

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## The Red Globe

### Writing the World in Eastern European Travel Literature of the Cold War

International Conference

Organisers: Susanne Frank (EXC 2020/HU Berlin), Clemens Günther (Freie Universität Berlin), Matthias Schwartz (ZfL Berlin)

#### When and where:

**1-3 June 2022, Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin (ZfL)**

*The conference will be held in cooperation with the projects “(Post-)Soviet Literary Cosmopolis” and “Writing Berlin” of the Cluster of Excellence “Temporal Communities” (Freie Universität Berlin)*

*Working Language: English*

Keynote speakers:

Eleonory Gilburd (University of Chicago)

James Mark (University of Exeter)

DEADLINE: 30 September 2021

After years of isolation and division during the late Stalinist period, the so-called ‘Thaw’ in the cultural politics of socialist Eastern Europe in the second half of the 1950s enabled a broadening of horizons. This made it possible to address previously hidden facts about the recent past, the appropriation of aesthetic forms and the reception of contemporary art, cinema and literature from the West. Above all, however, it meant the physical opening up of borders. Not only were foreign journalists, cultural and sports delegations, festival visitors and travel groups allowed to visit the world behind the Iron Curtain, but, vice versa, a host of reporters, writers and artists set out to travel to capitalist foreign countries—especially countries engaged in the struggle for independence from their colonisers. Travel literature became one of the most popular genres of those years. Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund crossed the entire Global South with their Czechoslovak Tatra cars, Daniil Granin explored capitalist countries such as

Japan and Australia, and Ryszard Kapuściński became the most important reporter of the anti-colonial liberation struggle.

These texts not only meant confronting the readership at home with previously unknown and foreign worlds but also paved the way for the emergence of a new global consciousness, which was to be clearly distinguished from the ‘imperial gaze’ of the capitalist West. ‘Writing the world’ on the one hand meant striving to find a socialist understanding of a ‘Red Globe’ to match the competing narrative of globalisation as Americanisation, which emerged victorious in the end. On the other hand, travel writers quickly moved on from the initial “dumbfounded gaze” (Ilya Kukulín) to develop a language of their own with which to represent and classify the ‘blue planet’ as a whole. This new language was an essential part of the search for a new, post-Stalinist subjectivity.

While the online conference “Inherit the World: Strategies of ‘translatio’ in the Soviet Literary Cosmopolis”, held from May 27–29, 2021 and the conference “(Post)-Soviet Cosmopolis: The Soviet Project of World Literature and its Legacies”, held from December 8–10, 2021, will ask how the Soviet understanding of a multinational and world literature as an imperial legacy lives on to this day, the conference on the “Red Globe” will build on this and focus on a specific genre of this world literature, namely travelogues. The planned conference will explore how travel texts of the post-war period developed through encounters with other cultures and ways of life—a socialist perspective on a global scale on collective belonging and imaginary communities in the context of the East-West conflict. Special attention will be paid to focal points of the Cold War conflict, particularly Berlin. In these years, the image of West Berlin as the “window to the free world” and the staging of East Berlin as a global metropolis of peace and friendship competed with each other and made the former German capital one of the key sites for renegotiating globality.

At the same time, writing travel texts always meant comparing one’s own point of view with the everyday reality of a world divided by conflicts and wars. The tensions between international solidarity, ‘capitalist interventions’ and regional interests, global networks and local economies, industrial modernisation and ecological destruction found their way into the travel literature of those years in diverse ways, and also contributed to the development of a cosmopolitan consciousness. The aim of the conference is to reconstruct this phenomenon, largely forgotten due to the economic and political failure of this “alternative globalization” (James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Steffi Marung).

The following general and specific questions concerning various forms of travel texts (diaries, adventure reports, chronicles, reportages, novels, sketches, memories, etc.) shall be addressed:

- How do representations of the foreign relate to colonial stereotypes, such as imperial orientalism? Were there alternative constructions of the autochthon beyond these 'occidental' stereotypes?
- What alternative anti- or postcolonial perspectives were adopted, especially with regard to the Global South? To what extent were these positions specifically socialist? How did they respond to the emerging left protest movements in the West and their understanding of international solidarity?
- What moments and images, atmospheres and experiences, situations and contexts were depicted in the travelogues? How was the socialist self related to other civilisations and cultural models in these texts? How was cultural difference produced and represented?
- How were other worlds narrated in travel texts? What generic economies can be identified in a global perspective? What models of world literature have been reproduced and reinterpreted here?
- How did the travel texts of the Cold War relate to earlier traditions of travel literature in their respective contexts?
- How did travelogues question the validity and significance of their own categories of perception, classification and representation? Did a poetics of self-questioning (e.g. through metafictional devices) exist in socialist travel literature? Were there socialist predecessors of later critiques of "Writing Culture"?
- Which techniques of observation did the travellers develop in order to grasp the wealth of foreign impressions? How did they use photography and media to enhance their accounts? How did they generate credibility before their audience? What were the main organising principles of the travelogues (e.g. travel as a process of disillusionment, travelling as a process of personal or collective learning)?
- How did the newly developed notions of the world vary in the different countries of Eastern Europe? What reasons can be found for the aesthetic and ideological divergence and convergence of representations of the Other?

Specific topics:

- **Capitalism Beyond Borders:** How was the capitalist territory reinvented in socialist travel literature? In what way did these depictions differ from the Soviet literary predecessors of the 1920s and Stalinism?
- **Writing Berlin:** How were highly symbolic places of the Cold War, such as the former capital of Germany, narrated in socialist travel texts? What alternative interpretations and stories were presented here?
- **Literary Communities:** How did Eastern European travel writers deal with the activities of their colleagues from non-socialist countries? What canonised pretexts and literary images were referenced in the travelogues? Was there a dialogue with competing contemporary interpretations and discourses?
- **Planet Earth:** How did travel literature deal with ecological issues? Were there ideas of global ecological interdependence and, if so, how were they conveyed artistically? To what extent were they meant to contribute to the creation of a global consciousness?
- **Global Citizenship:** What ideas of 'global citizenship' have been developed in travel literature? What were the guiding values of the socialist global citizen and how did they relate to competing narratives in the West?
- **Allegorical Dimensions:** To what extent did travel literature serve as an allegorical mirror for domestic situations? Did official or unofficial alliances develop between authors in the Soviet and Western imperial context?

Please submit your abstract (up to 300 words), a short CV and your contact details to Clemens Günther ([clemens.guenther@fu-berlin.de](mailto:clemens.guenther@fu-berlin.de)) and/or Matthias Schwartz ([schwartz@zfl-berlin.org](mailto:schwartz@zfl-berlin.org)) by July 31, 2021.