

Call for Papers

Commodification of History: The Past as Source of Entertainment and Commerce

Workshop organized by the Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena and the Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism in Prague

Prague, 15/16 September 2018

In a globalizing world, references to the past as a way of identity formation have become more and more important. Even though the “production” of history is the major field of academic historiography, the past is addressed in many popular contexts that are consumed and appropriated by immense numbers of people. Though the forms in which history is brought to life differ widely, most of them have one feature in common: they promise the distribution of knowledge via entertainment and this is what makes them so popular.

Producing history outside academia is often reduced to discussing history as business and forms of “marketing the past” have been criticized in academic discourse. Fears of standardization and a loss of diversity are being voiced in this critical evaluation. Sharon Macdonald called this phenomenon “commodification anxiety discourse” and pointed out that this needs “attention as an ethnographic phenomenon itself” (Macdonald 2013) Some disciplines already provide new terminology and methodological settings to tackle this issue: In cultural studies, the performative turn has shifted the focus towards practices of history production by focusing attention on actions performed and the bodily experiences involved in creating collective meaning. In this perspective performing the past is not merely a show, but a meaningful practice. In the field of history, terms such as “living history” or “doing history” have been established only recently to characterize the experiential component of various practices of reviving, restaging, and appropriating events from the past to the present.

The question how exactly history has been used in commercial settings, how the past is being transformed into history with a special commercial interest has so far been under researched. The workshop will pick up on this and tackle questions of commodification in an interdisciplinary approach and will aim at a more nuanced and in depth analysis of processes and practices of commodification. Papers may involve, but are not restricted to, the following questions:

- How do processes of valorization of historical sites and sites of memory proceed? Who are the actors involved? What are the strategies and practices at play?
- How is history being negotiated at such sites and what is the specificity of historical narratives produced at such sites? How can these narratives and processes of knowledge production be analyzed?
- What share do audiences have in these practices and in the creation of historical narratives at such sites? What is their role and how are historical narratives tailored according to their needs, expectations, assumptions and preconceptions? What attempts are being made to shape the historical consciousness of spectators?
- What theoretical frameworks work best to understand processes of commodification of the past?

Thus putting the spotlight on the commodification of history, the workshop will provide a space for exchange of scholars who analyze these phenomena aiming to foster further conceptual thinking in an emerging interdisciplinary field. As the event will take place in Prague, special attention will be paid to phenomena of commodification in Central and Eastern and Southeastern Europe. These submissions will be given priority during the selection process, however, case studies from Western Europe are also highly welcome. Papers which suggest a comparative approach are as appreciated as studies of a single case as long as they are based on a theoretical approach that helps to foster a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of commodification in an interdisciplinary way.

The workshop will include both discussion panels and a fieldtrip to a site of commodified history in Prague to provide participants with hands-on experience. If you wish to take part in this workshop please send a short abstract of max 200 words and a short CV to Juliane Tomann (Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena) and Vojtech Ripka (Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism (ÚSTR), Prague) by **April 15th 2018**.