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REVIEWS



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JANA NDIAYE BERENKOVA; MICHAEL HAUSER; NICK NESBITT (EDS.),  
*REVOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE: MAY '68 AND THE PRAGUE SPRING*,  
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*Revolutions for the Future* is an eclectic collection of essays on the philosophy of May '68 and the history of the Prague Spring written for students and scholars interested in (re)examining the intellectual legacy of these events and their emancipatory potential for the present day.

As the editors of this volume state, the main goal of this book is to reassess and argue against the dominant narrative according to which May '68 and the Prague Spring represent failed revolutions that paved the way for the development of liberal capitalism in the West and the East. Contrary to this narrative, the main premise of this volume is that these events “constitute *unfinished revolutions*”, since the ideas that arose before, during and after these revolutions are relevant to – and ought to be analyzed so that one could prepare for – the revolutions to come.

The book is divided into two independent sections that can be read separately. The first section deals with the philosophy and logic of the concept of the *event*. In this section's opening essay, Rancière argues that if an event represents a disruption in the causal sequence of social things, then May

'68 *is* an event. By generating a new understanding of politics, May '68 created another causal sequence of social things and thus disrupted the normal one. Namely, this event created new ways of “perceiving, feeling, speaking and acting”. In other words, it created new dynamics of action. In the following essay, Jacques demonstrates that a similar understanding of the *event* is present in Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's thoughts. Contrary to these optimistic views, Balibar shows in which way Jacques Lacan's theory of the “Four Discourses” can be interpreted so that it clarifies Lacan's skepticism regarding the revolutionary potential of the event that took place in Paris in May '68.

In the essays that follow, written by Berankova, Naderi, and Nesbitt, the book takes a different turn. In these essays, the authors discuss the philosophical work of Alan Badiou. In particular, they discuss his work on the concept of *suture*, *model*, and *commodity*, respectively. This subsection can be read independently from other essays considering that it deals entirely with Badiou's philosophy of mathematics. At this point, it seems that the reader is expected to be familiar with Badiou's

views on May '68 in order to grasp how these rather abstract discussions inform this section's analysis of the *event*. In the next section, the book takes a turn from discussing the philosophy and logic of the *event* and moves to a historical analysis of the Prague Spring.

By invoking Rancière's twofold understanding of politics with respect to the Prague Spring (i.e., politics as the "police order" or an activity detached from the citizens that maintains the normal causal sequence of social things vs. politics as an activity in which citizens are engaged and in which they create new causal sequences of social things), Hauser concludes that a revolution is not necessarily an antagonistic act directed against the ruling formations. In other words, Hauser opposes Rancière and claims that the Prague Spring showed that the ruling formations or the "police order" can participate in an emancipatory transfiguration of the socialist state by mediating the creation of new politics. In a similar vein, Kužel provides a historical overview of the development of the workers' councils in Czechoslovakia and argues that there these decision-making bodies belonged to the "police order". Nevertheless, they had the emancipatory potential. Thus, like Hauser, Kužel claims that the workers' struggles during the Prague Spring show that emancipation needs not to be understood as essentially opposed to the state.

In the rest of this section, Kober provides an in-depth analysis of the legal dimension of the Prague Spring that he considers neglected in the existing studies of the legal reforms that took place in the Eastern bloc between the late 1940s and the 1960s. In the following essay, Landa discusses the post-revolutionary theories on the role of science and technology in socialist states. His engaging analysis demonstrates how the thoughtful understanding of dissidents and radical democrats about the role of experts, science and technology in socialist

states was replaced by their technocratic implementation that enabled the development of liberal capitalism in the East. Mervart continues with assessing the practices of the Association of the Left during the revolution in Czechoslovakia and the intellectual legacy of its most prominent member Egon Bondy. This section ends with Bielińska's review of the specificities that shaped the revolutions that took place in Poland and socialist Yugoslavia during the second half of the 20th century. In the concluding essay, Feinberg provides a sobering analysis of the ways in which the central concepts of the (allegedly) failed revolution of the Prague Spring were erased and forgotten during the (allegedly) successful revolution of 1989.

Finally, *Revolutions for the Future* offers a new perspective on the theoretical and ideological dimensions of the revolutions that took place in 1968. In a comprehensive manner, it addresses the main actors, concepts and critics of the events that marked the end of the 20th century. The clear and engaging narration of this book has the power to convince even a skeptical reader of the complexity of May '68 and the Prague Spring and their relevance for the contemporary discussions on the nature and scope of socialist democracies. Nonetheless, inexperienced readers should not be intimidated by the philosophy and history contained in this book, since the authors' expertise enables them to smoothly cover and present necessary details. However, some background knowledge of the issues discussed would undoubtedly open up new perspectives and provide a more rigorous understanding of the book's central themes. In sum, by rejecting the claim that the ideals of socialist democracy were erased and forgotten in the circumstances that followed 1989, *Revolutions for the Future* encourages new discussions and brings in new possibilities for future societal development.