

The Culture of the Russian Revolution and its Global Impact. Semantics – Performances – Functions

Veranstalter: Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München / Universität Regensburg

Datum, Ort: 02.06.2016–04.06.2016, München

Bericht von: René Küpper, Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte

The 3rd Annual Conference of the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies headed by MARTIN SCHULZE WESSEL (Munich) and ULF BRUNNBAUER (Regensburg) focused on the Russian October Revolution of 1917 under four main aspects: the performance of the Revolution in films and on stage, the rhetoric and religious semantics of the Revolution, and its global implications, especially in Asia. This regional focus, combined with cultural historical aspects and the reevaluation of new historiographical perspectives on the Russian Revolution provided a tour d'horizon of several methodological and theoretical approaches.

With the centennial of the Revolution approaching next year, commemorating the Russian Revolution in contemporary Russia becomes an even more highly political affair than usual. In his keynote on politics of memory and cultural memory BORIS KOLONICKII (St. Petersburg) argued that the commemoration of this „contested event“ was highly ambiguous during the perestroika, still is today, and so the Revolution would continue to be a „very unpredictable past“. Kolonickii convincingly questioned the notion that the projects of Russian memory politics will be successful, since the Revolution was still subject to partisan views. Kolonickii's keynote set a high standard that was held up by the keynotes on the following days. YURI SLEZKINE (Berkeley, CA) provocatively depicted the Bolsheviks as a sect of apocalyptic millenarians, who „conquered Russia and were conquered by it“. The thesis of „Bolshevism as Russia's failed Reformation“ led to a vivid discussion whether it was to be understood as a political religion or quasi-religion or rather as sheer Millenar-

ianism. The third keynote by ALEXEI YURCHAK (Berkeley, CA) dealt with the preservation of Lenin's corpse as a sculpture of the body constructed out of the body itself. As Yurchak argued, the same happened to the ideology of so-called Leninism: the form was preserved, while the matter was continually changed – quite a convincing metaphor.

How was the October Revolution performed, that is put on theater stages and in films? As ADA RAEV (Bamberg) showed, the first years after the Revolution opened a window of opportunity for Russian avant-garde theater artists and authors, whose concepts and performances remarkably inspired the development of Soviet film in later years. The theater avant-gardists' genuine impulse to create a new truly Bolshevik and proletarian theatre to educate and indoctrinate the working class was soon contradicted by different style concepts and centralization efforts of the Soviet government, as LAURENCE SENELICK (Medford, MA) pointed out. By the 1930s the avant-gardists were dead or in exile, and the so-called socialist realism became the tenor of the day. NATASCHA DRUBEK-MEYER (Berlin / Regensburg) interpreted in her paper the language of style of Sergei Eisenstein's intellectual montages in his famous „October“, linking the anti-religious sequences of this cinematic representation of the Revolution with the Bolsheviks' failed attempt to ban religion from Soviet society.

Apart from the revolutionary language of style performed on stages and in films, language itself was changed into a specific rhetoric of Revolution. While GEORG WITTE (Berlin) dealt with the dialectics of rhythm as a concept of impulse and control to move revolutionary bodies by revolutionary language, ILYA KALININ (St. Petersburg) explained the Russian Formalists' theory of Lenin's language as poetic and revolutionary at the same time, that is as a device and as subject of revolutionary struggle. In the Formalists' opinion Lenin as revolutionary leader was necessarily an artist, too, whose language had a dynamic historical power.

While the panels on performance and rhetoric of the Revolution reflected developments mainly taking part in the centres St.

Petersburg and Moscow, the following panel on revolutionary semantics of religion shifted the focus to the periphery and offered impressive case studies of religious groups. TOBIAS GRILL (Munich) opened up new perspectives on the religious symbols and imagery Jewish Socialists used to win popular support for their secular Marxist case. Non-Jewish Russian Marxists employed the same methods, but the Jewish social revolutionary intelligentsia tended to depict Socialism as secularized Judaism. FRANZISKA DAVIES (Munich) examined how the Muslim peripheries of the Empire, especially the Tatar Muslims of the Volga-Ural region and the Muslim intelligentsia, reacted to the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. She focused especially on how they turned into political actors demanding first equal rights and then cultural and political autonomy, the political discourse of Revolution having been transported by the returning Muslim soldiers from World War I in 1917. VITALIJ FASTOVSKIJ (Munich) analyzed the pseudo-religious self-stylization and at the same time self-definition of socialist revolutionaries awaiting execution in farewell-letters.

The impact of the October Revolution, especially in Asia, can be seen as an under-researched issue, but the conference pointed to several research gaps that might be filled by future studies. MARTIN AUST (Bonn) summed up the recent tides of political, social, and cultural history, regional studies and processes of nation-building, before discussing how to write on the Russian Revolution in a global perspective for a broader audience. KATERINA CLARK (New Haven, CT) contrasted the literary responses of the Russian poet Velemir Chlebnikov and the Kurdish Persian poet Abolqasem Lahuti, who in 1920 both participated in the Baku Congress for the Peoples of the East, and who both tried to combine Persian tradition with Bolshevik rhetoric on the same Persian text. STEVEN LEE (Berkeley, CA) pointed out several efforts to re-define the Bolshevik Revolution as an Asian Revolution directed against Western imperialism, or a global revolution launched in Asia, by drawing an arc from the interpretation of Vladimir Tatlin's iconic 1920 „Monument to the Third International“ to Ai

Weiweis 2007 Hommage „Working Progress (Fountain of Light“). TATIANA LINKHOEVA (Munich) and YOSHIRO IKEDA (Tokyo) presented papers on the impact of the Russian Revolution on Japan. According to Linkhoeva the Japanese government intervened in the Russian Civil war to fill the emerging power vacuum in North East Asia, that is to build its empire, but soon came to see themselves in a defensive position against Korean and Chinese communists linking Bolshevism with the fight for national liberation, against the ideological threat of the „Bolshevization“ of Japanese troops in Russia and the political opposition at home. YOSHIRO IKEDA (Tokyo) described how Bolshevik views on accelerating the predestined course of history were reflected by Japanese left-wing intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s. ZHANG JIANHUA (Beijing) drew an arc from 1954 to the present day by the history of „Moscow Restaurant“ – the Soviet Union's showcase in Beijing and a barometer of the Sino-Soviet relations and the transformations of society and the Party underwent in China as well. The former German officer Hans Tröbst, oscillating between Freikorps fighting in the Baltic, trying to join Wrangel's troops, then turning to the Turkish Kemalists was presented by GERHARD GRÜSSHABER (Munich) as an unusual case study of the global impact of the Revolution upon an unsettled extreme right-wing individual acting as a transnational borderliner of the Russian Civil War, as Grüsshaber put it.

The papers presented at the 3rd Annual conference offered a broad spectrum of perspectives on the Russian Revolution, whose global implications are still under-researched. But especially the case studies on ethnic and religious groups at the periphery of the Russian empire and on the Revolution's impact on East Asia showed great potential for further research.

Conference Overview:

Keynote

Boris Kolonickii (St. Petersburg): Predictable Past in an Unpredictable Future? The Anniversary of the Revolution, the Politics of Memory and Cultural Memory in Contemporary Russia

The Performance of Revolution

Chair: Christopher Balme (Munich)

Ada Raev (Bamberg): Russian Avantgarde Artists on the Stages of Revolution

Laurence Senelick (Medford, MA): Order Out of Chaos. First Steps in Creating a Bolshevik and Proletarian Theatre.

Natascha Drubek-Meyer (Regensburg): Revolution and Religion in 1917 – Eisenstein's Intellectual Montages of 1917

The Rhetoric of Revolution

Chair: Riccardo Niccolosi / Nina Weller (Munich)

Georg Witte (Berlin): „Drumming Preparation“: Poetics and Politics of Rhythm in the Soviet Avant-Garde

Ilya Kalinin (St. Petersburg): How Lenin's Language Was Made: Russian Formalists on Material of History and Technique of Ideology

Revolutionary Semantics of Religion

Chair: Jutta Scherrer (Paris / Berlin)

Tobias Grill (Munich): 'Another Messiah Has Come': Jewish Socialist Revolutionaries in Russia and their Attitude towards Religion (1890es-1920es)

Franziska Davies (Munich): Reform or Revolution? Muslims in Russia's revolutions of 1905 and 1917

Vitalij Fastovskij: Dying for the Common Cause: The Value of a Good Death in the Moral Framework of the Revolution (1881-1910)

Keynote

Yuri Slezkine: The Russian Revolution as a Reformation

Global Implications I

Chair: Tatiana Linkhova (Munich)

Martin Aust (Bonn): From Political and Social to Imperial and Global. The Russian Revolution in Historiography

Katerina Clark (New Haven, CT): The Baku Congress and the Language of Revolution: The Persian Examples of Velemir Khlebnikov and Abolqasem Lahuti

Steven Lee (Berkeley, CA): The Bolshevik Revolution as Asian Revolution: from Vladimir Tatlin to Ai Weiwei

Gerhard Grüsshaber (Munich): From the

Baltic to Anatolia: The German Officer Hans Tröbst between Freikorps, Wrangel, Kemalists and Bolsheviks, 1919-1923

Global Implications II

Chair: Andreas Renner (Munich)

Tatiana Linkhova (Munich): The Russian Revolution and the 'Bolshevization' of Asia during the Foreign Intervention, 1917-1925

Yoshiro Ikeda (Tokyo): Time and the Comintern: Rethinking the Cultural Impact of the Russian Revolution on Japanese Intellectuals

Zhang Jianghua (Beijing): The Memory of Restaurant Moscow in Beijing, the Changes of Image of October Revolution and Soviet Culture in Contemporary China

Keynote

Alexei Yurchak (Berkeley, CA): Retouching the Sovereign: Biochemistry of Perpetual Leninism

Tagungsbericht *The Culture of the Russian Revolution and its Global Impact. Semantics – Performances – Functions*. 02.06.2016–04.06.2016, München, in: H-Soz-Kult 14.11.2016.