Cultures of Secrecy in Soviet Life. Ekaterina Emeliantseva / Nada Boškovska, University of Zurich; Julia Richers, University of Bern, 25.01.2017—27.01.2017.

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Cultures of Secrecy in Soviet Life

In order to approach the particular role of secrecy regimes and their implications for Soviet social history, the conference brought together scholars who study âintegrative and segregative functions of secret knowledgeâ (Georg Simmel) in various ways. Understood as a set of practices, discursive frames and institutional structures, secrecy became a central feature of life in the Soviet Union, defining and reproducing certain societal boundaries and seeping into everyday life through individual appropriations of those discourses and practices. Within this framework, it was one of the aims of the conference to challenge the dualism of secrecy/non-secrecy, emphasizing the fluid and sometimes volatile character of these categories. One way to do so was addressing the motivational and mobilizing power of Soviet cultures of secrecy together with the unfavorable effects of limiting information circulation.

Even though the conference covered a broad range of different perspectives on the field, some contributions stood out because of their more general conceptual nature, while others sketched case studies of current research projects, dealing with different aspects of regulated and limited knowledge â mostly in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union.

In a total of seven panels, a variety of possible approaches to examine Soviet cultures of secrecy was presented (see detailed program below). By discussing secrecy as a diachronically unstable and â given problems like dual-use science or technology travelling across borders â somewhat fuzzy category ASIF SIDDIQI (Fordham

University) proposed to map secrecy on a âsocial map of knowledgeâ. Compiling information about who had access to which kind of information at what time could help to locate secrecy in an epistemological space, where knowledge was gradually regulated. MARK HARRISON (University of Warwick) instead used the concept of state capacity â a stateâs power to monopolize violence, allocate resources to objectives, etc. â to discuss the ambivalence of secrecy in the Soviet state. The regulation of information circulation was presented as an intrinsic feature of Soviet state capacity which *per definitionem* is always subject to compliance. Practices of secrecy could thus, depending on the context, either strengthen or weaken Soviet state capacity. As PAUL JOSEPHSON (Colby College) pointed out in his paper on the building industry around the northern polar railroad project in the Soviet arctic, the implications of secrecy regimes went far beyond a narrow arena of political decision-making. Analyzing infrastructural projects may uncover human and environmental costs, not least caused by secrecy restrictions. Additionally it was pointed out that the cultural aspects of secrecy may be traced through sources such as newspapers printed in forced labor camps, which were mushrooming alongside Stalinist infrastructural projects.

Some of the papers discussed secrecy and openness not in terms of access to information but as a blurry relationship between the two. Moreover, they shared a focus on everyday life in secret communities and explored the experience and materiality of secrecy in a bottom up perspective. SERGEI I. ZHUK (Ball State University) addressed the closed ârocketâ cities Dnepropetrovsk and

Kuibyshev in the 1970s and 1980s and showed how unusually open access to US print media in both locations enabled local Soviet youth to engage in re-enactments of North American indigenous tribes, known as *Indianistika* that eventually triggered serious Soviet studies of US history and culture (*Amerikanistika*). EKATERINA EMELIANTSEVA (University of Zurich) elaborated on the integrative power of secrecy exemplifying this through the âsecretive talkâ in the atomic submarine-building city of Severodvinsk and its specific spaciality, the dichotomy of secret and non-secret zones. Secrecy constituted and advanced community cohesion whether or not a person directly participated in creating and keeping state secrets. Radioactive contaminated territories outside the boundaries of the nuclear city Chelyabinsk-40 were portrayed by LAURA SEMBRITZKI (University of Heidelberg) as territories of dual rule by *Sredmash* and regional authorities. Under this dual regime, irradiated territories were declared forbidden zones but with very blurry borders since local residents depended on entering the zones to ensure their livelihood. SLAVA GEROVITCH (MIT) elaborated on secrecy in the scientific community and the internalization of secrecy. Within the Soviet space program daily routines like security checks and self-censorship constituted secrecy that translated into social structures and even into family-life. Through oral history interviews, GALINA ORLOVA (EHU Vilnius / SFEDU Rostov-on-Don) elaborated on the discursive production of security during the interview process by former ITR (engineering-technical workers) of Obninsk. Furthermore, the value of artefacts as a source to examine the practices of security was stressed. ROMAN KHANDOZHKO (RANEPA / Moscow) portrayed the relationship between the Party and scientific milieus. Asking how Party membership affected scientists and their work, he stressed the conjunction of the two but also elucidated how scientists sometimes fenced off Party officials from their work. Nevertheless, since the 1970s Party officials managed to increase their influence on scientists.

Adoption, exchange and cross-fertilizing of scientific and technological knowledge before the background of secrecy regimes and cultures were discussed in several papers. Insights in practices of limiting information circulation in the Soviet nuclear city of Shevchenko were given by STEFAN GUTH (University of Bern). Boundaries between secrecy and openness cut right through the city, changing the character of the well informed scientific-technical staff from heroes to suspects. Interestingly, in Shevchenko the co-development and cross-checking of nuclear devices prospered, as archival evidence on the French-Soviet cooperation in breeder-development reveals. Yet another project of trans-systemic cooperation was used by ANDREW JENKS (California State University) in order to develop some more general thoughts on secrecy as a byproduct of Cold War history. On the one hand, the scientific enterprise stood out due to a particular cult of openness. On the other hand, harsh restrictions, regulating the flow of knowledge, emerged on both sides of the Iron Curtain and must be discussed not as an endemic Soviet phenomenon but need to be understood in transnational terms and under the exceptional conditions of the East-West conflict. How secret technology development and the perception of rumors about alleged technological breakthroughs shaped relations between the United States and the Soviet Union was exemplified by FABIAN LUESCHER (University of Bern). He linked the history of nuclear powered airplanes with science diplomacy in the Cold War, stressing that the creation and cultivation of rumors about atomic aircraft propulsion effected several layers of political and cultural international relations, without actually disturbing the emergence of agreements on nuclear science and technology cooperation across the blocs. In the context of Soviet civil aviation STEVEN E. HARRIS (National Air and Space Museum / University of Mary Washington) showed how western technology was systematically adopted. The sources of Soviet progress were simultaneously hidden and frequently aircraft engineers even demanded acknowledgement for their achievements by western peers. Examples of airplane crashes and hijackings gave a colorful account of the ambivalent and volatile practices of secrecy surrounding civil aviation in the Soviet Union.

Other papers discussed visual and architectural representations, as well as the artistic processes that shaped secrecy culture. Based on a close reading of the novels âOn the Beachâ by Nevil Shute and âRoadside Picnicâ by the Strugatsky Brothers, ISABEL LANE (Yale UNIVERSITY) problematized the distinction between fiction and reality in the field of nuclear weapons at the peak of their unrestrained technological development. Such novels made it possible to represent or imagine the impossible but, at the same time, literature was constrained by secrecy and censorship. The relationship between television, popular culture and the Cold War was addressed by TARIK CYRIL AMAR (Columbia University) who used the TV-series Stawka, âSeventeen Momentsâ and âVisorâ to exemplify his arguments. By discussing spy heroes in postwar popular culture in Eastern Europe and the So-

viet Union, he showed the differences and interactions of James-Bond references in Cold War TV-series as well as their social, cultural, and political contexts. XENIA VY-TULEVA (Columbia University) outlined how much the architecture of ZATOs (closed cities and areas) included architecture elements that addressed secrecy in the form of spatial hierarchy. In the 1970s the ubiquitous imagination of the secret cities as metaphors became subject to the work of the Moscow Conceptualists who coined the iconography of the Atomic cities as a paradise. JULIA RICHERS (University of Bern) elaborated on the visual strategies that simultaneously showcased Soviet accomplishments and hid classified scientific know-how in the Soviet space program. The figure of Leonid I. Svedov, who represented the Soviet Union at numerous international conferences but was not actually involved in the scientific-technological process of the Soviet space program, demonstrates that in this case secrecy was not about invisibility but about lies and diversion.

The concluding discussion summed up the pivotal ideas discussed during the conference. It was emphasized that the analytical value of the term secrecy needs further examination. Is there such a thing as Soviet secrecy? How did regimes of secrecy change in the course of the Cold War? Participants stressed that a broad definition of secrecy as a phenomenon allows for comparative and long-term approaches in Soviet history. The concluding remarks revealed that a closer look at secrecy as a cultural practice would doubtlessly be fruitful for many of the current projects presented at the conference.

Conference overview:

Panel I: Secrecy regimes and experts' cultures
Chair: Jeronim Perović (University of Zurich)

Asif Siddiqi (Fordham University): Secrecy, Science, and the Soviet State

Mark Harrison (University of Warwick): Secrecy and State Capacity: A Look Behind the Iron Curtain

Sergei I. Zhuk (Ball State University): âSoviet Americanaâ: Knowledge Production in Two Soviet âSecretâ Cities, Dnepropetrovsk and Kuibyshev

Discussant: Philipp Casula (University of Zurich)

Panel II: Secrecy knowledge productionâ¨
Chair: Carmen Scheide (University of Bern)

Paul Josephson (Colby College): Heroism and Secrecy Across the Arctic. Building Industry in the Dark and Cold

Xenia Vytuleva (Columbia University): Blank-Space Geographies: Mapping Secrecy, Urban Syntax and Cultural Heritage

Discussant: Andrew Jenks (California State University)

Evening lecture:
Silvia Berger (University of Zurich): Survival Cell - Territory - Dreamland. The Bunker in Cold War Switzerland and beyond

Panel III: Secrecy practice, censorship, and cultural production
Chair: Ulrich Schmid (University of St. Gallen)

Isabel Lane (Yale University): "Genre and the Missile Gap: Western Realisms and Soviet Science Fictions"

Tarik Cyril Amar (Columbia University): Cold War narratives and representations of spying, secrecy, and multiple identities

Alexander Markin (University of Zurich): The Cult of Intelligence in late Soviet Film Production

Discussant: Assif Siddiqi (Fordham University)

Panel IV: Secrecy, space, and community in closed cities
Chair: Nada Boškovska (University of Zurich)

Laura Sembritzki (University of Heidelberg): White Spots on the Soviet Map: Perceptions of Closed Areas around the Secret City Chelyabinsk-40 in the Southern Urals

Ekaterina Emeliantseva (University of Zurich): âSecrecy talkâ, spatiality, and community cohesion in the closed city of Severodvinsk

Roman Khandozhko (RANEPA / Moscow): Community- Building under Conditions of Nuclear Secrecy: Communist Party Membership and Corporative Culture of Soviet Atomshchiki, 1968â1991

Discussant: Stefan Guth (University of Bern)

Panel V: Secrecy rituals and Cold War encounters
Chair: Ekaterina Emeliantseva (University of Zurich)

Julia Richers (University of Bern): Censored Cosmos. Visualisation Strategies in the Early Soviet Space Program

Andrew Jenks (California State University): The Apollo-Soyuz Test Project and Regimes of Secrecy and Openness

Stefan Guth (University of Bern): âEventually, we stopped lying...â Soviet regimes of secrecy and nuclear technodiplomacy across the Iron Curtain, 1965â1991

Discussant: Sergei I. Zhuk (Ball State U, USA)

Panel VI: Secrecy regimes, rumours, and everyday
Chair: Mark Harrison (University of Warwick)

Steven Harris (National Air and Space Museum; University of Mary Washington, USA): Not Knowing Before Going: The Culture of Secrecy and the Passenger Experience in Soviet Civil Aviation

Fabian LÃ¼scher (University of Bern): "Did you hear about the nuclear aircraft?â Secrecy, bluff and the dosage of facts about Soviet nuclear propulsion projects (1957â1977)

Discussant: Slava Gerovitch (MIT)

Panel VII: Secrecy and Memory in Soviet and post- Soviet personal Narratives
Chair: Paul Josephson (Colby College, USA)

Galina Orlova (EHU Vilnius / SFEDU Rostov-on-Don): Romance with Secrecy: How to Perform and to Exotize Up the Soviet Nuclear Science During and After Research Interview (the case of the Obninsk project)

Slava Gerovitch (MIT): That-Which-Must-Not-Be-Named: Remembering Secrecy in the Soviet Space Program

Discussant: Ekaterina Emeliantseva (University of Zurich)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/

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