

Central Eurasian Studies

Visualizing Ethnicity and Nationhood in Early Modern and Modern Europe - Invention of “Self” and “Otherness” in Visual Arts and Dress

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The first part of the course *Imagery of ‘Self’ and ‘Otherness’ in European Art* will be discussing how the concept of ethnicity, race and nationhood was perceived and evolved through the representation of figures of various peoples in 16-19th century European graphic arts and painting. The “ethnic imagery” was based on the use of certain stable, long-lived visual conventions. In certain cases for the analysis of visual stereotypes and narrative toposes behind stereotypic concepts on various peoples reference to the antique and medieval antecedents are indispensable. The logic behind the creation of visual stereotypes is intended to be understood through the analysis of representations. The second part: *Dress and Identity – Inventing the ‘Self’ in Dress* concentrates on understanding ethnic and national dress in the context of prevailing clothing systems of early-modern and modern Europe. Parallel to the emergence of national identity and the increasing appearance of various articulations and institutions of national culture, there also existed an emphasized consciousness in the attempt to create visual manifestations of national identity in colours, emblems, costume and other symbolic systems around the second part of the 18th and the first part of the 19th century. This process was noticeable in various layers of society, from the royal courts through nobility and urban middle classes down to common people. *A more thorough look at the Habsburg Monarchy* brings into picture the concrete case analysis of the Habsburg Monarchy with its colorful conglomeration of ethnic dress traditions.

The course is an interdisciplinary course using art and dress history knowledge combined with social history and anthropologic interpretations. The course wishes to make reference to the multiplicity of “visual imagery” and its complex nature, including both representations of various kinds and costume objects and dress signs, which were means of shaping the “visuality” of bodily appearance. The “dressed social body” is itself interpreted as a visual expression, a fabricated image. We say that mental-cognitive structures moving toward the concept of ethnicity are in an eternal interaction with how the notion of ethnicity is expressed in verbal and visual forms of representations. If the costume is interpreted as a visual construction defined by the clichés of imagery of contemporary “media” both in the process of its fabrication and also in its public reception, then it has some consequences for us. One of the concerns is the process how certain group identities (pre-modern ethnicity to modern nationalism) were formed parallel with the evolution of a manifestative visual imagery, both of which have various elements of interplay with each other. Representations form no less an integrative part of this imagery than costume objects, which gave an opportunity to express personal and group identities. That is why we intend to make the process of creating national costume visible in its undividable relationship to other branches of visual expressions representing costumed bodies.

We will work with visual sources, most often with prints, not for a morphologic understanding of the costume in itself, but for elucidating the technique of seeing prior to the appearance of modern mass media and communication. Graphics was by no means the nearly exclusive means of delivering visual information until the widespread use of photography. It is primarily graphics in which the tendency of stereotyping is most obvious, a “quality” which influentially shaped the way of thinking about the concepts “ethnic” and “national”. Massively reproduced popular images of complex “visual environments” raise the question how certain concepts were articulated, interpreted, spread and fortified through the perception of these images. When trying to interpret visual material with reference to visions on ethnicity and nationhood, we also need to see that this imagery served various intentional or non-intentional purposes such as entertainment, luxury, the manifestation of power, propaganda, relating the present to the past, delineation of self-identities, commercialization and advertisement. Using established iconographic and formal conventions, the purposely exploitable character of this imagery led to institutionalized presentations of ethnicity and nationhood.