Bruni had not yet established reputations as teachers. However, the state of affairs began to change rapidly. For instance, after October 15, 1918, L.N. Benoit's studio retained only 50 students, while N.I. Altman gained 38. The number of students taking classes under V.D. Baranov-Rossine increased from 15 to 35, while D.N. Kardovsky's class decreased from 83 to 43 and Hugo Zaleman lost 8 out of his 22 students.⁶³ V.E. Tatlin – who practiced the most unusual and Avant-garde methods in his work – had steadily gained a substantial number of followers, and by the fall of 1920 there were no less than 18 students in his class.⁶⁴

Studios were reformed and the “red students” took power

In March 1921 – during the reorganization of the Commissariat of Peoples' Enlightenment taking place in the turmoil of the first phase of the country's New Economic Policy – the Petrograd Free State Art and Education Studios were transferred to the care of the Petrograd Department of Education (Petroproforb).⁶⁵ The studios were reformed, and because the reformation was led by the former graduates of the old Imperial Academy, they succeeded in creating a “proper and elegant decoration” of the new academy. Under the pretense of introducing stricter academic plans and countering economic impracticalities, the school was now bound by impracticalities of a different sort – the vision of art and its functions was once again limited, the newly-forged connections with contemporary life were cut, the school was forced to give up its democratic principles, and the training was again dominated exclusively by classic, traditional art.

The new reformers who took power over the Svomas (the so-

called Provisional Presidium of the Svomas headed by E.Y. Shtalberg) began with the liquidation of those studios that did not fit in with the old views on the goals and forms of art.⁶⁶ The studios of A.A. Andreyev (so called Proletcult) and V.E. Tatlin – which identified themselves outside the boundaries of tradition – were closed. It is more difficult to explain the closure of A.T. Matveyev's studio⁶⁷ because he and two of his students – Karl Zale and Victor Sinaisky – together were responsible for over half of the monuments erected in Petrograd in 1918–1919. The same happened to V.E. Savinsky – to the great surprise of the artist himself because he was a known disciple of the famous Russian artist P.P. Chistyakov – as well as to the shock of the 50 students of his studio. “When the Academy was led by the commissars Karev and Shkolnik,” said the students with regards to the Provisional Presidium's actions, “they, in spite of being left-wing artists, truly valued Savinskii's great experience and provided him with a studio.”⁶⁸

A.A. Andreyev's studio was filled with recruits from different Soviet organizations and political departments of the Red Army. It was a studio composed exclusively of the proletariat and the new “red students” movement. The Union of the Workers of Art called his studio “the leading fighters” in propaganda artwork.⁶⁹

The project of the architectural memorial to the Comintern, developed by V.E. Tatlin and widely known since its presentation in 1921 at the 8th Congress of the Soviets, revealed the great perspective of the artist's endeavors, and A.V. Lunacharsky's intervention allowed Tatlin, as well as other suspended supervisors, to continue their work.⁷⁰ A special directive decree, issued by Commissar Lunacharsky, called all education programs in art schools to be invalid “before they are affirmed by the State”.⁷¹

The one-sided nature of the 1921 reform was discussed on October 29 of the same year at a special congress of delegates from the Narkompross's Academic Center and other Soviet organizations, such as the Glavproforg, Petrogubpolitprosvet, etc. The congress acknowledged the right for equal recognition of traditional academic forms alongside the new art movements aimed at bringing artistry to the working-class environment.⁷² A similar decision was made by the 5th Petrograd Conference of the Union of the Workers of Arts and the All-Russian Conference on Artistic Enlightenment.⁷³ The Svomas were reformed into an organization known as VHUTEMAS – 2 (to differentiate from VHUTEMAS – 1, which was based in Moscow). The prolonged series of reforms, which took place in the Petrograd art school, continued over the next ten years – a period that lies outside of the chronological boundaries of this article.

Art became secondary to the economy and ideology

The Independent Studios of 1918–1920 were the logical conclusion of a process that had been in the works for many years, which was a tendency to transform traditional academic schools into a federation of studios, which seemed a panacea to the *peredvizhniki* that predominated at the end of the 19th century. The new rules of admittance tore down the social barriers that had blocked many students from entering the schools, and

a new type of art student appeared. The system of academic awards, which cultivated artistic conformism in the old school, was done away with. The Free Studios welcomed and united all existing art movements. The freedom and equality of every trend in the Petrograd State Free Educational Studios was recognized by the commission of the Working Class Inspecting Committee, which inspected the Svomas' work in late 1920. That tendency was also recorded in A.A. Rylov's memoirs.⁷⁴ All those aspects made the Svomas the main center of development and creation of a new art school, which – despite all of the trials and mistakes – was brought to life in response to the call of the times. Certainly, if the country's economic situation had been better, the Svomas reforms might have achieved more. The Fine Arts Department clearly understood that the improvement of the studios' working environment depended on the overall conditions in the country and that the blame for the students' low level of preparation was to be placed on the Republican government's decision to allow first of all members of underprivileged classes to enroll in the art schools. But the latter decision was one of the essential aims of the Sovnarkom (Council of Peoples' Commissars), whose decree on the order of admittance to higher schools and universities sought to democratize culture. That problem was very accurately verbalized in a poetic matter by V.V. Mayakovski when he said: “If there were people – the art would apply itself”.⁷⁵

As a materialization of social conscience, art was secondary to the economy and ideology, and in the eyes of the new government art needed to concentrate not on the mastery of old techniques, but on the manifestation of the new revolutionary principles. The definition and further development of those principles was the only factor that could build a new method of art school training. The old art school could provide its students with professionalism in their craft, but not with new principles. The new school, on the other hand, was organized on new principles and on a new approach to the problems of art, yet it could not immediately develop the new means of their expression. This naturally led to a dialectic struggle of unity and opposites within the old and new art schools that took place in the first years after the Revolution. As a result of three years of work, the Svomas developed different approaches to the very function of art, including “art as an ideology” and “art as production”. Passionate fights and arguments revolved around those two approaches, especially because the latter was only recently introduced and was not easily accepted by the disciples of the old Academy. The young artists, on the other hand, felt that the place of art in social and cultural life was rapidly changing, that its impact was widening, and that its future was connected more with change rather than with tradition.

A few years passed, and by the end of the 1920s a new generation of artists was formed. This generation would see revolutionary Russia as their natural habitat, to which they were genetically bound. This generation would become capable of dealing with the problems of the subjective environment and with the concepts of art as life-building and art as production. However, the Avant-gardist concept of art that had developed ahead of its time

was accepted neither by the people nor by the state. The Socialist realism that followed the era of the Avant-garde was satisfied with the aesthetics of late academism and late realism. Nevertheless, the Free Studios had raised a generation of OST artists (a union of painters in 1925–1932), whose works would become an important ingredient in the art of the following decades. Finally, it is important not to forget that it was in the Svomas where the model for the monument to the III International by V. Tatlin was created, and of which the famous Russian art historian Nickolay Punin wrote: “The present project is the first revolutionary work that we can send and that we are sending to Europe”.⁷⁶ ✖

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- V byvshej Akademii hudozhestv [In the former Fine Arts Academy] // Ibid. 18 iyulya. no. 192.
- Ibid. 9 dek. no. 313.
- Ibid. 1920. 28-29 fevr. no. 384–385; 28 iyulya. no. 515; 1918. 30 okt. no. 2.
- Ibid. 1920. 13 iyulya. no. 502.
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- The first meeting took place on August 23, 1919. A Praesidium was elected, consisting of L.N. Benoit from the painters, V.V. Ellonen from the sculptors, and three communist representatives (the latter being directly appointed by communist members of the Studios). – RGIA. F. 789. Op. 19. D. 1833. L. 1-2.

- 43 *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art]. 1919. 10 okt. no. 264.
- 44 Because of the devastating heating crisis in Petrograd, classes in the Svomas were temporarily stopped and did not take place between December 1, 1919, and February 1, 1920. Painters, sculptors, and architects were reduced to a single studio. – RGIA. F. 789. Op. 19. D. 1833. L. 17, 20-20 ob.; *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art]. 1919. 20 noyabrya. no. 297; Ibid. 1920. 30 yanv. no. 358.
- 45 ROSTA – The Russian Telegraph Agency
- 46 Many students had to work in various Soviet organizations to earn at least some means of living. The greatest economic crisis and food shortage was felt in the winter of 1919.
- 47 Nauchno-bibliograficheskij arhiv RAH [The Research Bibliographic Archive of the Russian Fine Art Academy]. F. 789. Op. 25. D. 122. L. 78.
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- 49 V Svomas (Into the Svomas) in *Zhizn' iskusstva* [Life of art] no. 274–275; by the start of 1921, Svomas included 23 studios with 489 students. – CGA SPb (St. Petersburg Central State Archives). F. 2552. Op. 1. D. 5. L. 18. We should, perhaps, remind the reader that the population of St. Petersburg by 1921 decreased to one third in comparison with 1917.
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- 65 M. Spasovskij, *Akademiya hudozhestv. Ee proshloe i nastoyashchee* [The Fine Arts Academy. Its past and present] in *Argonavty* [The Argonaut Journal] (1923) no. 1, 76
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Revolutionary Synchrony: A Day of the World

by Robert Bird

By initiating the process of world revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks believed they were changing the very nature of historical time. While not everyone shared the cosmic horizons of Aleksandr Bogdanov or Aleksei Gastev, even the most pragmatic revolutionaries like Lenin immediately set about reforming the very structure of time, first of all by taking the Russian Empire onto the Gregorian calendar in order to synchronize the new workers' state with the developed world. This shift meant losing thirteen days, so that January 31, 1918, was followed directly by February 14. Everyone's birthday shifted thirteen days forward; the first anniversary of the October 25 seizure of power was marked on November 7, 1918.

As Soviet power was consolidated, some stalwarts of cultural revolution continued to agitate for a more fundamental restructuring of time measurement, not merely to match modern Europe, but to surpass it. In this the most radical Bolsheviks followed the lead of the First French Republic, which introduced a decimal measurement of time in 1793. Dreams of restructuring time were not uncommon in the age of Esperanto; a 10-hour clock is featured in Fritz Lang's dystopian film *Metropolis* (1927). But the Soviet Union quickly rejected proposals for such a radical reform of the clock; in the words of one author in the aptly named journal *Vremia* (Time), “This matter will have to be taken up by the global Council of People's Commissars after other, more urgent problems have been resolved.”¹

Despite the radical ambitions of the

First Five-Year Plan, it also did not envision a complete reform of chronometry. For Soviet planners, the main task was to maximize production by doing away with the weekend. Instead of seven named days, the week would consist of a fixed quantity of numbered ones, with no universal day of rest. This was called the *nepreryvka*, or unbroken workweek, which appealed to rationalizers because it allowed for months of uniform length: 12 × 30 + 5 additional holidays (6 holidays in a leap year). In November 1930, this short-lived calendar was replaced by one based on a six-day workweek, also with fixed days of rest. This new schedule cut everyone's regular days off by one-sixth, from 72 to 60 per year. But these free days were not coordinated among families or communities, and they were frequently changed, keeping people's domestic and social lives out of synch. (These experiments continued until June 1940, when the Soviet Union returned to the seven-day week for good, with Sunday as a

regular rest day, as part of a drive for increased productivity²; perhaps this was the day the revolution ended.)

In the midst of all of these reforms, artists in various media continued their own experiments with time and space, exploring the potential and limits of global synchronization. In this article, I trace the history of the collectively written volume *A Day of the World* (Den' mira) that aimed to compile news from around the globe for a single day – September 27, 1935. The author of the concept was Maxim Gorky, who recruited the journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov as editor.

abstract

A Day of the World (Den' mira) was a documentary volume, published in 1937, that was intended to provide a snapshot of the entire globe on a single day, September 27, 1935. The tensions within and around *A Day of the World* capture some of the basic contradictions in socialist realism, the official aesthetic method of Soviet art: between publicity and intimacy and between the dream of synchrony, global revolution and the aberrant temporalities of individual experience.

KEY WORDS: *A Day of the World*, Den' mira, Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Kol'tsov, Dziga Vertov, Christa Wolf, socialist realism.



Wall calendar for 1930 in continuous work-weeks. 1929. Courtesy of Productive Arts.



The author of *A Day of the World* was Maxim Gorky, left, who hired the journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov as editor.

After Gorky's death, Kol'tsov saw the project to fruition in 1937. The resulting volume was amply illustrated by photographs, cartoons, and other images representing the day. It was a conception that was emulated at least twice – in China in 1939 and in the Soviet Union in 1961, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the original day, September 27, 1960. Through these books, the idea of “a day of the world” resonated widely, for instance, in the work of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov and East German writer Christa Wolf. After examining the history of *A Day of the World*, I highlight the global network of revolutionary artists and thinkers that the book articulated and the tensions it framed within socialist aesthetics – between publicity and intimacy and between the dream of synchronous, global revolution and the aberrant temporalities of individual experience.

The history of *A Day of the World*

One could, given the desire and the time, trace the conception of *A Day of the World* back to the medieval notion of the *Liber universalis* or *Liber mundi*, or the earliest encyclopaediae. More proximately, the basic idea of a global literary snapshot is present in Fedor Dostoevskii's novel *The Demons* (Besy), where Liza Tushina proposes to Ivan Shatov that they begin a kind of almanac of Russian life. Liza's suggestion only raises Shatov's suspicions, because unbeknownst to her he is responsible for the secret printing press of a radical conspiratorial cell. Gorky's proposal for *A Day of the World* – like his conception of socialist realism more generally – joins Liza's documentary realism to Shatov's conspiratorial sense. Gorky's interest lies in making public the intimate factors that motivate and direct revolutionary activity, and in mobilizing public media – newspapers, photography, and political cartoons – to elucidate the politics of the intimate and the everyday.

In this respect, *A Day of the World* shares many features with Gorky's other documentary projects of the 1930s, from the journal *Nashi dostizheniia* [Our Achievements] to the infamous

volume *White Sea-Baltic Sea Stalin Canal* (Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina, 1934) through which Gorky sought to augment the historical record of the Russian proletariat, engender a new folklore, and, at the same time, forge new cadres of writers.³ Key to his documentary method was the collective principle: “To these and many other collective works we can attract hundreds of beginning writers, and this work will provide them with the broadest opportunity for self-education, raising their qualifications by means of collective work on raw material, and mutual criticism.”⁴ Most directly, *A Day of the World* grew out of Kol'tsov and Gorky's collaboration on the weekly magazine *Za rubezhom* [Abroad], which between 1930 and 1938 provided Soviet readers with glimpses of foreign life from a Soviet perspective. Drawing on the authors and forms of *Za rubezhom*, *A Day of the World* would present a massive compendium of materials about “Abroad” together with a similar bloc of text and images about the USSR, all viewed from the standpoint of future Communism, as if from outer space. In April or May 1935, Gorky wrote to Kol'tsov that the newspaper *Poliarnaia pravda* [The Polar Truth] in Murmansk had released a special supplement “The Day of the Kola Peninsula”: “If other newspapers release such special issues they will grease the wheels of our ‘Soviet Day;’” Gorky commented, probably meaning the section of *Day of the World* that was dedicated to events in the Soviet Union.⁵

The theoretical argument of *A Day of the World* is captured in the ambiguity of its Russian title; the title means both “a day of the world” and “a day of peace.” While the former translation has become standard, in Soviet rhetoric of the time the two concepts were inseparable; peace will ensue when socialism becomes global, bringing the world-historical into synchrony with the everyday. Thus in 1935 the Soviet Union began actively to collaborate with Leftist movements abroad, seeking to create a Popular Front against capitalism and fascism. The first institutional manifestation of the Popular Front was the International Congress in Defense of Culture in Paris in July 1935, which at-



A Day of the World: cover; page spread on Soviet children; caricature about the Japanese occupation of China.

tracted such diverse participants as André Gide, Heinrich Mann, Leon Feuchtwanger, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, and Waldo Frank. In some ways this event was an extension of the First Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934, which founded the Union of Soviet Writers. For its part, the International Congress founded the International Association of Writers, with a secretariat including Il'ia Erenburg and Mikhail Kol'tsov. *A Day of the World* was to mark the debut of this organization, the germ of a global socialist aesthetic, “the first shared enterprise of Soviet and foreign writers.”⁶

In the event, it proved impossible to coordinate Soviet interests with those of foreign sympathizers, and the International Association of Writers failed to survive the year. On December 10, 1935, Mikhail Kol'tsov wrote to Stalin to warn of its collapse and also to ask for 4,000 rubles in gold to pay foreign authors “at least a modest honorarium” for their contributions to *A Day of the World*, which had begun to reach the editors.⁷ It is unclear whether and how much they were paid in the end; in his introduction to the book Kol'tsov calls them “volunteers.”⁸ The uncertain financing contributed to haphazard organization. And yet, as the closest approximation of a global socialist art project, *A Day of the World* reveals some of the tensions at the heart of socialist aesthetics.

In addition to practical complications, the project's ambition of synchrony ignored the relentless march of time. By the time of publication, much had changed. Gorky died before the volume could be completed, and his coeditor Mikhail Kol'tsov was busy fighting in the Spanish Civil War, so this snapshot of September 27, 1935, was not published until mid-1937, at the height of the Great Terror, by the large publishing concern *Zhurnal'no-gazetnoe ob'*edinenie, which Kol'tsov managed. The world's attention was

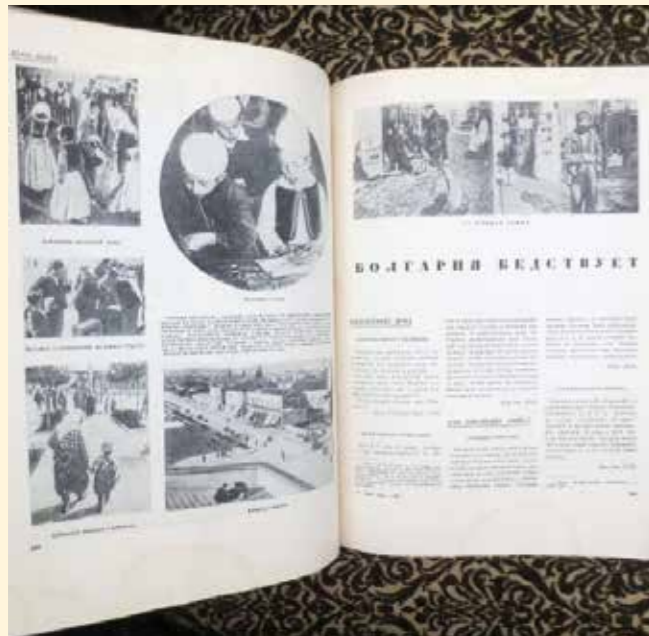
now focused less on Italian outrages in Abyssinia than on Spain, where Kol'tsov was preparing a new International Anti-Fascist Congress of Writers, which he called a “spectacle” intended to match the one in Paris two years earlier and to be perceived alongside the International Exposition that had just opened in Paris.⁹ What was intended as an inspiring synchronous snapshot of the entire globe in the present thus became a semi-obsolete monument to an ambivalent moment of the recent past.

The project also called into relief the tension between documentary and fiction at the heart of socialist realism. In a letter to Kol'tsov at the end of the year, Gorky expressed dismay with the uneven coverage and quality of the material gathered so far: “Where's Ireland? Why is so much space given to Palestine while 300 million Indians seem not to exist? Algeria and Tunisia are – in our days – cauldrons where major events are coming to the boil, but this is ignored. And Morocco is nowhere to be found!”¹⁰ Incensed, Gorky argues that the “material in its given form, unconnected and disorganized, has no meaning; this is throw-away material. It's entirely clear that the theme has not

excited those who have worked on it, has failed to shake their indifference. [...] Remember I said that the 27th – or any other day – is for us only a fulcrum, and that our work is not only work with concrete details, with realities, but also work of the imagination.”¹¹ Translated into the terminology enshrined by the polemics over socialist art, Gorky

found the compendium of documentary material expressive of atomistic “naturalism” rather than syncretic “realism.” But how could detailed documentation of everyday life on a randomly selected day be anything but “unconnected and disorganized”? Is this not precisely what makes the labor of compilation into a visionary and revolutionary act?

“A DAY OF THE WORLD ALSO CALLED INTO RELIEF THE TENSION BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION AT THE HEART OF SOCIALIST REALISM.”



"Bulgaria Suffering in Poverty": A spread from *A Day of the World*.

The structure of *A Day of the World*

A Day of the World opens with a "meteorological diary," comprising brief prognoses of the weather in various countries excerpted from local newspapers and translated into Russian. We then have a section "Under the Power of Capital," which begins with a collection of materials on the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, including brief press reports, photographs, and caricatures that focus on the unsuccessful negotiations of the Committee of Five under the auspices of the League of Nations. This is followed by a section "Abyssinia under Attack," which documents affairs in East Africa, and then "Italy in Flames," documenting the situation in Italy. This opening triad is then followed by sections dedicated to each major country and territory in the world, first in Europe, then Asia, then the USA, Canada, and Latin America. Each section is given a narrative title; the section for China, for instance, is titled "Bloodied China." This is followed by a section called "A Writer's Day," which includes "notations from the day 27 September made for the book *A Day of the World*" by such writers as Rene Arcos, Julien Benda, Berthold Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Heinrich Mann, Ernst Toller, Elsa Triolet, H. G. Wells, Stefan Zweig, Karel Čapek, and others. Finally, a long section – exactly 100 pages, one-sixth of the volume – covers the USSR showcasing the highlights of 1935, including the new Moscow Metro, the Stakhanovites, the construction of workers' sanatoria in the Crimea, the conquest of the Arctic, etc. Opening with a framed portrait of Stalin and richly illustrated with photographs, the Soviet section lacks any satirical text or caricatures. The Soviet Union is held up to the rest of the world as a place where the future is now.

A cursory investigation suggests that the foreign press reports, though given only in excerpt and in Russian translation,

are relatively true to their sources. A note about the boxing match between Joe Louis and Max Baer at Yankee Stadium on September 24, 1935, credited to *The New York Times*, is derived from a much longer article about the spike in electricity usage during the fight due to the massive radio audience.¹² *A Day of the World* cuts three columns of print down to two brief paragraphs, but the information and tone of the excerpt are not tendentious in any obvious way. The note is accompanied by another brief note on Joe Louis as "the pride of his people," an "inspiration" who appeared when "people were ready to damn the Negro people for good, as unsuited to lofty joys and happiness."¹³

The Louis-Baer fight comes up again in the essay by Waldo Frank, entitled "A Day of an American Intellectual," who writes that he spent September 27 acclimatizing himself to New York after six weeks at his small farm in Truro, on Cape Cod. After describing his neighborhood on the Upper West Side, Frank describes the highlight of his day as going to the cinema to watch the newsreel about the Louis-Baer fight (though he had also listened to it live on the radio).¹⁴ Among the many other events of the day, this boxing match illustrates how isolated, local events become focal points for the analysis of the world's major ideological issues – here, primarily, racial inequality – and of the media systems that disseminate information and distribute affect. *A Day of the World* opposes the sensationalizing media of capitalism not only through its global coverage of events, but also by allowing for thoughtful reflection upon them. Thus random occurrences were revealed to be part of a deep global pattern.

Temporal bifurcation

The dialectical interweaving of the accidental and the intentional was another source of tension between the editors of *A Day of the World*. Gorky's letter to Kol'tsov about the book – excerpted as a preface entitled "The Tasks of This Book" – strikes a militant tone:

"*A Day of the World* is a compendium of everything that is being created by the bourgeoisie of Europe in its attempt to retain the positions it has won. It is interesting to show how the bourgeois, the creator of the psychology of banditism – of Stirnerism, Nietzscheanism – infects with this psychology the petty bourgeoisie, creates Fascism, and deepens the inhumanity of the bourgeois.

To show the influence of unemployment: the increase of 'crimes,' of child prostitution, of suicide, the loss of the feeling of human dignity – this last is especially characteristic of the public statements of various consolers and distractors of the bourgeoisie.

To give examples of the incitement of national and race conflict. Examples of grandiose swindles like that of Stavisky, and examples based on malnutrition, and also of dissolution. [...]

It is necessary to show with especial clarity the rehearsals of Civil War in various countries.

Knowing how to create the new world according to plan, we must be able to destroy the old, to show a picture of the death of our enemy, which we desire."¹⁵

In his longer preface, Kol'tsov paints a very different picture, one of the variety of events – and non-events – taking place simultaneously across the globe on one arbitrarily chosen day, September 27, 1935. He even acknowledges contingent events in the USSR: "Arriving in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Lev Mikhailovich Khinchuk raged over the delay in equipping butchers' shops. In Verkhnie Kotly the driver Gorshkov ran over a woman with fatal consequences."¹⁶ Kol'tsov presents the book as a culminating victory of reportage as a way of composing order from the chaos of contingent events. Kol'tsov even enlists Gorky in his own defense, citing Gorky's endorsement of collectively composed documentary volumes at the 1934 Writers' Congress:

"My certainty that this technique of collective creativity can yield absolutely original and unprecedentedly interesting books is such that I also risk proposing such work to our guests, these outstanding masters of European literature. Won't they try to produce a book that would depict a day of the bourgeois world? I mean any day: 25 September, 7 October, or 15 December; it makes no difference. Take a quotidian day just as the world press reflects it on its pages. Show the entire, lurid chaos of contemporary life in Paris and Grenoble, in London and Shanghai, in San Francisco, Geneva, Rome, Dublin, etc., in cities and villages, on water and on dry land. Show the feast of the rich and the suicides of the poor, the meetings of academies and learned societies and the facts reflected in newspapers' chronicles of wild illiteracy, superstition, crime, the facts of sophisticated culture, workers' strikes, anecdotes and everyday dramas, insolent cries of luxury, the deeds of swindlers, the lies of political leaders: show, I repeat, a normal, quotidian day with all the crazy, fantastic variety of its phenomena. This is more a job for scissors than for the pen. Show the 'artistic' work of history in the course of a single day."¹⁷

Kol'tsov avers that in *A Day of the World* the voluntary collective of writers takes the place of a Hearst or Beaverbrook, i.e. of a major media magnate. Instead of being guided by commercial or ideological interests, they are led by the logic of history itself.

As evident in the editors' rival prefaces, Gorky and Kol'tsov

had radically different conceptions of planning and contingency in *A Day of the World*. Kol'tsov imagines a future reader treating the book as a kind of time capsule: "A museum of life and mores of one day of the epoch when the old capitalist world, in storm clouds and in the midst of great events wobbled and crawled off, yielding its place to the new world of socialism."¹⁸ The patterns that the capitalist world would recognize only retrospectively, the USSR was already actively planning and implementing. Thus the difference between the USSR and the rest of the world was also a temporal one. Kol'tsov remarks on this difference in his introduction; the world called September 27, 1935, "Friday," but in the USSR it was also known as "the third day of the *shestidnevka* [i.e., the sixth day of the work week]." Peace would arise only when the world became synchronized in revolutionary time.

Aberrant temporalities

It was not just world history that had undergone changes by the time of publication; more gravely for Kol'tsov's ambition, things had also changed markedly within world communism. Andre Gide, for instance, would no doubt have figured prominently in the volume had he not committed apostasy in late 1936 with his book *Retour de l'URSS*. Not all such fractures were so conspicuous, however. In the intervening year American writer Waldo Frank had broken with the Communist Party of the USA and sided with Trotsky. The Soviet editors appear not to have caught this news, so Frank's text was included in the printed volume. (Kol'tsov himself would be arrested and executed in 1940.)

The revolutionary temporality was also subject to more subtle disruptions. One of the cute details that Kol'tsov highlights in his introduction is the diary account for September 27 by writer Mikhail Prishvin, known as a poet of landscape and nature. Sure enough, Prishvin writes that Kol'tsov's request has found him preparing for a duck hunt.

"Your telegram forced me to reflect deeply on my entirely empty day today (last night I slept badly, this morning I was traveling from Moscow and dozed on the train, and now, while awaiting lunch, I am knocking the percussion caps out of empty

cartridges in order to refill them with gunpowder).

Everyone has such empty days and hours, but everyone hides it carefully. Your telegram upset me – what do I do, lie or reveal my emptiness? – I even quit refilling my cartridges and lay down to sleep after lunch."¹⁹

Thankfully for Kol'tsov, Prishvin turns his emptiness into an inspiring parable:

"A DAY OF THE WORLD OPPOSES THE SENSATIONALIZING MEDIA OF CAPITALISM NOT ONLY THROUGH ITS GLOBAL COVERAGE OF EVENTS, BUT ALSO BY ALLOWING FOR THOUGHTFUL REFLECTION UPON SUCH EVENTS."

“I want to tell you now that the writings that issue from my pen, to remain for many decades and affect people beneficially in my native land, and then to cross borders and there, in these other countries, also have an effect for decades – these writings are created by the power that acts against physical, territorial, geographical and other external borders between people.”²⁰

In a line omitted from *A Day of the World* but surviving in Prishvin’s voluminous diary, in the entry for September 27, 1935, Prishvin adds: “and real art is precisely the art of peace” – the peacefulness of the empty moments, even, it seems, if they are spent in such a violent occupation as loading a rifle.²¹

Prishvin proceeds to meditate on the coincidence in Russian of the words for “world” and “peace.” The homophones were distinguished in pre-revolutionary orthography, and Prishvin describes the teacher’s strategy for making the difference clear to schoolchildren:

“Teacher: Write for me *mir* with an ‘i’ number eight!
The pupil writes: *MIP*
Teacher: What is the meaning of this *mir*?
Pupil: As peace and quiet, Vasilii Vasil’evich.”

Now, however, the word for “peace and quiet” has become the name of a global struggle. Prishvin concludes that now, in 1935, “a smart boy will guess for himself that he should define this *mir* as the time in which we gather all our forces in order to direct them against war.”²²

Prishvin’s rather discordantly intimate note injects a rare pensive moment, a moment of suspension amidst the otherwise bombastic reports. He appears to endorse emptiness and idleness as a source of international peace. We read the note quite differently if we know – as Soviet readers of the time generally did not – that Prishvin was an obsessive diarist (the notation for September 27 runs over four pages in the printed edition of his complete diaries) – who invariably based his fictions on his diaries, thereby producing an extensive body of autobiographical literature. One of Prishvin’s favorite motifs was his period at school under the tutelage of Vasilii Vasil’evich Rozanov, an idiosyncratic thinker known for his anti-Semitism, who died in 1919 as one of the new regime’s most colorful critics. Needless to say, Rozanov was anathema to the Soviet authorities, not least to Gorky, and would never have been allowed to emerge from oblivion onto the pages of such a celebrated volume. What is he doing there?

Prishvin, I would argue, is suggesting not only that world peace is born in moments of personal “emptiness,” but that this emptiness is deeply embedded in an ambivalent personal history, one that cannot be sanitized of elements that are alien and even resistant to the future global synthesis. Historical peace is incompatible with ideological purity.

Horror vacui

Prishvin’s negative account of peace, however, is precisely what Gorky and Kol’tsov could not countenance. A case in point is the contribution of W. E. Du-Bua, or W. E. B. Du Bois as he is more commonly known. Du Bois spent the day traveling from New York to Atlanta, where he was teaching at Atlanta University. He describes discriminatory treatment at a “tourist camp for automobile drivers” (maybe a motel) and a restaurant at Penn Station, where he goes because it might be the only place in Philadelphia where he can count on being served, however reluctantly. He stops in Baltimore to see his daughter and describes segregation in Maryland and then Washington D.C. He visits Phelps Stokes and mentions *Encyclopedia of the Negro*, which he was supposed to be editing.²³

Comparison of the published text with the typescript held at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst reveals significant cuts to the text – approximately two-thirds of the original. Readers of *A Day of the World* do not hear Du Bois’s account of a mass meeting at Madison Square Garden to protest “Italy’s aggression against Ethiopia” or of his visit to a black physician in Philadelphia.²⁴ We do not hear of his encounter with a black man on the way to Baltimore, who wants to ride with him and talk about the Louis-Baer fight, or about the dismissal of students from his daughter’s school, or about all the African American academics he visits in Washington. Most egregiously, though, we miss Du Bois’s narration of his journey through the deep south, from Washington down to Atlanta, where Du Bois describes the parallel worlds inhabited by white and black populations. Instead, the Russian text adds paragraphs, not present in Du Bois’s typescript, describing segregation in Baltimore and Washington, including an account by the Haitian ambassador, the president of Liberia, and the wife of an African-American congressman.

One wonders why. Possibly the Soviet editors requested changes and Du Bois sent a new version. Possibly they objected to Du Bois describing a trip that took more than a single day.

Most probably the Soviet editors chose to underscore the problems in and around the US capital city, producing a more black-and-white picture of the seat of the American government.

It is evident that Du Bois’s and Prishvin’s contributions might have provoked Gorky’s criticism of writers’ stories of “how they spent 27 September, what they

felt, what they thought about.” Gorky wrote to Kol’tsov around the end of 1935 or the beginning of 1936 that he wouldn’t dare to call them “empty, but would call them deserted. They are not all like that, but in their majority they summon the image of desert hermits, people living far from the bloody outrages of Fascism, from the predators’ preparations for war, that they live in some Thebaid and regard life distant from them through some kind of fog. It’s possible that this is the fog of the hermits’ consciousness of their wisdom, their majesty.”²⁵ Gorky’s emphasis on planning goes along with an irrepressible belief in action, posing *A Day of the World* as an activist intervention in political struggles, and

**“HISTORICAL
PEACE IS
INCOMPATIBLE
WITH IDEOLOGICAL
PURITY.”**



Screenshots from the movie *Lullaby* (Kolybel’naia) from 1937. The film celebrates the progress of women in the USSR.

undermining the notion of it as an imaginative space (if not a Thebaid) where alternative worlds – worlds of peace and equality – can be contemplated.

A Day of the World on film

After learning about Gorky and Kol’tsov’s *A Day of the World* from the newspapers, in the summer of 1936 Dziga Vertov decided to make a film version. He had already made one such film over ten years earlier, when he had travelled the entire Soviet Union to shoot the feature film *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), documenting the economic system in action as a kind of NEP-era advertisement for the state trading company. But the new film would be vastly different. In the intervening decade, Stalin’s Great Breakthrough (industrialization and collectivization) had completely changed the face of the USSR, especially its economic organization. Advertising was no longer a major mode of artistic production. Beginning in 1932, the arts had been comprehensively reorganized under the banner of socialist realism, requiring the development of new methods of representation that were hostile to the naked registration of fact, what Vertov had previously called “life caught unawares.” The emergence of sound cinema helped to stimulate this reorganization, which made it possible to imagine a truly popular socialist art. Vertov had debuted a new paradigm for his filmmaking – and for sound documentary filmmaking in general – in *Three Songs about Lenin* (Tri pesni o Lenine, 1934), which he classified as a poetic documentary and described as a form of folklore.

Even more than the book *A Day of the World*, Vertov’s eponymous film was to be based on a stark opposition between the two worlds, East and West, and to project an entire media system in opposition to the capitalist one. It was in fact to be two films – one about the USSR, shot by Vertov himself, and another about the capitalist world (that is, the remaining five-sixths of the world) based on footage from Western film archives. In his proposal, Vertov spends far less time on his methods of shooting new material in the USSR than on the importance of his personal participation in the “artful” selection and arrangement of the found footage abroad. This editing – “no less tense than filming” – needed to “provide the possibility of bringing shots made

by capitalist firms into a combination that would be directed against capitalism” (what later would come to be known as *dé-tournement*), and also to “select those precise shots which in the artist-author’s foresight will form an image-based artistic work, together with Soviet material.”²⁶

As in *Three Songs about Lenin*, but unlike Kol’tsov’s book, in his film project *A Day of the World* Vertov proposes to focus on the experiences of women under both systems. This film eventually became *Lullaby* (Kolybel’naia), released only in late 1937 to a very limited audience. *Lullaby* was a film celebrating the progress of women in the USSR and the promise this advancement brought to the new generation that they were raising; a film that attributes this progress to Stalin at the moment he was subjecting the Soviet population to mass arrests and executions; and yet a film that also allows a young female parachutist to speak unscripted in an unbroken, two-minute take with synchronous sound recording.²⁷ Nowhere does one feel so strongly the tension in socialist realism between the real and the imagined, the contingent and the planned, the synchronous and the obsolete.

A Day of the World redux

Twenty-five years after Maxim Gorky initiated *A Day of the World*, the editor Aleksei Adzhubei produced another vast encyclopedia of Soviet civilization at another moment of its international expansion, at least as it was seen through official eyes (in addition to editing the newspaper *Izvestiia*, Adzhubei was Nikita Khrushchev’s son-in-law): *A Day of the World: The Events of Tuesday, September 27, 1960*.²⁸ One of the lasting legacies of this project is that it stimulated East German writer Christa Wolf to begin making annual notations of her everyday life on or around every September 27, a practice she continued until her death in 2011, resulting in a fantastically spontaneous and nuanced series of snapshots of history-in-the-making.²⁹

On the first September 27 – a Tuesday in 1960 – Wolf deals with her four-year-old daughter’s sore foot, argues with her husband about Lenin’s polemic with Gorky (“Are we free [...] to have arbitrary experiences that are perhaps socially desirable, but for which our origins and personal nature make us unsuited?”³⁰), researches her novel-in-progress at the Party committee of a

local factory (Lenin again was at issue), and retires to bed in frustration at the futility of writing. (She does not mention that she was, at the time, working as an informer for the Stasi, and one wonders what else went unsaid, perhaps even unthought.) On the final September 27, 2011, she observes from her hospital bed the nurses around her and the recent elections to the city parliament of a long-reunited Berlin.

In between these extreme states of empowerment and helplessness (she calls it “Kinderstatus”) lies September 27, 1989, a day when one world was ending and another seemed possible, when amid flows of refugees across newly opened borders the very dialectic of history jutted into view. The Wolfs spend the day with guests from the West. They imagine “a polity that would not proceed from an abstract rational idea, nor from general principles, and simply lead back to a bureaucracy again, but a state that establishes a working relationship between the individuals on the basis of concepts and situations, one that does not subordinate itself to any overriding principle – be it called world reason or progress – but to the well-understood needs of the individual.”³¹ What they imagine – what at this moment again failed to come to pass and what remains barely discernable through the world’s rifts and wounds – is everyday socialism.

Conclusion

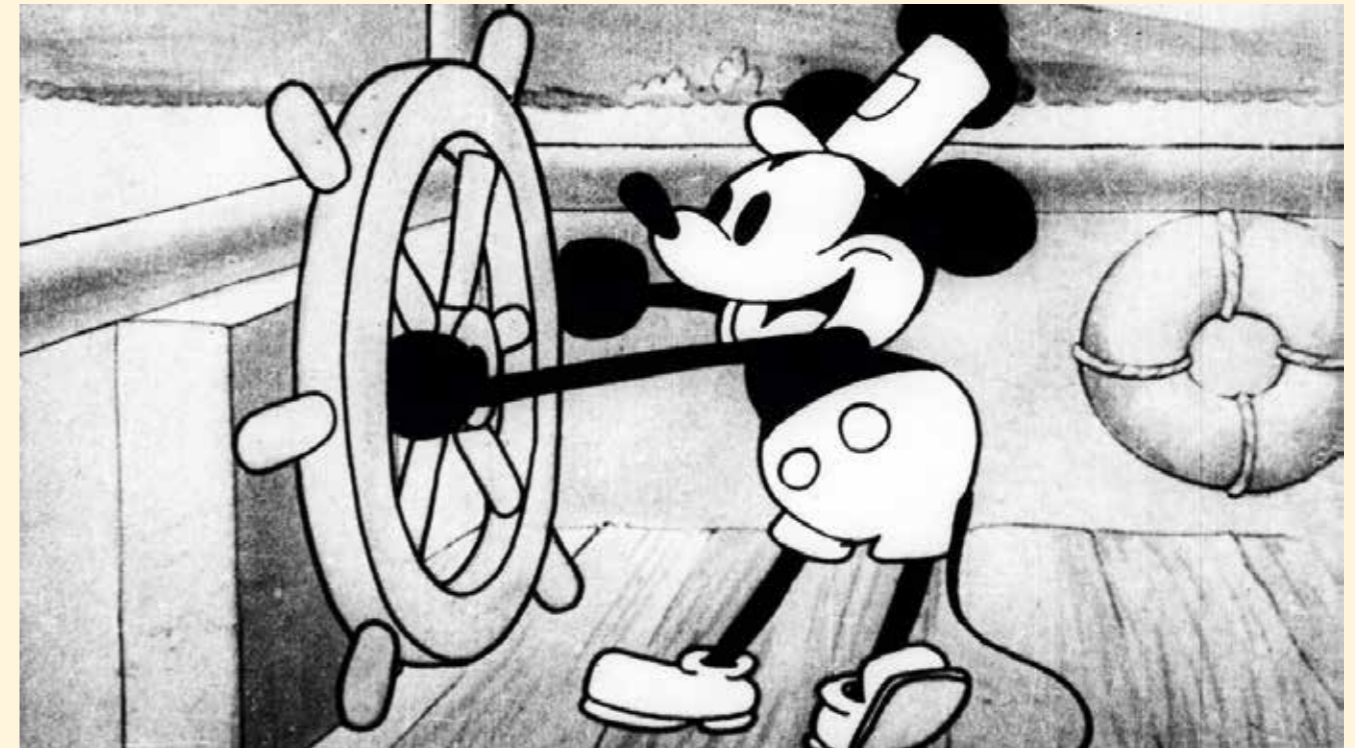
Conceived as a snapshot of socialism in its global becoming, *The Day of the World* inadvertently framed the impossibility of ever representing socialism as a fixed reality. Like the landscape outside one’s train window, socialism is always emerging and disappearing from view. For Gorky and other establishment writers, socialism was about planning and activity. It was about publicity and standardized, instrumentalized time. But their desire for realism opened the door to contingency and negativity, for descriptions of the imaginative spaces where socialism might be felt as desire and contemplated as a possibility, as an intimate landscape through which the human observer moves, rather than a world-historical project taking root in human hosts. It is this aspect of the book – the contingency celebrated by Mikhail Kol’tsov and W. E. B. Du Bois, and the intimate self-examination of Mikhail Prishvin and Christa Wolf – that makes it not only a historical curiosity, but also an event still addressed to our future. ✕

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Mickey Mouse – the perfect tenant of an early Soviet city

by Irina Seits

abstract

The article provides a closer reading of Walter Benjamin’s essays *Experience and Poverty* and *Moscow*, by juxtaposing the records of his visit to Russia in 1926–1927 with the author’s reflections on the nature of the transformations in the urban space of an early Soviet city. By using the dystopian image of Mickey Mouse as the desired inhabitant of modernity introduced by Benjamin in *Experience and Poverty*, Seits gives the allegorical and comparative interpretation to the substantial changes in the living space of Moscow that were witnessed by Walter Benjamin.

KEY WORDS: Russian Revolution, Walter Benjamin, Avant-garde, urban space, Russian constructivism, Moscow, Mickey Mouse.

Introduction. Dystopian image of the greatest babe of modernity

The first decade after the Bolshevik Revolution marked a huge transformation of the living space of the ruined Russian Empire. The revolution opened that space for re-appropriation, to put it in Lefebvre’s terms. It became a ground for experiments, a huge laboratory table, as it was called by Walter Benjamin¹ when he visited Moscow in the late 1920s, where major functionalist utopias were given a chance only to vanish in the bloody storm of the upcoming age of Stalinism. The 1920s became the period when most of the illusions born and cherished in the

past hundred years of faith in technological progress were lost. Avant-garde architecture declared itself the main apologist for technological progress and set high goals to form and frame the new society, to raise new men and to shape the future. Many world-renowned architects, writers, and thinkers came to the young Soviet Russia to explore the huge construction site on which the socialist dream was being built. They brought their illusions, only to bury them in the land where the Revolution had won, but the future was already lost.

Walter Benjamin was one of those who visited Moscow in that unique age when faith in revolution was still alive among those who perceived it from beyond the borders where it held power. For nearly two years, Benjamin himself contemplated joining the German Communist Party. Yet as G. Scholem noted in his preface to *Moscow Diary*, “the pros and cons of the matter would eventually lead him to decide against it”.² Upon his arrival in Moscow, Benjamin discovered that the revolution was already lost; the moment of commitment to it had already passed and been replaced with the struggle or “digging” for power “from morning till late”.³ However, his disappointment was not the decisive factor that made him retreat from his earlier political projects. As Bernd Witte wrote in his biography of Benjamin, the step of joining the Communist Party “would ultimately have been as contradictory to his fundamental decision in favor of existential independence and spiritual responsibility as the professional function. The announcement of his political projects can thus be read only as an expression of Benjamin’s deep personal despair”.⁴

The diary that Benjamin kept while in Moscow in the fall and winter of 1926–27 became the basis for his essay *Moscow*⁵ that included the extracts devoted to his impressions of the city as a spatial and urban phenomenon. Benjamin’s living experience in the center of Soviet power became a magnifying glass through which the future of modernity could be observed.

A few years later, in 1932, he wrote a famous essay, *Experience and Poverty*⁶, where modernity and its architectural space receive a profound critique and analysis through the concept of the new barbarism and the impoverishment of experience. A small episode in that text is given to the allegory of a new Disney character – Mickey Mouse, the very popular and successful child of modernity and the greatest barbarian of the time, “born” in 1928. Though only a few lines are given to Mickey Mouse in Benjamin’s texts, they deliberately outline the image of the successful inhabitant of modernity. The desire for liberation from experience and tiredness are the hallmarks of modernity, and in the sleep that comes as a remedy for tiredness the dream image of the Mickey Mouse is born:

“Tiredness is followed by sleep, and then it is not uncommon for a dream to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day – a dream that shows us in

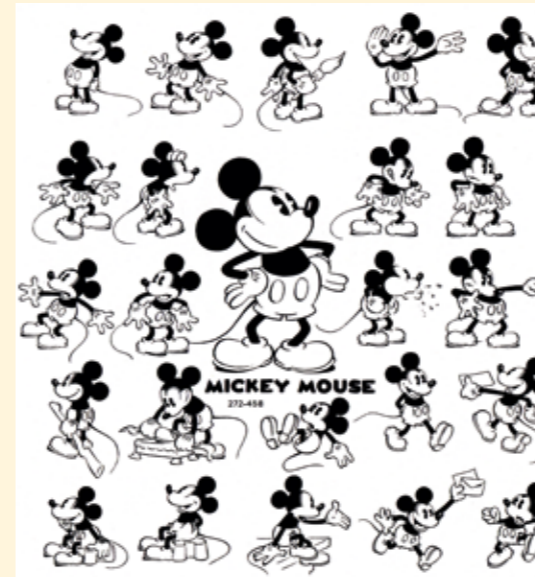
its realized form the simple but magnificent existence for which the energy is lacking in reality. The existence of Mickey Mouse is such a dream for contemporary man. His life is full of miracles – miracles that not only surpass the wonders of technology but make fun of them. For the most extraordinary thing about them is that they all appear, quite without any machinery, to have been improvised out of the body of Mickey Mouse, out of his supporters and persecutors, and out of the most ordinary pieces of furniture, as well as from trees, clouds and the sea. Nature and technology, primitiveness and comfort, have completely merged. And to people who have grown weary of the endless complications of everyday living and to whom the purpose of existence seems to have been reduced to the most distanced vanishing point on an endless horizon, it must come as a tremendous relief to find a way of life in which a car is no heavier than a straw hat and the fruit on the tree becomes round as quickly as a hot-air balloon. And now we need to step back and keep our distance”.⁷

WHEN IT COMES to analyzing how living space in Soviet Russia was transformed in the first post-revolutionary decades, the image of Mickey Mouse, seen through the dystopian perspective as a “dehumanized” and hyper-realistic character, may serve as an allegory that reveals the nature of those transformations imposed upon the inhabitants of the new Soviet reality.

Due to the format and size of the present article, I cannot introduce deep analyses of the historiography of Soviet modernity in order to approach the discussion via the legitimacy of strict divisions between Soviet, Western and/or American modernities in any comprehensible way. I can only note that I see the Soviet experiment as one of the inevitable manifestations of modernity. In this essay I take the visual image of Mickey Mouse that is widely known throughout the 20th century as an allegorical and metaphorical reconstruction of what the inhabitants of the early Soviet space went through under those radical transformations that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Without going into the genealogy and history of Mickey Mouse’s existence in the world of cartoons, I refer to the reflections on his image in Benjamin’s *Experience and Poverty* quoted above as well as to the short fragment *Mickey Mouse* from Benjamin’s talk with Gustav Glück and Kurt Weill that follows below:

“Property relations in Mickey Mouse cartoons: here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one one’s arm, even one’s own body stolen. The route taken by Mickey Mouse is more like that of a file in an office than that of a marathon runner.

“MICKEY MOUSE PROVES THAT A CREATURE CAN STILL SURVIVE EVEN WHEN IT HAS THROWN OFF ALL RESEMBLANCE TO A HUMAN BEING.”



Mickey Mouse model sheet by Al Taliaferro, 1930s.



Color schemes for the new residential block (*Zhilmassive*) in Leningrad, 1927.

In these films, mankind makes preparations to survive civilization.

Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind.

These films disavow experience more radically than ever before. In such a world, it is not worthwhile to have experiences.

Similarity to fairy tales. Not since fairy tales have the most vital events been evoked more unsymbolically and more unatmospherially. There is an immeasurable gulf between them and Maeterlinck or Mary Wigman. All Mickey Mouse films are founded on the motif of leaving home in order to learn what fear is. So the explanation of the huge popularity of these films is not mechanization, nor their form; nor is it a misunderstanding. It is simply the fact that the public recognizes its own life in them.”⁸

I TAKE MICKEY MOUSE’S image to reflect on the nature and genesis of reformations and re-appropriations of living space that were taking place in Russia in order to reflect not only on Russian history at the time, but on the destiny of modernity per se. Observing the realities of life in Moscow, Benjamin refers to the “new optics as the most undoubted gain from a stay in Russia”.⁹ European modernity becomes more visible and comprehensible after experiencing the Russian capital: “More quickly than Moscow itself, one learns to see Berlin through Moscow.”¹⁰

In this essay, I explain my own speculation on the image of Mickey Mouse taken as an allegorical object through which the collective image of the early Soviet citizen who was experiencing a radical transformation of her living space in all aspects and on all levels is reconstructed. There is no reference to Mickey Mouse in Benjamin’s texts related to his stay in the Soviet Union;

likewise, there was never a reference to Russia in Mickey’s episodes until very recently.¹¹

The crisis of the communicability of experience, one of the features of modernity that Benjamin criticized, was intensified in Soviet Russia to the level of exhaustion through the Revolution and all those transformations that followed and made Russia divorce itself from its past and the future it would otherwise have faced. The immediacy of the ever-changing present, the continuity of the transformations and mobilization of all the potential derived from the barbaric power of the newly established state, could be paralleled with the animated milieu of the Mickey Mouse character that undergoes a dehumanizing process from episode to episode. The endless reformations of social, political, cultural and technological orders and norms in early Soviet Russia required superhuman skills of adjustability from the citizens of the new country. And in this sense, Benjamin’s proposal that in the Mickey Mouse films “mankind makes preparations to survive civilization”,¹² the episodes of Mickey’s adventures that demonstrate the endless abilities of his body to deal with reality could be suggested as the manual to survive the Revolution.

Mickey Mouse was the allegory of a real animal, the perfect functional model of the living creature placed in a world that was drawn by a brilliant Hollywood dreamer and aired in movie theaters and on TV screens around the world. Stalin personally welcomed Mickey to be widely broadcast in the Soviet Union after watching the “Band Concert” episode of 1935 with Mickey as a conductor. The image of the Mouse also inspired Stalin to issue a decree that became the foundation for *Soyuzdetmultfilm*, the state animated studio that was renamed *Soyuzmultfilm* in 1937 and was known to all generations of Soviet kids. In the long run, Mickey Mouse’s dream world, his living space, had consequences that were far less catastrophic but similarly powerful to those that the inhabitants of new world built by the dreamer in the Kremlin had to deal with for over 70 years.¹³ The most disastrous features of modernity were concentrated in the USSR, while the personage that could have survived them with no loss to his per-



Narkomfin building (Architects: M. Ginzburg, I. Miljutin) in the 1930s.



Building in Zamoskvorechye district, Moscow.

sonality was designed and animated across the ocean.

In this article, the habitat of Soviet modernity is compared to the animated habitat of Mickey's living space, which is the space of modernity, through the critique given by Benjamin in the texts mentioned above. The inhabitant of modernity is inevitably subject to a dehumanization process because the divorce from experience and dehumanization are necessary conditions to "survive civilization": "Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind".¹⁴

Dehumanization of living space in the post-revolutionary decade in Russia was achieved through the constructivists' architectural experiments with new forms of spatial organization and production of new forms of living space. The very first step taken by constructivists was to eliminate the division of living space into private and public sectors. The deformation of the conventional forms of living space and abolition of any reference to privacy – from the state policy of nationalizing all private property from factories to homes to the negation of anything private in everyday living – intended not only to alter property relations in the young communist state, but to change the very nature of its citizens who were forced to transform from traditional farmers and workers into men of the future.

One of the first steps taken by the constructivists was the distribution of private living practices between the newly developed types of public spaces, as realized in the avant-garde concept of *zhilmassivs* – housing estates that provided tenants with all necessary infrastructure and conditions for living within the immediate vicinity of their major employment site, e.g. a factory. For each intimate living practice that was traditionally realized in private homes, such as meals or bathing procedures, a special new type of building was developed – a factory kitchen and a collective *banya* (bathhouse) respectively. The difference between those new spaces and traditional Russian canteens or *banyas* was that the new building types were designed not to give an alternative to private meals or bathing at home, but to

substitute and replace completely those spaces in conventional homes that were traditionally given to the kitchens and bathrooms. The spaces of kitchens, dining rooms, bathrooms and *banyas* were transferred from private homes to the public sector with the aim of rationalizing the living practices of the new Soviet state citizens, liberating them from the need to provide themselves with daily meals and hygienic care of their bodies. Thus control over the most intimate spheres of life was taken away from the people and given over to the outer infrastructure designed by the constructivists and operated by the state. In the most radical versions of the living quarters, *dom-kommunas* (communal houses) and *obschezhities* (collective houses), even the act of sleeping was turned into a collective practice as many people unrelated by family were allocated to the same sleeping space. Otherwise, the act of sleeping could preserve its intimate character, but private living space was limited to little more than a bed and a nail on the wall.

The idea behind the displacement of intimate living practices from private houses to publicly operated institutions was to ease everyday routines and liberate, first of all, women from the need to run the household. War on the dirty kitchen was declared to enable women to explore their talents and social potential; it was a step towards the formation of a new human free of the ties to her kitchen and open to comprehension of the most progressive ideas that modernity had to offer. Yet the state's aim in enacting those reforms was not only to take care of everyday routines; collectivization of private space was propagated as one of the major means of social and political control over citizens.

Benjamin predicts and explains the destiny of functionalism through analyses of modernity, whose inhabitants had to sever themselves from their previous experiences in order to survive. In the Soviet case, living under constant surveillance was completely different from living under the control of a traditional large family and community, requiring destruction of the notion of the traditional family, home, community and, on a larger scale, of the whole organization of a village or a town. The inhabitants of the new living space had to change not only the way

their everyday living practices were organized, but to break with all their previous traditions and experiences of living that they inherited from their ancestors. They had to be reborn into the newly produced living space.

Huge efforts were made by the new regime to return conquered imperial land to the state of natural space, speaking in Lefebvre's terms, and to prepare it for the new appropriation.¹⁵ The old urban habitat was cleaned and purified from references to the defeated era by various means, such as the demolition of imperial monuments, the nationalization of private property and the destruction and reformation of pre-revolutionary infrastructure – from factories and communications to public cultural and educational institutions. The 1920s were the period of the re-appropriation of space. Once the land was "natural" again, the new barbarians of modernity that headed the state started developing "absolutisation" that led in a different direction from what was proposed by the constructivists. Liberating the living practices of the new state's inhabitants from the exhausting routines of the past as proposed by the constructivists was replaced with the establishment of total control and surveillance over their lives by the state. Even though the new government and the avant-garde ideologists had started together from the liberating potential of the Revolution in the name of progress, the state had already dismissed the avant-garde by the mid-1930s.

Mickey Mouse and the Soviet people

The dehumanization and humiliation of living space in Soviet Russia turned citizens into dwellers whose daily task was to survive through constant adjustment to the changing conditions initiated by the processes of nationalization of private property and the program of *uplotneniye* (tightening)¹⁶ that made forms of collective living in communal apartments and revived barracks the most typical in the Soviet State up to the 1960s. People were deprived of their former homes, relocated and moved through the programs of collectivization and industrialization. They had to part with their families when sent to work at a plant at the other end of the country and to learn new professions. The Mickey Mouse films in which the public "recognizes its own life"¹⁷ draw simplified pictures of reality where the future is deprived of any predictability and is subject to constant reformation. Mickey Mouse's most attractive feature is his body's ability to transform constantly in order to overcome the fearful challenges that he faces from episode to episode. The prewar decades in the early Soviet state could have been the cradle prepared for the birth of Mickey Mouse – the greatest barbarian of modernity. The allegory of Mickey Mouse suggested by Benjamin is relevant not only to the description of the space of modernity, but to Soviet living space and to the collective portrait of its inhabitants as well.

“SOVIET INHABITANTS DID NOT POSSESS THEIR LIVING SPACE; THEIR OWN BODIES AND LIVES WERE AS EASILY SUBSTITUTED BY THE STATE AS MICKEY MOUSE’S JOINTS COULD BE REPLACED BY HIS DESIGNERS.”

The world of Mickey Mouse is an everchanging world where anything can happen at any moment while his body is adjustable to any circumstances. Mickey's body does not belong to him, he is not born with it – it is drawn by the artists who let his joints adjust and respond to the changes in the absurdist reality. Reality in turn is constantly changing, while the very existence of Mickey Mouse is limited and framed by each episode – he does not live his life, he performs his living only here and now when an episode is being aired. His existence is fully controlled by his creators; it is not his possession, and though Mickey identifies himself with his body, he knows that any of its parts can be taken away and replaced. That suggests the very new "property relations in Mickey cartoons" – Benjamin notes – "here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one's own arm, even one's own body, stolen".¹⁸ The displacement and replacement in this case is reduced to the migration of organs and joints within the space of one's own body.

Mickey Mouse does not possess anything. The living environment that surrounds him, the landscape, the buildings and his friends are under the control of his creators. The deprivation continues even further; Mickey is deprived of control of his own body as its parts can be easily stolen. In Soviet Russia it was the state that took control over the living environment of its residents, and later, through the system of repressions, over the displacement of their bodies and lives. In the case of Mickey Mouse, the deprivation of control and ownership over his own body is compensated with immortality that is assured by the ability to replace any stolen joint with immediate growth of a new one. Any wound that looks

incompatible with life heals immediately leaving no scar. Such immortality and adjustability were often necessary to survive in the interwar Soviet state, and since most people lacked them, many failed to make it through that episode of history.

Mickey Mouse's body is not subject to aging because it is disconnected from time and is entirely restricted to the contemporaneity of his performance. Time and experience do not leave traces on his body; Mickey does not have to learn from experience and does

not need to collect it because he receives new tools for dealing with circumstances as immediate gifts from his designers, fully dependent on their imagination. He is a unit, a vessel for endless speculations on his own existence. His body is an experimental material for the production of miracles that fill his life: "miracles that not only surpass the wonders of technology, but make fun of them".¹⁹ The Soviet population had become the body for improvisations by the state. While staying in Moscow, Benjamin notices that "each thought, each day, each life lies here as on a laboratory table".²⁰ If in *Experience and Poverty* Benjamin suggests the image of the all-mighty Mickey as a dream solution for the "endless complications of everyday living"²¹ that could bring

comfort to the life of exhausted inhabitants, then in the dystopian case of Soviet reality, Mickey's superhuman abilities were the means of, and conditions for, survival.

Soviet inhabitants did not possess their living space; their own bodies and lives were as easily substituted by the state as Mickey Mouse's joints could be replaced by his designers. The image of Mickey Mouse could be allegorized as a collective image of the Soviet population, where each stolen joint consisted of numerous lives of individual humans. When those humans are assembled to that collective image through the dehumanization of their own existence, they lose their human-like face and become the creatures of no particular species. They become the cogs in the state machine.

Mickey does not look like a real mouse. He possesses some likeness to that animal, but all parts of his body are stylized and simplified to such a degree that they form a creature that cannot be immediately and definitely identified with a mouse. One of the best known "portraits" in the cartoon industry is the shadowed image of Mickey, which is simply the three black circles – the most rationalized formula of the twentieth century's most functional personage.

The new barbarism of the old Moscow for Mickey's home

In the latest version of the educational series *The Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, on air since May 2006, Mickey and his company help little TV watchers solve simple tasks with the assistance of so-called "Mousestruments". Each time the show begins, Mickey's whole living space grows from scratch. Mickey appears on the road coming from nowhere and points to an open empty green lawn with trees, which, if we apply Lefebvre's theory again, serves as the natural space. Mickey encourages kids to say the words of a magic spell to make the club appear. This way the immediate appropriation of the natural space begins, and all elements of the club rise from the ground. As mentioned before, Mickey's story does not have a beginning and end. Even though his appearance changes, Mickey does not mature or develop in any way throughout his 80-year existence. He gets no family or kids, establishes no sustainable home, and we know nothing either of the times when he lives, or of his native city. We can assume that his homeland is the United States and his mother tongue is English, but at the same time this does not have any influence on his personality, which is deprived of any visualization of a specific national identity, e.g. through his living environment, clothing, etc. It is obvious that Mickey is a child of the Western world, but he loses even the English language – the only definite feature of his identity – when the episodes are translated to other languages. He talks to children all over the world in their mother tongues. Thus any episode from the late 1920s up to the most recent ones can be used as an allegorical fragment applicable to any episode

of the past and present centuries. The image of Mickey Mouse can be re-interpreted without necessary reference to the particular time when an episode was produced, which according to Jaeho Kang, author of *Walter Benjamin and the Media* (2014),²² "coincides with Benjamin's particular understanding of history as a fragmented image. It illuminates the theoretical ground of fragmentary individuality, existing as a work of art free from the whole system of judgement."²³

It is remarkable that the construction elements of the club that function both as Mickey's house and his friends' playground represent his own disjointed body; the main body of the house is in the shape of Mickey's famous red pants, and his head with the round ears appears as an upper section and a roof. The entrance to the house is arranged through one of his feet, while another is placed to one side and serves as a guest house or a shed. His white-gloved hand stands separately, serving as a station for the hot-air balloon. All these parts are assembled around the lawn and appear together with inhabitants: Goofy, Minnie, Donald Duck, etc. At the end of each episode, Mickey says "Goodbye" to the kids and all elements of his living space disappear together with him and his buddies, leaving no trace of their presence. In the next episode, it all starts again from scratch. The episodes are not connected with each other and can be played in any order, since the cartoon characters do not improve their skills and do not learn from previous experience. Every time they divorce themselves from their past; when the club disappears to nowhere, they disappear together with it. Each time a new episode begins, they are pure barbarians again.

In *Experience and Poverty* Benjamin refers to the houses where Scheerbart's people live:²⁴ those "movable glass-covered dwellings of the kind since built by Loos and Le Corbusier".²⁵ Those machines for living possessed "the greatest value" for Scheerbart and practicing architects of the time. Their greatest value was that they gave the inhabitants no chance to leave traces of their presence. The movable glass houses and their Mickey Mouse tenants were

equal to each other. They did not influence each other, leaving no marks on each other's bodies. They could disappear together all at once, and nothing would change. Every time the new reality was built up, it was to be immediately appropriated for the new movable dwellings. As the people and buildings moved on, they both disappeared from the former place of dislocation, leaving no traces of their existence. Being rootless, and bringing no memories along, they could easily be replaced. The living space, the architecture that filled it, and its inhabitants became interchangeable; humans could be replaced with numbers and records, as later happened in Stalin's GULAG.

That barbarian willingness to start from scratch, to come from the point of nowhere, was intensified by the constructivists in their experiments with early Soviet Russian space. The revolution sought to clean the space of Soviet cities from the traces of



The Mickey Mouse Clubhouse.

the past, to leave empty ground for the new space that was to be constructed. The inhabitant required by the new reality was the "naked man of the contemporary world who lies screaming like a newborn babe in the dirty diapers of the present".²⁶ A man should return to the very beginning of his existence – to the state of a newborn babe, just as the architecture should return to the null of its form. The return to basics permitted the normalization and naturalization of the new reality and ideology. When young children, who are still barbaric and poor in lived experience, watch Mickey losing his arm and getting another right away, they take it as a norm, they see no contradiction to reality due to their lack of knowledge and experience of possible consequences. They perceive what they see from a standpoint where everything is possible, and the poverty of their experience normalizes whatever they see. Every object is equal to itself, to its meaning and shape, and any way it acts and functions is acceptable.

In his cartoon life, Mickey Mouse hardly ever judges anybody. He is not a moralizing character and neither is his audience. He does not try to improve reality, he only adjusts to it. He is as much the hallmark and role model of the contemporary age as of the interwar period, which was described by Benjamin as possessing "a total absence of illusion" about itself "and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it".²⁷

When Benjamin stayed in Moscow, he found it full of barbaric sense. One feature of the new barbarism was the fullness of the Moscow streets that he compared to the "princely solitude, princely desolation" that "hang over the streets of Berlin".²⁸ After Moscow, Berlin is a deserted city.²⁹ Barbarians, just like children, are hostile to solitude; they fear it. The old, experienced and noble need solitude, while the young, strong and inexperienced are looking for abundance and fullness of living.

Benjamin sees that "in Moscow goods burst everywhere from the houses"³⁰; they are sold in the streets, carried along, lie in the snow. At the beginning, Russian constructivists supported and praised that fullness. The streets were decorated with propagandist posters that covered the ads of the defeated Empire; the façades of the churches were hidden behind huge portraits of Lenin and Stalin. The old was covered with the new, giving up the traces of its princely past to the barbaric abundance of the present.

As the snow covered the streets of Moscow, the burst of the new poverty covered the luxury of the disappearing city. Princesses passing along the streets in the fancy equipages were replaced with peasant women standing along the roads, selling toys and fruit. Sleighs had squeezed out coaches. The visible wealth of aristocracy was replaced with the business of poverty, cheap trade, and symbols of babbity sticking out of the windows.

Benjamin calls this Moscow that was revealing its new population's peasant origin a "gigantic village".³¹ He described the objects of childhood sold on the streets, such as toys and fruit, fascinated by the naïve colorfulness of the flea markets. The city was returning to its pre-urban "childhood state": "the instant you arrive, the childhood stage begins".³² One should learn to walk anew to proceed through the streets, to learn to see Moscow in order to comprehend its colors that "converge prismatically here, at the center of Russian power".³³ One has to come without the aim of deciding on the basis of facts because there is no basis in facts.³⁴ If he is not a child, which is equal to being a barbarian, he has to choose his standpoint in advance or he has to divorce himself from his previous experience and learn to live, walk, see, hear, and grasp anew.

The creation of communal space was neither the main goal of constructivist architecture, nor the final model of the ideal world; it was rather the transitional state of society that was fixed in the constructivists' works. The main question was the direction and final destination of that transition. It was clear for the constructivists that they had to move forward into the future, yet in practice that could be also a movement in the opposite direction.

In the section on Benjamin in Hilde Heynen's book *Architecture and Modernity*, she defines the main features of the new living space that replaced the "security and seclusion" of traditional homes as "openness and transparency".³⁵ Benjamin sees the dwelling space as reduced "for the living by hotel rooms, for the dead by crematoria".³⁶ The living space shrank compared to the bourgeois era, giving the inhabitants no possibility of leaving traces of their presence in their homes. Time and experience cannot be imprinted into the modernist living space made of glass. The impossibility of inscribing the fact of existence into modernist architecture and the avant-gardist striving to clear space of any randomness and any traces of time carries revolutionary potential for "public openness, transparency, and permeability as conditions of everyday life".³⁷

Mickey Mouse, the migrant

Other features of the new living space that affected all spheres of life were mobility and transition. Life itself lost the constancy of everyday routine because there was no "everyday" anymore; each day became a unique temporal unit filled with new unpredictable experiences. Benjamin recorded that "for each citizen of Moscow the days are full to the brim".³⁸ Dwellers were turned into migrants as their homes lost sustainability and were transformed into camps through continuous housing reforms. Living was replaced by camping. The temporariness of living conditions in rehabilitated barracks, newly-built *dom-kommunas* and



Mickey Mouse in "Dancevidaniya".

"*obschezhities*" (communal houses and dormitories), along with the tense feeling of waiting, forced people to adopt the unique abilities of Mickey Mouse's constitution that allowed for endless transformations of their bodies in order to adjust to the ever-changing reality.

After the revolution, hundreds of thousands of people were driven from villages to the cities to be turned to an army of micky mouses. Their bodies were the building material for the reformation and transformation of society. Individual human lives were reformed into masses, and the main powers that provided for their transformation into micky mouses were mobilization and mobility.

The experimental avant-garde space in Russia was to be inhabited necessarily with migrants. The majority of the new population of the towns where constructivists were realizing their projects were people who had been previously displaced from their original living spaces. They could have been brought from far away or migrated within the same region, city or even apartment, which became a communal flat through the program of *uplotnenie*, but either way they had already parted with their previous lives.

The new environment forced them to move constantly and in all dimensions. Living was montaged like cartoon episodes where homes and living activities disappeared at the end of an episode. For instance, a person was moved from a village to a town; his profession was changed from a farmer to a worker; his working space of a farmer's field was replaced with a plant; his living space of a hut was replaced with a room in a *kommunalka* (a communal apartment); his family was substituted with random neighbors. He realized that any break in the series of transformations of his life was temporary and that it could continue at any moment with anything from imprisonment to the career of a communist leader.³⁹

This mobility and mobilization were outlined by Benjamin during his stay in the young Soviet state as the major features of the post-revolutionary Moscow:

"The country is mobilized day and night, most of all, of course, the party. Indeed, what distinguishes the Bolshevik, the Russian Communist, from his Western com-

rade is this unconditional readiness for mobilization. The material basis of his existence is so slender that he is prepared, year in, year out, to decamp. He would not otherwise be a match of this life."⁴⁰

Constructivists captured and reinterpreted the temporariness and fragmentation of this new type of living. Most of the building types that they developed resembled the features of the period: mobility and transition. *Dom-kommuna*, *obschezhitie* – these housing types were based on the transitional character of a barracks. People were constantly moving in and out of these constructions, possessing a high level of mobilization and mobility that was noticed by Benjamin during his visit to Moscow.

The impoverishment of experience was achieved by the process of constant movement, the loss of traditional living space, connections and practices, the necessity of adapting and beginning anew "and with few resources"⁴¹ as well as by the will to adjust to a reality where everything was different – from a sleeping place to a job.

No experience is gained in constant moving; rather it is lost. A peasant, moved from the hut in his village to the third floor of the plant dormitory, permanently detached from the land, realized that his whole life experience of farming was useless in his new existence. The only skill that could be improved through transitional living was Mickey Mouse's ability to adjust and to survive under constantly changing circumstances by using the full potential of his body and brain. The new experiences gained by many people were so unique that even if their life stories were passed on to the next generation, they could not be sustainable and comprehensible enough to be guidelines for their descendants on how or how not to live. Benjamin begins his *Experience and Poverty* by declaring the end of storytelling and the devaluation of experience that resulted from the disastrous events of the first quarter of the century – World War I. Life experiences could not be "handed down in short forms to sons and grandsons, with the authority of age, in proverbs"⁴², as in previous ages. The absurdity, uniqueness and untranslatability of the mostly catastrophic life stories produced by the Soviet state secured the end of storytelling in Russia and helped to grow muted generations of Soviet people who knew nothing about their ancestors. What Benjamin claims in regard to the WWI generation is also valid for the revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations of interwar Russia:

"...experience has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world. Perhaps this is less remarkable than it appears. Wasn't it noticed at the time how many people returned from the front in silence? Not richer but poorer in communicable experience? And what poured out of the flood of war books ten years later was anything but the experience that passes from mouth to ear. No, there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly: strategic experience

has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers. A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its center, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body."⁴³

The reality through which that skill developed was so miraculously absurd that it could not be repeated in the same way. The generation of the 1920s and 1930s was experimental material on the laboratory table of the new state construction. It had divorced itself not only from its past, but also from its future. Unprecedented mobility was the only way to survive. Anyone who stayed still was swept right away by wind of history blowing into his face.

Migration is Mickey Mouse's lifestyle; he is ready to migrate and fit into any moment of history, which, according to Benjamin's concept, "contains everything, both the entire past and the virtual realization of the utopian final goal of history".⁴⁴ Considering the historical period referred to in this article, the relaxation and relief that could compensate for the loss of experience was hardly ever felt by the possessors of the new poverty.

The Disney Mickey Mouse is a more fortunate character, since unlike his Soviet and European prototypes, he lives through episodes with no fixed location that are aired outside particular politics, times and spaces, while the 1920s and 1930s in Soviet Russia remain one of the most dramatic and unfortunate periods of experimentation on humans in Europe.

Conclusion

In his *Moscow* essay, Benjamin outlined the major features of the new reality emerging from the destruction and reformation of the old city's urban space and of the construction of the new one, produced by the masters of avant-garde. Benjamin was not sensitive to the architectural experiments by constructivists during his stay; he did not see them. Though there were many construction sites and even more discussions and avant-garde project presentations in the mass media at the time when Benjamin lived in Moscow (in the fall and winter of 1926–27), they did not affect the visual body of the Soviet capital sufficiently to change its appearance significantly.

It was the time when the architectural avant-garde expressed itself much more vividly in theoretical studies that were widely published in various forms, from academic articles and monographs to reports in mass newspapers, project presentations and manifestos. Avant-garde aesthetics dominated the artistic sphere, and the principles of collectivism, functionalism and rationalism were declared to be key concepts that formed the foundation for reorganizing existing living space. Yet the façades Benjamin encountered in Moscow were far from those that constructivists were arguing for. Even though Benjamin was charmed by Moscow in winter, he left an essay where the very tactile picture of the city was deprived of the illusions of the age

that many of its inhabitants had been committed to indefinitely.

Avant-garde aesthetics were in the air, compatible with the state policies of post-revolutionary reforms. Their intensity was outlined by Benjamin as "experimentation to the point of exhaustion"⁴⁵ and could be comprehended in the term of the *remonte*: "This astonishing experimentation – it is here called *remonte* – affects not only Moscow, it is Russian. In this ruling passion, there is as much naïve desire for improvement as there is boundless curiosity and playfulness. Few things are shaping Russia more powerfully today".⁴⁶

The major features of the transformations that Benjamin witnessed: the radicalism of reforms, the abolition of privacy and the penetration of the collective into all spheres, the mobility and mobilization of all resources, the substitution of living by camping, the life filled with high expectations for the future that substituted reflection on the immediate present, the striving for power, the high mobility of the population, the enormous intensity of living and at the same time the childhood state of the society of the successful revolution – all those features combined into a magnifying glass through which the future of modernity could be grasped. Moscow's urban environment that Benjamin explored required enormous efforts and energy from its inhabitants in order to adjust to it and turn it into a comprehensible living space. Moscow's space that Benjamin explored was the space of modernity that revealed to the thinker one of its ends and that soon required its inhabitants to develop the features that Walt Disney gave to one of the most popular heroes of the 20th century just a year later.

The experimental living space produced by constructivists demanded from its inhabitants a radical divorce from experience and the past. The successful citizen was to be a naked man committed to nothing but the present, a man with no illusions, very poor at communicating his background and with few demands for existence. He was to be a micky mouse who could recognize nothing but the clouds in the sky over his head, who learned to rise again every time after he was betrayed and learned to see with eyes that never looked back.

The image of Mickey Mouse is used here as a metaphor for and allegory of the collective portrait of humans who were turned into the masses and underwent all possible challenges that modernity had to offer. The generations that reformed the state and were reformed by the state in interwar Soviet Russia had divorced their past and had hardly ever reached their future. They remained a fragment of the catastrophic history that still travels from episode to episode of Russia's contemporary history that once again divorced its past in 1991, and has not yet shaped its future.

Being a global nomad with no fixed home or origins, Mickey has traveled the world in all sorts of meanings. But it was only in 2015 that he "visited" Russia on his global Grand Tour in the cartoon series designed in traditional style. The episode is called *Mickey Mouse in "Dancevidaniya"*, which sounds like the name of a country or dance and at the same time like the Russian word for good-bye – *Do Svidaniya*. As always, Mickey arrived with his girlfriend Minnie from nowhere to visit the Bolshoy Theatre in

Moscow. It is unclear whether it is an old Imperial Moscow, a Soviet capital or a contemporary city. The wild folk dancing on the stage where only high Russian ballet is performed captures Minnie and Mickey in the world of which Mickey could be a perfect tenant, and which he had been avoiding for 87 years of his absurdist existence. ✕

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- 3 *Ibid.*, 36.
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- 7 *Ibid.*, 735.
- 8 Walter Benjamin, "Mickey Mouse", in *Selected Writings. Vol. 2 1927–1940* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 545.
- 9 Benjamin, W., "Moscow", 22.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Here I mean the episode *Mickey Mouse in the Dancedaniya* that was introduced in February 2015, which I will discuss further in this article.
- 12 Benjamin, W., "Mickey Mouse", 545.
- 13 H. Wells called Lenin a "dreamer in the Kremlin" after his meeting with the Communist leader in Moscow in 1920.
- 14 Benjamin, W., "Mickey Mouse", 545.
- 15 Here I apply Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space and "spatialisation". His concept greatly influenced modern urban theory and drew attention from the space itself to the social mechanisms and relations that participate in its production and formation, as well as in the perception (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) of the city. "Natural" space in this case is the initial space that the new state inherited from the Russian Empire, and can be compared to the space of nature that explorers enter when discovering a new land and beginning its development. Since the new state broke any ties to previous eras, it began the process of re-appropriating that space by destroying the sites of immediate reference to the space that it had divorced itself from in order to make that space "appropriate" for the construction of the new state and implementation of the new ideology. The Bolshevik state commissioned the production of a living environment that could raise newly formed citizens and fit them into the ideological communist political and social framework. Thus Russian architects of the first decade after the Revolution could not simply remain artists and constructors but were involved in the process of producing the new "appropriate space", as Lefebvre names it (Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 59), which was required by Soviet ideology and without which the ideas of social reformation "completely lose their meaning" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 59). After the process of appropriation was over and the social production of the new state, the space was complete, the space became

"absolute", meaning that it could fully resemble the state and translate its ideology through its spatial organization and architecture.

- 16 The program that was started in 1918 with the goal of providing the population with housing under the initial rule "1 room – 1 adult". Later, a minimum of 9 m² for an adult was established. The program was realized by confiscating the excess rooms and square meters from the previous owners and transferring them to the new tenants, mostly workers, resulting in the mass formation of communal apartments.
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- 37 Heynen, H. *Architecture and Modernity*, 119.
- 38 Benjamin, W., "Moscow", 31.
- 39 In the Moscow essay Benjamin wonders: "Where else is it conceivable that a distinguished military leader could one day be made a director of a great state theater?" – referring to a story of a general appointed to the position of director of the Theater of Revolution, as the Moscow Academic Theater named after Vladimir Mayakovski, the former theater of Meyerhold, was then called (Benjamin, 1999: 29).
- 40 Benjamin, W., "Moscow", 29.
- 41 Benjamin, W., "Experience and Poverty", 735.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 731.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 732.
- 44 Citation in Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 101.
- 45 Benjamin, W., "Moscow", 28.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 29.



The inverted myth

Viktor Pelevin's *Buddha's little finger* by Tora Lane

abstract

In his contribution to the volume *Russian Literature* since 1991 entitled "The Postmodernist Novel", Mark Lipovetsky makes the now rather widespread claim that the Russian postmodernist post-Soviet novel represents a break with the totalizing tendencies of the socialist realist novel and opens for new ways of experiencing and conceptualizing the world. In this paper I critically examine this claim on the basis of a reading of Viktor Pelevin's *Chapaev i Pustota* (transl. as *Buddha's Little Finger* or *Clay Machine Gun*) against the backdrop of contemporary debates about realism and simulacra. The basic narrative of the novel is set in the civil war in post-revolutionary Russia and told through the first person perspective of Petr Pustota. Yet, by adding words, concepts from a post-Soviet era and postmodernist narrative style, Pelevin allegedly undermines the hegemony of the totalizing Soviet narrative. Although Pelevin is able to perforate the Soviet narrative, the question remains if he indeed really is able to open up for a non-totalizing narrative about Russian political history. On the contrary, the Soviet myth of Chapaev lends itself to the totality of the private myth.

KEYWORDS: postmodernism, Soviet myth, post-Soviet, Viktor Pelevin.

There is a structural similarity between Viktor Pelevin's 1996 *Buddha's Little Finger* [US title; UK title: *The Clay Machine-Gun*] and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.¹ In both novels, two stories run parallel, one contemporary to the respective writer and the other historical, separated by time and space, but meeting at certain points of intersection on the level of theme and imagery. In *The Master and Margarita*, the story of Moscow in the late 1920s is paralleled by the historical time of Christ, and in *Buddha's Little Finger* one story is set in the 1990s post-Soviet Moscow, and the other in the Soviet Russia of the early 1920s, or at least in the author's imaginative rendering of that time. In both novels, the parallel structure serves to form a contrastive dynamic that puts the question of reality, and in particular, Soviet reality into play in different ways. This question can be framed with the help of Bulgakov's novel, where we are presented with an early satiric image of how Soviet culture with its myths and demagogy of a realist dialectic materialism was at the same time negating a transcendental sphere and "de-realizing"² the reality that it aimed to form.³ In *Buddha's Little Finger* we meet instead an image of the afterlife and legacy of a myth of Soviet history, where the satirical imagined historical past is correlated by a shattered, mythologizing and insane

contemporary post-Soviet world. I will not further compare these two works, because this already has been done by other scholars.⁴ The question that I will pose in this article is what the contrastive dynamics of the two stories in *Buddha's Little Finger* tells us about the legacy of Soviet historical myth in contemporary Russian culture and literature. In relation to the notion that Soviet society de-realized the experience of that very society, it is often argued that it was an important task for post-Soviet culture to deal with its past by deconstructing those myths of reality.⁵ However, through the thoroughly ironic treatment of the Soviet historical myth and anecdotes about Chapaev and his co-commander Petka in the novel, here presented as Chapaev and Peter Voyd, Pelevin distorts the myth of Chapaev as historical reality by expanding and exaggerating the unreal aspects in a demonstrative refusal to oppose myths to reality. On the basis of Buddhist philosophy, proclaiming the world of imagination, and propounded in the novel by Chapaev as a sort of Buddhist master for Petka, Pelevin lets his hero come to the insight that he must overcome all distinctions between past and present, myth and reality, in order to attain himself as what he truly is – a void.⁶

Pelevin's treatment of the Soviet legacy in the novel is thoroughly ironic. It can be understood in terms of "inverted stëb",⁷ which Rosalind Marsh characterizes as a dominant literary style of the mid- and late 1990s.⁸ "Inverted stëb" as she writes: "involves an over-identification with ideological symbols subject to popular derision, such as Lenin, in such a way that it is impossible to tell if the symbols are being endorsed or ironically subverted."⁹ And indeed in *Buddha's Little Finger*, the figures of Chapaev and Petka, as heroic symbols from Soviet history, literature and film, and as comical figures from the anecdotes, are both endorsed and ironically subverted. The basic story of the novel is not unambiguous, but there is a strong case for arguing that it is about a man who calls himself Petr Pustota, translated as Petr Voyd, because *pustota* means void. He lives in contemporary Moscow, where he is held in a psychiatric clinic for believing that he is *Petr* or *Petka*, a commissar of the civil war and close friend of Vasilii Chapaev, the legendary red commander. While Pelevin treats the story of Chapaev and Pustota with ironic distance, interspersing it with incredible details in a way that recalls modern pulp fiction rather than socialist realism, he simultaneously turns the story into a post-modern personal historical myth about a Bolshevik and Buddhist intellectual super-hero.

If Marsh argues that "inverted stëb" is related to a nostalgic return to Soviet values, I will argue that what is at stake in Pelevin's treatment of the Soviet historical myth is not so much Soviet legacy *per se*, but rather the way that it is and can be appropriated in contemporary post-Soviet Russia. In no way is the reader instructed in Soviet values and led to believe that this is a myth of reality, and yet the myth is explored for its qualities to produce a contemporary post-modern historical ironic novel. The play with the symbols, myths and anecdotes expresses an

ambiguity vis-à-vis the distinction between the contemporary and historical worlds in the novel in terms of myth and reality. The writer engages in a rather typical post-modernist play with simulacra in order to resist realism's dictum that art must be a truthful representation of reality, which was seminal for socialist realism's claim to be a representation of revolutionary reality. In other words, he does not in any way endorse the truth claim of socialist realism. However, in his play with representation in the form of phantasmagoric imagination, Pelevin also discloses how the contemporary world, which ought to free the hero from perceiving the mythologizing bonds to reality as real, in fact immerses the characters in flows of myths, clichés and images. In the chapters that take place in 1990s Moscow, there

is an inherent opposition between on the one hand, the stern reality of science (the doctor and medicine), and on the other, insane phantasmagorical and private appropriations or consummations of cultural artifacts or simulacra. In other words, Pelevin seems to suggest that although the play with simulacra may offer some kind of cognitive escape from the Soviet myths or symbols in their claim to reality, the myths not only remain as such, but

they enter a different and no less problematic economy of distinctions between reality and representation in contemporary culture. Ultimately, the question raised is whether there is not a different totality to the world of simulacra because it can only be experienced as total immanence in the private imagination, when the distinction between myth and reality is sublated.

Simulacra and the void

The notion of simulacra has been defining for our understanding of post-Soviet literature and its relation to Soviet culture. Ironic, absurd, grotesque, critical or endorsing accounts of Soviet myths, symbols, historical narratives in a play with representation are undoubtedly characteristic of late socialist and post-soviet art. Mikhail Epstein argued that post-modernism offered but a "new developmental stage" of the simulacra mentality generated by socialist realism and that there even is a "simulative character" of Russian culture as such.¹⁰ By contrast, Mark Lipovetsky replied that the postmodern world differs in its more complex forms of cognition and narrating because it is aware of the simulative nature of culture as opposed to Soviet culture, where the notion of simulacra makes no sense.¹¹ His argument is precisely that in its play with the Soviet myths, post-Soviet literature opens itself to new ways of conceptualizing them because it opens itself to an understanding of the extent to which the Soviet myth was not reality, as it was purported to be. If Pelevin underlines the simulative character of the Soviet myth in a way that would endorse Epstein's argument, he nevertheless also seems to make a qualitative distinction between the Soviet myth and its continuation in contemporary society. The myth of Chapaev aimed to form an image of reality in Soviet culture, but in the post-modern world myths, symbols and pop-

ular images comprise a private phantasmagoric game. In other words, although Pelevin ironically approaches the Chapaev myth in the form of a play with reality as but empty representations or simulacra, one cannot say that he entirely endorses the idea that the culture of simulacra leads to new forms of cognition. The culture of simulacra appears as a problem. The target of his inverted irony is both the Soviet myth of Chapaev and the idea that Soviet culture has been overcome by a contemporary reality that is able to see through the simulative nature of Soviet historical reality.

The term simulacra is in itself not unambiguous. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the Soviet Union was foundering and the critique of Soviet culture was reaching its momentum, the term simulacra was à la mode. The redefinition of simulacra was at this point vested with the hope of the destruction of the metaphysical dualism of Western philosophy, of finally realizing the Nietzschean desire to "overthrow Plato".¹² If the word for simulacra in the Platonic dialogue, the Sophist, is related to the world of likeness in which we live as opposed to the world of ideas, Gilles Deleuze redefined simulacra as a destruction of the distinction between the idea and the semblance, the model and the copy, the real and unreal. He argued that the simulacrum is the good mode of destruction, the good nihilism and the good creative chaos that Nietzsche called for in *The Will to Power*.¹³ Simulacra became the object of cultural studies of both modern and postmodern American and Soviet Russian culture.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard was much more critical of the contemporary world, which he characterized by his descriptions of the disastrous consequences of a world of popular culture where simulacra substitute the real. He showed that although the culture of simulacra seems to deny the possibility of a representation of reality, it still has a truth claim, and he begins by quoting Ecclesiastes as follows: "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true".¹⁴ He shows that this truth claim also in the end implies an ontological claim to the real, and that simulacra inscribes itself as the more real in terms of the "hyperreal". Throughout the book, Baudrillard consistently follows the substitution of the real for the hyperreal, and the substitution of questions of mimesis in terms of imitation, representation and reflection for practices of substitution as such. He defines the culture of simulacra in the following:

"Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us – a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double strategy of deterrence."¹⁵

The culture of simulacra appears as a form of destruction, a nihilism that leads to the "desert of the real", where the real becomes an object of anxiety, consumption and production in an even more contingent relation between art and reality than in the case of realism. Simulacra is the place of the non-place, the

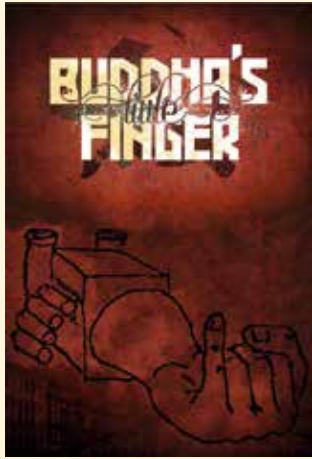
stage of the non-stage, the narrative of the non-narrative, the real of the non-real, as an object of strategies of deterrence. Nowhere can the real be found, and nowhere can it be avoided. It is everywhere in a "produced" form and therefore destructible; but there is also nothing but this production, no art and no aesthetic experience that is somehow other to the experience of produced reality. Further, there is no way that experience breaks in its projection of the world as myth and reality at the same time. And Baudrillard's doom is quite fateful in the final chapter entitled "Nihilism". He asserts that the world of simulacrum is the "circuit short-circuited by a monstrous finality".¹⁶

Although Deleuze and Baudrillard debated the notion of simulacra from different angles, both can nevertheless be situated in a discussion about the question of representation in popular culture, and in particular in virtual reality, where the real and the imaginary fuse. To begin with, Deleuze presents a certain apologia for popular culture in arguing that "the factitious", in other words, what is set on the real, "must be pushed to the point where it changes its nature and turns into a simulacrum (the moment of Pop Art)".¹⁷ Baudrillard, furthermore, as mentioned, is fundamentally critical of the consequences of popular culture while arguing for an understanding of the way that the simulacrum becomes a kind of fetishization of the real.¹⁸ These two standpoints are highly interesting in relation to Russian postmodernism as well as to Pelevin's attempt to understand the promises and failures of the post-Soviet world. On the one hand, post-Soviet culture offers itself as a break with a culture bound by a totalizing authoritative realist narrative based on a theory of truthful representation, and therefore as the beginning of a free "paralogical" play of phantasms.¹⁹ On the other hand, post-Soviet "reality" appears on the one hand as that world of medical science, and on the other, as merely a world of capitalist simulacra, an even more total and contingent "desert of the real", where the fetish "memory" of the Soviet past is but more virtually real and consumed as a private phantasy in the contemporary flux of empty signs, goods, desires, phantasms and fight for money. In his play with these phantasms, Pelevin in an ambiguous way uncovers how the world as simulacra only can work within a totality of simulation and myth, where the question of reality has been cancelled.

***Buddha's Little Finger:* a short description**

The writer himself asserts that he posed himself the task of reconciling the irreconcilable, which largely means fusing incompatible cultural stereotypes. His work with the Chapaev myth in *Buddha's Little Finger* is not to be read as deconstruction, but rather as a form of ironic reconstruction of the myth. The novel presents a form of contemporary adaptation of the myth for the post-Soviet popular literary scene, where the heroic qualities of the anecdotal heroes are spiced with narcotic hallucinations and instructive dialogues on Buddhist forms of sublation of the conflicts of the world. Through the irony of the novel, it would seem that the problem with the Soviet myth was not that it was a myth, but that it was a myth of reality, which always had the form of a

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Film poster from 2015. The author Viktor Pelevin.

narrative historical reality in accordance with official Soviet history. These myths were cumbersome, tiresome and static, and always told as a quasi-realistic story about the hero-people of the Soviet Union. Pelevin therefore departs from that myth in order to form an ironic contemporary popular representation of a historical super-hero story.

The main character of the novel is, as mentioned, called Pyotr Voyd in the English translation. Whether this Pyotr is something or just a void, filled and ridden by the flight of his phantasms, which in their turn are nurtured by narcotics, is ultimately difficult to say. As already mentioned, Pyotr Voyd is entirely convinced that he is a hero of the civil war, but the story he tells is utterly unrealistic and parodic. The reference to Chapaev owes as much to history, to Furmanov's novel or even to the 1934 film *Chapaev* by the Vasilev brothers, where the figure Petka appears, and to the endless jokes about Chapaev in Soviet culture,²⁰ but these references are at the most the skeleton on which the historical part is built. According to the Soviet myth, Pyotr and Chapaev are rather simple heroes of the people, and according to the anecdotes they are narrow-minded, but in the novel they are highly intellectual super-heroes who constantly engage in Buddhist and quasi-Buddhist nihilist disputes about the world, while feeding on alcohol and drugs. Pyotr is presented as a poet and representative of the literary avant-garde in St. Petersburg on the eve of the Revolution, and Chapaev a kind of natural genius and Buddhist master. We follow Pyotr's flight from Moscow to the provinces as he accompanies Chapaev in the civil war, but most of the significant events bear the mark of something unreal, since they either take place under the influence of narcotics, are told to him as forgotten due to an amnesia after a contusion, or bear the marks of surreal phantasms.

The world as reality and the distinctions between different myths and realities is constantly called into question in the philosophical discussions as well as in the narrative form. The play with reality as imagination is anchored in the first-person perspective, so that we constantly read the world as narrated through Petka's imagination. The movement between the worlds

is affected through certain "signs of the real", as Baudrillard defines simulacra. The torso of Aristotle in the clinic with which the fourth chapter ends appears in Chapaev's dream on awakening from unconsciousness after a battle, at the beginning of the fifth chapter. The fifth chapter ends with the cry: "Open the dynamo," and the sixth takes place close to the metro station Dynamo in contemporary Moscow. In a certain sense, the narrative of the historical myth is juxtaposed to the "reality" of the clinic and to the contemporary phantasms of some of the other patients interned at the hospital, where the main doctor Timur Timurovich attempts to cure them. Yet whereas Pyotr's phantasms present a relatively contingent pop version of Chapaev and Petka, the hallucinations of the other patients fuse reality with contemporary myths of super-heroes in American films and in Japanese culture. We therefore only really follow the process of recovery, or rather, the failed recovery of Pyotr. In the clinic, he is characterized as someone who refuses to acknowledge the new times, and therefore clings on to the old socialist realist narrative. According to the doctor, he belongs "to the very generation that was programmed for life in one socio-cultural paradigm, but has found itself living in a quite different one." (32) In other words, he seems to be a typical sovok, that is, a typical reminder of the Soviet period in the shape of someone who does not want to let go of the socialist past. However, as mentioned, as the novel proceeds, the refusal to let go of the mythical past begins to look like rather normal behavior. The other patients teach him that he must confess to, or at least pay lip service to, a belief in reality in order to get out of the hospital, although no one really does. The transgender patient Maria says:

"'No,' he said, peering through half-closed eyes at the bust of Aristotle, 'if you want to get out of here some time, you have to read the newspapers and experience real feelings while you're doing it. And not start doubting the reality of the world. Under Soviet power we were surrounded by illusions. But now the world has become real and knowable. Understand?'" (109)

None of the characters in the contemporary part of the novel, except perhaps for the doctor, experience "real feelings", and, as mentioned, the catharsis of the novel is based on the simultaneous recognition of the irreality of reality and of the reality of the unreal in terms of the total nothingness of the world as a void of and in imagination. What is more, Pelevin entertains an unresolved ambiguity in the way that the relation between Timur and Petka is portrayed. First, Timur wishes to cure Petka by an injection that will lead him to recognize himself in contemporary post-Soviet Russia, but the doctor eventually realizes the vanity of this attempt, and instead chooses to help the patient to intensify the experience of the past in order to reach a recognition of himself in the form of a psychological "catharsis". In the penultimate chapter, the doctor sends him back to the past, again with the help of drugs, and Pyotr indeed reaches this catharsis. He does so after a conversation with Chapaev, during which he realizes that "any form is a void" and that "the void is any form"

as an ecstatic and quasi-sublime fusion with the universe in the ironical form of the Ural river as the river of love at the end of the penultimate chapter. The mark of the success of this catharsis is that the two parallel story lines meet. Finally Timur is able to reach through Petka's dreams and appear to him in his imagination. In the conviction that he is cured by this catharsis, he sets him free, but when Pyotr leaves the hospital and enters the Moscow of the 1990s, he merely returns in his imagination to the beginning of the novel and repeats the same acts. The novel ends with the place and date "Kafka-Iurt, 1923–1925".

The fact that Pyotr preserves his belief is represented as an escape from the contemporary world, as a victory over Timur's limited idea of reality and as a mental illness. On the one hand, it seems that the writer seeks to instruct the reader into the same climax and insight as Petka, namely that there is no reality and therefore also no distinction between historical realities. On the other, the writer merely shows an ambiguity and a double feature of the "truth" of simulacra as a freedom in the void. Although Petka ascribes to himself a "peculiar flight of free thought" (103), he is caught in his own private phantasies.

Pustota, self and transcendence

Lipovetsky aptly characterized the novel as a "paradoxical *Bildungsroman*",²¹ which captures the greater part of the ambiguous structure of the novel, but I would like to expand further on the nature of this paradox because it is related to the problem of reality in the contemporary world. As mentioned, in the historical chapters, where Pyotr follows Chapaev to the Russian provinces in his fight in the civil war after having gone through Chapaev's lessons, and in his transcendent meeting with Baron Ungern, another figure on the borders between myth and reality, he reaches an insight into the world and the self, as well as into the self in the world, or into the world in the self, according to the scheme of *Bildungsroman*. In other words, the central catharsis and climax of the novel takes place in his phantasy of the 1920s and not in the alleged "reality" of the 1990s. This introduces an ambiguity to the catharsis and to the insight that he reaches. The issue at stake in the catharsis is related to the question of the reality of the self as established in the epigraph of the novel and the quote from Genghis Khan:

"Gazing at the faces of the horses and the people, at this boundless stream of life raised up by the power of my will and now hurtling into nowhere across the sunset-crimson steppe, I often think: where am I in this flux?" (VIII)

Throughout the novel, Pyotr continuously poses the question, "Where am I?" The answer that he must reach is given by his name. What Pyotr realizes, however, is that the "I" then only represents an empty entity, and it does not really matter what

or where this "I" is. In the final conversation that leads up to the final recognition, Chapaev and Pyotr discuss precisely the question of the self:

"'Tell me, Chapaev, who are you in reality?'
'Better tell yourself, Petka, who you are in reality. Then you'll understand all about me. But you just keep on repeating 'me, me, me', like that gangster in your nightmare. What does that mean – 'me'? What is it? Try taking a look for yourself/' (157) [...]
'How fascinating/ I whispered quietly, so am I/ Then who is this?' he asked, pointing at me. 'Voyd/ I replied.'" (158)

In a play with words, Pelevin lets his main hero look for himself as a search for the void, and he constantly searches as much for the meaning of the void of the real as for the reality of the void in the world and in the self. What Pyotr recognizes in the moment of catharsis is himself or his self as a void, that is, as a non-entity and non-existence. This insight is the kind of Buddhist wisdom that Chapaev seeks to bestow on him, and, as a confirmation of this insight, Chapaev tells him a parable about "a clay machine-gun", a fable in which Buddha pointed with his finger so that the true nature of things was "instantly revealed" – they disappeared. In the recognition of himself and the world as voyd/void, Pyotr is finally able to enter the kitschy and ironic "Undefinable River of Absolute Love" of the river Ural, which refers to one of the most famous and productive anecdotes about Chapaev and Petka. There he transcends the historical boundaries of the

world so that he suddenly appears able to embrace himself in his two different hypostases in the narrative. Thus, the all and the nothing seem to come together – the world is nothing, a void, and as a void, it can enhance and be all in that "boundless stream of life".

Interestingly enough, although Pelevin adheres to the *Bildungsroman* in the structure leading to this final insight, the fact that it ultimately leads to no "real" change in the narrative of the

mind of contemporary Pyotr is yet another way of making the reader wary as to whether the hero really has reached a qualitative insight or change that is the *sine qua non* of the modern formation novel. This novel aimed to portray how the awareness of the modern subject is formed in relation to historical and social reality. There, literary catharsis often took the form of "disillusionment" after the recognition of the delimitations of the individual, realizing that he was unable to construe an intelligible relation to a world of meaning, as Lukacs showed in his pre-Marxist work *Theory of the Novel*.²² What takes place in *Buddha's Little Finger* is a kind of fusion of a literary and a psychological catharsis as Freud defined it in terms of the process of recalling a complex to conscious awareness. The catharsis means a personal liberation, staged by Timur Timurovich, but it ultimately

"WHAT TAKES PLACE IN BUDDHA'S LITTLE FINGER IS A KIND OF FUSION OF A LITERARY AND A PSYCHOLOGICAL CATHARSIS."

leads merely to an insight into the pointlessness of establishing an intelligible relation to the world.

In spite of all the irony, the question of whether this insight really can be qualified as an insight in the self and in the world still seems to be of certain importance. Like the style of Nabokov, to whom the characters in the novel refer several times, Pelevin leaves the question open as to whether the escape from the world as reality is a defeat or a victory. Pyotr flees from reality to the imaginary because he has realized the ultimate sublation or *Aufhebung* of the opposition between reality and imaginary, of the self and the world.²³ Yet at the same time as he overcomes the oppositions of time, place, the world and being, in realizing himself as being nothing, or being the void, he transcends, or rather escapes to a beyond where he is unable to recognize the features of the contemporary world. There is no self, and everything is the self, the novel suggests to us. The novel ends with the image of a Pyotr completely encapsulated in his own imaginary past and without any recognition of the contemporary world, which, on the other hand, is a reality to which no phantasms seem to give any access.

The world as a void, and the void of the post-Soviet world

Since the ambiguous escape from the contemporary world is an escape into the historical past, Pelevin seems indeed to conform to the double nature of the “inverted stëb”. On the one hand, Pelevin makes complete fun of the Chapaev myth in its socialist realist version and aligns the Soviet myth with the popular narratives of the contemporary world, which are equally absurd, private and filled with kitschy clichés, as for instance in the case of the transgender character Maria who dreams about Arnold Schwarzenegger. Yet, at the same time, he enhances the myth and seems to advocate a return to the imaginary or to the paradoxical past illusion of the past. It is indeed in the Soviet past that Pyotr can find the transcendent stage and refuge of his imagination, and consequently also the stage of his experience of transcendence. The joke, or inverted joke, is in other words less an expression of his relation to the symbol itself than to his relation to the contemporary world where the symbol lives on beyond recognition.

Thus, through his postmodernist poetics of simulacra, Pelevin poses in an ambiguous and paradoxical way the question of how the postmodern world can feed on totalizing myths that it allegedly has freed itself from. The question thus arises to what extent the imaginary, which is the realm where the world of simulacra can have its free flight, is conditioned by being an image or an imitation of a “reality” that it has ceased to communicate with. Thereby Pelevin without any direct or indirect reference confirms the problem that Baudrillard identified in the relation between cinema and reality, namely that it (cinema) “is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent”.²⁴ In the postmodern aesthetics of Pelevin, the myth of the revolutionary hero as historical reality reappears in an aesthetics that negates that history as reality. What is more, in the way that the novel dwells on the ad-

aptation of the Soviet myth, contemporary Moscow appears as a “desert of the real” from which only flights of (narcotic) imagination can be made. The real of the contemporary world becomes the destitute place of man’s private fantasies. The style of “the inverted stëb” is thus sustained by the fact that the distinction between real and imaginary, inner and outer, is paradoxically both maintained and eradicated. Thus the conflict of man’s being in the world, which was crucial for the modern formation novel, remains not only unresolved, but also deterred, because it does not matter what is real and unreal. In the end, at the same time as the novel was to be the “final cure for what is known as ‘the inner life’”, it tells nothing but the story of inner life, taking place, as Pelevin asserts in “the monasteries of Inner Mongolia”. In other words, in the contemporary world Pyotr resigns from generalizing about himself and his inner life can be redeemed only through the free flight into private phantasms, but this matters to no one but himself.

Conclusion

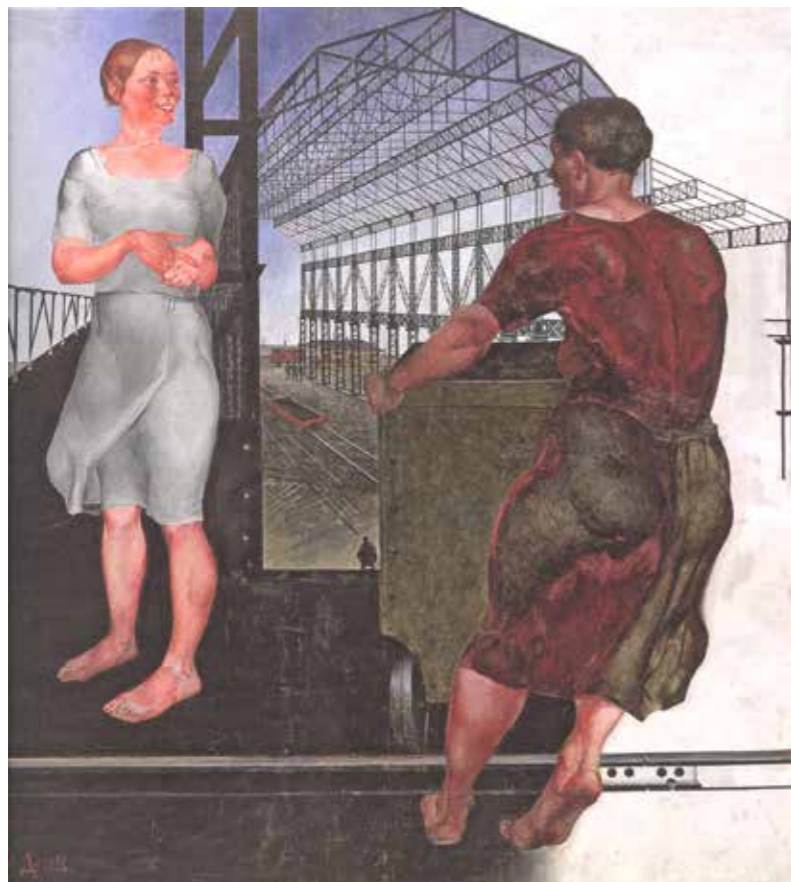
The question of the Soviet legacy in *Buddha’s Little Finger* is not treated as a question of engagement with history or the narrative of history in the form of confirmation or deconstruction of the Soviet myth. The myth is explored simply for the sake of its potential to be retold in the mode of a historical and intelligent super-hero narrative of the 1990s. In the midst of the phantasmagoric play with imaginations of reality conveyed through *mise-en-abyme* devices, discussions and demonstrations of Buddhist philosophy, references to popular culture and anecdotes, Pelevin shows how the main character at the same time maintains and abandons the Soviet legacy in the idea that his myth of the world is the world, and that reality is a non-entity. In this way he illustrates to us how the Soviet myths continue to live on in the form of attractive grand narratives in a post-Soviet divide between real phantasmagorical nightmares and what appears as an unattainable “reality” of facts. ❌

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- Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 14.
- With the narrative distinction between the biblical time of Christ, rendered through the serious and cumbersome reflections of Pontius Pilate, and the grotesque reality of the Soviet times rendered in a satiric and phantasmagorical absurd style in the novel, the religious world appears as the more real historically in the novel. The convergence of these (ir)realities on a transcendent level in the realm of Woland and Christ only seems to confirm the initial impression that time in the Soviet Union of the 1920s was helplessly out of joint and beginning to behave in accordance to the utterly unreal principles of dialectic materialism, claiming to be realistic.
- Olga Bogdanova et al. *Literaturnye Strategii Viktora Pelevina* (St. Petersburg: Petropolis, 2008), 134–160.
- In *The Total Art of Stalinism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), Boris Groys quotes the symbolist poet Andrey Bely, who asserted that “the victory of materialism in Russia resulted in the disappearance of all matter” (20) when arguing that the myths of the avant-garde resulted in the “aesthetic dictatorship” of Stalinism.
- For a discussion of the Buddhist theme, Meghan Vicks “Victor Pelevin’s Void and the Post-Soviet Condition” in *Narratives of Nothing in 20th-Century Literature*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) 161.
- The notion of “inverted stëb” is a development of the notion of ‘stëb’, a slang term for an ironic form of making fun at something, with which Yurchak defined the “aesthetics of the absurd” of the culture of late socialism. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 250.
- Rosalind Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, 1991–2006, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).
- Ibid, 300.
- The distinction between a modernist culture, where the real was at stake, and a postmodernist culture of simulacra, seems to be most apparent in relation to Soviet and post-Soviet culture. Evidently, socialist realism generated myths or narratives about the force of the people and its heroes in relation to history, and as these myths were denounced what was left was their representation in popular culture and an ironical disbelief. Yet several scholars argue for the contingency between Soviet culture and post-Soviet culture in terms of seeing socialist realism as a “production of reality” just like postmodern aesthetics. As mentioned, according to Mikhail Epstein, socialist realism was a kind of postmodernist aesthetics of simulation *avant la lettre*, and there were two postmodernisms in Russian history – one that arose in the 1930s with the establishment of socialist realism, and the other in the 1960s with the reaction towards the outmoded official discourse of Soviet culture in, for instance, Moscow conceptualism. The difference between them is allegedly that the first postmodernism is heroic and the second ironic. The first has a truth claim and tells the mythical narrative of the socialist’s engagement in reality, whereas the second paradoxically abandons any claim to reference reality, and yet in this seems to preserve a certain truthful relation to the dynamics of reality and imagination. Mikhail Epstein, “The Origins and Meaning of Russian Post-Modernism” in *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) 188–210.

- Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernism: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. Eliot Borenstein (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 12.
- Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum” in *October*, vol. 27, (Winter, 1983), 45–56. An excerpt from *Logique du Sens* translated by Rosalind Krauss, 45.
- Ibid.
- Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, transl. by Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor, (University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.
- Ibid, 7.
- Ibid, 161.
- Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum”, 56.
- In a way, as has been argued, Deleuze’s defense of simulacra and pop art can be read as a token of him being the “ideologist of late capitalism” as Zizek asserted in *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 84, whereas Baudrillard attempts to understand to what extent capitalism preserves and fetishizes production and the real at the same time as it extinguishes the difference between production and the real.
- Mark Lipovetsky, *Paralogii. Transformatsii (post)modernistskogo diskursa v kul’ture 1920–2000-x godov* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2008) XXV.
- Gerald McCausland, “Viktor Pelevin and the End of Sots-Art” in *Endquotes. Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*, eds. Marina Balina et al., Evanston, Ill (Northwestern University Press, 2000), 231.
- Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernism: Dialogue with Chaos*, 197.
- George Lukacs, *Theory of the Novel*, transl. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971).
- Aleksandr Genis, “Borders and Metamorphoses: Viktor Pelevin in the Context of Post-Soviet Literature” in *Russian Postmodernism. New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, ed. and transl. by Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 215.
- Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 48.



Alexander Deineka *Construction of New Workshops*, 1926. Oil on canvas. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

REVOLUTION. RUSSIAN ART 1917–1932

In 1917 everything seemed possible in Russia: the Revolution appeared to be on course to take over the whole of Planet Earth, even Mars, and from there to expand all over the universe. The Bolshevik government invited painters, sculptors, graphic designers, poets, critics and theorists, dramatists, photographers, and film-makers to participate in building a “brave new world”.

In 2017 the Russian Revolution reaches its 100th anniversary. Have the Russians honored this event? Have they celebrated at all? During Soviet times, celebrations of revolutionary anniversaries were heavily state-sponsored events. So I travelled to Moscow to look for signs of celebrations. What I found was “The Russian Revolution 1917–1922” in the Museum of Political History. Not large in scope, and not much of an anniversary celebration in comparison.

But what about art and the revolution? To find out, I went to the modern art building of the Tretyakov gallery, the largest museum of Russian art. But there were no posters about the anniversary on the walls. “Well,” said the lady who sold tickets, “we might exhibit some revolutionary art in the autumn, but we don’t expect many visitors. You know, people want to see classical art, not revolutionary or political works”.

Obviously, the revolution is not a hot topic in contemporary Russia, not even when it comes to art. If you google “revolutionary art” in Russian-speaking sites, you end up in the Royal

Academy of Arts as the first option. So London turned out to be the place to go!

In the much visited and favorably reviewed exhibition “Revolution. Russian Art 1917–1932” held at the Royal Academy of Arts in February through April 2017, a large number of works was displayed, borrowed from art museums all over Russia and other countries, as well as from private collections.

The London curators took their inspiration from the exhibition “Fifteen years of Russian art”, shown in Leningrad in 1932. The enormous Leningrad exhibition reflected virtually every aspect of human life – work, war, everyday life, love, culture, sports and politics – displaying 2,640 pieces of work by painters, graphic artists and sculptors. These were products of a uniquely vivid and creative period in the arts. But the period was also the epoch in which a former landscape of competing and debating groups and associations slowly slid into harsh state control and was amalgamated into one single organization, the Union of Artists. For the first time, the designation Socialist Realism was officially used at a celebratory event to refer to an art style. From then on, figurative art would be the only officially accepted form of expression.

THE PERIOD OF 1917 TO 1932 witnessed a changing climate for the arts, with a cooling-off in the late 1920s when the Stalin regime outlined Five Year Plans, renewed centralization, and initiated



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin *1918 in Petrograd (Petrograd Madonna)*, 1920. Oil on canvas. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

gigantic engineering projects. Before that, the movements of Constructivists and Suprematists, the association Left Front of the Arts, and others had flourished with participants such as Meyerhold (theatre), Eisenstein (film), and Pasternak (literature), dedicated to collective creative work and politicized aims, and condemning conventional art forms. “Conventional painting,” said the secretary of the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture, “is to productive art what chemistry is to alchemy, or astrology to astronomy.”

Artists of the Russian avant-garde were initially quick to embrace the revolution. Some of them acknowledged the regime’s ideological requirements, including artists such as Klutskis and Deineka, whose works would not make it to the Western world. Others, who felt increasingly ill at ease with the growing totalitarian claims by the state to control the artistic world, such as Malevich, Chagall, and Kandinsky, went abroad or only partly adapted to the changing climate. These artists were all well known in the West since before the First World War.

Still, conventional artistic expression typical of Isaak Brodsky’s realistic portraits of Lenin and Stalin continued to be part of the Russian art scene. Brodsky has in fact been regarded as a “court painter”. In 1932 the realistic style would triumph, supported by the regime. This was the year when Stalin attacked the avant-garde, proclaiming an ideal of figurative art optimistically depicting a bright future of Soviet Russia, the Socialist Realist style. Works of avant-garde, constructivist, leftist artists were transferred to hidden storerooms in the great Russian museums, not to be displayed again in public until the late 1980s onwards.

It is interesting to note that when avant-garde and “leftist” art was marginalized and banned from the Russian public scene,

it travelled west, such as Malevich’s “White Square on White” from 1918 that was exhibited in New York in 1935.

The scope of the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition could not possibly be as vast as that of the 1932 Leningrad exhibition. Instead, in displaying around 200 works the curators’ aim was to present a wider dimension of the art forms of the period by putting photography, film and posters, and a large display of revolutionary ceramics into the framework of painting, graphic art and sculpture.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ART UNDERWENT an explosive development in the years after the revolution. The importance of communicating messages that were easy to read, such as photos and posters, cannot be overrated for the leaders of a country with a high illiteracy rate. This is one of the reasons why experimental non-figurative painting by the Russian avant-garde was out-manoeuvred, it was not considered appropriate for ordinary people.

Russian film making of the 1920s, with leading figures such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, would later gain a worldwide reputation. At the London exhibition, *The Battleship Potemkin*, *Film-Truth*, and other films with a highly dramatic form of expression were displayed in a way that captured the eye of the spectator, giving the sense that the images have an eternal quality.

The section of revolutionary ceramics was, to my mind, one of the best at the exhibition. Absolutely lovely! Plates, cups, and figurines were displayed – painted by avant-garde artists such as Malevich, Danko, Chekhonin and Altman, depicting Suprematist abstract patterns or vivid proletarian and peasant figures. When the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, they nationalized the Imperial Porcelain Factory that had many thousands of porcelain pieces available, ready to be designed before they were finally glazed.

Many of the artists in the 1932 anniversary exhibition have scarcely been seen in the West, and The Royal Academy of

Arts exhibition made a point of highlighting a few painters well known and loved by the Russians but much less known in the West, such as Alexander Deineka and Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin. The works of Petrov-Vodkin in particular will come as a revelation to many, as the exhibition catalogue states. He was

represented in a separate hall, at both the Leningrad and the London exhibition.

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, born in 1878 in a small village by the Volga River, learned to paint icons early in his life. The iconic style prevails in many of his paintings all through his life, and in this he differed from many of his colleagues after the revolution. He also developed a unique style of depicting landscape from a spherical cosmic perspective. The painting illustrating my article is called *Petrograd Madonna* from 1918; it depicts a highly political motif in a religious iconographic style.

Alexander Deineka is better known outside Russia than

**“ARTISTS OF THE
RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE
WERE INITIALLY QUICK
TO EMBRACE THE
REVOLUTION.”**

Petrov-Vodkin but might still be seen as undervalued in relation to his talent. Born in 1899, after the revolution he developed a monumental art style with elements of photomontage technique. He frequently depicted men and women at work and in sports. *Construction of New Workshops* from 1926 conveys a strongly physical image of working women characterized by male features of strength and purposefulness. The painting can be positioned in the context of the public aim of liberating women from an outdated femininity.

The exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts ends in an almost shocking way. In a room displaying police photos taken of a painfully large number of Russian artists of various branches who were arrested and executed or sent to camps, we find a photo of Nikolai Punin, with the conventional en face and profile picture of a prisoner. Punin, a well-known art critic, editor of various journals and the curator of many art exhibitions in the twenties and thirties, was the curator of the great Leningrad exhibition “Fifteen years of Russian art” that inspired the London exhibition. He was sent to the GULAG camp system in 1949 on accusations of “Anti-Soviet activity” and died there in 1953. He is also represented at the exhibition



Nikolai Punin, portrait. Photographs from his personal investigation. File as Prisoner, 1949.

by a portrait painted by Konstantin Malevich.

The way the Russian revolution developed – into a system of terror, bloodshed and totalitarian claims to control free arts – might of course be a reason why Russians of today show little interest in celebrating the centenary of the Revolution. The fact that there is still very little consensus among history writers about how to treat the state socialist period, beginning with the Revolution and ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union, also contributes to a sense of floundering, of not knowing

how to evaluate Russia’s part in Europe’s “short 1900s – the age of extremes”. ✕

Helene Carlbäck

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Note: The main source for my article is “Revolution. Russian Art 1917–1932”, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK, 2017. This catalogue contains images of a rich collection of Russian art and ten chapters by specialists on Russian revolutionary art.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS LEGACIES

On June 4–6, 2017, the University of Tartu hosted its second annual conference on Russian and East European Studies. This time the three-day academic event was dedicated to a particularly notable occasion. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution in Russia, an historical event that both shaped the global geopolitical trajectories of the 20th century and had a drastic impact on the fates of all states and peoples in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Under the present circumstances, the organizers could not have thought of a much better title than “The Russian Revolution and its Legacies”. When it comes to this region, one can see that the revolution has had a particularly lasting impact, which still goes far beyond the scope of purely academic debates about its historical significance. Not unlike the Civil War in America, the battles that followed the 1917 Revolution are still being fought today in the form of new political cleavages and antagonisms. With the new surge of Russian irredentism and the ensuing conflict over the politics of memory in Ukraine and other Eastern European countries, key symbols of the revolution, like the statues of Lenin, for example, are more than just relics of the Soviet past. They now function as proxies in symbolic and material power struggles, that are taking place in a new regional geopolitical setting of the 21st century.



Bolshevik forces march on Red Square, 1917.

Predictably, Russia has remained the linchpin of many discussions. This has to do not only with the fact that this country has traditionally structured debates about the region of Eastern Europe, but also that inside Russia itself the national identity debate continues to revolve around the meaning of the 1917 Revolution and the drastic social, economic, and geopolitical changes that came with it. Despite the more than twenty-five years of the post-Communist transition period, many issues remained unresolved and therefore catalyze heated political discussions, polarizing contemporary Russian society. This explains Russia’s painful reaction to practices of de-Sovietizing historical memories in Central and Eastern Europe. Many questions here remain unanswered and some of them had to be addressed during the plenary roundtable on *Soviet Legacies and De-Sovietization in*

Russia and Eastern Europe. The roundtable featured several notable scholars of the post-Soviet world, including Richard Sakwa from the University of Kent, Mark Kramer from the Harvard University, Madina Tlostanova from Linköping University, and Lauri Mälksoo from the University of Tartu.

LIKEWISE, THE KEYNOTE speech of the conference, focusing on the “lessons of October”, explored different readings

of the Soviet experience. This year’s keynote speaker was Ronald Grigor Suny, director of the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, the Charles Tilly Collegiate Professor of social and political history at the University of Michigan, and emeritus professor of political science and history at the University of Chicago. He presented the paradox of the Soviet Union being a “self-denying empire”. The USSR, he argued, combined imperialism and centralization of power in Moscow with an anti-colonial agenda and a particular form of nation-building that took place in non-Russian parts of the Soviet pseudo-federation. In the end, the argument ran, the Soviet Union was a victim of its own success, creating the very people that abolished it.

The keynote speech contained points that were certainly provocative, if not controversial. Thus the claim about the “success” of Stalin’s industrialization probably raised more than one eyebrow in the audience. It did, however, also have an important positive message for all guests of the conference. Crude binaries and black-and-white narratives will not get us very far if we have to deal with something as complex and prolonged as the Soviet experience. Indeed, the conference was an excellent demonstration of the complexities that we still have to make sense of one hundred years after the “red October”. ✕

Aliaksei Kazharski

Researcher, Charles University in Prague and Comenius University in Bratislava.

conference report

Hundred years of the Russian revolution

The Russian Revolution centenary is in the spotlight this year. There are hundreds of exhibitions, shows, film screenings etc. being held around the world and especially in Russia.

The three days international conference “1917–2017: Hundred Years of Russian Revolution in Art and Aesthetics” took place in October 19–21, 2017, organized in collaboration between Södertörn University, Färgfabriken and the Moderna Museet. The dance performance by Nord2Nord band opened the conference at Färgfabriken and is reported at the webpage of *Baltic Worlds*. Some of the conference participants: Bird, Evseyev, Lane and Seits have their articles included in this special section. Such renown academics as Katerina Clark and Christina Kiaer gave keynote lectures at Södertörn University and Moderna Museet, while Per Enerud, the Media and Public

Outreach at Swedish Embassy in Moscow gave an open lecture at Färgfabriken on perception of the Russian Revolution by Swedish poets and diplomats.

The conference concentrated on the four major themes: visual art, media, literature and cinema. Around 40 participants from Europe, Russia and the US gathered in Stockholm, among whom there were researches in different fields on humanities as well as practicing artists, screen writers and film directors, dancers and journalists. The conference was open to public and attracted many visitors to its various venues.

ON *BALTIC WORLDS’ WEB SITE* you will also find a list of a row of exhibitions considering the largest venues, as well as conferences, on the topic of the legacy, impact and influences of the Russian revolution in art and aesthetics.

Muted histories and reunited memories

by Irina Seits

a story of a Swedish family during the times of the Russian Revolution

It is hard to overestimate the impact that the two revolutions of 1917 had on the destiny of Russia and all those who were connected to the country in any way. One of the most fascinating examples of the tremendous change of life paradigms caused by the Bolshevik Revolution is the story of a great Swedish family that contributed enormously to boosting technological progress in Russia before the outbreak of the Revolution. Three generations of the Nobel family had been living and working in the Russian Empire since 1837, patenting numerous inventions, connecting various regions with railroads, building factories and developing cities around them. Ludvig and Emanuel Nobel developed what we know today as CSR policy: Corporate Social Responsibility, long before it started being practiced in Western Europe. They provided their workers with developed social infrastructure, planting parks and constructing houses, hospitals, schools, libraries and theaters.

By the mid-1910s, thanks to entrepreneurs, inventors and investors such as the Nobels, the Russian Empire reached the world's leading position in the oil market as well as in various spheres of heavy and light industries.

It all ended with the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 when many brilliant contributors to the blossoming of the Russian Empire at the dawn of the century – be it in technology, culture or art – were forced to flee the country with their families. Those who managed to escape after leaving all they had behind the borders of the new state were witnesses to the decay of what they had given their talents and labors to.

This year marks 180 years since Immanuel Nobel, the talented inventor, machine engineer and manufacturer, first came to St. Petersburg. Shortly afterwards, his wife and gifted children – Robert, Ludvig and Alfred – joined their father. Their youngest son Emil was born in St. Petersburg. Ludvig Nobel, Alfred's elder brother, lived most of his life in Russia and devoted his genius to the development of technology and science in various fields.

Early this fall Irina Seits, Russian PhD candidate at CBEES, Södertörn University met with Gustaf Nobel, Ludvig's great-grandson, in order to talk about the Russian period in the life of his prominent family.

IRINA SEITS (IS): The centenary of the Russian Revolution this year marks a turning point in the development of Russia and the rest of the world. The global changes influenced millions of people's lives, and your family was one of those whose lives were ultimately altered by the Revolution. Was the memory of those events present in your family when you were a child? What did you hear about Russia and your family's connection to Russia? Was it present in some way in your childhood?

GUSTAF NOBEL (GN): Well, I wasn't really a participant in any affairs regarding Russia, because – you know the history – my family: my father, Gunnar Nobel had to flee from Russia with his brother Alfred, his little sister Nina, and mother Eugenie, as did my grandfather Gösta Nobel, who was not with them in Baku at that time; he was in St. Petersburg. Emanuel Nobel also left the country¹. They had to flee, and they were on the run for one and a half months. Afterwards my father never talked about it for the rest of his life. Up until his death he said nothing. He would say, "I don't want to talk about it". So we didn't hear much about Russia or Revolution from him. But then his brother, my uncle, was a bit more open about it because he was three years older than my father... So we had a little information from him, but not much, really. Russia wasn't very present when we were children. But as we grew



Eugenie with Alfred, Gunnar and Nina 1918, and Eugenie with newborn Ludvig in front of the villa Petrolea in Baku.



Gustaf Nobel.



up, we became more interested in the history, of course, and we started studying it to a certain extent. Growing up, there was not very much to say about it, since no one talked to us about it.

IS: And that was probably due to the trauma and all the losses that your family had gone through?

GN: I think my father was traumatized by those experiences, even though he was only four years old.

IS: You mentioned Emanuel Nobel, who continued developing his father Ludvig's oil and industrial empire. Russia had a very high level of technological development at that time...

GN: Yes, and he contributed greatly to this process.

IS: Until World War I broke out... Russia owed a great part of its technological success to the plants and factories that your family founded and developed.

GN: Yes, they were the biggest company in Russia at that time. Of course they had an impact, and a very powerful impact. And for the family, for those that ran away, above all for the adults it was a total change of paradigm. They came out of Russia to a completely different life, a life that they were not used to. They had had a good life in the Russian Empire, making tons of money over there. But apart from earning, they gave away a lot to the people who were working for them, and provided for them in all kinds of ways. We don't have to go into that. It was an important thing and everybody knows the history of what they were doing. It was Ludvig and Emanuel, in particular, who contributed to that².



The Nobel brothers of Sweden launched the Baku oil boom in 1873.



Branobel field, Balakhani.

IS: Emanuel Nobel, as well as his brothers, was a known patron and a humanitarian. He supported the spread of knowledge and education among his workers, providing them with space for learning and discussions. He was of liberal views and was connected to left-wing political circles. Thus it is not a surprise that the February Revolution of 1917 (not the Bolshevik Revolution that followed in October and forced your family to flee from Russia), started with the workers' resurrections at Emanuel Nobel's plants located in the industrial part of the city – the Viborg Side in Petrograd, where the family itself resided. Emanuel provided his workers with access to libraries and helped them receive an education, which inevitably heated the turbulence in society. Thus, indirectly, Emanuel Nobel participated in preparing Russia for radical reforms, yet he argued for the democratic development of the new capitalist Russia. Of course, he had nothing to do with Bolsheviks and Communists.

GN: No, it wasn't his intention. Not at all.

IS: The thing is that Russia was hit by the two revolutions in the same year. The February Revolution, that promised to bring democracy to Russia and develop capitalism, failed. That was the revolution that Emanuel supported.

GN: Which was logical, because he saw that that was the only way to go for the future of Russia and the benefit of all the other people. After the failure of the February Revolution, the Bolsheviks came and confiscated everything.

IS: They called it "nationalization". The Bolshevik leaders had particular and even personal interest in the Nobel's heritage, for example Joseph Stalin, who in his early years terrorized oil companies in Baku and was appointed by Lenin after the Bolshevik Revolution to investigate the potential of the confiscated oil industries. Around the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution the figure of Stalin is being re-evaluated in Russia and, unfortunately, it seems to grow in a rather dangerous way.

GN: My advice to everyone is to read the *Young Stalin* by Simon Sebag Montefiore. It's a very interesting book.

IS: He describes the "robbery of the century": the attack on the State Bank in Tiflis (Tbilisi), the Georgian capital, in 1907, of which Stalin was the main organizer, as well as his wild activities in Baku, including an attack on the Nobels' office.

GN: Yes, he was a criminal. The family weren't great fans of Stalin, that is for sure. Some people claim that he also worked on one of the Nobels' oil rigs at one time, but I'm not so sure.

IS: He did. After leaving Baku he also worked at the Nobel's plant in St. Petersburg for a short period before the outbreak of World War I. He was great at recruiting workers into revolutionary circles. Yes, Stalin had



Family House at the Nobels' Town on Lesnoy Prospect, St. Petersburg.



The monument to Alfred Nobel by sculptors Sergey Alipov and Pavel Shevchenko, on Petrogradskaya Embankment in St. Petersburg.

his own issues with your family. It is remarkable that the silence about the connection to Russia within your family history, which is very understandable, coincides with the suppression of the memory of and knowledge about the history and heritage of the Nobels in Soviet Russia. In Soviet times we had not heard much about Nobels and their impact on Russian and Soviet industrial growth; it was as if nothing had existed before the exhaustive industrialization, initiated by Stalin, began. And the myth that the industrialization that cost millions of Soviet lives was the only way to reach the necessary level of technological development is being promoted again today. It justifies Stalin's repressions and his methods of ruling the country. The Nobels weren't mentioned much. We knew about the Nobel Prize and some people, especially those living in Leningrad, heard something about the Nobels' plants that existed in St. Petersburg before the revolution, but the names of the factories were changed and it was all forgotten. We knew nothing about the Nobels' industrial heritage that fell into the hands of the Soviet state all ripe and ready. We heard of the Nobels as the "Russian Rockefellers", which is, by the way, another interesting connotation, because in the 1880s the Nobel family dislodged the Rockefellers completely from the Russian oil market. And then after the Revolution, when the Bolshevik power reached Azerbaijan, Gustaf Nobel...

GN: My grandfather, yes...

IS: ... made a good deal by selling part of the oil company in Baku to Rockefeller.

GN: That was called the deal of the century (laughs). But actually the Rockefellers did hold out for quite some time, until the 1930s.

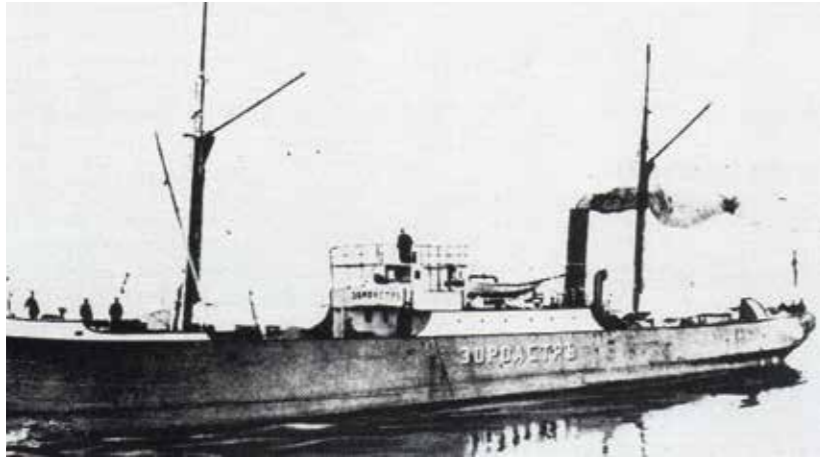
IS: They officially closed down their offices in 1950s, but before World War II they were quite active there. They probably still believed that Revolution might just pass over.

GN: But we all know that it didn't happen...

IS: Unfortunately. The Soviet state avoided recognition and promotion of the achievements of West Europeans, whose contributions, though badly damaged and neglected, still laid the foundation for the new country's economy. The intellectual, technological, economic, and infrastructural wealth left by the Nobel family was carefully studied and recorded in post-war Soviet times by economists, sociologists and historians, but those investigations never reached the mass media and the general Soviet population; they were never mentioned in schools. That history was reserved for specialists and was absent in the new ideological space, which was a part of the State policy.

GN: Yes, to bury it, to hide it from the general peoples' mind.

IS: And that neglect was inevitably mirrored on the other side of the Iron Curtain. When I came to Stockholm



The Zoroaster ship was the first world's oil tanker designed by Ludvig Nobel and built in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1878. Later same year it was sent to Baku to the Branobel's oil company, founded by brothers Robert, Ludvig and Alfred Nobel.

for the first time, a long time ago but after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I visited the Nobel Museum as one of the city's main attractions, and I was surprised that there was no mention of the Nobel family's Russian period, of the childhood years that Alfred Nobel had spent in St. Petersburg. When I re-visited the Nobel museum in a more conscious state of mind a couple of years ago, I remembered that and wanted to re-check. And it only says that Alfred Nobel visited St. Petersburg: and that's it.

GN: Yes, he was there. He was there with his family, in his early years, before his father Immanuel Nobel had to file for bankruptcy and leave Russia.

IS: Yes, Immanuel came to Russia in 1837. This year marks 180 years since that date.

GN: Yes, he soon brought Alfred and the rest of his family from Stockholm. He was initially doing great, but then after the Crimean War, in which Russia was not successful, they lost all orders from the government...

IS: Yes, because the government faced sanctions that severely limited the production of military equipment.

GN: And at that time Alfred returned to Sweden, together with his family, but his brother Ludvig stayed on in St. Petersburg.

IS: Alfred was 16 when he left Russia with his parents. He received his primary education in St. Petersburg and spoke Russian among other languages, including, of course, his mother tongue. His main teacher was a famous Russian chemist, Nickolay Zinin, who infected Alfred with his interest in nitroglycerin. There was another chemist, Petrashevsky, who was Zinin's and Alfred Nobel's competitor, and who experimented with the explosive features of nitroglycerin, but he was not successful in the practical application of his studies. When Alfred came back to Stockholm he continued the experiments that he began in Russia.

GN: And eventually he came across a solution on how to tame it. After that he never returned to St. Petersburg, I think. Nor did he ever go to Baku. He was a big shareholder in the largest oil company, but he never visited Baku.

IS: Yet the years that Alfred spent in St. Petersburg were an important part of his biography. But the way that the Nobel family history is currently represented in the Nobel Museum neglects the whole period of not only Alfred's life, but that of his parents, and other brothers – first of all, Ludvig and Robert. Ludvig Nobel, one of the major founders of the family industrial empire, was buried in St. Petersburg like some other members of the family even though he died outside Russia.

GN: Certainly, the family's relation to Russia is underrepresented in the museum to a certain extent. In my opinion, that period should be covered in more detail, but going back a couple of years. The story of my great-grandfather Ludvig, Robert and Emanuel, my grandfather Gösta Nobel, and others of course, was a hidden story for a long time. Nobody knew about it. Everybody talked about Alfred – since he came up with the Nobel Prize and all these brilliant ideas, and they set up a foundation after his death... But the others were just as successful as he. And they also had these other views of helping the people who worked for them, by providing accommodation, building schools for the children, giving them education, as you know... All these kinds of things. They were really ahead of their time. They deserve more attention. Today it's more widely known, you can Google it, and find the whole story about Ludvig, and Robert, and so on and so forth, which is good. I'm not saying that I want my family to be more famous than it is. But from a historical point of view, it has a certain importance to me. To let the world know that these two brothers were just as innovative, and progressive, and charitable, as Alfred was. Ludvig was

a genius, of course. But they all were. Robert as well. He was very skilled in his field of work. But it's amazing that they all were. All four. There were four brothers, as you know. One, Emil, never had time to develop his genius, unfortunately.

IS: Coming back to the Russian Revolution, what is your personal feeling about the 100th "anniversary"? What is it to your family now? Is it viewed as a dramatic event?

GN: It was a dramatic event.

IS: Was it a tragedy? The positive answer should be obvious, at least since the collapse of the Soviet regime; the question should be unnecessary. And yet in contemporary Russia, it has once again become a hot topic of public discussion, especially this year. There is still no solidarity in Russian society in its attitude towards the events of 1917. Moreover, one can feel a shift towards justifying and even glorifying the Bolshevik Revolution. And it divides society. You hear more and more voices in the Russian mass media that interpret the Bolshevik Revolution and totalitarianism in the country as the only and inevitable path of development. All of a sudden, the question is becoming urgent again. We still can't come to agreement on our history and our past. What is your opinion on this matter?

GN: My opinion, my personal opinion is that Russia would have been better off not having the Bolshevik Revolution, because a lot of development came to a halt when Communists took charge of the whole country and nationalized the industries and so on... I mean, the industries were up and running. They were doing very well. And a lot of those industries just couldn't keep up in the same way after the revolution, after the Bolsheviks had taken over – because they didn't have those leaders any longer. Since everyone was working for the State, they were all tovarisch [comrade] and all that... But business efficiency wasn't actually that good, neither in the development, nor the maintenance and running of all industry's services. It wasn't on the same level as before because they didn't have the same objective any more. A lot of things actually became failures afterwards, rather than successes. Then again, the Revolution lasted a long time, more or less up to 1989. Then a new revolution happened. Yet I'm sure there are still a lot of people in Russia saying that times were better before 1991...

IS: Did the "revolution" of 1991 re-open Russia and the post-Soviet space for your family? For example in Baku, your family did get the opportunity – not necessarily to come back, but to restore the history of Nobels in the capital of Azerbaijan, for example by founding the museum in the Villa Petrolea?

GN: Oh, in that respect, yes. Also, since I've been working with an Azerbaijani company for the past five to six years, I've learned also how people in Azerbaijan and particularly in Baku remember the Nobels.

IS: So just as Ludvig Nobel and then Emanuel once did, you are now returning to Baku... And how do you feel that difference?

GN: Well, when you spell out your name at the reservation in a hotel, they never doubt that you are a member of the family who were there. They actually know that there is a family. And they are very happy to meet you. It appears that they really mean it, as well, because the name is highly respected in Azerbaijan – much more than in Russia, I would say.

IS: That's what you feel?

GN: That's what I feel. I've been to both countries several times, but more so in Azerbaijan. It's just that everyone you meet and talk to in Azerbaijan knows the story of what the Nobels did there before the Revolution. And now Azerbaijan is also a free country...

IS: Yes, they are also the victims of the Revolution, like your family. In Baku, the Villa Petrolea was in a state of considerable decay until recently.

GN: Oh yes, but nevertheless it has been very nicely restored, built up as a park museum, with restaurants and a reception area, and also a little hotel with five or six rooms.

IS: Did your family participate in the restoration of the museum ensemble, or was it done by Azerbaijan?

GN: It was done by one person, who contacted the family³, but we were not involved financially, and did not have any influence over the plans. A number of the family members was invited to the inauguration, to come and take part in the ceremony.

IS: **Have you visited the museum?**

GN: Oh yes, I've been there several times.

IS: **How do you find it?**

GN: It's hard to say. I find it a bit emotional because my father was born there and lived in that house together with his brother and sister, as well as my grandparents. But they were the only ones who actually lived there, so from that point of view it's a bit sentimental. I have pictures showing my father sitting with my grandmother in the garden, in front of the old Villa Petrolea. And the new one looks very much like it (apart from the extra wing with the hotel rooms). But it's very nicely done. I really appreciate it, because it's a way of keeping the memory alive, although on the outside, the surroundings are so poor.

IS: **But it was probably the same when your family lived there. The Nobels were known for making paradisiacal oases around their plants that were so different from the surroundings.**

GN: Villa Petrolea was not just a villa. They had nine acres of land, where the engineers who came over and worked for them lived. They planted parks with 80,000 trees, and they used the ballast water from the tankers to irrigate Villa Petrolea and its gardens. That was another of Ludvig Nobel's brilliant ideas. They also had a theater there. Unfortunately all of this has been left in decay, in a ruined state. Yet there are big plans now. You know Baku's nickname is the Black City? For good reason. And now there is a project that has been going on for the last five or six years, called "Baku – The White City". I think it has stopped or halted, due to the decrease in oil prices, so there's not so much funding now. But it's a great project, to make Baku nice and "white", rather than "black", to move the refineries from the city center, and so on... Those are actually the old refineries that my family built there, so in a way they are also to blame for the "black city".

IS: **You are also involved in another project that contributes to the history of the Nobel family, the TV series that you've been working on. Could you tell about it?**

GN: We have the film script that was rewritten several times. Now I think we have reached a point at which it should be more or less acceptable for presentation. In fact it has been presented. As you know, the most important thing in making a series or a film is to find sponsors, who would like to realize this project. That's where we stand today. If done correctly, I think it has great potential, because it's an exciting story.

IS: **Oh yes it is...**

GN: It's like a drama.

IS: **It is a drama, with all the different story lines that one can imagine will be included. I know a bit about the project, but could you reveal its general idea? It is connected to the Russian period of the Nobel family when they lived in St. Petersburg, right?**

GN: In St. Petersburg and in Baku.

IS: **So it relates to the times around Russian Revolution, contributing to the promotion of what we discussed in the beginning, promotion of knowledge about the Nobel family and its brilliant members.**

GN: Yes, it is set there. I have to be careful not to say too much, but this story will begin in St. Petersburg, and maybe there will be flashbacks to Stockholm, because that's where Immanuel and his wife Henrietta lived and where three of their children were born; the oldest – Robert, then Ludvig and Alfred. So there could be flashbacks to that. But the film is very much based in St. Petersburg, when the father was working with land and sea mines, and so forth... And then, of course, it goes down to the oil war in Baku, where you had Rothschild, and Nobel, and then, of course, the Rockefellers.

IS: **Is it a documentary or a fictional drama?**

GN: It won't be entirely fictional, because it's based on history. But then you well know that when you make a film based on history, you have to add a few things, to sort of "boost the interest" for it. You have to add drama and intrigues, and all that. So it might be like – if you pardon the comparison – Downton Abbey.

IS: **That's what I thought...**

GN: Yes, in those terms. There are people in the family who said: "No, no, no... It's no good. You have to make a plain documentary film". And then you will have zero viewers, because nobody would watch that.

IS: **I would not entirely agree, but ...**

GN: You have to make it interesting...

IS: **But your family history itself is full of interesting and dramatic events, from private dramas and love stories to political affairs, such as an episode when Gösta Nobel secretly helped Carl Mannerheim, the Finnish general of Swedish origin, to flee from St. Petersburg during the Revolution, bringing him a civil engineer's costume and false documents to the Hotel Europe. And then Gösta and Emanuel themselves had to flee, which is a thrilling story in itself. All those dramas, not to mention Stalin, and so on. It could be very interesting. The times were so full of events. And the Nobel family was so much affected by it because of their presence in the very center of it all, contributing to all spheres of life in Russia.**

GN: Yes, they also supported scientific expeditions. For example Sven Hedin was a friend and was helped by the family⁴.

IS: **So the series will reveal the connections between Sweden, Russia, and Azerbaijan... The connections that we need so badly today.**

GN: Oh yes. The way I see it, it's necessary to do that. And my only hope now, my wish, is that we will be able to find proper financing for it, and start filming. Again, it will not be a film, but a TV series.

IS: **But that's the best format nowadays.**

GN: So we'll see. I don't know where we stand in terms of financing now. But still there is a lot going on which I'm very pleased with. It will be great to have this film, to see it made and available for the public.

IS: **And that is probably the best way to represent and to preserve the family history.** ❌

references

- 1 Emanuel Nobel (1859–1932), the eldest son of Ludvig Nobel and Mina Ahlsell, his first wife, the nephew of Alfred Nobel. After Ludvig Nobel died in 1888, Emanuel headed Branobel, one of the world's largest oil companies that held leading positions on the European oil market. After reaching an agreement with Rudolf Diesel, he founded the first diesel engine plant in St. Petersburg, that in the 20th century and currently is known as Russian Diesel (Fig). Emanuel made Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, one of the major centers of the world's oil industry. He also took a decisive role in securing the execution of his uncle's will to give his fortune to the foundation of the Nobel Prize. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Emanuel had to leave the country. All the family's companies and private property were confiscated in the process of nationalization.
- 2 Ludvig Nobel provided the workers in his factories with social security packages that included paid sick leave and vacations as well as the 40-hour working week. Employees had access to libraries and theaters; even tennis courts were available at some sites. The best employees were provided with housing. Ludvig, and after him, Emanuel, developed the ideas of the workers' settlements that later spread in Europe as well as in Soviet Russia – housing estates with very well developed infrastructure, green recreational areas, social centers, and clinics. The family never minded living in the same area where their workers resided, opening parts of their living quarters not only as offices but also as concert halls, theaters and libraries for their employees – from highly skilled managers to the simple workers.
- 3 Dr. Togrul Bagirov, the head of the Baku Fund of the Nobel Heritage.
- 4 Sven Anders Hedin (1865–1952) was a Swedish geographer and explorer. Emanuel Nobel sponsored his expedition to Kashgar in 1899. Emanuel Nobel also financed the Russian expedition to South America in 1914–1915.



Irina Seits and Gustaf Nobel, early fall 2017.

From clients to agents. Roma feminist activism in the special issue of *Analyze*

Analyze – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies, New Series, Issue no. 7, 2016

The Romanian Society for Feminist Analyses AnA 2016, 101 pages.

The special issue of the Romanian journal *Analyze – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, devoted to *Envisioning Roma Feminism*, is an important landmark in the advancement of Roma empowerment, and particularly Romani women’s activism, with a focus on “reframing Roma women from a social issue to a political subject” (15), to quote the editorial written by Carmen Georghe. Issues of Roma discrimination and Romani women’s stigmatization have been widely discussed in recent years due to their growing visibility and urgency in the European context, as well as a need for more adequate and just policies on the part of the EU and individual countries in relation to Roma. Yet even now relatively little attention is paid to significant differences between the Western European and the postsocialist genealogies, representations and agencies of Roma subjects. In its periodic attempts to assimilate the Roma (similarly to a number of the present neoliberal policies) the Socialist model with all its diversity and double standards was different from the predominant essentialist Orientalism and stigmatization of the Roma. This does not mean that it did not distort or erase Roma identifications, cultural heritage and epistemic and ethical models.

In South-East Europe, Roma history and destiny was specific and in many cases even more tragic than in other spaces. Therefore the emergence of such a special issue with the main focus on the policies of the South-Eastern European countries in relation to the Roma and Roma bottom-up social movements in response to these initiatives is quite timely and significant. The importance of its feminist bent is also hard to overestimate as the special issue takes a Roma perspective to address the topical issue of the clashes and lacunas between Western mainstream feminisms, postsocialist feminist agendas and various non-Western gender discourses that refuse to be emancipated according to legitimized feminist models.

One of the most interesting articles is written by Ildiko Asztalos Morell and refers to Roma women’s NGOs in Hungary. The author reflects on the complex and often contradictory dynamics of the Western liberal feminism flooding the postsocialist countries in the 1990s but thinning today, the local models linked with the socialist legacy of forced assimilation and at times annihilation of the Roma, and the contemporary often ultra-right and conservative Eastern/Central European states opposed to any feminist agendas. Most importantly she demonstrates how in these complex conditions the Roma women’s NGOs turn from being instruments of Western feminist indoctrination and charity, regarding Romani women exclusively as clients and not as agents (116), into quite independent social movements in which Roma women play the main part. This shift allows us to finally see, along with habitual Roma women stereotypes, their quite real problems as contemporary people and inhabitants of contemporary Europe, which regularly expels them outside modernity (in issues of education, housing, employment, health-care, etc.). Thus instead of the habitual accent on the violence

against Roma women, a much more important problem is their need for empowerment and social representation. Prostitution then becomes a consequence of poverty rather than a traditional Roma way of life, which shows that Roma women are not the proverbial subalterns who cannot speak and need to be liberated. Being well acquainted with activists of the Roma NGOs and the specific difficulties they face, and being aware of the general problem of feminists from postsocialist countries – a gap between academic feminism, where it exists, and women’s activism – the author argues for the cunning negotiating possibility of maintaining the international connectivity and the genuine interest in the real problems of real Roma women, using this intersection for the benefit of the bottom-up movements (118). This would allow negotiation between mainstream feminism, mainstream Roma organizations and the specific activism of Roma feminists.

THE GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL approaches of this article emerge from participatory sociology and working *with* the Roma women rather than merely *for* them. Yet it still needs more theoretical independence from Western interpretations, instead of merely serving as an attempt at verification of their ideas with the help of the local examples. It would perhaps be more useful to forget the Western analyses of non-Western NGOs and start immediately from the Roma cosmology, ethics, epistemology, and gender models as they are rethought in the agency of the Roma feminist activists. A better acquaintance with other global South and semi-periphery feminist initiatives would also be beneficial as a further step in the decolonization of knowledge and thinking.

This article is marked by an economic reductionism whereas the next, written by Diana Elena Neaga – “Empowering Roma women in Romania – gender or/and ethnicity”, is an example of a more culturalist interpretation. Neaga further develops and problematizes the intersectional approaches to the analyzes of Roma women. The indispensable value of this work is that the author is extremely fluent in the dynamics of figures and facts demonstrating the complex discrimination of Roma women in Romania, and at the same time accurately analyses the lacunas and voids about



A summer school teaches Roma women and men from Moldova about gender equality and their rights. PHOTO: UN PROGRAMME “WOMEN IN POLITICS” RAMIN MAZUR

which these figures and standard approaches to the Roma situation are silent. The author demonstrates how exactly intersectionality functions in this particular case: what is sacrificed by Roma women in order to gain rights in a society – their Roma (ethnic-cultural) or their women’s identifications; how the women’s movements promoting traditional gender roles differ and intersect with those that challenge the power relations between genders; and why is it sometimes necessary to take a tactical position, refusing to see the feminist agenda as the main goal for the sake of coalitions with other movements and reaching the common aim of empowerment. The latter intersects with many postcolonial women’s movements, including Muslim feminism, Chinese feminism, etc. At times the author seems to simplify the situation a bit when she limits herself to only three basic original elements of intersectionality – class, race and gender – which erases some important nuances. Neaga raises a crucial problem for most minoritarian communities – that of the preservation and revival of Roma identification without sliding into essentialism, and steadily preventing any efforts at assimilation.

MARION COLARD’S ARTICLE “L’émancipation de la femme dans la société rom traditionnelle de Roumanie” is mostly informative and draws heavily on intersectional theory, focusing on the possible role of emancipated Roma women as champions of reconciliation of mainstream society with that of the Roma communities. Admitting that the latter still suffer from exclusion grounded in the intersection of ethnicity and poverty, which in itself is a rather incomplete portrait of Roma discrimination, the author predictably completes this list with gender and proposes a hypothesis that women with their complex discrimination can be mediators of all other forms of discrimination. However the author operates with the outdated binary opposition of the modern and traditional values, and in her interpretation the Roma woman still has to choose between or attempt to live in the two worlds (145). However, both of these worlds seem to be highly constructed and stereotyped, and the whole opposition of the

traditional Roma world and contemporary modern society hardly holds. In addition, it is not clear where this work is coming from, in the sense that the author’s positionality is hidden or indirectly presented as external to the Roma – thus reproducing the much criticized scientific objectification once again.

More methodologically promising, though at times economically reductionist, is the article “The racialization of Roma in the New

Europe and the political potential of Romani women” written by Eniko Vincze. This work goes beyond the national discourse of a concrete Eastern European country and addresses global geopolitical tendencies, the correlation of the old and the new (Eastern, poor) Europe, within which the Romani women’s condition becomes token money, whereas their interests remain irrelevant. The author also reflects on the dangers of depoliticization in multicultural rhetoric, distracting from the issues of social and economic inequality and offering rights on paper rather than in reality, leading to the racialization of poverty. Multiple examples of trans-border discrimination against the Roma and wider, Eastern Europeans in the EU, testify to this tendency.

Vincze understands intersectionality in a most attractive dynamic way, focusing on the important issue of the complicated double critique, which is urgent not only for Roma feminism but also for other forms of women’s activism. In this case double critique refers to the criticism of both the Western liberal distortions of Roma history and identity, and the patriarchal control within the Roma community itself, as well as the still existing blindness to the interconnections of different forms of discrimination, particularly if it refers to elements of gender and sexuality entering the Roma discussions rather late. This article becomes a reflection on the meaning and the reasons for the failures of multiculturalism and universalism. The advantage of this work is that the author is familiar with critical race theory, trans-border discrimination, critical political

Continued.
From clients to agents

science, theories of nations without states and other contemporary discourses. Particularly interesting are the author's reflections on the nature of neoliberal racism using the example of Roma discrimination in the EU. The article dwells on the shift from the orientalist annihilation to today's progressivism and the deficiency of the human and cultural rights discourses in the analysis of the Roma situation and their instrumentalization in today's conditions of neoliberal capitalism or, as the author puts it, making the Roma into a "useful labor force for a market economy" (162). A consequence of this policy is addressed as a specific rivalry of poverty-stricken groups in relation to their racial and cultural stigmatization. When it appears to be impossible to integrate the Roma into a neoliberal society, they are dehumanized and their lives become dispensable. One could agree with the author that the political or re-politicized intersectionality of the Roma women, in alliance with other ethnic and social groups and genders, can be an important factor in the revival of the Roma struggle for their dignity and rights of production, reproduction and representation.

The special issue also contains historical works, important for the understanding of the genealogies of today's processes. Thus, Mihai Lucacs' article "The Critical ones: another tale of slavery" is a thorough analysis of the phenomenon of slavery in Romani history and an effort to compare it with the African case. The parallels that are traced adequately explain the racialization of the Roma and their resistance in all historical and contemporary versions of modernity. The main mechanisms of dehumanizing African slaves and the Roma are similar, up to today's boutique multiculturalism and excluding the neo-noble savages from modernity. The author analyzes the emergence and development of the stereotypes of Roma femininity (as an animal/biological rather than cultural condition) in the social control and reproduction of inequality. He introduces into the more accessible context the issues of specific abolitionism in relation to Roma slavery in Moldavia and Walachia, the role of the local feminists in this movement and the problematic civilizing mission in relation to the Roma, seen as passive victims of slavery, as objects and even as the ones to blame for their own enslaved condition,



PHOTO: UN PROGRAMME/FRANIN MAZUR

Diana Leahu (on the right), a 20-year-old Roma woman from Orhei, knows from personal experience what discrimination means. "At university when I presented myself as a Roma, I immediately saw how colleagues' facial expressions changed. One teacher even asked me why I came here and was not getting married, as Roma girls do," she says.

up to a denial of their victimhood. Lucacs dwells on the economic and social aspects of slavery and post-slavery as a condition of permanent poverty and lack of rights, and a loss of culture and identity in exchange for assimilation and questionable freedom, and attempts to explain the emergence of some criticized Roma customs (such as early marriages) by the slavery experience.

The author demonstrates an excellent knowledge of particular features of the Roma mentality, epistemology and ethics. Roma women are seen as the keepers and transmitters of this knowledge through the centuries, as those who can oppose something to the Gadge (non-Roma) view of the Roma. Even the Roma slave women are not devoid of subjectivity, and Lucacs does not see them as passive victims. On the contrary, it was through their resistance that the contours of independent Roma femininity and identity, based in its own and not imposed principles, first started to be shaped.

ONE OF THE MOST ethically and emotionally charged articles on intersectional and postcolonial feminist understanding of the Roma in East European societies is written not by a Roma researcher but by a European feminist anthropologist, Julia Hasdeu, in a most interesting form of a personal epistemological manifesto. For at least two decades she has been reflecting on the difficulties, distortions and silences in the collective interpretation of their experience of the Roma. She also dwells on the blindness of privileged researchers to these Roma wounds. Her position, enriched with knowledge of postcolonial theory, critical race studies and other contemporary discourses of deprivation and resistance, is combined with a deep knowledge of the factual material and a creative rethinking of theory in the light of this material. At the same time Hasdeu, is well aware and critical of her own position as a Gadge researcher, not free of racism in relation to the Roma.

Moreover, she questions the principles of anthropology as a Eurocentric, ideologically biased discipline that in the case of the Roma people ignores the issues of power, and avoids discussing events that are inconvenient for European society, such as the Roma holocaust, slavery, genocide, and today's extreme racialization. The author focuses on the previously neglected affects, traumas, emotional reactions and subjectivities produced

by and in the Roma and the changes in their racialization principles and their mediation in the temporal and political contexts. She thus successfully attempts to enrich anthropology with non-Western feminist theory. Hasdeu is marked by an attractive critical understanding of gender and a dynamic intersectionality in the interpretation of the Roma that is evident in her striving to be more silent, humble and listening, leaving space for the Roma feminists themselves (187).

The latter is quite similar to the principles of indigenous anthropology and echoes other non-Western feminist discourses, such as Muslim feminism, an interesting example of which is offered in the last article of the special issue written by Abla Hasan and devoted to a rereading of the Queen of Sheba's story with the goal of restoring justice in the interpretation of this important figure and advancing support of female public leadership in contemporary Muslim societies.

Envisioning Roma Feminism was conceived as a timely and important special issue consisting of somewhat unequal yet generally quite interesting articles. The overall impression is slightly spoiled by an insufficiently theoretical and conceptually inept editorial, full of annoying mistakes and misprints (the journal seems to lack a good proof reader which, is obvious in several articles, but especially in the editorial). For example 'essentialism' in the interpretation of the Roma women is mistakenly called 'existentialism'. In addition to this, the editorial does not offer anything conceptually new or original, except for reproducing the same basic intersectionality discourse once again. It is largely a result of the relatively recent discovery of this concept by Roma feminists and its interpretation as a step forward in relation to identity politics or assimilation. But this seems to be the main mistake – it is much more rewarding not to apply someone else's categories but rather to create or recreate one's own. And several authors of this special issue attempted to do just that. Hopefully this important work will be continued in the future. ✖

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Europe faces Europe.
Voices from the East

Europe faces
Europe:
Narratives
from its
Eastern Half

Johan Fornäs
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2017,
252 pages.

The major political and institutional form of Europe, the European Union, was built on the ruins of the Second World War as a Western European peace project. Over the course of the following decades, it gained a profile as a state-level form of cooperation within a setting of freedom, democracy and prosperity. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the political East did not solely mean the beginning of the ever-increasing integration and expansion of the EU we know today. From the viewpoint of the West's attractiveness in Cold War Europe, at the beginning of the 1990s the EU had a rocky road ahead in redeeming the truism of its identity.

The discussion of the European idea, or rather of the lack of it, demonstrates that this idea faces constant yet unrealistic expectations. The liberation from the shackles of communism has not provided a politically solid frame for a European identity for years, to say nothing of the distant horrors of World War Two. The criticism of the Western European liberal model that emerged in the former Communist Bloc territory is vivid proof of this. While the European integration process concerns former communist Europe in particular, *little attention has so far been given to how East European voices themselves relate to Europe as a dynamic project*. This is the basic research setting of the volume *Europe faces Europe: Narratives from its Eastern Half*, edited by Johan Fornäs, which powerfully approaches Eastern European narratives of Europe and Europeanness within six diverse case studies preceded by Fornäs' comprehensive introductory chapter. This previously neglected angle convincingly addresses the essential nexus between the European presence and history as well as the continent's most probable future.

Instead of focusing on particular geopolitical mapping, the book centers on the *peripherality* of European voices. While no study dealing with European identities and ideas can formulate a single and monolithic Europeanness, *Europe faces Europe* aims to scrutinize the plurality of European *identifications*. Although the book's emphasis on the plurality of voices represents nothing new as such, it is certainly relevant given the politically acute tension that prevails between Brussels-centered unifying ideals and Europe's peripheral narratives.

CARL CEDERBERG APPROACHES the famous appeal for a "new narrative for Europe" expressed in various forums in 2013–2014 by José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, in the light of writings of Hegel, Edmund Husserl and the lesser-known original Czech dissident philosopher Jan Patočka. Cederberg analyzes how Barroso's bureaucratic-authoritative appeal reflects the paradox of Europeans who hold universality as their particularity, as identified by Hegel and Husserl. By contrast, within his original philosophical *heresy*, Patočka pinpointed essential divisions in Europe, not only between West and East, but also between Europe and the Islamic world, in a way that went far beyond the ideological status quo between

Continued.
Europe faces Europe

capitalism and communism in 1975 when Patočka wrote the lines. According to Cederberg, it is Patočka's interpretation of *caring for Europe's soul* that is the most apposite regarding identities in Europe. It underlines the continuous struggle and renegotiation of the ideal of Europe.

In his chapter on the Cold War-era geopolitical narratives, Stefan Jonsson examines the two narrative approaches of the Soviet Union and the GDR concerning their views on Western European integration. The first of these approaches envisioned the common socialist future provided that the West's workers overturn capitalism and develop a successful Soviet-type society. Another narrative was built on a more general view on the modernization of civilization, envisioning a common European prosperity based on Europe's progressive history of capitalism and political emancipation. Some simplifying interpretations notwithstanding, the chapter provides compelling connections to the present disagreements and conflicts between the EU and Russia regarding the European ideal and the future.

ROMAN HORBYK'S CHAPTER on representations of Europe in selected data from the Ukrainian, Russian and Polish media during the "Euro-maidan" demonstrations in Kyiv provides a fascinating account of controversies that prevail between local identifications and upper-level identity ideals. It is grotesque that a motley group of people – some of them anything but pro-European liberals – died in the Maidan square carrying EU flags at time when the EU itself was struggling with political legitimacy and evoking the need for a new narrative for Europe. Likewise, Horbyk's analysis shows how Polish media passionately supported Ukraine's Euro-oriented popular rising while the country has profiled itself as the most vocal and influential critical member of the EU. Europe and Europeaness are constructed as an unattainable ideal from emphatically opposite standpoints – in particular, Russian mainstream vs. Ukrainian and Polish media.



The Iranian illustrator Sasan Saidi, living in Germany, says: "We can share a European identity without denying or abandoning our own roots".

Anne Kaun approaches the peripheral niche of the global Occupy protest movement by comparing media coverage of the Occupy Stockholm and Occupy Latvia movements in the respective countries. The comparison reveals interesting historical backgrounds and local factors in the frame of a transnational protest movement, yet the analysis as a whole remains too narrow. Katarina Wadstein MacLeod examines the *resilience* of peripheral identity in the curatorial strategies of four art projects dedicated to East European art. Her conclusion is that the European integration at identity level, "unity in diversity," has not seen the light of day. East European art is still "East European" and peripheral.

The final chapter by Johan Fornäs is a long and comprehensive analysis of East European narratives of Europe in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) in the framework of televised popular music. Fornäs scrutinizes East European songs and performers as well as representative frames of East European countries that have hosted the ESC since 1989. Fornäs's detailed analysis is based on the documented intentions of politicians, performers, composers and broadcasters and the reception history of the songs and contests in evaluating how Europe is constructed in them. The author's familiarity with the topic is breathtaking, and the chapter provides valuable insights into analyses of narratives combining textual, visual and audio data.

Fornäs' final chapter crystallizes the major offering of the volume as a whole: the rich operationalization of cultural studies methodology in the highly topical subject, narratives on Europe and Europeaness from the viewpoint of its "target," yet peripheral, position. In view of the excellent research agenda, versatile data, and convincing analyses, the volume would benefit from a slightly lighter and less theory-laden style that would make it more accessible. ✖

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Russia, Norway and the Arctic.
Challenges to security policies

Geir Hønneland, Russia and the Arctic. Environment, Identity and Security political challenges.

London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016, 205 pages

Tormod Heier og Anders Kjølborg (red.). Norge og Russland. Sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer i nordområdene.

[Norway and Russia. Security Policies in the Northern Areas], Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015, 208 pages.

Even if it is rarely mentioned on these pages, the Arctic region, especially the part called the Barents region, certainly belongs to the "Baltic worlds" and has many connections with the Baltic Sea region.¹ Needless to say, the former influences the climate and weather in the latter region. Most Nordic states and Russia are part of both regions, and all are members of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Arctic Council with their overlapping agendas.² While, for example, Sweden mainly faces the Baltic Sea region, Norway is more concerned with the Barents Sea and its border with Russia. It is therefore only natural that Norwegians and Norwegian institutes are among the most prominent in research concerning that region. This is amply shown by the two books at hand.

Hønneland is director of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Oslo and author of several books on Russia, Norway and the Arctic, with special focus on fishing issues. This book, which he has long wished to write, presents a wide range of theories on narrative, identity and foreign policy, whereas environment as mentioned in the book title is less evident.³ It partly builds on previously-used material, Russian newspapers, official statements and personal interviews from the 2000s.

Mostly relying on the renowned British historian E.H. Carr's *Time, Narrative and History* (1986), Hønneland sees narratives (stories), a sub-category of discourse, as constituting identities, but also entailing certain actions. He refers to the Swedish historian Erik Ringmar, who argues that stories of selves are preconditions for stories about interests and that recognition is important for one's identity. In the narratives, Ringmar discerns four types of 'plot' derived from literature, namely *romance*, where a hero saves the world, *tragedy*, where the hero is defeated, *comedy*, where the twists of fate find a happy ending, and *satire*, which takes an ironic distance.⁴ Hønneland applies these to Russian views on four interrelated policy issues: the scramble for the Arctic, the Barents Sea delimitation, management of marine resources and regional identity building.

AFTER REVIEWING WESTERN INTERNATIONAL RELATION RESEARCH on the Arctic since the 1980s, Hønneland starts with an overview of literature on Russian identity and foreign policy as it has evolved – from Westernism and Slavophilism in the 19th century (as analyzed by Iver B. Neumann) and anti-Western Communism, to Atlanticism under Gorbachev/ Yeltsin and great power statism with a Eurasian bent under Putin⁵ (A. Tsygankov). The 'North' (including Siberia!) was viewed as the land of freedom and bounty or, by some, as a prison. Russia came to identify itself more and more with the North, considering winter as the most Russian time of the year. The Soviets saw the North as a great resource; Solzhenitsyn saw it as Russia's salvation. Latter-day nationalists regard the Arctic as a compensation for the hegemony lost with the demise of the Soviet Union. Russia is associated with boundless space, a wide soul and disdain of a plain, dull life.⁶

In the chapter on the scramble for the Arctic, which was regulated through the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)⁷, Hønneland analyzes the Russian race to the North Pole, the planting of the Russian flag there in 2007, and the Russian debate in the following years. The government press above all presents the Arctic as a Russian domain, which it peacefully guards, whereas Canada, which also has an Arctic identity, is singled out as the main villain in militarizing the region (!). (Canada in fact opposed NATO activities in the Arctic.⁸) But Hønneland also extensively quotes and analyzes an article in a liberal newspaper that openly ridiculed the Russian claims and efforts in the Arctic as bluff and pretense. The dominant plot structure lies between romance, where the hero fights to save the Arctic for itself, and tragedy, where the West is looming. But he also finds satire in tales about Russia's never-failing ability to ruin everything that is good.

THE CHAPTER ON the delimitation of the Barents Sea between Russia and Norway presents the long negotiations on fishing rights, the median line, and Svalbard, which led to the famous compromise in 2010, as well as the concomitant discussion. Hønneland shows that the agreement was opposed and delayed by the former Soviet deputy fisheries minister V. Zilanov, the fishing industry, and the Murmansk Duma. It was argued that the Russian delegation, implicitly President Medvedev, had forfeited historic rights and was letting Norway squeeze out the Russian fishermen from rich waters (although the opposite was true). However, on the day the deal was announced, the Murmansk governor Yevdokimov wrote that the Barents Sea in fact was Russia's and Norway's common 'kitchen garden', adding that Norway could offer Russia advanced extraction technology on the shelf. After pressure from Moscow, the Murmansk Duma soon changed its mind and instead praised the agreement as a platform for cooperation. According to Hønneland, Zilanov saw Russia as a tragic hero, who lost the fight against shrewd Westerners, thus with more internal 'othering' than of blame on others. The winning side instead saw a comedy/satire, where misunderstandings are cleared up and everything is fine.

A related chapter deals with the disputes

Continued.
Russia, Norway and the Arctic

over how to manage the rich common fish stocks in the Barents Sea and Norway's fishery protection zone around Svalbard, disputes that resulted in incidents in the 2000s but were largely resolved in good faith. On this topic, Hønneland finds two related forms of Russian identity, both resulting in tragedy. This stems either from perceived Western malice or from Russia's eternal inability to maintain order, or both. The Norwegian side is depicted either as crafty Vikings aiming to break Russia's neck on NATO's behalf, or as a civilized country, safeguarding the fish stocks in a manner beyond Russian comprehension. Here Hønneland also finds an element of comedy.

THE NEXT CHAPTER on region building and identity formation contains in-depth interviews conducted several years ago with Kola inhabitants, showing that they see themselves as different from both weak southern Russians and soulless, affluent Scandinavians. However, when it comes to environmental protection they trust the latter more than Russian authorities. Here Hønneland discerns a mix of comedy and satire. On the institutional level, he presents the Norwegian initiative to form a common Barents region and council with Russia, building on the tradition of Pomor trade along the coast, ideas that first met some response in the Russian Arctic. However, the Pomor concept was soon discarded as a Norwegian-American trick to destroy the Russian ethnoses. Ivan Moiseev, director of a Pomor institute in Arkhangelsk, was accused and found guilty of inciting hatred in 2013.⁹ Here Hønneland finds a NATO-inspired tragedy with some satire.

From these four cases, Hønneland concludes that tragedy is the most forceful narrative, while romance, comedy and satire are less prevalent. In all cases, Russia defines itself in relation to the West and NATO, but this can be modified and differentiated with Norway being seen as rather friendly and Canada as more aggressive. There is also internal 'othering' in the blame put on Moscow, past mistakes and general Russian incompetence with 'fools and bad roads'. In Hønneland's view, Russia in the Arctic has so far opted for openness to the world, accommodation with Norway, and adherence to international law as advocated by the Foreign Ministry.

However, the scales can easily tip. Hønneland notices that the power structures have been rewarded by more investments in the Arctic and that a Ukrainian crisis started in 2014. Narratives can change, they do not offer a full explanation of foreign policy behavior and they need to be complemented by a study of internal power struggles. Indeed, since Putin's re-election in 2012 Russia has become more repressive, nationalistic and anti-Western, and the militarization of the Russian Arctic has intensified. Russia has tested the limits of Norwegian sovereignty on Svalbard with visits by a sanctions-listed minister and military units en route to exercises near the Pole. Tragic, self-critical and satirical views on Russian identity and foreign policy vis-à-vis the West are probably yielding ground to stories about Russia as a hero.

Hønneland's sophisticated and theory-oriented, yet very in-

formative, book is well supplemented by Heier & Kjølberg's more empirical anthology. This looks at Russia from a Norwegian security perspective, written as it is mostly by researchers and officers at the Defence Research Institute (FFI) and other military institutions. It is also more up-to-date, even though it was published slightly earlier, and it provides special chapters on external events and internal Norwegian conditions.

In the introduction, the editors pose the question of which security political challenges (N.B. not threats) Norway is facing in view of Russia's military actions in Ukraine. True, Russia is no longer a superpower and inferior to NATO, but it opposes the Western conception of a world order built on common liberal values, instead proposing spheres of interest and Westphalian state sovereignty. It has taken surprising military steps to achieve its goals. Russia can now be seen as a revisionist state aiming to restore its former status.¹⁰ The country is particularly interested in the Arctic because of its economic potential, and it has considerably boosted its military power since the 2000s.

IN THE FIRST chapter on Norwegian-Russian relations in the High North (as Norwegians call their Arctic neighborhood), Anders Kjølberg observes that for 600 years Russia has never fought a war with Norway (unlike, for example, Sweden) but on the contrary helped to liberate Finnmark from Nazi troops in 1944. True, Soviet leaders soon raised demands concerning Svalbard and later Sovietized Eastern Europe, as a reaction to which Norway joined NATO in 1949. But Norway also adopted a dual policy of 'deterrence and reassurance' (*avskrekking og beroligelse*) (J.J. Holst) vis-à-vis Russia, as well as 'integration and screening' (R. Tamnes) with regard to NATO, which meant self-defined limitations concerning NATO bases, nuclear weapons and exercises in Norway.¹¹ After the Cold War, the restrictions on NATO exercises were relaxed, but military contacts with Russia were also established. After Russia's interventions in Georgia and Ukraine, it is now the Baltic states and Finnmark that need reassurance by NATO, according to Kjølberg.

In a historical survey of how Russia views the West, the second editor Tormod Heier notes that even though Russia was one of the domi-



The Barents region is defined as the area around the Barents Sea, including Svalbard.

nant European powers in the 19th century, the Tsars that feared the West would undermine their autocratic regime and saw Russia as the guardian of the true Europe – just like today. The Communist regime also saw Russia as a champion for Europe, but a proletarian one.¹² Heier rightly sees a Westernizing trend under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, but considers the August coup in 1991 as the start of Russian national patriotism rather than a Soviet backlash. Moreover, Yeltsin's 1993 constitution is called a step away from liberal values on account of the strong powers accorded to the president. In Putin's presidencies, Heier views a return to the old Russian spiritual tradition, where stability is more important than democracy. He seems to agree with D. Trenin's and A. Tsygankov's views that this development is also a result of Western disrespect for Russian security interests as manifested by NATO enlargement, support for revolutions in, for example, Ukraine and its interventions in Kosovo and elsewhere.¹³ Heier ends with the strange question of whether a too liberal interpretation of democratic values might not lead to dissolution of the state and Western hegemony in Russian society.

GEIR HØNNELAND AND Anne-Kristin Jørgensen then step in to analyze the compromise culture that has prevailed in Russian-Norwegian fishery relations since the 1970s despite changing political ups-and-downs, including the Ukraine crisis. There is a standing joint commission, the 2010 delimitation deal was a compromise, and Russia too needs to avoid overfishing.

Turning then to the chapters on factors external to the strictly bilateral relations, Katarzyna Zysk scrutinizes Russia's military assets in the Arctic and their development in recent years de-

spite economic stagnation. She identifies three types of threats as seen in Russia, including threats from the USA, threats to Russia's economic interests in the Arctic, and non-military threats to its transport lanes, for instance, US claims that the Northern Sea Route should be internationalized.

Further, Tor Bukvoll and Kristian Åtland examine Russia's wars in Georgia and Ukraine and their consequences and lessons for Norway, concluding that NATO membership is a key factor. Jo G. Gade and Paal Sigurd Hilde examine NATO's policy in the High North and its growing importance. Finally, four chapters on internal factors in Norway describe Norway's military posture and interests in the Far North.

In the concluding remarks, the editors note that NATO has become more important for Norway in recent years. They highlight the risk that a more nationalist Russia might want to revise agreements with Norway in order to strengthen its legitimacy and avert attention from domestic problems. US foreign policy is said to be so ideological that a change to a more pro-Russian policy is unlikely. However, after the book was published, the election of Donald Trump as US President for a time raised that possibility, which was probably promoted and then hailed by Russia. Indeed, things change.

Continued. Russia, Norway and the Arctic

Clearly, Hønneland's book and Heier & Kjølberg's anthology offer a lot of factual information and theoretical insights concerning Russian-Norwegian relations in the Arctic from different perspectives, which sometimes overlap. They show that the topics and the region are important and worthy of scholarly study also in the neighboring Baltic Sea states. ✕

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references

- 1 The Arctic is here loosely defined as the area north of the Polar Circle, and the Barents region is defined as the area around the Barents Sea, including Svalbard. See also Thomas Lundén, "Cross-over contacts in the subarctic peripheries", *Baltic Worlds*, no. 4, 2016, 95–96.
- 2 Ingmar Oldberg, "Rysslands roll i Östersjörådet, Barentsrådet och Arktiska rådet" [Russia's role in the Council of Baltic Sea states, the Barents and Arctic councils], *Nordisk Östforum* no. 1, 2014, 9–20.
- 3 Environment is the focus of discourse analysis in Hønneland's *Russia and the West. Environmental cooperation and conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 4 Erik Ringmar, "Intertextual relations: The quarrel over the Iraq war as conflict between narrative types", *Cooperation and Conflict*, no. 41 (2006) 403–421.
- 5 Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe. A Study in Identity and International relations*, London: Routledge, 1995, Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).
- 6 Here references are made e.g., to Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul. The Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).
- 7 According to UNCLOS, economic zones may only reach 200 nautical miles from the shoreline, but claims on continental shelves of another 150 nautical miles based on geological evidence may be presented to a UN commission of experts. These, however, only give a judgment for the states to negotiate on.
- 8 See Gade and Hilde, p. 99 in Heier & Kjølberg (red.) as reviewed here, and Niklas Granholm, *Delar av ett nytt Arktis* [Parts of a new Arctic] (Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2009) 31 ff.
- 9 Moiseev turned to the European Court of Human Rights, apparently to no avail so far.
- 10 See also my paper "Is Russia a status quo power?" *UI Papers* no. 1, 2016 (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs).
- 11 Johan J. Holst, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk i strategisk perspektiv* [Norwegian Security Policy in a Strategic Perspective] (Oslo: NUIPI, 1967), Rolf Tamnes, *Integration and Screening – The Two Faces of Norwegian Alliance Policy, 1945–1986* (Oslo: FFI, 1987).
- 12 Heier here refers to Neumann (1996) *op.cit.*
- 13 Tsygankov, *op.cit.*, Dmitrii Trenin, "Russia Leaves the West" *Foreign Affairs*, no. 4, 2006, 87.

Norm-breaking female soldiers. Russian revolutionary heroes

Låt oss dö som hjältar: kvinnliga soldater i revolutionens Ryssland

[Let us die as heroes: Female soldiers in the Russia of the Revolution and the Civil War] Per Enerud, Carlsson Bokförlag 2014 275 pages.

Although Per Enerud's book *Let us die as heroes: Female soldiers in the Russia of the Revolution and the Civil War* [Låt oss dö som hjältar: Kvinnliga soldater i revolutionens och inbördeskriget Ryssland] is not primarily about women and war, the matter of women and war is nonetheless essential when reading the book, which deals with women who defied the norms of the day. The author is a freelance journalist and makes clear that his goal was not to write research but rather to create a journalistic report, to "talk about an exciting epoch by means of two concrete women, and about two concrete women by means of an exciting epoch". This means that there are no footnotes, that the text is written entirely in the historical present, that the content becomes to some degree a kind of basic course in Russian history, and that the manner of addressing the reader is sometimes as casual as it is with the columnists of *Metro*, the free newspaper. But despite the unpretentious appearance, Enerud's book is very much worth reading, and it contains many interesting reflections about Russia's twentieth-century history.

The two women Enerud chose to study appear in many ways to be each other's opposites. Maria Bochkareva was a poor peasant woman from Siberia who, despite her gender, was allowed to fight as a volunteer in the tsarist army in 1914, and who, after the February Revolution, organized a female "death battalion" for the Kerensky regime, which was sent to the front in the summer of 1917. During the civil war, Bochkareva allied herself with the Whites and was sent to Britain and the United States to mobilize opinion against the Bolsheviks. However, when she returned to Russia, she was captured by the Reds and executed.

LARISA REISNER BELONGED to an entirely different social and ideological milieu. She was part of a Baltic-German-Polish noble family in St. Petersburg, had a university education, spoke several languages, and spent time with famous writers and bards such as Maxim Gorky and Alexander Blok. Her father had leftist sympathies, and she was herself involved early on in the Bolshevik Party. During the civil war, she served as a political commissar in the navy. Before dying of typhoid in 1926, she managed to be a diplo-



Maria Bochkareva (above) and Larissa Reisner (right).



mat's wife in Kabul and Comintern agent in Hamburg, as well as gain fame as a journalist and writer.

It is not only socially and ideologically that Bochkareva and Reisner seem to be each other's opposites. A Swedish journalist from the newspaper *The Social Democrat*, who reported on the Russian Women's Battalion in 1917, wrote that Bochkareva's "by no means contemptible corpulence" made the uniform a bad fit, but on the contrary she would be "a pleasant hostess behind the jars of preserves and trays of cookies during a nice chat around the samovar in some small town out in the country". The slender Reisner – the mistress of Anna Achmatova's husband Nikolay Gumilyov (executed in 1921), of the Comintern leader Karl Radek (executed in 1939), and possibly also of Leon Trotsky (murdered in 1940) – is, on the other hand, described by contemporary witnesses as a rare beauty. She remained aristocratically refined even during the Soviet times, requiring cavalry horses for her regular riding tours through the freezing and starving Petrograd and arranging masquerade balls in the Admiralty's halls for the city's cultural elite. The costumes had been ordered from the costume collection at the Mariinsky Theatre.

The upper class girl who becomes a revolutionary is not unique – Alexandra Kollontai is another example from the same time and milieu – but what motivated Maria Bochkareva? Unlike Reisner, she left no written texts or private letters. We know her

story only from a book of "memoirs" written as propaganda by a journalist during her United States trip in 1918, and from the interrogation records written up by the Cheka in connection with her arrest in 1920. Her upbringing with an abusive father ruined by drink seems to have been an extremely unhappy one. As an eight-year-old, she was forced to work in order to help support the family. During the Russo-Japanese War, when she was fifteen years old, she ran away with an ensign. He vanished to the front, and she instead married a former soldier – Bochkaryov – who was an alcoholic and abused her. She left him and joined up with another man who also abused her. Several times

she tried to take her own life. At the outbreak of World War I, the tsarist regime imposed a ban on alcohol. This proved to be disastrous, since one third of the Russian state's income came from the sale of vodka, but Bochkareva – in whose life vodka had caused so much misery – sensed like millions of other people in Europe in the summer of 1914, that "a new, more pure, happier, and holier world" was about to be born. She left the man who was beating her and walked on foot two hundred

kilometers through the Siberian Taiga – to volunteer as a soldier! The commander in Tomsk rejected her, but she sent a telegram to the tsar who approved her wish to become a soldier.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY, IT IS EASY to imagine that the military environment, with its "regulated brutality", might seem like a refuge from more erratic tormenters at home. And because of her previous experiences, Bochkareva did not have any problems whatsoever adapting to the raw atmosphere among her comrades. She redefined herself as a man when wearing the uniform. The guys called her "Jaska" (the diminutive of Jakov, her partner's first name), and brought her along when they went to the brothel.

The memoirs also indicate that she was an enterprising and resourceful person. Before

Continued.
Norm-breaking female soldiers

the war, in order to support herself and her abusive, alcoholic husband, she worked laying asphalt and managed to advance to the position of foreman, responsible for twenty-five workers. (For a time she also ran a combined laundry, sauna, and tea room.) Although Enerud does not make a point of it in his work, Bochkareva acquired experiences that were unusual in tsarist Russia. The industrial sector was relatively small – barely three percent of Russian peasant households would generally hire additional help, and there was nothing like the rich spectrum of popular movements, political parties, and labor unions that existed in Western Europe that offered ordinary people leadership experience. For this reason, the Russian Army was in need of competent lower ranking officers in 1914. There were two NCOs for each Russian rifle company in 1914 – compared with twelve in each German rifle company. Obviously, this would influence the outcome of the war between Russia and Germany. When Bochkareva joined the tsarist army, she thus had leadership experience, which most of the 12–13 million Russian men inducted into the army during World War I were lacking. On the front, she distinguished herself immediately, was wounded three times and awarded several medals, and was quickly promoted to corporal.

When discipline began to break down after the tsar's fall in the spring of 1917, she had had enough and wanted to leave the army. The President of the Duma, Pavel Rodzianko, met her during a visit to the front and ensured that she came to Petrograd. There, she was given the responsibility for training and leading a women's battalion.

The women's battalion would set an example, shame the men on the front, and thereby strengthen the faltering morale. The women's battalion could also be put on display before foreign journalists as a symbol of the new, progressive Russia and generate goodwill and continued loans from the Western allies. Although the fall of the tsarist regime resulted in the introduction of soldiers' committees for every unit, and a ban on all punishment, Bochkareva ruled with an iron fist. The recruits were buffeted by slaps in the face. The two thousand women who reported as volunteers were quickly reduced to about three hundred. These were all the more devoted, and were shipped away to

the front, where in July of 1917 the Russian Army prepared for its last offensive during World War I. When Bochkareva's battalion rushed out of the trenches, it had been reinforced so that two men were in the lead between each woman. After initial successes, the attack soon fell apart – though it was not primarily the female soldiers who failed. In October, when the Bolsheviks were taking over, Bochkareva's battalion was still on the front, where, more or less alone, it continued fighting against the Germans. Only then was it disbanded, and Bochkareva commenced the odyssey that would take her to London and New York, and would end with the executioners of the Cheka.

Bochkareva's battalion was only one of fifteen different female units established in Russia in 1917. Another was the battalion that defended the Winter Palace during the storming by the Red Guards. In total, about 5,000 women joined these units. Yet Bochkareva's battalion was the only one that saw combat. As before in history, in Russia in 1917 genuine femininity was viewed as incompatible with the warrior identity. Bochkareva explained to the recruits on arrival that, now, "you are no longer women, but soldiers".

IN THE SOVIET UNION, Bochkareva was conveniently forgotten. The same fate befell Larissa Reisner, who had a problematic class background and was too entangled with disagreeable figures such as Trotsky and Radek. Still, during World War II the Soviet Union was the only country that allowed women to have combat roles. They served as snipers and fighter pilots, and as medics on the front. The approximately 250,000 Soviet women who not only wore the uniform but underwent military training constituted less than one percent of the Red Army's personnel from 1941 to 1945, but in a struggle that concerned the nation's very survival, their efforts were of moral importance. As with Bochkareva's death battalion, their presence would spur men on to sacrifice.

As Enerud points out, Bochkareva's life story fits well with the Russian myth of "the holy idiot". She lives a fairly ordinary Russian woman's life until she suddenly receives a calling, and then she challenges the prevailing order in words and actions, turns everything upside-down in order to serve the Russian people, and in the end dies as a martyr at the hands of the irreverent Bolsheviks. According to the author, it is thus by no means impossible that she will be declared a saint in Vladimir Putin's Russia, where she has been increasingly celebrated in recent years, and where the need for heroes and role models has now become particularly acute. ❌

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Transnational and cosmopolitan families.
Exploring diversity among migrants

Viorela Ducu and Áron Telegdi-Csetri,
Managing "Difference" in Eastern-European Transnational Families

Peter Lang:
Frankfurt am
Main,
2016,
190 pages.

This book is a welcome and fascinating addition to the recent debates on family migration to, from and within the diverse European countries and beyond. The collection begins with a substantial introduction on transnational differences and cosmopolitan meanings in the lives of families and couples who are originally coming from or are related to so-called Eastern Europe. I really enjoyed this book!

I felt like I was thinking right along with the authors especially, when reading the introduction. I highly recommend this piece. Research on family migration to/from/within this very diverse region is a much needed topic to explore. Firstly, Eastern European migrants have for too long been portrayed as "economic migrants", and we still know too little and our knowledge is still too scattered regarding the diversity of the broad field of family migration. Economic aspects, of course, play an important role in family matters, but if we begin our journey from the understanding of family relations, such an endeavour is much richer and nuanced. Throughout the theoretical introduction and diverse contributions, we can see that "free movers" actually do not see themselves or their relatives as economic migrants. People do not use such vocabulary in their everyday discourses.

This collection approaches the whole region as a locus of diversity – from economically thriving Poland, to poorer Albania, from member states of the European Union (EU) to candidate states and (potential) candidate states. We use different alphabets in Eastern Europe, have different dominant religions and so many languages. Due to geopolitical positioning and different migration "freedoms" or "restrictions", human movements across national and regional borders vary greatly across this space. In lay discourses, we tend to quickly judge and compare states and societies according to standards (who imposed these, one might ask ...) such as closeness or distance to the West. Differences in this region are multiply layered, and various in-between processes of identification and belonging flourish in Eastern Europe.

The critical inquiry into differences within the region, countries and communities complicates the picture even further. Although we are, again, used to thinking about Eastern Europe

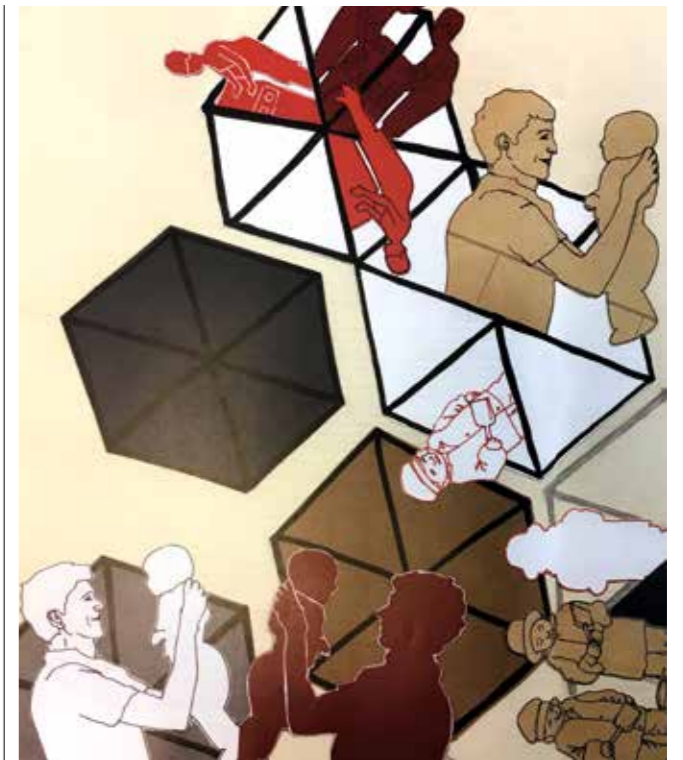


ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

as an emigration region, as source-countries, many families are "truly" transnational and cosmopolitan – they live, travel, and maintain ties not only within Europe, but also globally.

THE BOOK consists of the introduction and ten chapters and is divided into three parts. The first deals with transnational families from a gendered perspective.

It includes contributions on cross-border fathering in transnational Ukrainian families and develops a typology of "check-paying fathers", "re-emerging fathers" and "waning fathers" according to the degree of responsibility the men feel towards their families back home. This is a much needed contribution; we know increasingly more about female migration from Ukraine to various European countries, but this chapter fills the gap in research of gendered remittances, fatherhood remittances and changing men's roles in migratory contexts. This part also features a chapter on human trafficking of Romanian women in Italy and how family and emotional ties are used as coercive instruments by exploiters. It also explores the correlation between children left behind and human trafficking. The next chapter takes a different vantage point – the emancipation of Romanian migrant women – and rightly points out that feminist approaches are still seldomly used in Central and Eastern European migration studies. For the highly skilled, transnational lifestyles are rather congruent with their vocation, and emanci-

Continued. Transnational and cosmopolitan families

pation goes hand in hand with lifestyle migration. Professionals engage in migratory careers with motivations that are not solely economic. Their main motivations, indeed, can be lifestyle and related to positive risk-taking. These individuals want to explore the world, and they see migration as an existential endeavour, or even an adventure.

Finally, in this first part, comes a chapter on work-family balance analysis in a migration context and through a gender lens. It addresses women's emancipation and nuances of redefining motherhood among Albanian women in Greece. The chapter probes the question of how transnational mothers expand the concept of hegemonic mothering. Working migrant mothers feel much guiltier that they cannot fit everything within 24 hours, including work, career, and care for family members. During the economic crisis in Greece, many men, including and especially migrant men, lost their jobs, and more women became the bread-winners for their families.

The next part of the book is devoted to couples in the context of migration and begins with a contribution on Polish couples in Norway. The authors argue that when acquiring egalitarian capital in an egalitarian country like Norway, the paramount importance lies in mediums and relations within which migrants are embedded. The difference in gender egalitarian Norway in comparison to Poland therefore shapes integration practices among migrants. In sum, the specific egalitarian capital is gained through socialisation processes in migration contexts and in the dynamics of a family life.

The next chapter provides an in-depth single case study of a Chinese-Hungarian couple. It follows to the twists and turns in the decades-long life story of a Hungarian woman married to a Chinese wholesale tradesman. The contribution is well-grounded in the broader context of Chinese migration to Hungary and in the contradictions of a transnational family-business career and an independent professional career in couple relationships. I want to especially highlight the chapter by Ducu and Hossu on bi-national couples living in a third country with potentially tri-national children. As someone studying translocal families within the Baltic-Nordic region, I was especially delighted to find useful conceptualizations and interpretations of the choices that are made among such couples. For instance, couples can choose a language that is "neutral" – neither the mother's nor the father's but, for instance, from a country where the couple met or their previous residence. The authors make a convincing case for how families choose language practices to escape power relations, and such practices become a focal point of a couple's subjective history. This might be at odds with dominant and rigid ideas of migrant integration, but family migration has never been a straightforward case for "managing" migration or integration. Besides, bi-national couples pose a challenge for return migration too; returning "home" means at least two countries, and one of these, or both, can be completely "foreign" countries to their children.

Third, and the shorter part, of the book is devoted to transnationalism during childhood. It consists of two contributions. One is on children who were "left behind" in Romania and are young adults today. The experiences of these young adults are studied both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, the last chapter deals with the issue of adoption of Eastern European children after the "Iron curtain" deregulations. Written from a human rights perspective, it probes deeper into how events in recent history have led to a lack of trust in institutions responsible for child adoption. The study provides a useful global overview of why many countries have banned international adoption, and it emphasizes the relevance of national laws, especially in Eastern Europe and Russia.

In sum, this is a book full of rich, critical ideas and original contributions. On a slightly critical note, which may be inevitable in most publications, claiming coverage of "Eastern Europe," the book is somewhat dominated by contributions from and about Romania. The Baltic states are overlooked here although some commentators might be pleased that the political efforts to getting rid of packaging the Baltic states in such an "invented region" are underway. Nonetheless, such in-depth contributions of family migration to, from and within the Baltics would also be a very welcome addition to the migration literature landscape.

Lastly, do not forget to read footnotes of the introduction. These are particularly strong, critical and well developed. To one of the footnotes, I added an exclamation mark. Indeed, why do we tend to think about family migrants and care only in terms of "moral economy"? If we approach family migration within the conceptual framework of political economy, we might make a leap forward in recognizing the relevance of family in current migration regimes. ✖

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THE PEACE OF STOLBOVA 1617 – A SEMINAR ON THE BEGINNING OF A PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

The 400th anniversary of the peace treaty between Sweden and Russia has for obvious reasons been in the shadow of the revolution(s) and coup(s) that occur 300 years later. But apart from the fact that the political changes affected the same area of the Russian-Swedish-Finnish borderland, the Stolbova peace marked the beginning of almost a century of relatively good relations between the neighboring states, with many interesting aspects on trans-border interactions.

A seminar on this theme was arranged by Armémuseum, the Swedish Army Museum in Stockholm, in cooperation with the Section for Slavic languages at Stockholm University, on Friday, October 13, 2017. Associate professor Elisabeth Löfstrand, Stockholm University, gave a background and described the great political disorder in Russia at the time of the treaty and the Swedish attempts to intervene in the complicated succession to the Russian throne. Her colleague, professor Per-Arne Bodin, spoke about two contemporary Swedish authors' description of Russia, Petrus Persson Petrejus in a lengthy monograph from 1615 and Johannes Botvidi in a short doctoral dissertation in 1620, and especially their attempts to describe the Orthodox faith as "relatively Christian" (i.e. Lutheran) in contrast to Papism.

PROFESSOR ADRIAN SELIN of St. Petersburg Higher School of Economics gave a talk entitled "After the assignment: Agitation, repatriation, delimitation". The peace process and the treaty contained many aspects, some trivial, and some of great importance. From Selin's introduction: "The Treaty of Stolbovo was signed on February 27, 1617. It was the final point of a long confrontation between Russia and Sweden, each filled with different political ideas and conversations. Peace between the two powers was assumed, and the conversations in 1615–17 were primarily about money, territories, and the souls of Novgorodian servicemen, peasants and priests. However, the result was the appearance on the Baltic coast of new type of territory that could at best be called a borderland.



The peace treaty was signed on May 1, 1617.

Sweden received territory inhabited by an Eastern Orthodox Christian population. This new Swedish province existed for more than eighty years." Selin's book *Russko-Shvedskaya Granitsa (1617–1700 gg.): Formirovaniye, Funktsionirovaniye, Nasledie* [The Russian-Swedish boundary (1617–1700): Formation, functionality, heritage] was published in St. Petersburg in 2016 but has so far not been translated. Docent Aleksandr Tolstikov of Petrozavodsk University described the boundary as a symbolic resource. The transition into Russia by foreign officials was organized as "entering the home of the tsar", while Orthodox believ-

ers from the Swedish side were badly treated in Novgorod. While monks and priests were demanded to leave within 14 days, or to stay in the new Swedish territories, the Orthodox faith was thus not forbidden and churches and even priests and monks lived on but were not replaced, as explained by docent Alexander Pereswettoff-Morath of Stockholm University. Non-ethnic Russian Orthodox believers, Finns, Ingrians and Votians, were seen with suspicion and expected to convert to Lutheranism.

IN THE SWEDISH propaganda, Poland and Denmark were the eternal enemies, while Russia was a friend or foe depending on the actual situation, as explained by Dr. Anna Maria Forssberg of the Army Museum. As a result of the treaty, Russian and Swedish merchants were allowed to set up commercial "exclaves" in the other country, and Elisabeth Löfstrand described the "Russian Court" in Stockholm, where the merchants were allowed to observe the Orthodox faith inside the premises, while their seasonal import and export voyages were rummaged through the Swedish customs officers.

On February 16–17, 2017, a seminar on the Peace was held at Lund University, organized by Professor Arne Jönsson, comprising other aspects on and around the Treaty. The lectures given at both seminars will be published in a joint anthology. ✖

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