Observing communicative competences

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My personal ‘Prague’ started in 1991, two years earlier than the conference’s move there. I had finished my dissertation at Freie University in Berlin on the fate of German political scientists from the Weimar Republic to early West Germany. Deep in my brain and head I was a Habermaniac (I have not changed very much since then, I have to admit) but I never went to study in Frankfurt and I was never involved in the complex group dynamics of the younger Frankfurt School group. My interest grew on the topic of modern democratic theory. Jean Cohen’s article on Habermas, ‘Why More Political Theory?’ (Telos, 1979), had thrilled me and so I went to meet her in person at Columbia University in 1990. She told me about the Dubrovnik meetings and its distinctive ‘eastern-European-dissidents-meet-western-critical-intellectuals’ concept. At her invitation I first attended there in 1991. Spontaneously Axel Honneth and Helmut Dubiel asked me to give a kind of workshop talk on my (probably somehow weird) ideas on how to merge Habermas’ theory of communicative competence with rational choice theories. Well, anyway. Soon I got involved with a number of suggestions on my ideas by Ivan Vejdova, Nancy Fraser, Günther Frankenberg and others. The group and the discussions were tremendous and stimulating and opened a totally new intellectual horizon for me. Even more importantly for me, Jodi Dean and I as the two external ‘fresh people’ in this group became friends in this year: and we have been close friends since then (even though we may disagree on aliens, Zizek and communism from time to time).

After the intra-Yugoslavian war broke out in the summer of 1991 and parts of the old town of Dubrovnik got bombed the group stuck together. Thanks to Alessandro Ferrara we met at a wonderful place on the Italian island of Ischia, near Naples. However, we all shared the feeling that we had to go back to a place where the old East/West exchange could be preserved. Hana Havelkova suggested Prague as a possible location and thanks to Sandro’s activities we were welcomed at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in May 1993. This was the starting point of a new success story.

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The theme of German critical theory, American liberal philosophy, and French-inspired existentialism are discussed. In a recent issue of *Aesthetics*, a larg...