

IMAGES OF FASCISM IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CULTURE

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FASCISM – WITH AND WITHOUT INVERTED COMMAS

Hartmute Trepper

editorial

The current issue of *kultura* on 'Images of Fascism' in Russian post-Soviet culture bears clear evidence of the improvisational and fragmentary. For financial reasons, it did not have a guest editor. The topic, however, was important to us. It was partially inspired by the discussion on the social acceptability of 'Fascism' among the established art scene and the new ruling class provoked by the award of the prestigious Kandinsky Prize.¹ We have therefore allowed the authors considerable leeway in choosing their topics and their understanding of 'Fascist' – such that two do not even mention the term. Thus, the issue does not follow a sketched-out concept. Nevertheless, the texts have, without prior agreement, produced parallels; these will be presented here.

An important function of the concept of 'fascism' in the official practice of the Soviet Union was, in accordance with political needs, to identify absolute evil; another unspoken purpose in the realm of art was to convey insights into one's own, Soviet totalitarian order through the depiction of the enemy (Mischa Gabowitsch, Maya Turovskaya).

From both results the extreme potential for provocation inherent in a deviant application of the symbols, slogans and ideologemes associated with 'Fascism'; above all in the cultural sphere, this practice turns 'Fascism' into a cipher for principled opposition to the Soviet regime. It sometimes stood alongside other forms of protest anathematised by the Soviet regime, for example Rock Music. This has repeatedly provoked the question of whether the content of the 'Fascist' symbols and the intentions of those who use them coincide.

The change in the ideological and political constellation following the end of the Soviet Union enabled the rise of a new, ideologically heterogeneous opposition that is decidedly anti-Western and anti-democratic and brings together, alongside others, Stalinists and the supporters of Fascist ideas into one 'front'. An external expression of this can be seen, for example, in the hybrid symbolism of the 'National Bolshevik Party' (NBP), which soon found supporters among the creative circles and whose status as either a political or artistic project has been hotly discussed for years (Gabowitsch, Ewgeniy Kasakow).

This opposition is powered by the long latent and now strongly emergent xenophobia against all 'blacks', a term which refers not only to African students, but also immigrants and migrant workers from countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (Saskia Wegelein). Under the new defining label 'White Power' (Tatyana Golova), the terms 'Russians', 'Slavs', 'Aryans' and 'Whites' have largely become synonyms. They create a bridge between the claims by supporters of Fascism to belong to a superior race and National Socialism's contempt for the Slavs as a 'slave people'. The spectrum of cultural traditions in the emblems and symbols is broadening (Golova, Kazakov). As part of this, it seems that the old depiction of Jews as the enemy is losing ground in some currents to fears about the 'advancing Islamisation of Europe'.

To what extent the subcultures included in this study are marginal is a separate question. In the meantime, the ultranationalist founder of the 'International Eurasian Movement', the philosopher Alexander Dugin,² has long thrown off the air of marginality and moves, respected and much in demand, in the established political, media and academic public. 'Right-wing' thought of all shades seems to have a future.

1 Max Seddon (Moscow Times) in 'art margins' May 5, 2009: http://www.artmargins.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=392:a-fascist-in-our-midst-alexey-belayev-guintovt-and-the-kandinsky-prize-scandal&catid=111:articles&Itemid=68

2 Andreas Umland: Fascist Tendencies in Russia's Political Establishment: The Rise of the International Eurasian Movement, in: Russian Analytical Digest, Nr. 60, 2009: 13-17. <http://www.laender-analysen.de/index.php?topic=russland&url=http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/>