

Metropolitan Catastrophies (London, 12.-13.7.04)

Call for Papers

METROPOLITAN CATASTROPHES

Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations in the Era of Total War

Centre for Metropolitan History

Institute of Historical Research

London

12-13 July 2004

Deadline: 12 January 2004

The Centre for Metropolitan History at the Institute of Historical Research, London invites younger or established scholars to submit proposals for original papers to be presented at a two-day conference on the metropolitan dimension of total war. Total war blurred the boundaries between home and front and transformed cities into battlefields. The logic of total mobilisation turned the social and cultural fabric of urban life upside down. Moreover, large cities and city dwellers became legitimate targets of enemy action and suffered disproportionately from air raids, sieges, genocide, and epidemic diseases in the wake of war. The social upheavals and physical devastation of total war cast a long shadow over the postwar years. Survivors and later generations set out to reconstruct urban life and to search for meaning in the midst of the ruins of their communities.

The imagery of urban disaster preceded the experience of catastrophes. The first strand of the conference, Scenarios, discusses the apocalyptic imagination of intellectuals and experts in peacetime. Artists and writers anticipating doom presented the coming upheaval as an urban event - a commonplace of late-Victorian and post-1918 pessimism. On a different plane, civil servants and engineers materialised visions of urban chaos and devised countermeasures in case of emergencies. Both groups helped to furnish a repertoire of cultural forms which channelled and encoded the actual experience of war. The second strand deals with metropolitan Experiences, notably mobilisation, deprivation and destruction in wartime. Possible themes range from

displays of 'war enthusiasm' at the outbreak of hostilities to house-to-house fighting concentrated in the ruins of family life. Ruins and the repercussions of war is the central theme of the third strand, Commemorations, which investigates postwar efforts to remember and forget. The quest for meaningful forms of commemoration was hard enough after the First World War; the Second World War, which saw whole cities disappear in flames, raised the possibility that the limits of representation had been reached.

Some of the topics which presenters may wish to address include:

- Anticipation and allegory: images of urban chaos in Expressionist art
- The business of panic: safety practices in two postwar periods
- Terrific entertainments: air warfare, the atomic bomb and science-fiction publishing
- Ghettos and the remaking of urban space in Eastern Europe
- The psychology of siege warfare: Leningrad in the Second World War
- American metropolises and the political crowd during the Vietnam War
- Longitudinal perspectives: Paris under the impact of wars: the Franco-Prussian War, the two world wars, the Algerian War
- Berlin: centre of revolution, the Nazi's 'Germania', city in ruins, capital of the Cold War
- National myth-making and forgetting: the London Blitz; the bombing of Tokyo
- The fire of Smyrna (Ismir) experienced and remembered
- Hiroshima: a regional city turned international site of memory
- Modernism and nostalgia: urban reconstruction in the East and the West

Ultimately, this conference hopes to provide a forum for the interchange of ideas on the comparative history of metropolises and wars. During the last decade, scholars have shown increasing interest in the social and cultural history of modern warfare in general and the two world wars in particular. Yet the comparative history of total war remains largely unwritten; much research is

limited by national perspectives and conventional periodisation. This conference

explores the cultural imprint of military conflict on metropolises (understood as cities of international stature, but not necessarily capital cities) worldwide over a long time-span. While papers which focus on a single city at a particular point of time are welcome, contributions comparing different metropolises or contrast the relative impact of different wars on the same city are especially encouraged.

The Centre for Metropolitan History is seeking proposals for both 30-minutes papers and shorter contributions of ten minutes. Contributors would

be encouraged to include visual material. We expect to publish a selection of papers in a volume. Professors Patrice Higonnet (Harvard), Jay Winter (Yale) and

Antony Beevor (London) will be keynote speakers. The working language of the conference and the published volume will be English. Please send a 300-word abstract and a one-page CV to the conference organiser at the following address by 12 January 2004: Dr Stefan Goebel, Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London

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[<mailto:stefan.goebel@sas.ac.uk>](mailto:stefan.goebel@sas.ac.uk),

[<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/cmh.main.html>](http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/cmh.main.html). We are seeking hard to make a contribution towards speakers' expenses.

Reference:

CFP: Metropolitan Catastrophies (London, 12.-13.7.04). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 9, 2003 (accessed Dec 19, 2025), [<https://arthist.net/archive/25758>](https://arthist.net/archive/25758).