

Call for Papers “Mainstream! Popular Culture in Central and Eastern Europe”

5th conference of Centre for the Study of Popular Culture



with the support of National museum of Czech Republic, Faculty of Arts of Charles University
and the German Historical Institute Warsaw



29 October – 31 October 2020, Prague

Mainstream media representations of celebrities remain problematic, as excited discussions regarding the recent funeral of singer Karel Gott have demonstrated. The appraisal of his long-term career has been divided into two extreme positions: uncritical admiration for the idol who spread joy under different political regimes on one hand and condemnation of his kitschy art associated with his selling out under these regimes on the other. What the overall debate has confirmed, is that stars and celebrities of popular culture can become symbols of any given period.

The focus of the conference is on mainstream culture, which can be defined as the most popular, widespread, most accessible and understandable cultural expressions across society. Following Gramsci's and Hall's approaches, it is the mainstream that is considered the essential sphere where ideological hegemony is negotiated.

The aims of the conference are twofold : firstly, in its role of capturing the 'spirit of the time' (Zeitgeist), the conference plans to examine mainstream culture as a vital source of knowledge for unveiling social values and (attempted) changes and secondly to critically explore Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as a specific phenomenon thereof. Recently, CEE has featured in public debates due to its common hostile responses to EU migration and asylum policies, the ridiculing of climate change movements, the promoting of “traditional” family values and attempts to introduce illiberal democracy. While some social sciences and humanities have paid extensive attention to these issues, culturally oriented research has dealt with the distinctive features of Central and Eastern Europe to a much smaller degree.

To address this shortfall the conference would like to ask the question whether popular culture in CEE manifests any specific values and beliefs inherent in these respective societies. What exactly are they? Do these values and beliefs come from any particular long-term regional legacies? How do local and regional CEE mainstream media productions interact with cultural imports from wider world (or globalizing) cultures? What kind of impacts can be identified?

This conference is explicitly opening up the discussion and inclusion of all research perspectives on mainstream cultural production. Since the CEE is a regional label rather than a geographical notion, the delimitation of the examined area is not strictly given. Comparative studies and papers from other regions focusing on the mainstream in the (semi)peripheral global variations or in relation particularly to the CEE region are positively encouraged. Equally, there are no limits on the historical period of research interest as long as it is clearly related to the establishment and/or functioning and forms of mainstream culture in the region. An ideal contribution should include a comparative element running across the researched area.

Nevertheless we would also like to invite case study analyses of particular local popular works, genres, media (their content, production and reception), key authors and producers (both contemporary and past) that contributed to the dissemination of values, beliefs and practices through negotiation of ideological hegemony. Inter- and transdisciplinary as well as varied conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches from different academic fields and traditions are also very welcome.

The conference will be divided into four streams. Possible questions for each include but are not limited to the following:

I. Spaces of the Mainstream/ Mainstream Spaces

- Are there any common values and beliefs that dominate CEE mainstream cultural production?
- Are there any cultural productions that appear across the CEE region?
- What role have regional developments played in the convergence/divergence of mainstream cultural production in CEE?
- What celebrities and cult products does CEE share? What makes them specifically international?
- In what ways is the formation of the CEE cultural mainstream different from global production and is it similar to the productions in other culturally peripheral regions?
- Does popular culture play a particular role in CEE?

II. Mainstream Values and Beliefs

- What values are constant in the mainstream production of individual CEE societies?
- How are they re/negotiated under different political conditions?
- What values change and emerge in response to social and political changes?
- What mythologies disseminated through popular culture are indispensable to particular communities and political regimes?
- What changes have occurred since the EU accession, the collapse of state socialism, its accession, or the accession and collapse of other forms of dictatorship?
- How do CEE societies negotiate meaning-systems offered by the dominant media?
- How do different national communities define themselves in relation to the West and East (North and South), neighbouring nations and minorities in mainstream culture?

III. Mainstream Production

- Which media genres are favoured and which are overlooked in the mainstream culture of any given time and society? How do different media and genres encourage the spreading of specific ideologies?
- Which folk culture exists outside mainstream media? What practices are essential (or specific) for CEE societies (leisure activities, hobbies, sports) and what meanings are they associated with?
- What is the role of parody and irony? How do they undermine/confirm shared values and beliefs?
- How do international co-productions affect encoded values and meanings?

IV. Transferring the Mainstream

- What is the influence of globalized culture and what changes came along with the rise of the Internet and especially social networks?
- How did global values and beliefs spread, how do they continue spreading and what is their local reception? Does the reception of global culture have local specifics?
- What specific values and beliefs do local versions of global formats communicate?
- How global *is* the contemporary mainstream culture – in particular for the younger generation?
- How can digital humanities help us research popular culture?

Conference deadlines

Submission of panel proposals: 15th May 2020.

Submission of paper abstracts: 10th June 2020.

Notification on acceptance: 30th June 2020.

Conference registration opens 30th June 2020.

Guidelines for Abstracts

Abstracts should be submitted by email to the contact below and should include:

Author, name and affiliation with full contact details.

Abstracts should not exceed 300 words.

Submission of Panel Proposal

In addition to the regular submission of paper abstracts we also welcome the submission of panel proposals. A maximum of five papers in English can be submitted in a panel proposal. If three or more papers of the proposed panel pass the review process, the panel will be accepted.

Panel proposals should be sent by email and should include:

Panel title, name of the proposing organisation / individual, name and full contact details of the contact person, name and affiliation of panel chair, panel abstract (between 200 and 300 words) as well as title, author, author affiliation, and the name of each paper to be presented in the panel.

Paper/panel submissions will be subject to peer review.

Submissions and contact email

All submissions must be made exclusively via email to mainstream.cee@gmail.com

The organizers intend to put together a themed monograph, in which selected papers will be published as full-length chapters.

Conference Fee

20 € Early Bird (until 15th July 2020)

30 € Main Registration (until 30th August 2020)

50 € Late Registration (until 30th September 2020)

Organizing team

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