

Abstracts

Day 1.

Keynote lecture: "The most profound discovery... is that life leans out into the night": The European 20th Century and the Specter of Responsibility

BY MARCI SHORE

Historical turning points such as 1914, 1939, and 1989 are real-life examples of what the children's novelist Madeleine L'Engle famously described as "a wrinkle in time": time suddenly jumps, more abruptly than one could have imagined, revealing how spatiality is bound up with temporality, as a leap from one time to another feels also like a leap from one place to another. But the old time and place never entirely disappear—as the aftermath of 1989 has shown us. In 1848 Marx and Engels described communism as a specter from the future. Over a century and a half later, communism is no less haunting as a specter from the past. For many years the communist archives played the role of the Freudian unconscious: that dark psychic closet into which everything too disturbing for the conscious mind was thrown. Freud had no illusions that prying open that closet would be painless. In the process of "accounting with the past," we have attempted to draw clear lines between guilt and innocence. We long for the absence of moral ambiguity, which could restore our sense of wholeness. Yet "accounting with the past" as an attempt above all to distinguish guilt from innocence has often blinded us to the deeper and more essential questions revealed by that past. A nationalist "historical policy" will always fail, because what we fear is also inside us. Remembrance—if it is to have any greater meaning at all—must involve a deeper understanding of the nature of responsibility. In thinking about this it is worth revisiting Jan Patočka's "Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History": in particular the relationship between responsibility and what Patočka described as "shakiness."

Panel discussion: Turning Points of European Remembrance. Different approaches.

WŁODZIMIERZ BORODZIEJ, HEIDEMARIE UHL, JAMES MARK, PAVEL TYCHTL

In the 20th century there were multiple turning points changing dramatically history of the whole continent: two world wars, Holocaust, beginning and end of Nazi and communist regimes, war in former Yugoslavia or Eastern enlargements of the European Union. There were also local turning points, which affected the situation in the whole or part of the

continent e.g. anti-communist uprising in Hungary or collapse of Franco regime in Spain. During the panel different national and regional approaches to the most important turning point will be examined. The following question will be discussed: how differently turning points in the 20th century European history are understood on a national, regional and European level, are there any turning points, which are similarly understood through the whole continent, how the national and regional perspective affect the history writing and assessment of the past events.

Day 2.

Panel discussion: The Collapse of Communism and Afterwards. Legacy of the Cold-War period in Europe

ŁUKASZ KAMIŃSKI, MICHAL KOPEČEK, LAURE NEUMAYER, MATĚJ SPURNÝ

The collapse of the communism in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe opened a way to democratization of the former communist countries and finally to Eastern enlargement of the European Union. These processes in communist countries were differently carried out. Not in all cases stable democracy has been established. 25 years after the first democratic governments in Central and Eastern Europe were appointed, there is still much controversy about the role of the former oppositional elites, negotiations with communist regimes (round table negotiations) as well as about the role of secret services and communist elites in the transition processes. Participants of the panel will discuss the legacy of the transition and the cold-war period 25 years after.

Panel discussion: The Next Generation. New interpretations of recent European history

IRIT DEKEL, SANDRA VOKK, ZOFIA WÓYCICKA, LENKA KOPRIVOVA

Historical narrations presented by academics, who witnessed the events on their own are often differently interpreted, or are questioned by the next generation of scholars studying social and historical change. Younger scholars who have only a vague personal remembrance of past events have more distance to the subjects. During this panel this question will be discussed with just such academics, those who started their academic studies after the 1989. Are there any differences in the approach to history and its interpretation when comparing to former generation's approach and interpretation of same events? Do they ask completely new different questions or maybe only show slight change of interests? To what extent their approach and concerns informed by current events in Europe, commitment to democracy and change in the making of the countries they reside in?

Day 3.

Final lecture: The Gospel of the superiority of the present over the past? Reclaiming the critical potential of history, 25 years after 1989

BY PIETER LAGROU

Contemporary discussions of the history of Europe seem caught in several conceptual traps. One is the binary opposition between remembering and forgetting as exclusive options, while, obviously, the issue is one of priorities: which episodes, which kinds of history do we think are more important, more worthy of public and scholarly attention than others? A second is the obsession with national singularity that seems to characterise most histories of the twentieth century, histories that are thus unable to account for the manifest convergence of European societies at the century's end. The third and probably most important problem is the simplistic story line reducing contemporary history to the clash between democracy and its enemies. Democracy is not a stable form of government that crystallised in the wake of 1789 and then took two centuries to finally triumph over its enemies in 1989. Democracy is a conflicting set of principles: popular sovereignty and a regime of individual rights; universalism and nationalism, for a start. The conflicting articulation of political modernity over two centuries, including fascism and communism, constitutes one single narrative, one in which all European nations take part, at all times. The history of Italy from 1922 to 1943, or that of Poland from 1939 to 1989, are as much part of a complex history of the becoming of a European democracy as the French third Republic, British parliamentarism or the 1957 Rome Treaty. Commemorating 1989 should therefore be an opportunity to conceive of the history of the twentieth century in Europe as a single process, rather than a mere addition of incommensurable experiences.

Final discussion

SIOBHAN KATTAGO, DUŠAN KOVÁČ, OLDŘICH TŮMA

During the final discussion the participants will try to answer the following questions: what is common European experience about the dictatorships and wars, how different national and regional narratives could meet and how different nations or social groups could openly and productively discuss the past of the continent, could we agree that the most important turning points have an important place in the history of each European nation and still a significant impact on lives of all Europeans. The disputants will also propose topics to be discussed during next symposia.