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# Remembering Communism

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## During and After

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### Communism (review article)

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Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 285 pp., €21, ISBN 0-8014-4839-5.

Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2008). 235 pp., €35, ISBN 0-8014-4606-1.

Maria Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), 450 pp., €21, ISBN 0-9790-7726-5.

#### Introduction

In the past decade there has been a real explosion of studies on collective memory in eastern Europe. Two large themes have attracted the attention of scholars: the ongoing re-evaluations of the past after the end of communism and the memory of state socialism. These two topics were evidently related to each other in two ways: first, the communist period became an object of collective memory and many events linked to communist rule were re-evaluated once taboos and politically imposed interpretations fell by the wayside. Second, many political and public figures identified communist rule in eastern Europe as the reason why the nation's 'genuine' memory had been distorted. Now, they claimed, history could and had to be rewritten in order to bring previously suppressed memories to the foreground.<sup>1</sup>

The scholarly interest in collective memory reflected the significance of history in public debates. Historian Helmut Altrichter stresses that 'history was everywhere'

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Niedermüller, 'Zeit, Geschichte, Vergangenheit: Zur kulturellen Logik des Nationalismus im Postsozialismus', *Historische Anthropologie*, 5, 2 (1997), 245-67.

during the changes in eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Alternative memories and histories, as opposed to the communist master narrative, were a cultural source of anti-communist opposition. In Hungary, for example, the resurgent memory of the Soviet crackdown on the 1956 revolution played a powerful role in the de-legitimisation of communist rule; lifting the taboo on discussing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1941 played a similar role in the Baltic republics of the Soviet Union. In Yugoslavia increasingly acrimonious debates on the Second World War between historians in Croatia and Serbia in the second half of the 1980s were one of the factors that undermined the founding myths of communist Yugoslavia.

After the end of communist rule, collective memory and its public manifestations became bones of political contestation. The post-communist regimes aimed at altering the memory landscape in various ways; for example by changing street names, by destroying communist monuments and erecting new ones, and by introducing new textbooks for history education. These changes were anything but uncontested: conflicts over the representation of the past reflected existing political and social cleavages and helped to reinforce them. Some of these conflicts attracted international attention, for example when predominantly young members of the Russian minority in Estonia protested against the government's decision to relocate the 'Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn' (the Soviet Army), from the centre of Tallinn to a cemetery in the outskirts in April 2007. The removal of the monument led to a severe crisis in relations between Estonia and the Russian Federation.<sup>3</sup> This debate suggests that the representation of the Second World War and of communism were the most hotly contested issues in the post-communist conflicts over collective memory.

The salience of memory politics was determined by the important role which control over the past plays for the legitimisation of political orders. Anti-communist political forces that competed for power aimed to present themselves as organic outgrowths of their nation's history and portrayed communism as an enforced detour in the nation's destiny. Even greater importance was attributed to the past in those countries that had newly appeared on the map: with the exception of only five post-socialist countries in eastern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania), all others are newly created states that emerged from the break-up of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The importance of this fact for the dynamics of collective memory cannot be overestimated: the Caucasus excluded, there are now sixteen independent states in eastern Europe which did not exist in 1990. Since the ideological underpinnings of the nation state are deeply rooted in the past – the nation is a mnemonic operation – there was a strong drive to come up with new national master narratives in order to substantiate independence.

Scholarly attention to the politics of history and the dynamics of collective memory in eastern Europe, therefore, was anything but unwarranted. One major focus of

<sup>2</sup> Helmut Altrichter, 'Einführung', in Helmut Altrichter, ed., *GegenErinnerung: Geschichte als politisches Argument* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), ix.

<sup>3</sup> See Siobhan Kattago, 'War Memorials and the Politics of Memory: the Soviet War Memorial in Tallinn', *Constellations*, 16, 1 (2009), 150–66.

analysis was public discourses on history and their political implications, as well as the process of ‘coming to terms’ with a dictatorial past.<sup>4</sup> Historians also reflected on the (professional) historians’ role in the rewriting of the past.<sup>5</sup> These studies highlight the complexities of the collective memory of communism, which floats between attempts to come to terms with communist crimes on the one hand and idealisations of state socialism on the other. What became evident was the split that exists between ‘official’ and popular versions of the past. Studies of ‘ordinary’ citizens show that their memories of communism often diverge from the politically charged representations propagated by politicians, the media, and other public sources.

One recurrent theme in these explorations was the significance of nostalgic memories of communism across eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> An important point of departure for the study of nostalgia is Svetlana Boym’s seminal book. Boym firmly places nostalgia in the present and links it with the future. She highlights the double nature of nostalgia: on the one hand, it is an interest driven representation of the past. On the other hand it has great heuristic value for understanding contemporary cultural and social processes in eastern Europe, of which it constitutes an important part:

Nostalgia is never literal, but lateral. It looks sideways. It is dangerous to take it at face value. Nostalgic constructions are based on mimicry; the past is remade in the image of the present or a desired future, collective designs are made to resemble personal aspirations and vice versa.<sup>7</sup>

Recent research has extended Boym’s approach insofar as it claims that nostalgia is also a source for understanding the past. The empirical evidence of widespread nostalgia for socialism even in countries such as Poland, where communist rule was widely opposed, is by now overwhelming.<sup>8</sup> (Neo-)liberal and conservative commentators often portray nostalgia as a retrograde ideology that impedes the firm establishment of liberal democracy and market economy. Yet, other commentators arguing from left-of-centre positions view nostalgia as a source of alternative policies for the future. However the political potential or risks of nostalgia are evaluated, the salience of nostalgic memories points to widespread feelings of loss and insecurity among the populations of eastern Europe, for whom nostalgia is a means to articulate dissatisfaction with the present and also to render their biographies meaningful. Maria Todorova asserts that:

<sup>4</sup> See Altrichter, *GegenErinnerung*; Ulf Brunnbauer and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie: die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2007); Stefan Troebst, ed., *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen im Süden und Osten Europas: Bestandsaufnahme und Forschungsperspektiven* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Alojz Ivanišević, ed., *Klio ohne Fesseln? Historiographie im östlichen Europa nach dem Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus* (Vienna: Lang, 2002); Ulf Brunnbauer, ed. (Re) *Writing History. Historiography in South-east Europe After Socialism* (Münster: LIT, 2004); Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi and Péter Apor, eds., *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 354.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Todorova, ‘Introduction’, in Todorova and Gille, *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, 2.

It is not only the longing for security, stability, and prosperity. There is also the feeling of loss for a very specific form of sociability, and of vulgarization of the cultural life. Above all, there is a desire among those who have lived through communism, even when they have opposed it or were indifferent to its ideology, to invest their lives with meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, or remembered, or bemoaned as losers or 'slaves'.<sup>9</sup>

A common element in most of these investigations of post-communist memory is the treatment of the end of communism as zero hour. These studies rarely investigate connections between communist-era memory and post-communist memory, and do not historicise the latter. Yet, the memory of communism as recorded in the 1990s and 2000s was hardly unaffected by the ways individuals remembered communism during its existence. One reason for this lack of connection might be the scarcity of studies on collective and individual memories under communism – with the exception of studies on official history politics – in contrast to the period after its demise. The potential in linking communist-era memory with that of the post-communist period is suggested by two of the three books reviewed here: from Stephen Bittner's and Irina Paperno's accounts it becomes clear how memories which emerged during Soviet times pre-configured tropes that would also shape collective memory after the end of communist rule. The mythological image of the Arbat in Moscow, for example, developed during the 'thaw' and was related to specific visions of its history; the Russian intelligentsia's memory of Stalinism as it evolved during the Soviet period therefore already included important elements that would later inform the narratives of the post-Soviet intelligentsia and help them to locate themselves in the history of the Soviet Union.

**The Soviet memory of the Soviet Union: Stephen Bittner's *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw* and Irina Paperno's *Stories of the Soviet Experience***

Communism was an inherently forward-looking ideology. Public discourse was saturated by images of a radiant future, and the heroic past was represented in a way that linked the past with the present and the future. The present was usually considered a transitional stage by communist ideologists. Its qualities were measured by the density of the seeds from which the envisioned communist future was to grow. The communist parties legitimised their rule by pointing to their role for achieving this future. It was one of the characteristics of late socialism that the relation between past, present and future shifted. The promised communist paradise did not materialise, so the present became an eternal period of waiting. Some people began to commemorate the heroic time of the building of socialism, looking 'backwards towards the future' and contrasting it with their sense of stagnation or decline in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Cristofer Scarboro, 'Today's Unseen Enthusiasm: Communist Nostalgia for Communism in the Socialist Humanist Brigadier Movement', in Todorova and Gille, *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, 46–60.

Thus, in order to understand contemporaneous perceptions of the present and expectations of the future of people living under communism, their specific memories of communism, as it had unfolded thus far, must be considered. Individuals' adjustments to political changes were informed by their memories of what had already happened. This was especially true in the Soviet Union, where communism had lasted the longest and where the October revolution, the civil war, Stalinism, the terror and the Second World War had left particularly deep marks in the collective memory. These memories were always present when Soviet citizens had to adapt to changes in the ideological and political framework.

In their excellent books Stephen Bittner and Irina Paperno focus on different periods from the tumultuous and often traumatic history of the Soviet Union: Bittner seeks to understand how Khrushchev's thaw was perceived, remade, and remembered, while Irina Paperno is mainly interested in the ways Soviet citizens remembered Stalin's terror and the Second World War. The two authors employ different methodologies: Bittner keeps to more traditional methods of historical analysis, using primary archival resources and published texts; Paperno pursues a literary-oriented approach and grounds her discussion in the meticulous analysis of Soviet diaries and memoirs. A common feature of the two books is their central protagonist, the intelligentsia (although Paperno gives a voice also to less educated people). These studies are therefore important contributions to the understanding of the Soviet intelligentsia's self-perception.

Bittner wants to understand how members of the intelligentsia (artists, writers, scholars and architects) centred in Moscow's Arbat neighbourhood experienced the thaw. Bittner analyses eminent intellectual institutions – the Gnesin Music Academy, the Vakhtangov Theatre, the Institute for World Literature – as well as debates about the construction of the Novyi Arbat (New Arbat) avenue and the preservation of historical monuments. In discussing these institutions and debates, Bittner resurrects a plastic image of the intelligentsia's adjustment to the politics of the thaw. Furthermore, he presents the intelligentsia's role in thaw politics as constitutive, not merely reactive. The thaw appears as a time of complex negotiations, adjustments, innovations and reversals, and as a period of (and in) which the intelligentsia struggled to make sense. Memory, such as that of the terror, was always present in these adaptations. Nonetheless, the thaw also soon became the subject of new memories. 'An era whose contradictory reforms and disorienting ideological climate bred so much nostalgia for the pre-Stalin period, quickly became an object of nostalgia itself' (209).

The physical site of Bittner's stories, the Arbat, puts additional stress to the role of memory because this neighbourhood turned into its own myth in the 1960s. Bulat Okudzhava, the Soviet songwriter, praised the Arbat as his 'religion' and 'fatherland' and put it firmly in the self-image of the intelligentsia, for whom the Arbat was a symbol both of pre-revolutionary culture and of travails under communist rule. The Bolsheviks had attacked the 'bourgeois' Arbat after the 1917 revolution and at the height of the great purge in 1937–8, many residents of the neighbourhood were arrested. In the 1960s a large part of the old neighbourhood was destroyed to make place for the Novyi Arbat, a broad thoroughfare with modernist high-rise buildings.

All the same, the Arbat remained a laboratory for practices of the Soviet intelligentsia because of its important cultural and academic institutions.

One of the most important conclusions of Bittner's book is that the intelligentsia's memories of the thaw were very different from the thaw as actually experienced by the intelligentsia. While the thaw came to be remembered as a distinct period of relative freedom between Stalin's death in 1953 and the arrest of the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Iuri Daniel in 1965, this period felt much more ambivalent and contradictory when lived by contemporaries. At the time, they did not speak of *the* thaw but of 'thaws and freezes, of cloudy weather, and of uncertain forecasts' (4). In fact, in retrospect the thaw appears as a time of a particularly strong sense of uncertainty, of vague hopes and of dashed expectations. The widespread disorientation after the ideological and political certainties of Stalinism had come to an end was a major inspiration for this ambivalence. Khrushchev had denounced Stalin but not Stalinism and the party had not provided clear guidelines on how de-Stalinisation was to be implemented. Bittner, therefore, aims to highlight the ways in which intellectuals navigated the 'turbulent waters of de-Stalinisation', how they tested and created new liberties, and how in this process they produced de-Stalinisation (13). He discovers two major factors which shaped the emerging trajectories in different intellectual fields: generational differences on the one hand, and the centrality of the past for the politics of the present on the other. These trends were inter-related because the memories of Stalinism and of pre-Stalinist times were some of the major differentiating factors between the generations.

The particular strength of Bittner's book is the focus on concrete actors. It manages to render the thaw as something that was made in everyday (inter-)actions. Bittner is not interested in high politics but in the responses of intellectuals to the political changes triggered by Khrushchev. The author shows how intellectuals translated the new politics into their own fields of expertise by portraying three famous institutions of learning and of culture (the Gnesin Music Academy, the Vakhtangov Theatre and the Institute for World Literature) and discussing debates among architects about modern architecture. This was often a protracted process because people did not really know where the new limits on freedom were set – leaving aside that these very limits were oscillating all the time – nor did intellectuals pursue unanimous interests. There were cleavages, resulting from different experiences of Stalinism but also ideological differences (for example between party members and non-party members). The thaw was, therefore, always something very specific. The micro-relations of power peculiar to any institution, the relevance of certain intellectual fields as attributed to them by the political leadership, and the personalities of individuals all had a differentiating impact. There was a lot of contingency in the concrete manifestation of the thaw in different realms. Bittner manages to uncover these ambiguities in his detailed account – although sometimes less empirical detail would have been more.

The death of Stalin and his denunciation by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 triggered dynamic changes in the cultural sphere. These changes were caused as much as by the new, though difficult-to-decipher political conditions as by the urge of the younger generation to break with Stalin's crude

impositions. In the Gnesin Music Academy, for example, students demanded to do away with socialist realism as early as 1954 and began to pay attention to trends in western music. The curriculum became ‘the place where the Stalinist past intersected and shaped the present’ (46). Bittner shows how the party’s attempts to maintain the aesthetic canon failed thanks to the students’ unwillingness to follow it. Teachers at the school were not unanimously happy with their students’ reform-mindedness: they were concerned about their overtly critical attitude about all things Soviet, fearing a backlash, and about their unnerving questions about the Stalinist past.

One recurrent theme in the intellectual adaptations to the thaw was the memory of the 1920s, the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP, *Novaia Ekonomicheskaiia Politika*). This had been a time of artistic and scientific experimentation that had come to an end with Stalin’s advent to power. Bittner asserts that ‘nostalgia for the 1920s was a central component of thaw culture’ (75). Students of the Gnesin Music Academy rediscovered Stravinsky; at the famous Vakhtangov Theatre, staff looked to the 1920s for inspiration. The revival of the theatre’s legendary 1922 staging of Carlo Cozzi’s *Princess Turandot* in 1963 marked the ‘Arbat’s most famous bout of restorative nostalgia’ (76). The Vakhtangov story is exemplary in another way as well because, in time, the party began to meddle in the repertoire more directly again (from 1967). Thus, the 1920s liberalism in theatre could not be restored despite the tireless and courageous efforts of the Vakhtangov’s artistic director, Ruben Simonov. Architects were more successful, in part because their rediscovery of the constructivist architecture of the 1920s complemented Khrushchev’s pragmatic ideas for new housing developments. Khrushchev saw in pre-fabricated designs the solution to the perennial housing shortage, and architects managed to draw parallels between standardisation (*tipizatsiia*) and Soviet constructivism. So, the building of the Novyi Arbat in the 1960s was proof to architects that the ideas of constructivism were rehabilitated after the Communist Party had officially denounced Stalin’s architectural ‘excesses’ in 1955. Novyi Arbat would provoke the ire of preservationists (their activities are covered in a separate chapter in Bittner’s book), yet it was instrumental for the reconnection of Soviet architecture to its pre-Stalinist legacy. In architecture these developments survived the end of thaw; architects came out of it with a bolstered social and political status.

Another important result of the study is to point out the legacies of the thaw. On the one hand, the thaw ‘itself became an object of nostalgia’, once the party-state stiffened the limits on intellectual freedom once again. On the other hand, the years of the thaw had lastingly changed the intelligentsia’s practices. Bittner showcases the newly found self-assertiveness of the intelligentsia in their response to the arrest and trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel in 1965–6. In the Institute of World Literature, where Sinyavsky had worked, scholars struggled for the integrity of their work and opposed party intervention. More generally, hundreds of prominent Soviet intellectuals sent letters of protest to political leaders; a similar letter campaign was triggered by the arrest of Aleksandr Ginzburg in 1968. Bittner stresses that many of the letter-writers argued from the perspective of civic-mindedness and based their protest on ‘their identities as citizens’ (201). Many of them urged the political leaders to observe the laws of the Soviet Union – the legalist strategy that would become so important for

Soviet dissidents. The letters showed that although intellectuals framed the arrests in terms of a resurgent Stalinism, they had lost fear. In such a way they managed to preserve elements of the thaw, even when the thaw seemed to have come to an end: 'The impact of the thaw on Soviet society was in many ways permanent, even at the moment when they feared the thaw was in full eclipse' (209).

While Bittner presents revealing micro-studies of debates in institutions, Irina Paperno focuses on the intimate lives of Soviet citizens. Paperno wants to understand how individuals made sense of their Soviet experience during the existence of the Soviet Union through a detailed analysis of published memoirs and diaries (her source base includes a hundred texts by seventy authors). The empirical discussion of her condensed book consists of three parts: the diary of Lidiia Chukovskaia, which provides a description of her collaboration with the famous poet Anna Akhmatova; the notebooks of the barely literate former peasant woman Evgeniia Kiseleva; and an analysis of dreams as recorded in Soviet diaries and memoirs. The common theme in all three bodies of records is the centrality of Stalin's terror and of the Second World War in the memories of Soviet citizens.

Paperno's book is a valuable contribution to the growing number of studies that use Soviet diaries and memoirs in order to understand how life during communism felt to the people who lived it and how Soviet citizens constructed their selves.<sup>11</sup> One of the most valuable results of such an approach is the differentiated understanding of the impact of communism on the public and on the private sphere. Paperno identifies two major strategies used by memoirists to link their lives, what the author calls their 'I', with political developments: some authors posited a 'somewhat naive' opposition between public and private, while 'many others provided records intent on revealing the most intimate facts as evidence of the private life formed, that is, deformed, by the Soviet system' (18). Yet, the author, unfortunately, does not position herself in the debate over the nature of state socialism, despite the fact that the empirical material of her analysis gives ample evidence for the qualification of both the totalitarian model and of the notion that there was a clear-cut dichotomy between public and private.

Paperno does not build her argument on a discussion of 'memory'. She is instead interested in the social and individual meanings of memoir writing. Yet despite the author's reluctance to engage with the theoretical literature on memory she makes an important contribution to it by highlighting the significance of memories of past experience for finding a place in society. Paperno stresses that memoirs and diaries were important for the building and consolidation of small communities, such as families and circles of friends. This was particularly important to members of the intelligentsia who self-identified themselves as bound together by common fate. 'By writing memoirs, Soviet people consolidate on paper the tenuous networks of dangerously extended families, intimate circles of like-minded friends, and the visionary community of the "Russian intelligentsia"' (33). Yet, by including into the analysis the notebooks of a woman from very modest social origins, Paperno is able to

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

show that ‘ordinary’ people also considered their intimate lives worth recording. They too felt an impulse to highlight how their lives were affected by major historical forces. To members of both the intelligentsia and the working classes, commemorating and mastering the past was an essential means to find a place in the present. The concrete modes of inscribing one’s own fate in the larger historical narrative, however, could be very different, as shown by the analysis of Chukovskaia’s diaries and Kiseleva’s notebooks.

Lidiia Chukovskaia (1907–1996) was a long-time companion and intimate friend of Anna Akhmatova. She documented her interactions with the famous poet in the years 1938–42 and 1952–65. Chukovskaia served as Akhmatova’s ‘living archive’ (59). Her diary is not only a great source for studying Akhmatova’s life but also for understanding the self-perception of the critical intelligentsia under Stalin and Khrushchev. The diary proves the centrality of the terror in the life and thinking of intellectuals. ‘The all penetrating quality of the terror is at its most intense in the feeling of being under surveillance, carefully conveyed in the diary’ (65). The experience of the terror and the fear it produced haunted Chukovskaia and Akhmatova even after Stalin’s death. The diary registered a return of fear after the official denunciation of Pasternak in 1958, and the campaign against Brodsky in 1964 brought back memories of the terror.

Another major theme in Chukovskaia’s diary is the lack of living space. This affected personal relationships because the scarcity of housing limited the range of options individuals had for their living arrangements. Akhmatova, in particular, rejected comfort and privileges. Yet, the difficult material conditions under which members of the intelligentsia were forced to live were part of the maintenance of the specific ethos of the Russian intelligentsia:

[T]he unswerving and uncritical allegiance to values associated with the nineteenth-century intelligentsia tradition: alienation from establishment; rejection of accepted living forms; valorization of poverty, suffering, and self-denial; reliance on the written word for self-expression and self-preservation; staunch belief in literature as a source of moral authority; and an overwhelming sense of the historical significance of one’s personal life (61).

A very difficult life also characterised the second protagonist of Paperno’s book, Evgeniia Grigor’evna Kiseleva (1916–1990), who was born to a peasant family in the Ukraine and later worked as a waitress in the canteen of a mine. She started to write her notebooks in 1941. Hers was a ‘typical’ Soviet life of harsh living conditions, famine in the 1930s, the cataclysms of the war, hard work, domestic violence and drunken men. Yet, Kiseleva displayed high identification with the Soviet state. The terror is not mentioned in her story at all. It is the war that dominates her three notebooks. The war is connected to the disintegration of her family and provides the frame through which Kiseleva can connect her personal story with the national narrative. It is that link which gives significance to her personal life.

Her life story connects the violence of the war with domestic violence, creating a cycle of betrayal, abandonment, violence, and squandering of family property . . . Her story suggests that the root cause of the whole chain of sufferings – the dissolution of the first marriage and the unhappy second marriage – is the war. (127)

Yet, the experience of the war rendered the Soviet government legitimate to Kiseleva: in her eyes, the post-war Soviet leaders protected her from the horrors of war.

One of the most interesting points of Paperno's analysis concerns the role of television. Paperno maintains that Kiseleva's narrative was influenced by Soviet film, and television plays an important role in her second and third notebooks, which cover the 1980s. The public entered her private life as a pensioner through the television set, and Kiseleva absorbed Soviet mythology and its narrative patterns through it. Television, with its scores of films on the Second World War and its reporting on the 'warmongering imperialists', fed into her fear of another war, and it was exactly that fear of renewed war that inculcated loyalty to the state in citizens such as Kiseleva. Hence, the personal memories of the war could be mobilised by state propaganda and turned into a means of authority. The role of television in the Soviet Union and other state-socialist countries, which has been under-researched until now,<sup>12</sup> again complicates the notions of any clear-cut dichotomies between the private and the public.

Paperno makes a powerful argument for a closer inspection of the state and its rulers in the intimate lives of Soviet citizens, of their memories and identities, without however arguing for the existence of total domination of the private by the public. Although she uses the term 'totalitarian', her own analysis points to a much more complicated relationship between state and citizens. While the politics of the state and the dramatic events of Soviet history were important elements of personal narratives, individuals made their own sense of them. As the examples of Chukovskaia and Kiseleva evince, the resulting attitudes towards the government could vary widely. Yet both texts show the enormous pressures on personal lives and the many ways in which the Soviet state invaded domestic spaces (159).

These pressures became manifest in dreams as well. People often dreamt of political events; Stalin and the terror are again recurrent themes. Paperno treats these dreams as forms of knowledge and as manifestations of the individuals' emotional concerns; dreams, therefore, are a valid source of historical inquiry. Reiterating Charlotte Beradt's approach in *Das Dritte Reich des Traums*,<sup>13</sup> Paperno also sees dreams as a means of terror because in dreams, people foresee what can happen to them and they begin to 'terrorise themselves' (164). Dreams were part of the atmosphere of fear which served to underpin the Soviet communists' rule. While some of Paperno's conclusions might go too far – for example, the claim that dreams weigh more in 'totalitarian societies' (207) – her discussion of dreams opens an innovative avenue to grasping the emotional side of living under communism. The analysis of dreams likewise contributes to understanding current, post-Soviet selves because the contents of dreams did not change overnight.

<sup>12</sup> For one of the few analyses, see Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism After the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Beradt, *Das Dritte Reich des Traums* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).

**The Memory of communism after communism: Maria Todorova's  
'Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation'**

Maria Todorova opens this edited volume with a critique of the mandatory nature of 'coming to terms with the past' (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) for the post-communist societies – that is, when this operation rests upon prescriptive or normative qualities. Indeed, rather than pursuing a moralistic-historical crusade against a vanished ideology, research should highlight the complexities, ambiguities, contradictions, paradoxes and antinomies of state-socialist regimes. The collective and individual memories of communism cannot, of course, be taken as *prima facie* representations of historical processes, but they do offer insights into the realities of life under communism. Todorova, therefore, states that the formula 'remembering communism' is a means to approach the social and cultural aspects of daily life under communism (12). She makes the point that a discussion of the memory of communism is important from a philosophical point of view as well: it helps us understand alternative ways of organising modern, industrial societies and to reconstruct what people in eastern Europe once had considered a 'good life'. The memories of communism also shed light on the various legacies of communism, such as in education and welfare – and on the losses that many people sense they experienced during transformation. There is also a political dimension in the effort to reconstruct the memory of communism: 'remembering "communism" can be seen as part of the memory of the Left alternative' (14). The dismissive attitude of conservative and neo-liberal forces towards 'ordinary' people's nostalgia for communism proves the validity of this point: they fear that nostalgic memories might translate into support of left-wing parties (which actually has been the case).

The book is organised in thematic blocs that deal with specific media and authors of memory: institutions, oral histories, archives and memoirs, textbooks and visual representations. As in any other collective volume, the individual chapters are of very different quality. Not all make significant contributions to deciphering the memory of communism, but most do. What is more problematic is the lack of comparisons despite the stated goals of the project. Aside from the editor's introduction, only one chapter (by Peter Vodopivec on Slovenian and Croatian textbooks) is comparative. So it is difficult to evaluate what of the described phenomena is idiosyncratic and what can be generalised. This problem is increased by the overrepresentation of Bulgarian materials: ten out of sixteen chapters discuss things Bulgarian. The book was not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of remembering communism but still there should have been a discussion of how far Bulgarian cases can be seen as exemplary and how they fit in the overall picture. Since all state-socialist systems differed from one another, it is likely that memories diverge significantly as well.

When taken together, the chapters reveal the salience of memory and the saturation of public and private discourses with references to the past. Bulgarian initiatives to collect memoirs and diaries, as described by Iliyana Marcheva and Galia Misheva in their chapters, are cases in point. Another important insight of the book is the mismatch between public and private representations of communism.

In institutionalised discourses, such as in political debates or in textbooks, where interpretations of the past are linked with political agendas, there is little room for the intricacies and ambiguities of life under communism. Iskra Baeva and Evgeniia Kalinova, for example, describe attempts by conservative forces in Bulgaria 'officially' to demonise communism, such as with a parliamentary resolution in 2004. German textbooks, analysed by Augusta Dimou, display a tendency to locate the communist experience outside the perimeters of 'European' history or even portray it as an antithesis to 'Europe'. Peter Vodopivec points out that the Croatian textbooks of the 1990s, published during Franjo Tuđman's rule, portrayed the Yugoslav period and socialism in dark colours. Bulgarian films of the 1990s dealing with the communist period, analysed by Vania Stoianova, tended to depict clear dichotomies between victims and victimisers and imagined 'communist Bulgaria as a barren, dark, and hopeless place' (382). Maria Todorova discusses the destruction of the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in Sofia, which was ordered by the government in 1999. The government hoped that by erasing this monument they would prevent a re-emergence of communism.

Todorova's case-study also highlights the unintended consequences of government sponsored memory (or in this case, oblivion) strategies. Despite its destruction, the mausoleum remained present in the mind of the people; actually, the void place where the mausoleum had been located recalls the artefact and its meaning: 'Oblivion cannot be imposed by decree' (429). This example points to the divergence between 'official' memory discourses and the often marginalised memories of individuals and powerless social groups. The chapters in the book that discuss these oral histories are the strongest. Tanja Petrović, in her excellent account of the nostalgic narratives of workers in a cable factory in the Serbian town of Jagodina, highlights how remembering socialism shapes present-day perceptions and actions. Her interviewees are generally nostalgic about socialism and about Yugoslavia. Nostalgia helps them not only to articulate their disappointment about transformation, which has greatly impaired their standard of living, but also to make sense of their experiences. Petrović stresses that it is not just the bad economic situation that makes workers nostalgic but their sense of humiliation. During socialism, workers felt part of a modernisation project, while after socialism everything went downhill. One respondent said that 'We were much more a part of Europe in socialism than we are now' (141). Workers also stress the dignity and self-respect which they enjoyed during socialism, whereas today the worker does not figure at all in the ideological imaginary of post-communist Serbia. In her equally compelling analysis of the social memory of textile workers in the Slovenian town of Litija, Nina Vodopivec corroborates Tanja Petrović's findings. Workers associate socialism with social equality, security, stability and solidarity. They remember socialism not as a political system but as the 'good old days' (226). The memory of the Yugoslav period helps them to make sense of the present and to position themselves in the rapid economic, political and social changes which ensued after the demise of communism.

These two chapters are powerful reminders why the study of memory is so important for understanding both past socio-cultural realities and present concerns.

First, we can learn a lot about communist societies by listening to the memories of those who lived communism. This helps to historicise the communist experience and to question normative assumptions such as of the 'Return to Europe' after the end of communism. Actually, for many contemporaries communism and its modernising agenda did feel European. Second, the memory of communism confirms the important fact that people seek to find continuities in their life and are unwilling easily to write off their past only because it is devalued by newly dominant political forces. The reason for this can be found not only in the tendency of humans to recollect their lives in linear narratives but also in the generally pivotal role of memory for the construction of the self. In fact, there is something political in this position: memory helps people to position themselves vis-à-vis dominant discourses. Nostalgia, therefore, can become a cultural source of anti-hegemonic strategies. Tanja Petrović argues that nostalgia 'enables individuals and groups to establish and argue their positions and status' (128). A point well made, and yet another reason why memory merits scholarly attention.

Taken together, the three books reviewed offer fresh and original insight into the inner life of communism as 'civilisation' and the ways people remember it. They are therefore important contributions to the understanding of the social and cultural history of eastern Europe under communism and the legacies of communism. Yet, they are of interest not only for students of east European history but for a wider audience because they suggest original ways to study the social significance of memory and the adaptation of men and women to times of extraordinary social, political, economic and cultural change. They suggest new arenas where the articulation of memory can be traced. However, the three books leave the reviewer with an important question as well: what is the relationship between the memories of (early) communism during communism and the post-communist remembering of communism? This is arguably the next logical step in east European memory studies. Studying this connection will help to historicise transformation and to overcome the notion of 1989 as 'zero hour'.