

"Visualizing revolt and punishment in early modern times: conflict- and contact-zones between different visual cultures and policies" (rationale)

In 1701 the former secretary of an imperial delegation to Moscow published his ambassadorial diary in Vienna with the Emperor's copyright. When the Muscovite envoy to Vienna got hold of the book, he was immediately scandalized. The book contained detailed descriptions of the mass executions and tortures staged by Peter I as a response to a musketeers' uprising in 1698. Interestingly, almost two years earlier German newspapers had circulated quite similar reports without raising scandal, even though they were quite systematically screened at the tsar's court. But in contrast to the newspapers, the book contained pictures of the mass executions.

What was a rather usual way of visualizing punishment in the Holy Roman Empire and other parts of Europe was far from normal in Russian (Orthodox) culture, where such explicit images hardly existed in a secular context. The Russian public was only familiar with religious images of punishment (e.g. scenes of the Last Judgment). The pictures therefore evoked associations among Muscovite diplomats that would have seemed far-fetched for a Western spectator. And in the heated atmosphere of the time, the parallels between Peter's spectacle of suffering and the apocalypse matched well with the tsar's reputation as Anti-Christ, which was widespread among the Muscovite population. In addition and probably rather by accident than on purpose, the engraver had not shown the public that was attending the executions: Could this have been seen as a token of the executioners' alleged lack of legitimacy? All these were highly delicate issues and since none of the sides involved was aware of the other's different perceptual patterns, they indicate significant cultural misunderstandings due to a clash of visual cultures with quite different notions of the limits of what could and what could not be represented.

The case raises more questions than it provides answers. In most of early modern Europe visual representations of punishment played an important part in the governments' strategies to reinvigorate social hierarchies and to reestablish public order after the traumatizing experience of socio-political upheaval and revolt. Scenarios of punishment and executions of ringleaders were not only *staged* publicly, as it has been stressed by Michel Foucault and his followers. They were also disseminated in print, both through text and image, whereby the authorities hoped to reach a much broader public.

On the workshop we want to explore conflict- and contact zones between different visual cultures and the images these cultures produced on and around revolts. Pictures were often essential to the communication of revolt because they were the only language which the entire population could "read", the lower strata included. One could therefore even argue that patterns of visual perception were at least as important for shaping early modern people's mindsets as the written word. Since texts and images often accompanied and informed one another, boundaries between textual and iconographical representations and their respective political grammars need to be explored on an interdisciplinary level and in accordance with current debates on theory and methodology. In broadsides pictures were often a literal (or rather visual) "translation" of the text. But they could also stand alone. Their non-verbal texture made a different, probably often more emotional appeal to spectators than words did to readers. Accordingly, classical art-historical research is just as relevant to interpreting early-modern media as are modern visual culture studies, philosophy, literary studies and even neuroscience. It is no question *that* pictures were widely perceived in the early modern period. But it is much more difficult to say *how* they were perceived. Ambivalence in perception could relate to differences in genre (icons, broadsheets, book illustrations) as well as to differences in context (religious or secular; collective or individual crime; tragedy or comedy as classical modes of representation). Since the language and grammar of the images are often very unfamiliar to us, we have to engage in a thorough exercise of deciphering in order to unearth early-modern forms of perception and to carefully weigh them with scholarly approaches of our own time. Only when it came to dissonances in the basic evaluations of images and a subsequent feeling of estrangement were early modern people pushed to articulate and make explicit what was otherwise taken for granted and cannot be traced in sources. In this way the confrontation of divergent modes of visual representation and the voiced experiences of irritation can shed light on both the literary "syntaxes" and the visual "codes" of representation.