

RED

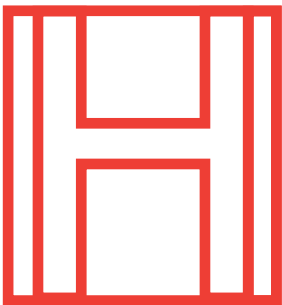
CENTURY

What do we make of Revolution?

Graduate conference

March 31
April 1
2017

Harvard
University



CALL FOR PAPERS

2017 marks the centennial of the October Revolution. We face this event in a unique historical moment. Globalization has shown the failure of its totalizing project. The discourse of a harmonious multicultural world sustained in the idea of the “end of history” is now contested by the disruptive re-emergence of politics. The cosmopolitan foundations of the European Union tremble; we see a sudden resurgence of fundamentalist ideologies inside and outside Western capitalism; information technology companies contest state power in unprecedented ways. These exigencies will be our starting points in assessing the rhetoric of emancipation established by the October Revolution.

Revolution is a concept with a strong temporal element: it stages a break with the past by bringing into the present an ideal of the future. We can look back at the century that 1917 inaugurated —replete with horrors and failures— and let a thread of contemporary reflections about emancipation unfold before our eyes, beyond the Russian process and even against it, traversing geographies and disciplines. Our conference will bring together graduate scholars from across the humanities to interrogate this Red Century, through the debates that accompanied the revolution and its historical aftermath.

DEADLINE:

February 5, 2017

SUBMISSIONS

Conference format

The conference will consist of a series of seminars, each focused on a given object, conducted in a round-table format. Panelists will give a 5-10-minute presentation that takes the object as its topic, a starting point, a point of comparison, or a provocation. Presentations will be followed by discussion among the panelists and with the public.

Additional images, documents, and videos relating to the objects can be viewed at redcenturyconference.wordpress.com

Please include your institutional affiliation, specify which of the eleven objects your proposal pertains to, and note if you are also interested in presenting on another proposed object.

One-page PDF proposals are due by February 5 2017 by email.

Please send your proposals to:

redcenturyatharvard@gmail.com

The Body of the Revolutionary

object 1

Lenin's body has been painstakingly preserved and proudly displayed for over 90 years. Che's body was defiled after his assassination. Ideological circumstances, in these cases and others, necessitated and permitted the preservation and desecration of dead bodies. Bodies are contested terrain: they enact politics and are produced by politics simultaneously. What can revolution tell us about human bodies—alive or dead, female or male, the leader's or the masses', present or disappeared? What part do biopolitics and struggles against death, decomposition, and corporeal vulnerability play in revolution?



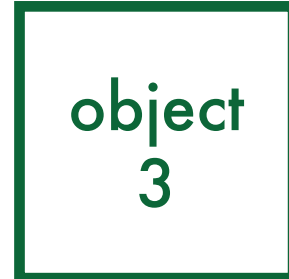
LADA car

object
2

A symbol of the American dream, the car is also synonymous with the mass production and consumption long sustained by Fordism. But what do cars symbolize in socialism? Produced for party members, the police, and exemplary workers, the Lada is the paradigmatic Soviet commodity. It is part of popular representations of communism, as seen from inside and outside—an object of mockery and nostalgia. What can the Lada say about the history of material culture of the Soviet bloc, China, and other socialist countries? What is historically particular about dynamics of consumption, design, and functionality in socialism? What potential for thinking new ways of consumption lies in “actually existing socialism”?



Long March: Restart



Bought by MoMA in 2008, this is a side-scroller video game installation by Feng Mengbo in which the viewer is dwarfed by two enormous screens of about 80 by 20 feet. With a joystick in hand, you become a small Red Army soldier fighting enemies throughout China. Your weapon: unlimited cans of Coca-Cola. How is Revolution visually reproduced? What were—and are—the relationships between Western mass culture, Art, and Revolution? Are there emancipatory practices inscribed in market socialism? Or in virtual space?

Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IzrzOqwPNI>



The Working-Class Family

object 4

This 1968 performance by Oscar Bony consisted of a family sitting on a platform eight hours a day. The label read: "Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, a professional die-caster, is earning twice his usual wages for being on display with his wife and son." Closed by the police a week after its opening, the exhibition was severely criticized by both the left and the right. But what can we make today of this "act of social sadism made explicit," to quote Oscar Masotta? Would it be as shocking today? And does it signal the historical divorce of political and artistic avant-gardes?



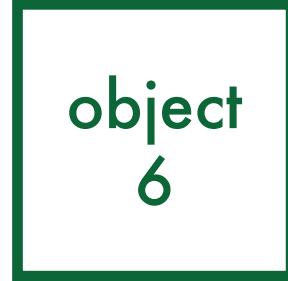
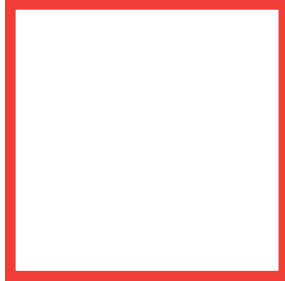
Soviet calendar (1947)

object
5

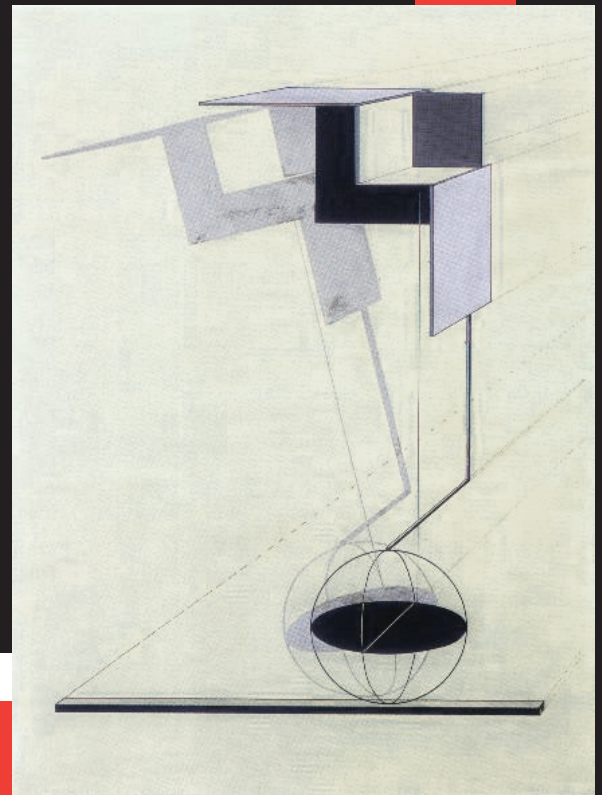
To commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the Foreign Languages Publishing House (Moscow) issued the English-language Soviet Calendar: Thirty Years of the Soviet State. Following victory over the Nazis, the book propagandizes the Soviet Union's accomplishments, portrays its daily life, and fuels its mission as a global superpower at the outset of the Cold War. As a compendium of celebrated events and figures, the almanac is the perfect occasion not only to analyze—once again—the broad uses of propaganda, but also to think about how the Soviet Union conceived the past and projected the future at a crucial moment of its historical development.



PROUN series



The first decades of the 20th Century saw the simultaneous emergence of political and aesthetic revolution. El Lissitzky made a series of paintings, prints and drawings called "Proun" between 1919 and 1927. The title is said to stand for *proekt utverzhdenya novogo* (Design for the affirmation of the new). This series advances Lissitzky's account of the artist's involvement in the chain of production. How does this radical artistic production impact contemporary aesthetic practices? How does revolutionary art bring together various discourses (painting, print, architecture) to create the effect of the new?



Performing October

object 7

Historical memory of the October Revolution crystallizes around the Bolsheviks' capture of the Winter Palace from the Provisional Government. Although the palace was overtaken with little resistance, the event was highly dramatized in later reenactments, most notably the Soviet mass festival *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920), which in turn inspired Sergei Eisenstein's 1927 film *October: Ten Days That Shook The World*. These dramatizations marked anniversaries of the Revolution. As we approach its centennial, how do such reenactments reconfigure the meaning of revolution in historical imagination? What role does performance play in memory?



The Internationale

object 8

Stand up, damned of the Earth! The words of The Internationale are a reference common across languages. More than a song, it is a practice and a monument. Its history draws an international revolutionary genealogy. As a national anthem, it paradoxically transcends and rejects nationalism. It embodies the spirit of internationalism, and exists simultaneously in many languages. What are the borders and border-crossings of revolution? What place do the original and derivative have in revolutionary praxis and ideology?

L'INTERNATIONALE
PAROLES D'E. POTTIER
MUSIQUE DE DEGEYTER

Mouvement de marche

Il n'est pas de bonheur suprême:
Ni Dieu, ni César, ni tribun.
Producteurs, ouvriers: nous sommes!
Devotions le salut commun!
Pour que le vaincu rende gorge.
Pour lire l'esprit du combat,
Soufflons nos mêmes vœux: fange,
Bottons le fer quand il est chaud!
C'est la lutte finale, etc.

L'Etat campeine et la loi triche,
L'impôt saigne le malheureux,
Nul devoir ne s'impose au riche
Le droit du pauvre est un mot creux.
C'est assez longain en letelle,
L'Eglise veut d'autres lois:
Pas de droits sans devoirs, dit-elle;
Ecoux, pas de devoirs sans droits!
C'est la lutte finale, etc.

Mieux dans leur apothose,
Les Rois de la mine et du rail
Ont-ils jamais fait autre chose
Que devaliser le travail?
Dans les raffres, forts de la bande
Ce qu'il a créé s'est fondé,
En descendant qu'on le lui rende
Le peuple ne veut que son die,
C'est la lutte finale, etc.

Ouvriers, paysans, nous sommes
Le grand parti des travailleurs,
La terre n'appartient qu'aux hommes,
L'usif ira léger ailleurs.
Combien de nos chairs se repaissent?
Mais si les culottes, les vestons
Ils de vos matras disparaissent,
Le soleil brillera toujours!
C'est la lutte finale, etc.

Lining up

object
9

Citizens wait in a static line. How is this phenomenon of desire, lack, and delay rooted in the revolutionary commotion? It introduces a play between desire and lack, delay and consumption. Revolution changes not only modes of production, but also modes of consumption. Socialist economies are forced to reconcile the constraints of central planning with aesthetics and functionality that can contest capitalist luxury and abundance. How do pleasure and consumption respond to moral, ideological, or political demands? Can product democratization, sustainable development, and an ethics of consumption coexist?



Vaclav Havel's first presidential address

object
10

Dissident author Vaclav Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution: a non-violent transition from one-party Communist rule to free elections and parliamentary government. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, dissidents labelled “counter-revolutionaries” faced off against ossified “revolutionary” regimes, under the banners of human rights, civic responsibility, and private conscience. What is the relationship between dissent and revolution? At what point does dissension become revolutionary?



Links http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990/0101_uk.html
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3OK650epuo>

The Mass Strike

object
11

Rosa Luxemburg authored her seminal text *The Mass Strike* (1906) after witnessing the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905—the first revolutionary movement in an industrial society spurred by mass workers' strikes. Although she maintained political ties with the German Socialist Democratic Party (SPD) for most of her life, the mass strikes of 1905-1907 led her to reject the labor movement's commitment to building socialism through electoral processes. What role does the strike play in revolution? Does it mediate revolutionary theory and praxis? How do labor movements contest dominant state ideologies?



Link

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike>

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