

CONFERENCE

The Nines: Brinks, Cusps, and Perceptions of Possibility—from 1789-2009

December 3-5, 2009

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Conveners:

Dario Gaggio, associate professor of history and CES-EUC director

Mary Gallagher, associate professor of political science and CCS director

Michael Kennedy, CREES research associate and Howard R. Swearer Director, Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

Douglas Northrop, associate professor of history and CREES director

Discussant:

Geoff Eley, Karl Pohrt Distinguished University Professor of Contemporary History, U-M

Kerstin Barndt, associate professor of Germanic languages and literatures, U-M

Exhibiting 1989/2009: Utopian Temporalities and the Work of Memory

The institution of the history museum has prominently accompanied and shaped the process of national unification in Germany but it may be the more transient medium of the temporary exhibition through which we gain insight into the multiplicity of histories and regimes of representation associated with 1989. In my analyses, I engage with three exhibition projects that stage the historic events of the “peaceful revolution” in public spaces outside the museum ranging from the Alexanderplatz in Berlin, to Hanover’s World’s Fair in 2000, and large-scale landscape projects in the former industrial heartland of East Germany. From differing vantage points of social, national, and industrial history and through various aesthetic strategies, the exhibitions work through the events, foregrounding questions of time and history: the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous, flat and deep history, melancholy and catharsis.

Janet Hart, associate professor of anthropology, U-M

We almost forgot that it was about an American election: “Visible minorities” and the Globalization of Memory, Paris 2009

On Tuesday, January 20, 2009 Barack Obama stood in front of the U.S. Capitol and delivered his inaugural remarks. Not long afterward on the Champs Elysees at an event sponsored by the Democrats Abroad, an interracial, intercultural, international group danced, sang, fist-pumped, wept, and drank champagne as the parade played on the enormous screen above their heads. In another part of town, Antillais (French West Indians), Africans, and African Americans celebrated at an event organized by Patrick Karam, the Inter-Ministerial Delegate for Equal Opportunity for French Caribbean Citizens. That evening similar scenes were played out in public venues and in private

spaces in Paris and around the world. In an unprecedented convergence, each reveler, regardless of station or national origin, bristled with pride and ownership. The investment of meaning in the singular figure of Barack Obama may remind us of the new availability of individual and collective Lenin's after 1917. In the aftermath of the November election and the January investiture, the relationship between European black citizens and Obama as cosmic point person has continued to develop, the original sentiments now at times tempered with skepticism or outright criticism. The paper will examine facets and implications of that relationship, arguing that the extraordinary attachment to the ideal goes beyond mimesis or the sudden appearance of a usable symbol. For Europeans of color, Barack Obama's election has introduced a whole new register of social memory.

Daniel Herwitz, Institute for the Humanities director; professor of history of art, philosophy, and comparative literature; and professor of Art & Design, U-M

1999: The End of the Beginning

Chicago with its sculptured park, London with its Tate Museum, a media fixated on the Y-2 scare. In this year before the millennium, ten years into the post-Soviet world, when genius was a rising market with its twin towers gleaming white, monuments to capitalism in lower Manhattan, and everyone dotting their sentences with the word "com". For a moment it really seemed that Y-2 was the chief threat to human sustainability. The media had streamed this pseudo-disaster through the global airwaves in order to keep audiences fixated, but audiences were also ready to believe. They were ready to believe because of an incipient anxiety that global markets formed a complex system which had surpassed the ability of anyone to understand it. Those rising within it obtained the status of wizards. But like Oz, they knew little about sustainability, nor about genuine threat. 1999 was the moment before this post-cold war world revealed the depth of its internally generated threats.

Except in South Africa, where the intensity of threat to the democratic transition was revealed in exactly 1999. The threat came in the form of collapsing neo-liberal ideologies, the failure of democracy to produce a multi-party system, above all in the form of a virus more real than Y-2 K. The response to this genuine virus on the part of the State President precipitated the collapse of South Africa's moral prestige (earned through Mandela and the miraculous decade of democratic transition, including the first democratic elections, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the completion of what is perhaps the finest constitution in the world). And this collapse was around the very issue of viral realities, and their relationship to systems of postcolonial power, indigenous heritage, and their relations to scientific truth. The appearance of these threats and responses signaled the end of the beginning, which in South Africa became an early beacon of endings elsewhere.

Michael D. Kennedy, Howard R. Swearer Director, Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

Institutionalizing Futures under Conditions of Uncertainty: The Polish Round Table and Elections of 1989

Commemorating 1989 typically invokes the imagery of the Berlin Wall's fall, powerful as it is for symbolizing both socialism's exhaustion and the reunification of a Europe dedicated to freedom, solidarity, and rights. But 1989 did not begin with that imagery, and such a future was not embedded in the practice that ultimately undid communist rule in Poland, and which lay the foundation for that negotiated revolution across Europe.

In this essay, I return to reflections by various Polish Roundtable participants to identify the relationships among conditions of uncertainty, practices of negotiation and contest and the horizons of anticipation that moved the first eight months of 1989, and the end of the 20th century. Based on this empirical elaboration, I propose a more general account of how certain kinds of short range politics can be embedded in longer range confidence about futures, and introduce a more fundamental question about whether some kinds of confidence are better placed than others.

Donald Lopez, Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist & Tibetan Studies Chair, Michigan Society of Fellows, U-M

Lhasa, March 10, 1959

For Tibetans, March 10-17, 1959 is considered perhaps the most consequential week in Tibet's long history. However, outside the Tibetan community, the events of those days are not widely known, and within the Tibetan community, the events of those days are variously reported. This lecture will briefly recount the events of that week, noting the conflicting accounts, and will reflect on their significance fifty years later.

Gerard Libaridian, Alex Manoogian Visiting Professor of Modern Armenian History and Armenian Studies Program director, U-M

Opportunities Gained and Lost: The Caucasus, 1988-1998

National and national-democratic movements in the three South Caucasus Soviet republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) played a significant role in at the end of the 1980s to weaken the power of the Central government and its ability to continue the Soviet federation and centrally planned economy. The break up of the USSR did offer these republics the opportunity to chart a more sovereign course in charting their futures which, ostensibly, included the democratization of their societies and institutions.

These opportunities were lost, nonetheless, for a variety of reasons, not least because of the dominance of ethno-territorial conflicts and the increasingly nationalist discourse that dominated state agendas and the intense relationship between domestic and foreign/security policy agendas.

This paper will analyze critical events during a decade of great expectations, smaller windows of opportunities and the serial failure to benefit from them.

James Millward, professor of history, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

Urumchi 1759 and Urumchi 2009: China as Eurasian Empire

The Qing conquest of Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan, Chinese Turkestan) in 1759 might not seem to be a world-historical event; indeed, the incorporation by the Qing empire of a chunk of Central Eurasia nearly three times the size of France has until recently been entirely neglected by world historians, and the contemporary Chinese habit of denying that Xinjiang was conquered at all helps cloud that moment's significance. But with the passage of each subsequent nona-chronological milestone, especially 1919, 1949, and 1989 (1991), the significance of Xinjiang as imperial fact has increased,

until the citizens of Urumchi unintentionally marked the 250th anniversary of Xinjiang's conquest with startling (though in some quarters long-expected) violence in the summer of 2009.

Urumchi 2009—the tensions between Hans and Uyghurs throughout China and furious PRC government exchanges with Uyghur exiles internationally—draw our attention to neglected aspects of China as Eurasian, Islamic, multi-ethnic, and post- (or not so post-) colonial. Ethnic diversity in borderlands like Xinjiang is widely viewed by Han in China as a good reason for delaying democratic reforms; Western observers consider China's mistreatment of religious and ethnic minorities among China's gravest failings, which deny it the international respect its global economic power and careful diplomacy might otherwise ensure. Here I will consider whether 2009 will mark a Chinese reconsideration of how non-Han ethnicity fits into a largely Han national vision, what such a reconsideration might look like, and its implications for China's place in the world.

Farina Mir, assistant professor of history, U-M

August 15, 1947: India's Independence and Partition

On August 15, 1947, Prime Minister Jawarharlal Nehru gave a speech to mark India's independence from 200 years of British colonial rule. Speaking of its "tryst with destiny," Nehru told the Indian nation and the world that India was now going to "awake to life and freedom." Nehru's rhetorical flourish belied the carnage that had engulfed much of north India, however, with Hindus and Sikhs pitted against Muslims. Indian independence from British rule is thus inextricably linked with the simultaneous partition of the Indian subcontinent. This paper elaborates critical ruptures this event engendered, juxtaposing them with key aspects of state structure that survived the transition to postcolonial statehood. Whether producing rupture or allowing for continuities, the event that is Independence/Partition has fundamentally shaped postcolonial societies in South Asia.

Ron Suny, Charles Tilly Collegiate Professor of Social and Political History, U-M

Years of Revolution, 1919-1989: The Frustrating Fate of Socialism

Nineteen nineteen was a moment of high expectations, particularly on the European and American Left. The excitement and unpredictability of the Russian Revolution had infected social radicals, workers, and former soldiers and sailors from northern Italy to the northwestern United States. But a year later the wave of strikes, protests, and uprisings had largely subsided, and "bourgeois" order had been restored.

Nineteen forty-nine was a year of another kind of revolution – imposed revolutions from above in Eastern Europe. Those regimes established by those revolutions came crashing down in a cascade of protests, roundtable negotiations, and mass mobilizations. The Soviet empire retreated, with Gorbachev unwilling to use his army to support ostensible allies who refused to reform.

This talk explores the meanings of those various revolutions around the question: "What is socialism, anyway?"

Xiaobing Tang, Helmut F. Stern Professor and Professor of Asian Languages and Cultures and Comparative Literature

Why Should 2009 Make a Difference? Reflections on a Chinese Blockbuster

This paper is not so much a reflection on the historical nine as on what 2009 has presented and prodded us to think about. Specifically, I start with a recent Chinese film about the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and introduce a larger question of how to regard and rethink mainstream Chinese culture. I will argue that we need to work toward a shift, among scholars of modern Chinese culture and literature in particular and American public opinion in general, that takes mainstream Chinese culture seriously. By seriously I mean a recognition of this cultural production as a vibrant and complex ecology that we cannot afford to reduce or ignore. It is not just a question of knowledge or appreciation, but also has to do with different memories and visions of history, which then raises further questions about our ability or willingness to accept them as such.

Jeff Wasserstrom, professor of history, University of California-Irvine

China's 1919 and China's 1989: Remembering, Forgetting, Comparing

This paper will focus on the May 4th Movement of 1919 and the Tiananmen Uprising of 1989, two of the best-known student-led struggles in modern Chinese history. In revisiting these key events in this anniversary year, I will explore several themes. One is how the events of 1919 and 1989 have been commemorated and linked to each another. Another is how certain aspects of them have tended to be overlooked, downplayed, or ignored, such as the central role that protests outside of Beijing played in making the May 4th Movement a success (too often, it is remembered simply as a struggle based in one city) and the fact that more workers than educated youths were slain during 1989's June 4th Massacre (too often remembered as a tragedy whose main or sole victims were students). A third is how appreciation of China's 1919 and 1989 can be enriched by placing them into international frameworks, though not always the expected ones (e.g., I think that the Tiananmen Uprising actually had more in common with Prague Spring than with the much more nearly contemporaneous Velvet Revolution).

Wang Zheng, associate professor of women's studies and history, U-M

Filmmaking in the Mao Era and Issues in China Studies

Focusing on a key figure in the Chinese Communist filmmaking history, this paper explores the continuities and changes in cultural transformation in China from 1919, 1949 and to 1989 while engaging with conceptual and methodological issues in the field of China studies. The author uses archival findings to demonstrate the continuation of Mao's cultural revolution dating back to 1942 when he enunciated his theories of proletarian cultural construction in Yan'an, a consistent agenda that transformed practices of cultural representation in the socialist period and led to the culmination of the Cultural Revolution. Highlighting the central predicament in Mao's agenda, that is the representation of the subalterns by the urban elite, the paper suggests the necessity of academics' reflection on their own complicity in reproducing power relations between the subalterns and the elite.

Genevieve Zubrzycki, associate professor of sociology, U-M

1959-1969: The Death of the King, the Murder of the Saint and the Birth of Quebec

Quebec's Premier Maurice Duplessis died in 1959, after ruling the Province of Quebec for almost a quarter of a century. His political reign was characterized by rabid corruption and quid pro quo relationships with the Catholic Church and big business. A few months later, in June 1960, Jean Lesage, chief of the Liberal Party, was elected to the post of Premier under the slogans "Things must change", "Now or Never" and "Masters in our own house." Thus began a decade of profound political, social, economic and cultural transformations that pulled out Quebec not only from Duplessis's era of so-called Great Darkness (*Grande noirceur*), but effected a radical rupture with a traditional past and marked Quebec's forceful entry into modernity. In historiography as well as in national mythology, Anno Domini 1960 is therefore generally regarded as the year "0" that divides past and present, distinguishing the epoch of a traditional Catholic French Canada from that of modern secular Quebec. While the so-called Quiet Revolution started with Duplessis' death in 1959, it ended with the death of another "giant," Saint John the Baptist, Patron-Saint of the French Canadians, publicly beheaded by secular nationalists pushing for a new vision of the nation on June 24th, 1969 during the annual parade in his honor.

The paper examines how institutional reconfigurations of national and religious forms are received and endowed with meaning, enacted in popular practices, but also advanced through iconographic representations and the use of material symbols "on the ground." One of this essay's empirical goals is to show that a core feature of the Quiet Revolution was an aesthetic revolt whereby social actors reworked the visual symbols of the nation, redefining national identity in the process; that revolt, I argue, in fact catalyzed some of the Quiet Revolution's institutional transformations. Without giving proper attention to it, the picture of Quebec's dramatic secularization and the reconfiguration of the nation-religion relation during the Quiet Revolution, remains incomplete. I thus study the constitution of Quebecois identity during that decade through an analysis of religio-national symbols as they were used in religious processions, popular parades, and political protests.