International, interdisciplinary conference

memento STALINGRAD – Multi-perspective considerations of the history, reception and topicality of a battle

TU Chemnitz, June 27-29, 2025 (Friday – Sunday), Altes Heizhaus

Conference languages: German, English

SPECIAL ACCOMPANYING EVENT ON THE EVE OF THE CONFERENCE

– 26.06.2025, 7:00 PM, Neue Sächsische Galerie –

„WAR and PEACE“

Public reading and discussion with Viktor Jerofeew

– reading in German: Christoph Grube –
– moderation: Jakob Kullik, Eugen Wenzel –

Friday, 27.06.2025

09:00-09:45 (GER)

Greeting: *Bernadette Malinowski,*
Holder of the Professorship for Modern German and Comparative Literature at the TU Chemnitz

Greeting: *Ralph Burghart, Mayor of the City of Chemnitz*

Invitation to the opening of the Alexander Kluge exhibition and, in the presence of the artist, a short presentation of the painting: Volgograd Experience: The Mill' (1977) by Axel Wunsch
Mathias Lindner, Director of the New Saxon Gallery Chemnitz

Welcome and opening: *Eugen Wenzel,*
Research Associate at the Chair of Modern German and Comparative Literature at the TU Chemnitz, head of the conference

“Stalingrad is not a monument to some pathos, it is a ‘school of experience’”, Foreword by Alexander Kluge
Christoph Grube (presentation),
Research Associate at the Chair of Modern German and Comparative Literature at the TU Chemnitz

PERSPECTIVES ON MILITARY HISTORY, HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY (1/2)

09:45-10:30 Peter Lieb (Potsdam) (GER)

The Battle of Stalingrad 1942/43. Turing Point of the Second World War?

The Battle of Stalingrad is often considered the turning point of the Second World War. When the last remnants of the German 6th Army capitulated in the northern pocket on 2 February 1943, the Wehrmacht had lost about 250,000 prisoners and dead in the fighting of the last two and a half months. For the first time in this war, an entire German army had been destroyed, which was already considered by contemporaries to be a warning sign of the defeat of the German Reich. Nazi propaganda, however, tried to reinterpret the defeat as a moral victory and a necessary sacrifice in order to prepare the military and the population for total war. But there were also some voices arguing from a military point of view that by tying strong Soviet forces on the Volga, the collapse of the entire front in the south could be prevented. In fact, it is often forgotten to this day that in the course of the defeat of Stalingrad, the Wehrmacht was able to inflict severe defeats on the Red Army in the defensive battles of Kharkiv.
Of course, in an industrialised war of the dimension like the Second World War, it is difficult to speak of a single decisive battle or a turning point. Historians have therefore also identified other possible turning points of the Second World War, most notably the Battle of Moscow at the end of 1941. This lecture thus wants to scrutinise the military significance of the Battle of Stalingrad. First, the course of the battle will be analysed, then its location in the German-Soviet War and finally its place in the entire Second World War. Stalingrad was undoubtedly a heavy military defeat for the German Reich and an important step towards victory for the Soviet Union. In doing so, one must also consider the horrendous losses of the German allies and the political impact of the defeat on these alliances. However, the significance of Stalingrad as a single event is put into perspective as soon as this battle is considered in the context of the war as a whole.

[COFFEE BREAK]

10:45-11:30 Lyuba Vinogradova (London) (EN)

German Soldiers through the Eyes of Stalingrad Civilians

At the moment when the German army reached Stalingrad in the summer of 1942, there were around 1.2 million civilians in the city: 500 thousand population plus 700 thousand evacuated and refugees. According to different sources, from 100 thousand to 400 thousand managed to evacuate to the other side of the Volga. The rest stayed. By February 1943, the population of Stalingrad was reduced to 32 thousand. Some had managed to escape, others were taken to Germany as forced labour, and hundreds of thousands died during the fighting in the city that had been reduced to rubble. Some voices of civilians that survived the battle in the basements of Stalingrad have reached us.
Not many diaries from that time survived; in some cases, the diary survived, and the author did not. These precious sources, to which I have added some memoirs and oral testimonies, give a glimpse of the invaders as seen through the eyes of the Stalingrad civilians. The diaries take us through the story of the battle. First, the German soldiers arrive as near-victors in August 1942: they just need to get across the Volga to secure the victory. Another diarist describes her and her family's coexistence with the German soldiers in the basements of the ruined city during the bitter winter of 1942-43: soldiers and civilians alike are desperate not only for food but also for water as most wells are gone, and every

trip to the Volga is extremely dangerous. Civilians describe the unimaginably brutal fighting and, finally, in February 1943, the sight of defeated enemies. The German soldiers are weak with hunger, suffering from frostbites, some, in that extremely cold winter, in bare feet and stripped to their underwear by the Russian soldiers.
There is one story, one diary that I have found particularly striking. A woman from Stalingrad, with her three young children, belonged to the civilians that got trapped in the fighting city. Against all the odds, she managed to secure the survival of her family. Her descriptions of various interactions with the German soldiers are striking: she is almost forced to strangle her baby when it disturbs the sleep of a German soldier; she shares the precious water with German soldiers in exchange for some meat from a dead horse; she escapes the fighting but her "sacred" little sack of flour, apart from which she has nothing, is stolen by a fellow refugee and only returned to her after interference of a German soldier.
The testimonies by Stalingrad civilians about their life during the battle are by no means objective. Still, they provide a precious insight into their mindset and precious details which are so important for a historian.

11:30-12:15 Liudmila Novikova (Heidelberg) (EN)

The Soviet Home Front after Stalingrad: A Regional Perspective

The Soviet victory at Stalingrad, as is well known, marked an important turning point in the situation on the fronts of World War II. But while the tide of the war started turning in favor of the USSR, the Soviet policies on the home front evolved as well. This presentation focuses on the post-Stalingrad situation on the Soviet home front both on the national level, and on the local one. Taking as an example the Soviet Northern region and the ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, it provides a glimpse on how the new circumstances affected the situation on the ground.
The discussion focuses on three central themes: first, the politics of survival, second, the politics of hope, and third, the politics of control. First, the improvement of the military situation, paradoxically, made the conditions on the home front at times even more dramatic, as the scarce material and human resources had to be channeled to the newly liberated territories. In particular, provisioning the population on the home front with sufficient food remained a major challenge throughout 1943 and 1944, as the example of the Northern region glaringly revealed. Second, while the material conditions remained extremely precarious, victory at Stalingrad inspired the hope that the war would end with a Soviet victory in the foreseeable future. The Soviet regime gained in popularity among the population because it had demonstrated its ability to deliver a significant, possibly the decisive victory in that war. Part of the politics of hope were various efforts of the Soviet regime to foster the vision of a prosperous and happy future as a means to consolidate popular support. Third, the anticipation of the victory in the war did not make the Stalinist regime less repressive. As the Soviet leadership attempted to ascertain its control over the home front and in the liberated territories, persecution targeted new population groups that ranged from alleged traitors and real collaborationists with the Nazis to Soviet citizens who freely associated with the country's wartime Western Allies. The example of the Soviet Northern ports where Lend-Lease convoys arrived, reveals that starting in 1943, the Soviet side extended repressions to local residents, mostly women, who had close relations with Allied Lend-Lease sailors or with Allied ground personnel; even some Allied servicemen were sent to Soviet camps for misdemeanors they had committed on the shore. Thus, the more assertive Soviet position at home also meant greater isolationism from the country's capitalist Allies in the sphere of international politics that became noticeable after Stalingrad.

[COFFEE BREAK]

12:30-13:15 Stefan Garsztecki (Chemnitz) (GER)

The Impact of Stalingrad on the Eastern European Resistance against the 3rd Reich

The defeat of the 6th German Army in Stalingrad had a strong impulse on resistance groups in occupied Eastern Europe. On the one hand it encouraged these groups and strengthened their determination to intensify their own fighting, On the other hand it had an impulse on Stalin's decision how to deal with Eastern Europe after the war. The German defeat had from this perspective two sides. The lecture tries with some examples from Poland and Czechoslowakia to discuss this different effects.

[LUNCH: Chemnitzer Hof]

14:30-15:15 Wolfgang Kissel (Bremen) (EN)

Stalingrad as the "Second Birth" of Russian Civilization.
On the Transformation of a Stalinist Discourse under Putin's Regime

The paper´s focus is on the instrumentalization of the battle of Stalingrad and the victory of the Red Army by the current Putin regime. Its first section analyses the activities of the The World Russian People´s Council, a private organization closely linked to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Council was founded in the early 1990s and acquired particular importance as a platform for a new nationalist ideology after Putin´s ascent to power. In 2018 the Council´s homepage published an article about Stalingrad as the second birth of Russia´s civilization. It was signed by the political scientist Alexander B. Rudakov, a collaborator of the Heritage Institute of the Russian Ministry of Culture. According to Rudakov the battle of Stalingrad was not only a fact of military history, but contained a "spiritual, philosophical, moral, and civilizational sense". The Baptism of the Rus in 988 and Christian values serve as the main characteristic of the Russian civilization which is by definition "free of colonial aspirations, non-aggressive and non-expansive and dominantly directed towards an eschatological dimension". According to the article´s author, it was after the battle of Stalingrad that the alleged rebirth of Russia could take place, based on a new relationship of the state and the Orthodox Church. Thanks to Stalin´s rapprochement with the church in 1942, priests were freed from prisons or the gulag and could return to their parishes, the leadership of the Church was restored to its former rights. These changes allegedly cleared the way to an unprecedented surge in Russia´s creative powers. Its point of culmination was the conquest of the sky by the first artificial satellite Sputnik in 1957, and Gagarin´s first expedition into orbit. The article´s interest for our general topic resides not in the originality of the author or of his thinking, but in its representative function for a discourse about civilization which harks back to Stalin and the early forties. The third section focuses on the emergence of this Stalinist civilizational discourse and its origin in a speech Stalin delivered on the 27th anniversary of the Great October Revolution (November, the 6th 1944) which celebrated the achievements of the Red Army saving Europe´s civilization from its imminent destruction. In the following years a discursive formation emerged in the Soviet mass media which was characteristic of late and post-Stalinism and oriented towards asserting Communist society as the avant-garde of world civilization and the SU as the second superpower, equal to the USA. The shift from a total rejection of the concept of civilization under Lenin to its reintroduction as a key concept of Soviet self-definition was based on the victory and its presence in Soviet memory. The final section focuses on the residues of the Stalinist discourse in post-Soviet Russia and their transformation into central ideologemes of the Putin regime. Against

this historical backdrop, the "rebirth of Russia´s civilization at Stalingrad" is a consistent element of a great discursive strategy which aims at contesting and undermining the civilizational superiority of the West.

15:15-16:00 Ian Garner (Warsaw) (EN)

Stalingrad, Social Media, and the Return of the Past in Russia's War against Ukraine

Vladimir Putin and other state-aligned discursive actors describe Russia's war against Ukraine as a repeat of the so-called 'Great Patriotic War': a battle against a fascist and Nazi threat that promises to obliterate both Russian territory and Russian identity; a defensive war Russia has no choice to wage in order to save itself from the threat of destruction. Since 2014, state actors – along with the producers of pulp fiction, memes, and other manifestations of popular culture – have labelled various aspects of the war against Ukraine the 'new Stalingrad.' In this talk, I begin by demonstrating how a narrative of suffering and redemption embodied in Stalingrad is central to the state's discourse on the war (e.g. in Putin's speeches, in television programs, and in news platform texts). Then, using a combination of content and critical discourse analysis of data scraped from VK groups and Telegram channels, I set out to explore how social media users interact (or do *not* interact) with this discourse in pro-state social media spaces by (re)producing texts, images, and videos about Stalingrad's purportedly redemptive qualities around the discursive nexus of the war against Ukraine. Initial results suggest that, while the image of Stalingrad itself is less important in these social media spaces than in state-aligned actors' discourse, the underlying metanarrative of suffering and redemption through war is – whether consciously or not – widely reproduced across various social media spaces. The paper, therefore, sheds some light on the workings of what William Merrin and Andrew Hoskins term the "sharded" nature of experiencing modern war, as the work reveals some materialized aspects of the (sub)conscious but seemingly "unverified and uninspectable" linkages between broken, fractured, and fragmented narratives and sites of (re)mediation.

[COFFEE BREAK]

LITERARY PERSPECTIVES

16:15-17:00 Paul Oswalt (Berlin) (GER)

Alexander Kluge: Battle Description

With his novel "The Battle" (Schlachtbeschreibung), Alexander Kluge has created a perspective-rich view of the Battle of Stalingrad. His narrative draws on documents from the Wehrmacht, interviews with contemporary witnesses and anecdotal stories from the immediate surroundings of the event or from further away from the battle. What holds the narrative together? What logic does the selection of montage elements follow and which aspects do they reveal - which are not shown? To put it in the words of Walter Benjamin: What are the fruits of a reading that "reads the text against the grain", as Kluge himself ultimately demands of his reader in the preface to Schlachtbeschreibung? This article will explore these questions and take a look at the connections between the elements of the work, Kluge's other narrative works and the historical context of the Battle of Stalingrad.

17:00-19:00 TIME AT FREE DISPOSAL

– 7:00 PM, New Saxon Gallery –

Opening of the exhibition:
Whoever Wins, Crashes. Stalingrad – The Structure of an Organized Disaster
(Alexander Kluge on War)

subsequently BUFFET RECEPTION IN THE NEW SOXON GALLERY

Saturday, 28.06.2025

09:15-10:00 Dirk Rochtus (Leuven) (GER)

Stalingrad as a turning Point in the Life and Work of Johannes R. Becher and Franz Fühmann. The different Views of two Poets of the GDR

Several West and East German authors have written novels about Stalingrad. Yet also poets were not silent on the issue either, especially in the German Democratic Republic (GDR; DDR in German). This paper focuses on two authors who were also active in the cultural field of the GDR, namely Johannes R. Becher (1891-1958) and Franz Fühmann (1922-1984). As a young man Becher became a communist at the time of the Weimar Republic. Already in 1943, being on exile in Moscow, he wrote a book of poems with the title *'Dank an Stalingrad*'. To Becher the victory of the Red Army affirmed that the communists were standing on the 'good side of history'. Just like the Bavarian Becher Fühmann stemmed from a bourgeois milieu that was situated in the 'Sudetenland' (The German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia). Yet he followed a more difficult track from National Socialism to Communism. This process which the former soldier of the 'Wehrmacht' called 'die Wandlung' ('The Change'), took place after the war in Russian captivity. In his collection of stories *'Das Judenauto*' however Fühmann makes it seem as if his doubts about a victorious warfare of Nazi Germany already had started after the defeat of its Sixth Army in Stalingrad. In 1953 he published the poem *'Die Fahrt nach Stalingrad*', a deep reflection on Stalingrad on the occasion of his visit as a member of an official delegation of the GDR to the city. The title is pointing at the long way he mentally had to go and whereby Stalingrad symbolizes the turn in his ideological thinking.
That is a big difference with Becher whose 'Danke an Stalingrad' expressed the correctness of the own worldview. But the question is whether the triumph of the Red Army in Stalingrad does not camouflage the uncertainties of these East German poets. Both of them started in a later stage of their lives to question socialism cautiously. In this paper both books of poems are being submitted to a text critical analysis with regard to their mirroring of the socialist ideology. The paper therefore investigates the following questions: What does Stalingrad as a cipher mean for the world view of both authors and which similarities and differences do exist between these men who have been socialized in a different way and walked a different path? In how far did they reflect the socialist view on the war, Stalingrad and the fate of Germany?

10:00-10:45 Ievgeniia Voloshchuk (Frankfurt/Oder) (GER)

Germans and Russians at Stalingrad: Representation, Strategies of the Battle of Stalingrad in the Anthology Chronicle of Courage by Ilya Ehrenburg

The journalistic work of Ilya Ehrenburg (1891-1967) occupies a special place in Soviet war literature. The Kiev-born Russian writer of Jewish origin, who spent almost thirty years in exile and only returned to the Stalinist Soviet Union after fleeing from Nazi-occupied France, became one of the leading Soviet war correspondents of the Second World War despite his unconventional biography. According to imprecise estimates, Ehrenburg wrote well over 1,000 war articles during this period (A. Rubashkin), which illuminated the development of the war and exerted an enormous influence on Soviet soldiers and civilians. At the same time, Ehrenburg's war pictures also had a propagandistic effect on public opinion abroad, where his numerous war articles were published in renowned newspapers from London to Johannesburg. In addition to the war reports for the Soviet press, the author wrote over 300 essays for foreign media. These texts were first presented to Soviet readers in Ehrenburg's anthology "Chronicle of Courage", which was only published in 1974, seven years after the author's death and around thirty years after the end of the Second World War. By this time, the war reports and propagandistic appeals contained therein had largely lost their burning topicality, which significantly influenced the reception of the anthology. Nevertheless, this anthology, which the well-known Soviet poet Konstantin Simonov characterized as "one of the most remarkable journalistic documents of the difficult time", contains the extensive factual material that Ehrenburg had meticulously compiled during his work as a war correspondent for the newspaper "Krasnaya Zvezda" ["Red Star"]. In addition, the book provides significant models of Ehrenburg's interpretation, which are of interest both for the study of war discourse as well as for the analysis of Soviet propaganda during the Second World War. It was of decisive importance for the texts in this volume that they were written from the outset for foreign readers and "external" propagandistic targets and that they transported the correspondingly adapted interpretation patterns across state, ideological or cultural borders.
The lecture offered focuses on the specifics of the representations of the Battle of Stalingrad in Ehrenburg's articles. The focus of the text analysis is on the basic concepts and strategies by means of which the images of Germans and Russians are constructed within the framework of the Stalingrad narrative. The auto- and hetero-images are analysed in their interactions with imagological stereotypes, ideological clichés, propagandistic mobilization practices and the so-called "language of hate". Furthermore, topographical and cultural-geographical constructs are examined in detail, which embed the Battle of Stalingrad in the broad context of European history.

[COFFEE BREAK]

11:00-11:45 Rainer Grübel (Oldenburg) (GER)

Grossman's Stalingrad and Life and Destiny. Reinterpretation of the Battle of Stalingrad and Soviet History in the Novel Duology

If in the year four of Putin's invasion of Ukraine and in the year eleven of Russia's aggression against its neighboring country we once again consider Vasilij Grossman's great Russian novel *Жизнь и судьба – Life and Fate*, we do so with the conviction, that our historical situation as the context, in which the reception of a literary text takes place, unavoidably influences not only the reading act but also the interpretation of the text, we regard. Furthermore, our understanding of the historical situation itself, which is referred to by the narrated fictional story, is not less affected by the conditions of our

reception, than the factual and fictional happenings and their interpretation in the novel itself. Reciprocally our understanding of the Second world war, shaped by a new reading of Grossman's novel influences also the conditions of our perception of the war, taking nowadays place on the borderline of the Russian Federation and the Ukrainian Republik and not less in the depth of these two countries, and as a hybrid war also in many other countries of Europe. Only the future will tell us, whether we are witnessing the begin of the Third World War or a more limited international conflict like the Yugoslav Wars in the early 1990s.

We regard the battle of Stalingrad as a cultural chronotop, narrated by Vasilij Grossman three times as a major military and political fight of the Second World War in big texts: the first time in 1944 in the anthology *Годы войны – Years of War*, comint close to the genre of war report and consisting of seven mainly chronologically following each other sections, called „Wolga – Stalin-grad", „The Battle of Stalingrad", „Staricyn – Stalingrad, „In the direction of the Main Road", „On the Streets of the Offense", „The Army of Stalingrad" and „The Front of Stalingrad". So in five cases the name of the town, in and around which this battle took place, figures as a part of the reports title. We contrast it to his second narrative, a big novel on the battle of Stalingrad, written with the title „Stalingrad" in the years 1946-1952 but coming out in 1952/1956 in two defaced by censorship versions under the heading *За правое дело – For a Just Cause* (reedition without censorship in 2019). It had been conceited as a dilogy, the second part of which, written in the years 1952-1959 with the title *Жизнь и судьба – Life and Destiny,* because of ideological reasons could not be published during the writer's lifetime. We draw attention to a special feature of the chronotopoi of these novels, the cross-linking of historical, (auto-)biographical and fictional elements.

Then we show that, shocked by the information about the extermination of the Jews by the Germans in the Holocaust (which affected also his own mother) and irritated by Stalin's politics concerning the Jewish population of the Soviet Union, the author counteracted the role of the praise of heroic deeds of soldiers and the civil population in and around the battle more and more by a critical view on Soviet ideology and politics. So, and this is in our view relevant also for our vision of battles in the world of today, the role of freedom and liberty, of responsibility and stewardship was growing, compared with the social function of order and obedience. This shift also affects our view of (war-)history and its possible representation in narratives, which in the case of Grossman is influenced by the historiosophic model of Tolstoj's *Война и мир – War and peace* (1865-1869), orientated to the ‚will of the people' (narodničestvo). Grossman's intention to liberate himself from the restrictions of Soviet ideology and Socialist realism were however, as we can show, limited by his will to publish the novel in the USSR.

We consider also the cultural place of the battle as a military chronotop, which is inseparably connected with a toponym like „Stalingrad" with its in this case problematic Namesake and its implicit relation to „Leningrad" (cf. Šostakovič's 7th Symphony) and Grossman's (all to) late realism, which he started to relativize in his posthumously published prose *Добро вам! – Good for you!* (1988) and *Все течет – All is flowing* (1989), and we compare it with the more modern Russian prose of Isaak Babel', Andrej Platonov, and Varlam Šalamov.

DIDACTIC PERSPECTIVES

11:45-12:30 Eugen Wenzel (Chemnitz) (GER)

"There was only one math lesson between Langemarck and Stalingrad." The Necessity of War Literature for School Lessons

German writers' assessments of the two world wars regularly include the view that the German school system bore a considerable share of the blame for these wars. Reference can be made here, for example, to Erich Maria Remarque, Erich Kästner, Heinrich Böll or Wolfgang Borchert, who sums it up with the sentence: "There was only one math lesson between Langemarck and Stalingrad." The war-loving educators understood almost instinctively that literature can be instrumentalized particularly well for war-glorifying purposes: Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin and Heinrich von Kleist or, for example, the Song of the Nibelungs, deliberately used in lessons, conveyed to young pupils that "death for the fatherland" was the highest fulfillment of masculinity. It is therefore all the more astonishing that the opposite side has never been too aware of the opposite potential of literature. However, literature is indeed highly suitable as a mediator of deeply anti-war attitudes, which it is one of the highest duties of education to promote. The aim of the lecture is to demonstrate this suitability using a concrete example: by presenting excerpts from German and Russian-language Stalingrad literature, it will be illustrated how this text corpus can be able to develop a differentiated attitude in pupils with regard to the understanding of heroes. The focus on the concept of the hero is derived from the emphasized connection of this topic to the reality of young adults: Striving for orientation, they often stylize people as their role models or even heroes, which is often highly problematic to glorify in this way. Confronting them with heroic concepts from war literature at this point can only be beneficial, as it shows them, among other things, how fatal the consequences can be if heroes are not scrutinized critically enough.

[COFFEE BREAK]

12:45-13:45 Hans Richard Brittnacher, Marcus Heyduk (both Berlin) (GER)

The Myth of Stalingrad as a (not only) literary didactic Challenge

The literature on Stalingrad now fills several meters of shelf space. We will limit ourselves to two novels that are worthy of comparison due to the extremism of their position. The first is Heinz G. Konsalik's novel Der Arzt von Stalingrad (1958), which praises itself as a "song of praise" <!> of humanity, but in fact has clear reactionary tendencies - its genesis is clearly evident against the backdrop of the discussion at the time about the rearmament of Germany in view of the imminent danger from the 'Eastern Bloc'. The reactionary tendencies of the novel include not only the exoneration of the Wehrmacht from all atrocities, but also the view of the 'Asian', mostly drunk, 'lazy', incompetent 'Russians', which bundles together all the revanchist stereotypes that were rampant in the consciousness of the defeated Germans of the 1950s. The novel was a sensational success, as was its contemporary film adaptation (1958). In contrast, Alexander Kluge's Schlachtbeschreibung (1964) clearly demonstrates a differentiated awareness that does not attempt to rehabilitate the Russians, but instead uses literature to highlight massive doubts about the possibility of a clear distinction between good and evil, right and wrong.
Kluge's epistemic doubt finds expression in his metaphor of the grid, in order to find an image for the diverse influences, dependencies, conditions, meteorological events, political decisions and military

fortune, which alternately, alternatively and confrontationally set the course of the "Battle of Stalingrad". The result is a description of the battle + which, unlike Konsalik's novel, manages without superficial accusations of guilt and cryptic protestations of innocence. The analysis of the two texts (using excerpts) can illustrate the use of stereotypes, sharpen the view of historical difference and the change in cultural awareness and, if necessary, also develop comparative media aspects by including film excerpts.

[LUNCH: Chemnitzer Hof]

15:15-16:00 Andreas Schwerdtfeger (Berlin) (GER)

Stalingrad as a Subject of History Lessons

Subject of the presentation is the concept of a teaching sequence on the Battle of Stalingrad for a 9th-grade high school class. The sequence primarily focuses on promoting interpretive competence, i.e., students work with sources. Secondary literature is used in parallel to create background knowledge for source interpretation. Both, German and Soviet perspectives are examined. The sequence follows the didactic principle of exemplarity in that the Battle of Stalingrad is treated as a central example from the immediate events of the World War, for which little teaching time is allocated in the Berlin curriculum.

FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

16:00-16:45 Hans-Ludwig Kröber (Berlin, forensic psychiatry) (GER)

The Willingness to Kill and the Limits of Man's Capacity to Suffer

For anyone born just eight years later, Stalingrad was present but past. It was the epitome of an inferno, yet of a fundamentally different inferno than the NS extermination camps. Ultimately, the German soldiers who had fought their way to Stalingrad were there by choice, by virtue of their own will, with their own interests, to conquer and loot, and already, they were tainted by the war crimes the Wehrmacht had committed since the beginning of their campaign. They were kept together by what Sönke Neitzel & Harald Welzer have described in "Soldiers" (2013), what Stefan Kühl (2016) has described in "Ordinary Organisations" – but what of this remained now? The soldiers fell victim to grotesque strategic errors and were caught in a trap, 3.000 kilometers away from home, without reinforcement, without food supplies, without vehicles or clothing, without ammunition, and most of them without any knowledge about their situation. "A weary, tired, filthy, drained, and morally indifferent mass," Plievier wrote ("Stalingrad", 1983), "with however enough latitude for despair, paralysis, panic, sickness and death of the dissolving army." This condition persisted, week by week, in the freezing cold, without protection, with suicides from desperation, and still months to go until the surrender that came far too late. A total loss of meaning of one's own presence and of fighting arose: they were betrayed, blamed and in the end, abandoned in hell. Later-born people cannot comprehend how anyone could endure these conditions at all – and how they managed to sustain the willingness to fight of those who had the weapons and ammunition to do so. Presumably, the option to fight, to do anything at all was a mental relief – rather fighting than dying of thirst and hunger, rather taking action than freezing to death. Many soldiers however became »Mussulmans«, emotionally deceased, before, and without direct impact of the enemy, dying physically.

[COFFEE BREAK]

17:00-17:45 Frank Asbrock (Chemnitz, psychology) (EN)

What Does Stalingrad Mean for Dealing with Conflicts Today?
A Socio-Psychological Perspective on Collective Memory between Defense and Guilt

The Battle of Stalingrad has become a central moral reference point in Germany's collective self-image after 1945, casting the nation as either perpetrator or victim. In this presentation, I will discuss how such ambivalent memory guides present-day conflict positions. Drawing on social identity theory and research on collective emotions (Roccas et al., 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), I propose that whether Stalingrad is framed as collective guilt or collective victimhood channels three socio-psychological mechanisms: (1) threat-laden identity cues that amplify ingroup defensiveness, (2) moral-disengagement scripts that normalize renewed violence, and (3) guilt-based frames that open routes to reconciliation. Comparative memory surveys across eleven nations show striking cross-cultural convergences in World-War-II salience yet divergent moral lessons (Abel et al., 2019). Recent German panel data illustrate the dynamics in real time: public support for the German government Ukraine war policies dropped from spring 2022 to fall 2022, driven by perceived threat and right-wing authoritarianism (Bolesta et al., 2023). Similar patterns surface in other conflict perceptions, underscoring how selective memory can legitimize either empathy or enmity. Collective guilt fosters constructive engagement only when national identification is moderate and political framing invites moral responsibility (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2014); otherwise, defensive victim narratives prevail.

17:45-18:30 TIME AT FREE DISPOSAL

– 6:30-8:00 PM, New Saxon Gallery –

Discussion on the significance and topicality of Stalingrad

Jörg Baberowski (Berlin) – Claudia Weber (Frankfurt/Oder) – Harald Welzer (Berlin)

(moderation: Eugen Wenzel)

[DINNER :Ratsstube Chemnitz]

Sunday, 29.06.2025

FILM AND MUSICOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

09:00-09:45 Jürgen Heizmann (Montreal) (GER)

War in 3D. Fedor Bondarchuk's Stalingrad

Fedor Bondarchuk's 2013 film is not a milestone in cinematic art. Although STALINGRAD was an extraordinary box office success, partly on an international level, the work was more or less panned by critics. One Russian reviewer even denied the director the moral integrity to make a film about such a significant event as the Battle of Stalingrad, comparing him to a paedophile who wanted to paint an icon. Bondarchuk's film is, however, relevant in terms of media history and socio-politics. It is the first Russian film shot in 3D and in the IMAX system, designed to meet and possibly even surpass the technical standards set by Steven Spielberg with his war film SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, which is also extremely popular in Russia. It is an example of the trend in contemporary war films to show the audience the suffering as drastically as possible and give them the impression that they are participating in the events themselves. The production of the film was preceded by a survey which revealed that 30% of Russian young people were unaware of the Battle of Stalingrad. It can be assumed that Bondarchuk, who began his career with video clips, deliberately tailored the aesthetics of his film to the viewing habits of this target group. Since nowadays most people in the East, as in the West, access history exclusively through film and television, it is not surprising that Culture Minister Medinsky described STALINGRAD as a socially useful blockbuster. In my lecture, I will situate Bondarchuk's film in the history of the war film genre and explore how the screenplay, based on Vasily Grossman's famous epic Life and Fate, deals with the myth of Stalingrad after the decline of communism and in the context of the new patriotic culture inspired by Putin. In particular, I will ask how the film – also in comparison to previous films about the Great Patriotic War – presents the Red Army and the Soviet people, what roles women play, what significance Stalin is accorded, and how the German enemy is portrayed.

09:45-10:30 Annegret Zettl (Leipzig) (GER)

Women in heroic Roles in the German and Russian-language Stalingrad Films

War films serve a variety of purposes, depending on temporal distance to the depicted event and the current global political situation at the time they were made. War films prepare for war by inciting or mentally toughening up future war participants; they encourage people to persevere during an actual war or allow them to process the events in retrospect. Female figures as war heroes were sometimes more, sometimes less present in the cultural memory of the USSR. The Germans were very ambivalent about the fact that they also fought in the Second World War against female soldiers, which reflected in German films.

According to very different estimates, there were between 500,000 and two million female soldiers in the Red Army on the Soviet side, depending on whether the members of the NKVD and partisan units were included and depending on who presented these figures. In Stalingrad fought on the Soviet side the 588th all-female Night Bomber Regiment, the legendary 46th Guards Regiment. Some female snipers achieved great fame. However, the vast majority of female army personnel were employed in the supply stage, e.g. in the medical corps.

How were these facts portrayed in war films in German- and Russian-speaking countries? Female characters portrayed as combatants break with the gender role concept that divides men into active heroes and women into passive objects of violence. Since female combatants break with the narrative and viewing habits of war films, they are like a blank sheet of paper: suitable for fulfilling diverse emotionalization intentions. In film plots, female soldiers as victims are killed or raped. Heroines, in contrast, rescue and care for wounded comrades, fall in love, protect children, trick, seduce, or kill the enemy. In the Soviet and post-Soviet space, screenwriters resorted to culturally deeply rooted images or narrative structures from fairy tales and myths, and tried to preserve female figures as symbols of pacifism and humanism, while in German-speaking countries screenwriters preferred stereotypes of women as saints or whores.
The lecture will examine the diverse functions of female figures in Stalingrad films at different times and contrast the perspectives of both sides.

[COFFEE BREAK]

10:45-11:30 Karen Painter (Minneapolis) (EN)

German Music Composition after Stalingrad

How did composers and music publishers respond to the defeat at Stalingrad? The announcement of the Sixth Army fighting to the last meant signaled many lost lives, which had to be mourned. I examine the songbooks for funerals that were released by Nazi organizations, showing differences in collections for women. The poems set to music, even by party members, were less stridently ideologically than before, and some were not political at all. The size of these songbooks is remarkable, at a time of paper shortage. Songbooks connected the musical practices at home and on the war front—in usage as well as in the poems set to music.
I also survey the few musical compositions that were premiered or published after Stalingrad, noting a similar pivot away from politics. Still, caution reigned: the authors set to music were canonic German writers or party members.
Finally, I show that as the Kirchenkampf and persecution of religious leaders continued unabated in 1943-1944, the music released by party organizations and party members addressed the spiritual needs of Germans confronting news of death. Yet almost no sacred music for the dead was published during this period, leading some German publishers to look abroad for scores to release.

PERSPECTIVES ON MILITARY HISTORY, HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY (2/2)

11:30-12:15 Oliver Benjamin Hemmerle (Ludwigsburg) (GER)

Stalingrad – A Very French Victory?

From a Parisian Métro-Station to street-names in communist suburbia in nearly all major French cities Stalingrad is even today omnipresent in the French public sphere. In my presentation I analyse the importance of Stalingrad as a symbol in France from 1943 to the present:

- Stalingrad before the Libération of 1944 in the context of the De Gaullian Free French, the comm unist parts of the Résistance and the relations with the Soviet Union
- Stalingrad in the 4th Republic with the emerging Cold War and a strong French communist party

- Stalingrad in the context of the anti-NATO stance of de Gaulle during the early 5th Republic
- Stalingrad during the socialist-communist government in the early Mitterrand-presidency
- Stalingrad in post-Cold War France and after the decline of the French Communist Party
- Bir-Hakeim (1942) as the (symbolic) Free French Stalingrad before the (real) battle of Stalingrad
- The Stalingrad comparison in France
- Putin, Stalingrad and France

12:15-13:00 *Final discussion and farewell*

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