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ZZF Conference Report

European Cold War Cultures? **Societies, Media and Cold War Experiences in East and West, 1947-1990**

This conference aimed to rethink Cold War culture from the perspective of how and to what extent the term ‘Cold War culture’ resonated across the European geopolitical divide after 1945. It was an effort to move beyond the ‘cloak and dagger’ world of international diplomacy and nuclear brinkmanship, focusing instead on the ways in which everyday European cultures were made and unmade under Cold War conditions. Conferences and historiography geared toward this theme typically tend to be fueled and framed by US Cold War narratives, often in the guise of analyzing how Western Europe was “Americanized” after 1945, or, more recently, how Eastern Europeans negotiated their cultural identities in relation to the US popular culture despite official propaganda. This conference by contrast was interested in exploring new directions in Cold War culture. In particular it sought to investigate how European national cultures maintained their distance from the commercial, military and cultural menace from the United States, often drawing on the past to build new political and cultural identities from the physical and moral ruins of World War II. Whether the term “Cold War culture” is a useful means of investigating postwar European cultural developments was one of the key questions at the conference, and one that elicited many different responses over the course of the conference.

Whereas a good amount of attention at the conference was paid to Germany, there were a great many papers on Northern and Eastern Europe, including topics on lesser known Cold War “outposts,” such as Romania, Estonia, Finland and Iceland. A large number of contributors took up comparative analyses of how Cold War operated across geopolitical borders, whose effect assured that discussion remained at a high comparative level. Unfortunately not much attention was directed toward France or Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey and Portugal were absent), but these countries did figure in the discussions in suggestive ways. What was particularly interesting was the strong presence of young researchers from Northern and Eastern Europe, who employed the best of “new cultural history” – including “visual studies” and material culture – in highly suggestive ways in their presentations.

The first keynote speaker, Lary May (Minnesota), opened up by reprising the pivotal role of Hollywood as the great engine of US post-1945 cultural expansion worldwide, as well as outlining how the American “dream factory” helped create a new American national identity in the 50s. This was one of the Cold War’s most enduring marriages of power and culture, as it helped give form and credence to the infamous American “way of life” in Western Europe as a perceived weapon against the dangers of a fascist past and potentially communist future. Marsha Seifert (Budapest) was more interested in questioning the topic of Cold War culture itself, arguing as she did that it was all too commonly confined to the 1950s with little concern for its historical antecedents. In particular she claimed that Cold War culture did not really begin with the Cold War, but actually emerged out of World War II, and even in terms of the US-USSR confrontation back in 1917. She also drew attention to the diversity of Cold War experiences, adding for example that the British and French

were not subject to the same Cold War tensions as the defeated countries were, such as Italy and Germany. In this sense, the keynote speakers framed the discussion of the conference, to the extent that they both questioned the spatial and temporal boundaries of what is meant by Cold War culture.

The first panel addressed media. In a world in which the rival blocs were rarely in direct contact with one another, mass media emerged as a key interface of Cold War communication. Inge Marßolek (Bremen) led off with a stimulating discussion of how Cold War culture was often reduced to select mass-produced images of annihilation and destruction – mushroom clouds, rockets, bomb shelters. Of particular interest to her was to explore how Cold War politics were visualized by the mass media across the Cold War divide, with particular attention to how these canonical images were received and discussed in the West and East German press. What emerged very strikingly was the extent to which these postwar globalized images were for Germans actually “embedded in a visual repertoire of wartime memory and experience.” Joes Segal (Utrecht) continued in this ‘visualization of politics’ vein, focusing on painting to show how this field too was radically reshaped by Cold War imperatives. Here he ably articulated how painting was mobilized by various European Cold War states – taking cues from their respective superpower patron -- as desperately-sought cultural legitimacy and post-fascist ideological support. How various national cultures made use of the national (visual) past as cultural ballast, however, could have been drawn out more fruitfully here. Drago Petrescu (Bucharest) took up the political usage of radio in 80s Romania, and in so doing shifted attention away from visual media toward the importance of sound. In his paper, he made a strong case for the way in which Romanian state-controlled radio eventually undermined state legitimacy and emerged as a subversive force of dissent in the run-up to the overthrow of Ceausescu’s dictatorship in 1989.

The second panel addressed the cultural meanings of borders in border regions. After an introduction by Jane Curry (Santa Clara, CA) Sabina Mihelj (Loughborough) discussed political discourses in the Istria region in Yugoslavia where Western European culture strongly influenced the self-reception and public self-depiction of the population. Edward Larkey (Baltimore/Berlin) analyzed the reactions of two youth radio programs broadcast by RIAS (West Berlin) and DT-64 (East Berlin) to the introduction of private radio stations in West Germany and how changes of cultural self-reception of young people in East and West Germany prompted this shift. Indrek Treufeldt (Tartu) showed how Estonian television reacted to developments in Finland in the 1950s, arguing that a shift in perspective could be observed not only in Estonia, but also in Finland.

The third panel took up the theme of consumer culture. If the first two panels discussed how audiovisual media emerged as a key Cold War battleground, this panel looked at the relationship between marketing and Cold War politics. Stephanie van de Kerkhof (Hagen) started off with an interesting case study of Rheinmetall, West Germany’s largest weapons manufacturer. Here she showed how the long-established family firm marketed weapons of mass destruction after 1945, selling them as non-aggressive “images of security, trust and protection” in contradistinction to Fascist Era glorification of war and violence. Just as the Cold War remade the imagery of destruction for a peacetime era, consumer articles were also subject to ideological makeover. A good example was the advertising campaign for the automobile in 60s Romania and East Germany, a topic neatly discussed by Luminita Gatejel (Berlin). In it she illustrated how these virtually inaccessible cars traded on new

dreams of mobility and the good life, often doing so with a mix of imagery ranging from Heimat iconography to classical settings in order to give expression to fantasies of status, travel and homeland for travel-restricted socialist consumers. But where the first two panelists discussed the importance of “surface aesthetics” to Cold War cultural politics, Stefan Schwarzkopf (London) addressed the new fascination among British advertisers with “depth models” of consumer psychology. In particular he talked about postwar trends in the British advertising industry, indicating how it developed new tactics of reach and persuasion, frequently looking toward the US in making use of the “new sciences” of market research and industrial psychology in order to win over consumers in the Age of Ideology.

Panel IV was called ‘Political Discourses.’ Most of these contributors were concerned with how the difficulties of the past shaped the memories and passions of the present. This could be seen in the paper by Balazs Apor (Florence) on the reconstruction of communist leader cults after 1945, concentrating in his case on the making and unmaking of the Rakosi legend in Hungary. In it he provided a solid case study of how the national(ist) commemoration of East Bloc leaders clashed with ideals of Soviet internationalism. Marie Cronquist (Lund) offered a very polished paper on Civil Defense in Cold War Sweden, showing how images of civil defense there often became allegories of the Swedish welfare state under threat from their European neighbors to the south, and in so doing updated wartime imagery for new Cold War purposes. Valur Ingimundarson (Reykjavik) turned the spotlight on a key regional war crimes trial – the so-called Mikson Affair, in which Estonian policeman Evald Mikson was placed on trial for killing Communists and Jews in 1941. It became a cause celebre, to the extent that the Estonians, Swedes, Soviets and even the Simon Wiesenthal Center became involved in this Cold War (and then post-Cold War) dispensing of justice. Olga Yurievna Voronina (Harvard) then provided a good case study of how something seemingly trivial – Isiah Berlin’s two visits to Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova -- became a thorn in the side of Stalin, with considerable ramifications for her and Soviet cultural policy in general. What each panelist illustrated was the reach of Cold War politics into the realms of national hero-worship, civil defense, wartime justice and even cross-cultural friendship.

Panel V was entitled Transgressions and Transcendencies, and provoked a large amount of discussion. While the emphasis of the previous panel was squarely on the past, this panel set its store on the present, and in particular on how dreams and nightmares became ways of dealing with the difficulties of the present. In the first paper Quinn Slobodian (New York) furnished a good presentation on the West German delegates to the socialist World Youth Festivals of the 1960s. Of central importance here was how they drew on Third World heroes to advance strong critiques of Western capitalism, offering shifting version of democracy along the way in solidarity with Third World causes, and in so doing became forerunners to New Left. Roman Krakovsky (Paris) shifted the discussion to the surreal, analyzing the parade floats on display at the May Day parades in Czechoslovakia to underscore the culture’s phantasmagoria of fear, as all and sundry Cold War anxieties took on monstrous pop culture form in the shape of hungry capitalist hydras and other carnivalesque creatures of evil. The use of the otherworldly to defuse the worries of the present found expression as well in Monique Scheer’s (Tübingen) paper, in which she delivered a highly suggestive exploration of the renaissance of the cult of Mary among Catholics in West Germany after the war, and how its miracles became a coping strategy for West German citizens in a world menaced by communism, moral lassitude and potential

global annihilation. What this panel revealed so well was the extent to which the Cold War colored the popular imagination from student radicals to conservative Christians.

Panel VI dealt with matters of the historization of the Cold War. In his opening lecture, Leo Schmidt (Cottbus) analyzed some of the material (e.g., architectural) legacies of the Cold War and connected these legacies with aspects of public memory. Andrew Beattie (Sydney) spoke about the dialectics of politics, history and memory of the Cold War in the late nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties. Taking Berlin Tempelhof airport as an example, Petra Henzler argued that the airport as a historical base for the *Luftbrücke* symbolically represents the freedom of West Berlin. Dmitrii Sidorov (Long Beach, CA) analyzed the historicization of the Cold War from a Russian perspective, giving special attention to geopolitical aspects. Meike Wulf (London) focused on scenarios of doom vivid among Russian Estonians and Estonians living in Western countries by analyzing the formal and symbolic language of memorial sites for World War.

The final panel started off with a debate between Konrad Jarausch (Chapel Hill/Potsdam), Bernd Stöver (Potsdam) und Susan Reid (Sheffield), who picked up the main issues raised by all of the panels by reconnecting them more empirically to the following broader questions: Can the North American concept of Cold War Culture be transferred to the European case? What are the differences between Eastern and Western European Cold War Cultures and how applicable is the concept? It was generally agreed that the term “European Cold War Culture” is useful for addressing certain general questions but that in every single case study national cultures need to be more closely considered as well, and that it might be more appropriate to speak of “European Cold War Cultures” in order to account for the variety of Cold War narratives and experiences in all parts of Europe.