

New Subjectivities, New Emotions, New Politics: Oppositional Politics and Counter Cultures Across the Iron Curtain During the Long 1970s

Veranstalter: Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies, Europe University Viadrina, Frankfurt an der Oder; Joachim Häberlen, European History Research Centre, University of Warwick; Mark Keck-Szajbel, Centre for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies, Europe University Viadrina; Kate Mahoney, University of Warwick

Datum, Ort: 12.06.2015–13.06.2015, Frankfurt an der Oder

Bericht von: Lewis Smith, History Department, University of Warwick

On Friday 12th and Saturday 13th June 2015, researchers gathered at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) for a conference organized in collaboration with the University of Warwick. The aim of the conference, as Joachim Häberlen (Warwick) outlined in his introductory remarks, was to explore the extent to which new and/or convergent styles of 'emotional' politics could be identified across the Iron Curtain during the 'long 1970s'. Numerous recent historiographical interventions have noted the prevalence of feelings and questions of authenticity in societal critiques during this time. Countercultural movements accused the state, economic structures or even society as a whole of being barriers to the development of 'true' emotions or subjectivities.

The organizers of this symposium sought not only to showcase some of the emergent work relating to this subject, but also to discover common themes, practices and languages across spaces and social structures. Could, in fact, the politicization of emotions, the struggle for an 'authentic' subjectivity, or even new ideas of what it means to *do* politics offer a means of overcoming the prevailing Cold War binaries and crafting a truly European story? If so, what caused these convergences to occur?

Beyond merely collecting national histories, great emphasis was thus placed on trying to connect the papers that were presented over the course of the conference. This was facilitated practically through a relatively open

panel format, in which speakers were encouraged to make a relatively brief presentation relating to a pre-circulated paper, before an extended period of discussion. In total, sixteen papers were given, spanning a broad spectrum of movements.

The opening panel was loosely organized around the theme of 'performing subjectivity'. JAKE SMITH (Chicago) opened the discussion by posing a series of questions about the relationship between subjectivity and social structures. Do new subjectivities create new social structures or vice-versa? And what is the role of performance within this relationship? After introducing and comparing Pierre Bourdieu's 'habitus,' Judith Butler's notion of critical citation and finally Brian Massumi's analogy of the regulatory football field, Smith argued that none of these frameworks were capable of accounting for the significance of the sheer exhilaration that not only emerged *from* but also attracted people *to* forms of protest. Smith used punk cultures in the FRG as a lens through which to explore this element of protest, as well as the ways in which an emotional response could itself be considered a goal of transgressive activism.

DANILO MARISCALCO's (Palermo) study of the Metropolitan Indian movement in Italy, discussed in his absence by Sarah Blaylock, elaborated upon some of these questions, particularly surrounding performativity and the construction of alternative subjectivities through altered emotional states. Mariscalo argued that the development of a 'youthful proletariat,' along with the performative style of the Metropolitan Indians, could be viewed as evidence of „a new form of antagonist subjectivity [that] emerged in the crisis of industrial capitalism in the 1970s.“

A notable overlap of both movements, as revealed in the two papers, was the common significance of joyfulness as a political tool: an antidote to the mundanity of everyday life. In fact, the prevalence of joy and fear as motivating factors more broadly during this period was something commented upon in subsequent discussions, as several participants found commonalities in their own research. Along with this intense emotionality, the state, consumerism, and the impact of commodification were all mentioned as com-

mon factors in shaping the evolution of, or responses to, oppositional activism. At the same time, it was agreed that caution must be taken so as not to overlook the genuine diversity of 'enemies', audiences and goals that existed. Finally, participants discussed the relationship between technologies of the self – practices aimed at transformation on a personal level – and the establishment of oppositional *communities*, and the extent to which a regulated aesthetic served to facilitate or hinder the achievement of practices of autonomous subjectivities.

The second panel, entitled 'Authentic Subjectivities,' revealed further links across national borders. Papers by JEFF HAYTON (Wichita State), ANGELO VENTRONE (Macerata) and DEANNA WOOLEY (Indiana University / Purdue University Fort Wayne) all highlighted the centrality of finding a 'true self' in oppositional politics in Germany, Italy and Czechoslovakia respectively. Jeff Hayton compared punk movements in East and West Germany and argued that the common denominator of both movements was the pursuit of authenticity through artistic expression, in the face of stifling governmental structures. Deanna Wooley demonstrated how Czechoslovakian student activists in the late 1980s challenged the state narrative of 'normalization' by declaring the resulting dissimulation to be a 'pathological state'. Wooley argued that students in this moment reimagined Havel's notion of 'living in truth' in expressly oppositional terms, to simultaneously draw upon and distance themselves from the previous generation of dissidents in Czechoslovakia. Angelo Ventrone contextualized the politics of authenticity by outlining some of its philosophical foundations and highlighting the prominence of such rhetoric in early 20th century activism on both the extreme left and far right. Bringing the presentation back to the 1970s, he argued that activists in Italy viewed life during this period as a „declaration of an open war against joyfulness,“ and that integral to groups such as Lotta Continua was a desire to re-discover a sense of holism that had supposedly been corroded.

In her comments, Kate Mahoney highlighted how each paper asked questions of the

'new-ness' of 'new subjectivities' and 'new politics.' Mahoney argued that each paper revealed the duality of authenticity as both creative and nostalgic for the movements discussed. Mahoney also pointed to the ways in which each movement sought to appropriate the past, from the ironic uses of Nazi imagery by German punks to the Czech student movement's evocation of Havel at the same time as it was declaring an irreconcilable generational schism.

The final panel of the first day focused on subjectivity and gender politics. Each movement that was discussed had a relatively local and specific focus and at face value appeared relatively different. ANTOINE IDIER (Université de Picardie) explored how homosexuality influenced radical Leftist activism in France post-1968, while JANE FREELAND (Carleton University), ZSOFIA LORAND (Florence) and KATE MAHONEY (Warwick) studied women's movements in East Germany, Yugoslavia and England respectively. At the heart of each paper was a common question: what did it actually mean for the personal to be political during the 1970s? In many ways, the answers to this question revealed a number of philosophical and practical similarities within the movements. In particular, activists sought to craft an oppositional subject position through the development of a political language capable of accounting for the influence of the politics on conceptions of the self. The emphasis placed by these groups on 'psychological resistance' and 'consciousness-raising' could be seen as evidence of shift towards a focus of the self as the locus of politics across the Iron Curtain. Similarly, Joachim Häberlen emphasized in his comments how each paper offered insights into the *practice* of establishing alternative subjectivities, especially in the form of 'consciousness-raising' groups.

Panel Four, 'Emotional Politics,' featured four presentations. Three of the papers offered close studies of the relationship between emotions and power. MARIA BÜHNER (Leipzig) studied lesbian activism in East Berlin, with a particular focus on the relationship between this movement and the church. Drawing upon Deborah Gould, Bühner argued that the techniques mobilized by

the movement should be considered as 'emotion work.' DOLORES AUGUSTINE (New York) similarly explored the role of emotions in political activism in East Germany, this time in relation to environmentalism and in the form of a comparison between activism in East and West Germany. Augustine argued that fear was a ubiquitous motivating factor within these movements, and also sought to emphasise the extent to which emotionality became celebrated as a rebellion against hegemonic rationality. BARIS YORUMEZ (University of British Columbia) meanwhile, focused on Czechoslovakia in the years and months leading up to 1989, and stressed the importance of exploring not only the intense emotionality of revolution or dissident activism, but also the emotional strain of everyday life. Noting the immense pressure to conform and restrict any expression of discontent to the private sphere, he argued that this political climate fostered feelings of powerlessness and resentment, and that this often manifested into anger towards the apathy of fellow citizens.

PETER MITCHELL'S (Edinburgh) paper on 'Subcultures, Spaces and Emotions in Late Socialism' explored ideas of emotions and subjectivities in relation to the East German squatter movement, and also encouraged discussion of the spatiality of political activism. Space had been a common undercurrent in many of the previous papers but until this point had not been fully discussed. Given that relatively mundane spaces such as youth centres, parks and churches were often-times key to the development of subcultures, Mitchell asked whether it was more useful to explore how counter-hegemonic spaces produced alternative subjectivities, or how alternative subjectivities produced counter-hegemonic spaces. In his comments, Andrew Tompkins (Berlin) similarly noted the significance of spatiality as a common theme of the panel. Tompkins encouraged participants to discuss the ways in which spatial and emotional paradigms were enmeshed in their narratives, and to consider the extent to which these paradigms should be disentangled. Tompkins also offered an alternative insight into the relationship between emotions and rationality. Drawing on his

own research into anti-nuclear movements, he demonstrated how in certain cases, the appeal to emotions such as fear was actually a distinctly rational decision: a clearly thought through political strategy aimed at harnessing the fear of others.

The final panel explored the links between emotions, politics and consumption. Each paper explored the role of the state and its influence in ascribing or denying 'oppositional' status to cultural movements. MANUELA MARIN (Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca) analysed the way in which the Romanian secret police – the Securitate – understood and responded to the emergence of new musical countercultures among the Romanian youth in the 1970s and '80s. The Securitate, Marin showed, feared the political consequences of foreign musical imports such as punk rock, and thus considered it a „patriotic duty“ to sanction or „correct“ the youth's alternative consumption styles. BENJAMIN MÖCKEL (Cologne) and MARKO ZUBAK (Budapest) on the other hand, explored the ways in which technologies of governance in Western Europe and Yugoslavia respectively actually promoted certain forms of popular music, including those that had previously held oppositional status. Indeed, Benjamin Mockel's paper demonstrated the extent to which musical events had become alienated from previous 'political' affiliation in Western Europe, which he suggested was reflective of a broader shift towards ideas of 'ethical consumerism'. Marko Zubak's study of Disco in Yugoslavia revealed how the discotheque was a highly contested space, in which subjectivities could be transformed multiple times even in a single evening. These papers, as Mark Keck-Szajbel highlighted in his comments, thus reaffirmed the need to consider the role of the state and the media in defining the political parameters of cultural expression.

The debates that evolved over the course of the conference revealed a number of key commonalities in terms of philosophy and practice within the oppositional movements across the Iron Curtain. Perhaps most fundamentally, there appears to have been a shift within activism towards questions of the self, and considerations of the barriers posed by

technologies of governance to the possibilities for constituting forms of subjectivities. A desire to discuss, defend, discover an authentic self seems to underpin many of the countercultural movements, although the debates that occurred over the course of the conference also revealed a need for 'authenticity' as a concept to be treated with a certain reflexivity. As punk and the Metropolitan Indian movements show, activists not only searched for authenticity, but also sought to subvert the very idea of it; while hippies or disco could be interpreted as a desire to lose control, rather than gain it.

It was also suggested that similar emotional styles within alternative cultures could indeed be identified across the Iron Curtain. Joy, fear, desperation, were all features of activism during this time, though the extent to which these were means, ends, or byproducts of activism was never fully determined. Similarly, as was discussed during the fourth panel, the exact novelty of ideas such as 'joy' or 'fear' as elements of oppositional culture is somewhat difficult to specify.

Participants were cautious not to overlook fundamental differences that existed across space, in spite of similarities. These included the differing relations between activists, the state and society as a whole, differences in periodization, and differences on a methodological level, depending on geographical interest. Historians studying countercultures in Eastern Europe seemed more receptive of oral history, for example, given the relative scarcity of archival material. Further discussion will be required to fully understand or incorporate these differences into a cohesive narrative. Similarly, further discussion of the broader global political context, especially the emergence of neoliberalism and the decline of broad ideological utopias, would offer opportunities for developing this historical enquiry further.

Conference Overview:

Introductory Remarks: Joachim Häberlen (University of Warwick)

Panel 1: Performing Subjectivity

Jake Smith (University of Chicago): Temporal Dissonance: Music, Performance and Opposi-

tional Subjectivity in the Long 1970s

Danilo Mariscalco (Università degli Studi di Palermo): [U+F05B] absent, discussion of paper led by Sarah Blaylock [U+F05D]: The Italian Movement of 1977 and the Cultural Praxis of the Youthful Proletariat: The Case of the Metropolitan Indians

Panel 2: Authentic Subjectivities

Jeff Hayton (Wichita State University): Punk Subjectivities: Authenticity, Difference and Generations across the Iron Curtain

Angelo Ventrone (Università di Macerata): Revolution as a Quest for an Authentic Life: The Sixties and Seventies in Italy.

Deanna Wooley (Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne): From Normalization to Normality: Managing Authentic Subjectivities in Late Communist Czechoslovakia

Panel 3: Subjectivity and Gender Politics

Jane Freeland (Carleton University): East German Women Activists against Gender Violence: Creating Subjectivities and Negotiating Citizenship

Antoine Idier (Université de Picardie): Homosexuality and Politics in the French Post-68 Radical Left

Zsafia Lorand (European University Institute, Florence): New Feminist Identity and Politics through Conceptual Transfers and Activist Inspiration in Yugoslavia in the 1970s/80s

Kate Mahoney (University of Warwick): The Political, Emotional and Therapeutic: Personal Histories of Consciousness-Raising in the English Women's Liberation Movement

Panel 4: Emotional Politics

Dolores Augustine (St. John's University, New York): East and West German „Eco-Freaks“ and Green Christians of the 1970s/80s: Emotions, Communities, Practices and Relationship to Power

Maria Bühner (University of Leipzig): The Rise of a New Consciousness: Lesbian Activism in Berlin in the 1980s

Peter Mitchell (University of Edinburgh): 'R5, We Love You!' Subcultures, Spaces and Emo-

tions in Late Socialism

Baris Yorumez (University of British Columbia): Normalization and Its Discontents: Powerlessness and Resentment in Post-1968 Czechoslovakia

Panel 5: Emotions, Politics, Consumption

Manuela Marin (Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca): The Securitate and Youth Counter-Cultures in Socialist Romania

3

Benjamin Möckel (University of Cologne): Pop Music and Political Activism in the 1980s: „Live Aid“ and the Origins of Humanitarian Pop Music

Marko Zubak (Central European University, Budapest): Saturday Night Fever on the Other Side: Yugoslav Socialist Disco Culture, 1977-1982

Concluding Discussion

Tagungsbericht *New Subjectivities, New Emotions, New Politics: Oppositional Politics and Counter Cultures Across the Iron Curtain During the Long 1970s*. 12.06.2015–13.06.2015, Frankfurt an der Oder, in: H-Soz-Kult 09.01.2016.