

Conference: Testimony. Commemoration. Wellbeing.

The Center for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade, the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade will hold a conference on “Testimony. Commemoration. Wellbeing” on April 20-27, 2018 (April 20-24, 2018 in Sarajevo and April 26-27, 2018 in Belgrade) as part of the project “Testimony – Truth or Politics: The Concept of Testimony in the Commemoration of the Yugoslav Wars”. This conference aims to democratize the historical narrative building in the region and to strengthen the inclusion of the Yugoslav Wars in the European remembrance practices.

Witnessing is a participative act, testifying is an act of speech with multiple addressees at once, at least those relating to the situation testified upon, the situation of testifying and a self-address which constitutes multiple speakers. The simultaneity of time and space creates an ever changing assemblage of singular-plural social relations, intimate and political, at work much after the testimony has been given and anew each time it is heard. The diversity of social relations at the base of testimony makes its relation to reality, both that experienced and that in which testimony is heard, complex. This trait makes it unstable for the purpose of the listener whose demand is for the Truth, i.e. a comprehensive meaning which would constitute the person testifying as Subject and/or as a generic Subject, also constituting both testifying and testified factual situations as Events.

Michel Foucault describes the role of institutions in which testimony takes place as follows: “The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities [...]. It is that which defines the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing; it is the system of its functioning. Far from being that which unifies everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse, far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourse, it is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration.” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 145-6).

Among the initial linguistic-theatrical settings of testimony are the court room and the legal system. They bind the speech act of testimony to the demand of providing evidence for factual truth and regulate the multiplicity of social relations at the base of testimony. By defining the witness as disinterested they dismiss the claim and demand that any speech act, including that of the witness, puts forth. In return for these restrictions the judicial system

offers its idea of justice, even if justice is attainable. However, is that all that is necessary? In the post- WWII period there was a rapidly growing use of the international judicial system to provide justice for the victims of human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, with newly-coined terms such as transitional and restorative justice.

The conference will examine how different global ideological paradigms (human rights, Holocaust commemoration, conflict management, reconciliation, Marxism) and institutional regimes (local and international courts, NGOs, archives, state and private educational institutions) act as regulative measures to produce adequate testimonies. The main question which the conference focuses on is what are the settings in which the excess that testimony always already produces as settings that can create a possibility for alternative social relations. These relations could then, in the context of the commemoration of Yugoslav wars in the 1990's, allow for a common life and wellbeing.

We invite abstracts of maximum 250 words to be sent to trajkovic@instifdt.bg.ac.rs by February 28, 2018. We welcome papers from various fields of study as well as from practitioners sharing their experience with testimonials. Applicants will be notified about their participation by March 15, 2018.

Other project partners are: *The Ignorant Schoolmaster and his Committees, Belgrade; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Boem, Vienna, Austria; Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT Transeuropa), Rovereto, Italy; Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo; Centre for Cultural and Social Repair, Banja Luka; The Leibniz-Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg, Germany.*

Further information: <http://svedocanstvo-imenovatoratom.org/en/conferences>



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