
Fachbereich 07

Historisches Seminar

Abteilung für Osteuropäische Geschichte

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz • 55099 Mainz

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Visual culture of the Russian Empire

Sommersemester 2008

Prerequisite: Nil

Teaching Pattern: Lecture/ Presentation in PowerPoint/ workshop

Total Hours: 2 hours lecture per week + Block seminar

Course Description

Recent years have seen a significant expansion in the use of visual presentational strategies in text, teaching and conferences, as well as in the use of visual research methodologies and their accompanying commentaries. A number of factors are driving this visual agenda, including an expanding array of digital technologies which are inexpensive and easy to use. From PowerPoint to the digital images which can be made and manipulated through still and video cameras, making everyday visual records has never been easier or more accessible. That sighted human beings navigate the social world visually is by now established as a fundamental fact of social existence. John Berger's famous comment that 'Seeing comes before words... and establishes our place in the surrounding world' supports the fundamental connection between visualization and the organization of human existence, of being in the world. Our knowledge of the world is shaped by our senses, and contemporary bodies in western societies prioritize the visual over other senses. Non-coincidentally, mass culture is hyper-visual. The contemporary person is a product not so much of literature, but it is a visual construction. And this brings together the situation in today's Russia with the cultural and psychological situation of Russia in the XVIII-XIXth centuries.

In the course of the analyses, it is necessary to consider the fact that the 'representation' has other mechanisms for the structuring of identity, rather than the literary text. It is important to realize how culture works with the visuality, how the image becomes the basic practice of the psycho-cultural creation, how it assigns the direction of identification, including national identification. What made a person 'Russian' or 'Non-Russian' in Russia? What cultural tropes and political practices contributed to the formation of his/her identity? What was the place of the visual image (or the representation) in this process?



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The aim of the course is to show mechanisms of visual construction of the 'ethnic world' of the Russian Empire and the involvement of image in the process of national identification. Students from various departments will be encouraged to reflect upon the artistic practice of typification, distortion, verbal interpretation, as well as circulation and propagation of the created ethnic representations. They can do their coursework with either critical or creative writings on the topic. Students shall watch various representations of 'Russian' and 'non-Russian' people, 'Russian' and 'non-Russian' nature, cities and the past, which existed in the mass artistic production of the Russian Empire.

Course Procedure

Class will be conducted as a course of lectures and seminars. Basic theories and perspectives used in visual studies will be presented. Students are expected to participate in class discussions, as well as present research articles and their own research findings to the class.

Required texts

- Anderson B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd ed. London, 1991.
- Art, Culture, and National Identity in the Fin-de-Siecle Europe/ Ed. By M.Facos and S.Hirsh. Cambridge, 2003.
- Beyond boundaries: Language and Identity in contemporary Europe/ Ed. By P.Gubbins and M.Holt. N.Y., 2002
- Burke P. *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*. Ithaca, 2001.
- Bushkovitch P. *The Formation of a National Consciousness in Early Modern Russia*// Harvard Ukrainian Studies. 10/3-4 (1986). P.355-376
- Confino A. *The Nations as a Local Metaphor: Wurttemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1919*. Chapel Hill, 1997
- Hastings A. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*. Cambridge, 1997.
- Hellberg E. *The Hero in Popular Pictures: Russian Lubok and Soviet Poster*// *Populare Bildmedien*/ Ed. By R.Brednich and A.Hartmann. Gottingen, 1989. P.171-191.
- Hellberg-Hirn E. *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness*. Aldershot, 1998
- Hobsbawm E. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, 1992.
- Hosking G. *Russia. People and Empire. 1552-1917*. Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1997
- The Invention of Tradition*/ Ed. By E.Hobsbawm and Ranger T. Cambridge, 1983
- Lotman Yu.M. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Bloomington, 2000
- Mitchell R. *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830-1870*. Oxford, 2000
- Panovsky E. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. New York, 1939
- Russian Modernity*/ Ed. D.Hoffmann and Y.Kotsonis. MacMillan Press, 2000
- Russian Nationalism Past and Present*/ Ed. By G.Hosking and R.Service. New York, 1998
- Russianness: studies on a nation's identity: in honor of Rufus Mathewson, 1918-1978*. N.Y., 1990
- Smith A.D. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford, 1999
- Swift A.E. *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia*. Berkley, 2002.



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Tolz V. Inventing the Nation: Russia. London, 2001

Critique of visual message:

Students are expected to describe and analyze one of the visual messages suggested by a lecturer in the class.

They will make oral and visual presentation on the topic of own choosing.

Students will analyze its content in terms of how notions 'nation', 'motherland', 'patriotism', and 'past' are portrayed, using one (or more) of the basic theoretical frameworks discussed.

Oral Presentation of Research Paper:

Students will present formally their research paper ideas and research findings (up to that point) to the class during Block seminar. Their presentations will be graded on content and use of visual aids, including posters, caricatures, engravings, masterpieces, book and journal illustrations, and the like. Length: 20 minutes. Dates: July 12th

Syllabus

June 10: Introduction: **What is the 'visual culture'?**

- 1/ Structure: the aim of the course, the subject, chronology, researchers' approaches, terms.
- 2/ Presentation in PowerPoint: 'Visual sources and their specific 'characters''
- 3/ Students' renditions of the visual images

June 17 '**Explorations and Portrayals of the Russia's Ethnic and Social World**'

Part 1:

- 1/ Revealing the designs of the body of a 'Russian person'. This poses the problem of coming to agreements with regard to how a 'non-Russian' should appear. In this case, there was a spectrum of discursive variations: a 'non-Russian' could be portrayed as 'another' (people of the Russian Empire or people of different estates), or as a 'foreigner', or even as an 'alien' and 'enemy' (typified 'true Turk' or 'general Europeans' – Germans, Poles, Frenchmen, Englishmen)
- 2/ Presentation: Russian peoples' images in book illustrations and engraving albums of the XVIIIth century
- 3/ Students are expected to analyze some of the images

Part 2

- 1/ the students' papers will consider the phase of the photographic period of the visual culture in Russia. Photography and new practices of creation and reproduction of visual means, connected with it, received propagation in Russia from the beginning of the 1840's.
- 2/ Presentation: Russians and Non-Russians in Russia of the XIXth century
- 3/ Students' comments on the presentation

June 24 '**Satirical image (lubok and caricatures) as a communicative message**'

- 1/ The changes in the caricatures and lubok (cheap popular prints) established under Peter I inevitably paved the way for the prints to be used to illustrate Russia's wars. Over the course of the period studied, Russian elites and artists had started to form a sense of national



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consciousness that included many components. An antipathy toward foreigners, the belief that authentic Russianness lay in the peasant village and the 'Russian soul', a renewed interest in national mythology, and the idea that Russia possessed its own national character developed among Russian cultural figures.

2/ Presentation: Caricatures and *lubochnie* prints.

3/ Comparisons and discussions of visual strategies of Western European caricaturists and Russian artists

July 1 'Visual images of the Russian Past'

1/Revealing the agreements about the symbols, used in the creation of a visual story about the Russian Empire's past. And since joint experience invariably includes the historical images of friends and enemies, the realization of this task requires the analysis of the visual nucleus for the identification of the legendary 'Russianness' and 'Non-Russianness'.

2/Presentation: historical figures' portraits and masterpieces made in historical genre.

3/ Students' comments on the images

July 8 'Ocean of the Russian Land'

1/Deconstructing visual tropes 'Ocean of Russian land', 'Alien lands'. This task has been realized on the basis of studying theatrical decorations, landscape and scenery images, which could be observed on engravings, inside galleries, or by looking at fine china. It is important to understand the artistic practices employed for the transformation of the image of the city into the image of an empire, and that of the earth into the beloved body. Thus I would like to trace how the visual aspect brings forth patriotism, the 'love of locality'

2/Presentation: landscape engravings, maps and photographs

3/ Discussion of the presentation

Block seminar on June 12th: Research Paper Presentations and Discussions

8 papers and presentations are planned for 4 classes



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