

### **3. European historical forum**

**Black-and-white messages in color? Eastern / southeastern European and German contemporary history in film and television, Berlin 7th/8th November, 2013**

**Report by Hartmut Schröder**

A subject of this year's international trade conference were the opportunities and limitations of the Film medium concerning the conveyance of history. For this purpose, young historians, human rights activists, television editors and other practitioners met and debated documentary and fictional film productions with the help of numerous examples, as well as the underlying historical and political attitudes and the significance of powerful images for the corresponding social consciousness.

#### **History in film and television. Possibilities, problems, controversies**

In her introductory lecture, Judith Keilbach (University of Utrecht) introduced some fundamental aspects in the relationship of film / television and history. She described first a debate in the USA about the film "Lincoln" of Steven Spielberg: Because of the incorrectly shown voting behavior of the congressmen from Connecticut concerning the abolition of slavery (only two instead of actually four votes in favor) a current representative had demanded a correction so as not to put Connecticut even more "on the wrong side of history".

Keilbach explained, in line with the screenplay writer Tony Kushner, that "Lincoln" as a historical drama - completely according to the genre conventions - not only shows historically authentic people and situations but also fictitious figures and meetings. Moreover, historical correctness had been sacrificed here deliberately and after careful research, through a dramaturgical decision, in order to represent a "bigger historical truth", namely the inner conflict of the USA in the slavery issue. This could be denounced as a falsification of history; nevertheless, Kushners differentiation between *history* and *historical fiction* points to a basic misunderstanding in the criticism of historical films. It is important to differentiate films initially in terms of their access to history, for example in terms of whether they are documentary films or feature films and with the latter the rules of the respective genre conventions (character constellations, dramaturgy etc.)

would be effective. Miniseries and series would offer other possibilities and more possibilities than a film of 90 minutes, and through this, because of the narrative possibilities, television is possibly better suited for presenting history.

Above all, it is important whether there is a requirement for an explanation of history or whether historical references serve only as atmosphere or for the generation of conflicts. Films or TV programs would never be able to be a reflection of historical reality; they are always selective - like academic presentations, stated Keilbach. This becomes clear not only with the help of the presented (or omitted) events, but also with the question of when does a narrative begin. For example, "Lincoln" extensively leaves out the American civil war and the new German television trilogy about the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, "Unsere Mütter unsere Väter", begins in 1941 (and not in 1933 or 1939). It therefore concentrates on experiences during the war in the east so that no stance must be taken on political or ideological questions from the time before. As a result, all films adopt a specific perspective on the events portrayed, which refers to the general interests of the context being developed. Cinematic portrayals of history are always the expression of the respective time of origin, Keilbach summed up. The particular perspective can lead to conflicts about a film if there is still no social consensus about the presentation of history, or if a film is perceived as an attempted reinterpretation of history.

The problem should be emphasized of the power of images that etch into our memory and that we consider to be reality. This results in memory of the images, not of the event. A "shared cinema experience" thus becomes a part of the collective memory. On the other hand, recollection and collective memory are always dynamic, and movies and pictures contribute significantly to this. It is interesting, however, that in spite of our knowledge about their constructed character, films are discussed as a depiction of reality. This is associated with the "reality effect", through which, in the perception of cinematic images, an impression of reality is initially generated. In the perception of written texts, for example, another transfer process is necessary, and is always associated with a certain distance. This is removed with the cinematic image, Keilbach stressed.

However, films and programs with historical references often additionally accentuate this claim to reality and use certain cinematic methods for that. The following are among these authentication strategies, inter alia: visual orientation on historical models (casting, historical locations, props), reenactment of existing, well-known documentary material and stories, fading in writing for the local or temporal settings, staging immediacy via diary-like text, manual or shoulder camera creating the impression of being directly behind and with the figures.

With documentary films, another rhetoric is used of course; it is rather argumentative and demonstrates what is frequently portrayed by citing specialist literature and experts. Mutual authentication of contemporary witnesses and documentary material used is noticeable with contemporary history documentaries: the eyewitnesses remembered what was then shown as it were, whereas what was shown was from the memories of eyewitnesses, as Keilbach illustrates with the help of an example from the television series "Holocaust" (ZDF, 2000). Next to the picturing of history and reflection incentives for viewers generated by how they are affected - the potential of film and television lies in the possibility to present a variety of perspectives, as for example in the form of five different biographies in "Unsere Mütter unsere Väter". Also the experience of actors of historical roles would offer an additional experience dimension. Moreover, experimental reenactments could question the truth claims of movies and lay bare the constructive nature of historical narrative. A film, even a bad one, is "good" if it triggers discussions and controversies about historical political issues, Keilbach summed up.

## **Television history landscapes: Serbia, Russia, Ukraine**

### *Serbia*

Snežana Milivojević, media theorist from Belgrade, first stated that there is a complicated relationship between television and history because the former is a medium of current, common everyday life (and understanding) and therefore the translation of history into television is a very difficult task. The illusion of "here and now" is generated especially strongly in live broadcasts, by the fact that the audience bears witness directly to the authenticity of the

events. Not without reason, they have been called the "first draft of history". By its general reporting, television already plants iconic images of events into the consciousness of people (moon-landing, when the wall came down, Iraq war...).

Due to its powers of persuasion and centrality, television leads to a certain homogenization of the population and its basic attitudes and is easy to exploit by the government even in democratic countries.

Television often earns the criticism that it spreads commercial "trash" and that it minimizes and trivializes serious issues. But it should be borne in mind that television was and still is the most important medium of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Television habits would also characterize dealing with future media, prophesied Milivojević.

Concerning the 1990s in the Balkans, where the history of violence has scarcely passed, if at all, the relationship between television and history is even more complicated because of emotional involvement. In Serbia and in other countries of the Balkans, television avoids rather awkward subjects of the recent history (Vesna Terselić from Sarajevo had already referred to other taboos existing in many countries, for instance regarding questions of collaboration with National Socialism, of complicity etc.).

It is noteworthy that many official TV depictions from the 1990s have survived the regimes and the circumstances under which they were produced. On the other hand, many oppositional media that had succeeded in surviving under the authoritarian regimes would be unlikely to survive commercialization pressure in a democracy, says Milivojević.

In the 1990s, Serbian television was an intensive field for historical battles, as if the battle at Amsfeld in 1389 had to be fought once more and won this time with the help of television. Television has become the place of political confrontations about history, also because it has not fulfilled its most important functions of processing the present and coping with everyday life. As part of this, the history of the federal state of Yugoslavia has been deconstructed to rewrite it into one that promised a better future, Milivojević opined. Television has served to legitimize the new perception and formed a narrative from the very complicated difficult reality, which the people in the disintegrating country followed out of a need for reassurance. Deconstruction

and reconstruction of history are normal, but had been done here without open social discourse, stated Milivojević. Many of the strategies from the 1990s even still exist after 2000.

### Russia

The sociologist and cultural scientist Daniil Dondurej outlined and emphasized the television environment in Russia in which “the ideas of the people about life are generated”.

In spite of extensive television production and television reception (it is a main activity of 95-105 million people daily), Russian television is not an object of social reflection. 80% of the population would barely make a distinction between the physical and the "second" reality. A considerable tolerance towards violence also prevails in the news and other moral prohibitions have also been killed. (Judith Keilbach had already remarked that through the competition situation and the urge to outdo others, and through the mechanisms of the medium and its consumption, all taboos are likely to fall in the long term.)

Of the 340 television channels, four central stations take up 40% of the air space. A central factor is the viewer ratings and commercialization becomes clear through the six billion private dollars of the television commercials market, compared with only 200 million dollars from the state side. There are two television populations in Russia, Dondurej diagnosed - the viewers until 23:30, when determination of viewer ratings and advertising calculations have an effect, and a minority for the time from 23:30 to 6:00 when interesting, good programs with human language are broadcast. Hence, Dondurej recommends to sleep during the day and to watch TV at night. In Russia there is neither state nor private television, and even less public sector television, but only commercial television, Dondurej summarized.

All that is embedded in an ideological context in which the state, through an “intuitive astonishing drawing from national mentality and proto-feudal matrices, from the ability to lead and manipulate”, positions itself as the most important demiurge of all types of activity. In the Putin doctrine, the Russian state has its own civilization between Europe and Asia and is paternalistically responsible for everything - which is transported by all available means via

series, news, statements in discussions so that 70% of the population shares these views. In addition there is patriotism as love for the state, Putin's new concept of the "prevailing majority of the citizens", that is juxtaposed with civil society and the constant search for current enemies. Here Europeans and Americans are less high up on the list than "other religions" and "foreign-born", while the rich, despite systematic moral denunciation in television series of the last twenty years (currently 3500 hours per year are broadcast), are not yet "inaugurated" as enemies, Dondurej reported. The broadcasts are created so that people not living in 2013 are not in a time dimension, and also that it is not important who lived in 1937 or 1956. It is spoken about on television, however, so that society does not consolidate. Overall, for a long time, a "cultural contract" has prevailed where television, as a "political statute", does not broadcast anything that would not be agreeable to the political regime and in return has a free hand to develop six billion dollars.

Concerning portrayals of history on television, Dondurej reported that the "socialistic consciousness" for this remains systematically not worked through, that historical TV series were controlled and individual statements about Stalin's "shortages" were drowned out by multipart Stalin epics. The biggest ideological construct of Russian television towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a particular form of remembrance of the Second World War: war cult, victory cult, victim cult... Patriotism is nowhere picked out as a central theme in peacetime. There is a "humanization" of the war. So it is only natural that Losniza's "My luck" is not broadcast and probably also not his new film "Baby Jar", in which nobody is without blame for this tragedy. "Remorse" ("Pokajanije"; 1984) is practically banned from television. Not even the hint of a juxtaposition of Stalinism and Nazism is possible - whoever undertakes this is considered to be an enemy of Russia, Dondurej explained. The time from September, 1939 to June, 1941 also belongs to the "banned zones". A project of the scriptwriter Alexander Mindadse, who received an award in Cannes, has been "put off" at the moment by the cultural ministry to 2030. All this "Content of the consciousness" is associated in Russia with a frightening consensus, Dondurej summed up.

## Ukraine.

On Ukrainian television scene, Wolodymyr Kulyk from Kiev highlighted that there - pointedly - two narratives of history exist, a Soviet version and an anti-Soviet version, equally represented within society, but also overlapping with a part of the population. Thus, for the majority, Stalin is not an effective manager, but rather a criminal, just like Bandera is also not a hero for the majority. On television, however, a "Soviet" narrative dominates. This is due to an "ideological ambivalence": though many would condemn the Holodomor nevertheless, they justify the Soviet order as such. On the other hand, many are not "nationalistic enough" to refuse the consumption of a "Soviet" narrative. In addition, the Russian-speaking television audience is more numerous in Ukraine and is wealthier - and therefore for (Ukrainian and Russian) producers and for advertising is the more attractive target group. Also "Ukrainians" would rather accept what is preferred by "Russians" than the other way round. Moreover, there is hardly any political pressure on the television industry in favor of a national narrative in the way that exists, for instance, in Russia.

Productions that comply with "Soviet" narrative dominate as films or series and in primetime less in documentaries, where "national" subjects are also presented. Also in the choice of the shown events the Soviet narrative prevails: mostly events from the Soviet or tsarist eras, when Ukraine was part of Russia, would be covered, thereby appearing as "normal". Subjects of Ukrainian independence or the struggle for independence are practically excluded from the "imaginary landscape of the past" (according to Morris Suzuki). While episodes of the "Soviet" narrative, following particular series conventions, often concentrated on the everyday life of historical figures and thereby the question of their actions or even crimes retreats into the background, questions of the "national" narrative would preferably be covered in documentaries, news and discussions. "Victory Day" that is intensively considered on television stands opposite the Independence Day of 1991 that is scarcely appreciated on television. As a reaction to this "marginalization" of the national narrative on television, its devotees went for a more intensive processing in literature by vehemently opposing "their"

history with "our" history. This trend is not less problematic, Kulyk summed up.

Concerning the situation in Belarus, it was pointed out that here, unlike in the Ukraine, there is a complete dependence on a foreign discourse. Anything Russian is perceived as one's own, anything national Belorussian as something foreign. This is due to the post-colonialism in Eastern Europe. Concerning this, Wolodymyr Kulyk countered that "foreign" depends on whether, here, the borders of the state or the *Socium* would be considered. The audience is to be defined sociologically or ideologically (and also across national borders), which constitutes a challenge for TV producers. Thus the most unspeakable Russian productions would not be shown in Ukraine even though the limits of what is presentable are broadly based: everything, except for the most chauvinistic productions, is shown and is accepted by a sufficiently large audience. There is hardly any resistance from civil society that would cause problems to television producers. Wachtang Kipiani (Kiev) added that Ukraine purchases productions for price reasons instead of producing them; then the result is watched with certain schizophrenia.

### **Who decides - public preferences or television producers?**

The historian and media scientist Christoph Classen (Potsdam) pointed out that according to his observation the media, even in dictatorships, could not operate on a continuing basis against society and, hence, would have to try to bring something popular. Hence, the question arises whether the gloomy diagnoses stated are only valid for the media system or also for society and its historical consciousness. Wolodymyr Kulyk commented about that, that society is also responsible itself for media consumption. Thus it needs an active minority (as in the 1960s in the FRG) that establishes effective barriers against the silent majority swallowing the "Trash". Irina Scherbakowa commented that the audience is absolutely receptive to new things: Wajda's "Katyń" on the main TV channels of Russia has considerably changed the attitude of the population to these events. Wachtang Kipiani (Kiev) reported that with the program "The big Ukrainians" - where in advance, a possible exclusion of communists or nationalists met with resistance in each case (with a certain fan mentality) - Bandera surprisingly ended up far ahead, which is suggestive of the fact that that TV makers do not always know or

assess their audience very well. Snežana Milivojević considered whether, in view of the success of "Roots", a well made soap opera could be a popular format to approach thematically the war of the 1990s. The representation of history on television should follow developments in society. It is not only about groups of powerful men but also about normal people, women, workers, minorities. Dondurej countered this with the fact that unfortunately in Russia hardly anyone took an interest in a tractor operator in 1937, but rather in how Stalin puts the Political Bureau in its place.

### **Television as a medium of historical documentation**

On the situation of historical documentaries on German television, Christoph Classen reported that they had experienced an incredible career need here in the last 20 years and since approximately 2000 have been prime time capable. This was related to the remembrance boom, a need to reassure oneself "in the period". In Germany, there is a concentration on contemporary history, especially the Nazi era and the Second World War, and in addition spectacular subjects are preferred (mine disasters, RAF in the FRG, injustice in the GDR). Characteristic, above all, is the concentration on national and only a few transnational subjects, strong personalization and focusing on major single events. Longer-term developments or structural changes are scarcely investigated.

Hybridization can be formally observed since the 1990s: documentaries increasingly have feature elements and, in the meantime, are meticulously composed narratives with reenactments, special effects and music. With contemporary eyewitnesses as an instrument for authentication, a trend towards being emotional can be observed, which reinforces the quality of the experience for the viewer via a "para-social relationship". For prime time historical documentaries, this means a trend towards an authoritative form of conveying history emanating from a strong power of imagination, so that the quality of construction of the history narrative is concealed. On the other hand, there is a trend towards historical myths that do not relate to the past, but emerge from present identity needs and discourses with which the past is projected. To sum up, Classen critically took up the argument of ZDF's former head of television editing for contemporary history, Guido Knopp, that

enlightenment needs audience reach and countered that enlightenment maybe rather needs minority and cumbersome formats.

### Russia

On the situation of the TV historical documentary in Russia, Irina Scherbakowa reported that since the end of the 1980s, maybe an even stronger upswing has taken place than in Germany. The focus was initially on witnesses who spoke on what were up to now "forbidden" aspects of history, and since then this expansion has developed according to the western model in the direction of "BBC-like" documentaries and is constructed with a corresponding approach. The familiar, usual formulas and clear patterns of this format opened the gates for a certain dilettantism.

This is relevant above all in dealing with contemporary eyewitnesses. In Russia, many have grown up with contemporary eyewitnesses who reported at school and on the screen about the Second World War. Their stories always followed an approach from which anything individual, contradictory and complex was omitted - also with regard to the censorship. Only Konstantin Simonow's "There came a soldier" (1975) allowed soldiers to report of experiences that did not comply with the approach. With the inflation of contemporary eyewitnesses on television in recent times, it is associated that often interviews are done without any professional care and without awareness of how difficult the handling of contemporary eyewitnesses is and how difficult it is for their testimonies to be incorporated in a documentary.

Furthermore, a false dramaturgical image arises without the respective context, since people remember quite differently at different times. Thus the recollections of Stalin's daughter about her childhood and her relationship with her father at the beginning of the 1990s and her recollections ten years later are two quite different stories. On the handling of traumas, Scherbakowa stated that tears of contemporary eyewitnesses, as an example, could in no way be a real picture of a trauma. Christoph Classen underlined that contemporary eyewitnesses would often not be taken seriously enough and would simply be used as instruments to provide evidence for an already existing narrative or thesis of the film. Recently there is a trend being observed towards the portrayal of contemporary history in

personal stories, which means, however, a legitimate but not necessarily historical approach, Oleg Rostovtsev (Dnepropetrovsk) warned that it should be appreciated that there can be many mistakes with the recollections of contemporary eyewitnesses, which is why one cannot rely solely on these. Classen explained that contemporary eyewitnesses, on the other hand, would also be taken too seriously: a "witnessing" from contemporary eyewitness recollections generates misunderstandings because with contemporary eyewitnesses - like with everybody else – events would be dynamically stored by the memory and would be reactivated, namely functionally geared to the present (for the production of biography, identity and social competence). Furthermore it must be noted that images from weekly newsreels (possibly from fight scenes) are not "documentary" images but are staged and recreated. Nevertheless, these images become part of a wide variety of productions, Scherbakowa lamented.

### **History between enlightenment and propaganda**

In the discussion of "historical television", the fact that it has to be accurately distinguished between journalism propaganda and real historical films was emphasized by Oleg Rostovtsev. Although the films mentioned about Stalin or Putin formed an important context and had an impact on the conception of the world, they could not, however, be discussed as "historically-driven films". Nikita Sokolov warned about propaganda carried out under the guise of "documentaries". He lamented the absence of a historian group in Russia that could reliably offer orientation. There are only individual respectable historians, who were also in danger of being "used", possibly by means of statements taken out of context. Moreover, the category of "Secret Service historians" has developed in Russia, who have special access to archives and other sources and are used in documentaries. To this end, Daniil Dondurej noted sarcastically that each broadcast finds exactly the historians it needs. Rolf Dieter Müller, military historian from Potsdam and consultant for "Unsere Mütter unsere Väter" commented that scientists could only consult, and prevent the worst, for films with their specific characteristic features. They would have to decide whether something is true or false, probable or improbable (but perhaps just not entirely to be ruled out).

Irina Scherbakowa argued against the view that there is no historical truth. The film "Schukow's unknown battle" for instance, is rather weak in its traditional form, but stands out as an example through the comparison of the German and Soviet losses in the battle at Rschew (which goes against the mythologizing of war and has therefore taken care of scandal). Christoph Classen stated that, although there is no absolute truth, there is, however, careful handling of sources and facts, even if the interpretation and the compilation opened up some leeway.

On the question of successful works, Irina Scherbakowa named Sergei Losniza's "Blockade" (2006), that is put together from library pictures of the blockade of Leningrad, is set to music without words and reflects the state and the atmosphere of the town more strongly than all documentaries with their expert explanations. Nikita Sokolov referred to "Imagination" ("Predstawlenije"; 2008) also by Losniza, which assembled the details of a provincial Soviet weekly newsreel, and showed them up to be a lie.

## **History in feature films and TV films**

### *Discussions about "Unsere Mütter unsere Väter" (UMUV)*

The three-piece series „Unsere Mütter unsere Väter“ was shown in March 2013 on the second German television station (ZDF) and achieved very high viewing figures, but besides a lot of praise, also met with criticism, above all in Poland, Russia and Ukraine. Benjamin Benedict, one of the producers of the film, reported first about the history of the origin and the issues pursued with this film about war experiences between 1941 and 1945. Producer Nico Hofmann and scriptwriter Stefan Kolditz had undertaken with the film to try to tell the story of their parents' generation who were young when they went into the war and hence approach an understanding of their inconceivable experience. This should not be done only in the categories of victims or the resistance movement, but also as perpetrators - each of the central characters caused the death of people. With the complicated story telling the tale of five friends and narrated in a discriminating manner, an audience of millions was achieved and the many letters proved that the film has contributed to an analysis of history: in the process, many had told their family history, where their father / grandfather, their mother / grandmother

had been. For him, it was not to be expected that the film translated into personal history to such an extent. In the process, the “publicity power” of the medium of television has been consciously used.

On the question of the creation and the reconstruction of the war, Benedict referred to a development in TV away from "black-and-white" in the direction of a bigger differentiation, ambivalence, even inscrutability of characters. This differentiation was attempting to tell historically what would be consistent with biographical material that addresses the audience's experiences and stimulates historical analysis. The film is very much constructed as a narrative (in the neutral sense) and it was thought about for a long time how the viewers could be reached best of all. In addition, the camera has consciously been left on the shoulder to generate closeness, inter alia. The challenge was to construct, with a multi-perspective narrative technique, an impression of the reality at that time, with it being limited - after many test auditions - to five characters, so as not to overwhelm the audience and to have them watch the film with enthusiasm.

Christoph Classen called the film a typical example of “historical event TV” that is produced and marketed at great expense with the assertive authority of the public television station. It offers an interpretation of history with “huge clout”. Classen asked what reflection and educational effect is still possible in view of this urgency, and in particular if the film, like others too, can be attributed to a victimization myth. To sell this as something new is problematic. Concerning this, Benedict countered that the objective had been that many people grappled with history. This had happened, indeed intensely and emotionally; and that, in addition, “the chance of a last dialogue” with the parent generation had been taken. On the question of “victims or perpetrators”, it was clear for him that the characters are perpetrators. In terms of education and information, Benedict referred to the fact that there Oleg Rostovtsev argued that he could stand behind the film if it was clearly said that it was about viewer ratings and money, and that history had nothing to do with it. If there was, however, the claim to want to understand the parents in their history, this was another situation and this film was not a critical analysis of their own history but a "tranquilizer". On the question of the reception, Rolf Dieter Müller, who had consulted as a historian on the film,

remarked that the Wehrmacht Information Office in Berlin had experienced a considerable rush after the film. Wolodymyr Kulyk referred to the title (which had caused confusion several times in the discussion) and asked whether this didn't necessarily imply a national German frame of reference and how people like immigrants should handle it.

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Institute of Historical Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences) criticised, with regard to the "documentation" for the film, with its implied information claim, that archive footage and scenes from the film, as well as the narrator's voice and statements by historians and contemporary eyewitnesses, were combined there, and, for example, the pointed (in Poland sharply criticised) representation of the partisans of Armia Krajowa as anti-Semites in such an intertwined sequence is authorised by a historian. Maybe the statements of the historian have been taken out of context or are due to careless post editing, Saryusz-Wolska wondered. Noteworthy about the discussion there is that historians discussed about a fictitious representation, something that has features of a Baudrillard'schen Simulacrum. In Poland, the role of the Russians and Ukrainians in the film has not been discussed, Saryusz-Wolska added. It always seemed to have been about the representation of their "own" protagonists from the perspective of their own memory culture. The debate pathways had diverged, it was remembered - according to Assman - in monologue.

### **Myths and images**

On the handling of myth figures and their images, Klaudija Sabo from Vienna introduced a cutting from the film "Pretty village, pretty flame" (Lepa sela, lepo gore; 1996). This attempts an "artistic critical commentary" on the Serbian Kosovo myth, in line with Christian motives, about the battle at Amselfeld in 1389. In the film Serbians are surrounded, together with an American journalist, by Muslim troops and the protagonist Viljuška laments to the journalist that the Serbians - in contrast to "Germans, Englishmen and Americans" - had already eaten from a plate with forks in the Middle Ages. This refers to a Byzantine myth and goes back to a fresco in the monastery of Studenica. The scene works through mutual clichés and myths ("justice and prosperity in the west", "backwardness of the Balkans" – "cultural superiority of the Serbians"), explained Sabo. The symbols served as

motivators (even for war) and through technical film means (alternation of glossy photographs and journalistic video technology) the role of the media is pointed out in the construction of myths - Viljuška had found out about the fork from television, the journalist functions as a gateway to the global public and everything is recorded self-reflexively by the director. Here the transference mechanisms of history and images are indicated, the borders of fiction and reality create a problem, reporting is questioned and the documentary as a reflection of reality is doubted, Sabo summed up.

### **Reducing modernization**

Nikita Sokolov (Russia) concentrated in his lecture on the few film productions in Russia that, though they have to be attributed to the mainstream, claim to be a realistic representation of historical reality and can be regarded as worthy of discussion.

Here, Sokolov diagnosed for the medium of television the imminent difficulty to keep a distance (between viewer and the watched, production and reception time) and countered this by a fundamental feature of European culture, namely the knowledge about the historicity of the world. This foundation, the understanding that past times were different, that our forefathers made decisions with other ideas in mind and starting with other motives, is destroyed by modern TV film, Sokolov said. A “reducing modernization of the past” is done and with it a depreciation of history.

Scriptwriters are forced to incredibly simplify the reality, which is extremely complicated, for their medium, and to reduce the number of characters.

Then, for the increase of tension, love stories would be intertwined that had nothing to do with either the past or this present time. One example of this is the Russian film “1612 - Chronicle of a time of confusion“ (2007), where the events in the screenplay did not go well together from the start and, finally, were mystically resolved by a white unicorn. Even with good bases, as was the case with Wassilij Grossman's novel “Life and Fate”, which was turned into a miniseries that, in large parts, correctly depicted what was in the novel, a narrative line that was extremely important for Grossman had been taken out, which culminated in long discussions of a Soviet and an SS officer about the (very similar) features of Nazism and Bolshevism, Sokolov reported. This storyline, extremely important for the historical consciousness in Russia, has

been left out by the television producers because it allegedly made matters too complicated.

By means of the (unsuccessful) example that films, though they can artistically deal freely with facts with a historical claim, would have to consider, however, the circumstances and motives of the people in that time, Sokolov named the popular miniseries "Likwidazija" (2007) about the fight of the Soviet authorities against "bandits" in 1946 in the area of Odessa. Inter alia, there, an Odessa of Babel is shown that is an Odessa that, in 1946, simply did not exist anymore, explained Sokolov. He complained that, even with the best source situation, historical occurrences are distorted, and this is not done maliciously or from political motives but probably alone due to following a common practice of the medium.

Because the people, according to Franz Boas, did not live in an objective reality but in what they themselves imagine as a representation of reality, the described is dangerous and a crime of the television against society, Sokolov challenged. According to his conviction, a simplistic scheme of social reality, where with the past cannot be distinguished from the present, makes manipulations of a society easier. Therefore, film artists would have, due to the effectiveness of the images, a big responsibility.

The absence of the historical distance, according to Sokolov, creates the illusion that the world is simple and easy solutions are possible. It contradicts the humanistic claim to mediate that individual and society are complex and call for complex solutions. Russia had to suffer very much during the last hundred years because of easy solutions!

## **Outlook**

The warning against simplification was often supported by the forum participants. However, simpler approaches were also worth considering, with which people and the foundation could be prepared for complicated representations. Lena Schemkowa of Memorial pointed out that it is important to depict the basic trend of a historical situation. Jens Siegert

emphasised, further to a thesis of Sokolov. Concerning the idea of a restriction to five protagonists, enforced because of threat of "overtaxing " of the audience he countered with the argument that one - with corresponding will and skill - can represent something that is complicated also by using a person. Complexity is also important concerning the reception: Popular historical films reproduced and strengthened national clichés if the look at the viewer ratings becomes the deciding motive, says Christoph Classen. Several times, it was emphasized that also the debates about history in the film in total, still strongly remained within the national framework. International co-productions could demand the perception of other contexts because the story must be "negotiated" differently, something that, however, also put increased demands on the production. Daniil Dondurej warned that one should not simplify by oneself and thereby exclude options, for instance because everything appears to be controlled by the Kremlin. Doors would have to be found and opened , then there would be more examples that somebody who lives in Berlin makes a film with French money about Jews in Kiev that will distress everybody and make people pensive (Losniza's "Baby Jar"...). The cosmologies, views and interpretations that result at all levels owing to exchange of information and co-production (as an answer , for example, to self-centring and the absence of co-production in Russia) have to be preserved - one day they will definitely be needed , Dondurej is convinced.