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Maria Todorova, ed. *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation.* New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010. 450 pp. $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9790772-6-5.

Maria Todorova, Zsuzsa Gille, eds. *Post-Communist Nostalgia.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2010. viii + 299 pp. $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-671-9.

Reviewed by Jonathan L. Larson (University of Iowa)
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Mediation of the Past and Critical Analytics of/after Communism

More than twenty years after the collapse of the socialist experiment in Eastern Europe, the recent past is being documented, studied, and reflected on in ways exploding beyond the purview of the traditional historian. Young, less conventionally trained scholars from institutes of national memory in such places as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia expose secrets of the past out of state police archives. Foreign and domestic documentary films have been produced for circulation at festivals, on public television, and in art house cinemas. Funding to support research on the recent Communist past has encouraged anthropologists, sociologists, and oral historians to weigh in, bringing a flood of "historical" studies based on less traditionally "historical" methods. Individuals find publishers for memoirs that they feel fill gaps in public memory of Communist rule. Many of these projects take arms explicitly against excesses or falsehoods that they perceive in popular memory: the forgetting or sentimentalizing of the past, on the one hand, or the demonizing of it on the other.

To study such a period as late Eastern European socialism and how it is remembered is to venture into a field potentially outside the comfort zone to traditional historians whose primary source, a repository of factual record, is the archive. Archival sources, after all, are usually unavailable to scholars studying a period as recent as late socialism. But as argued by proponents of "the historiographic turn," beginning in the 1980s, perhaps the archive has been fetishized at the expense of both understanding its limits and appreciating alternative sources, including several that become more available with temporal and experiential remove. And whether or not traditionally trained historians like it, the Communist past is already being remembered through other sources and with media other than professionally written and peer-reviewed historical monographs and articles.

Two recent edited volumes attempt to engage directly with this pluralism of theory and method. *Post-Communist Nostalgia* and *Remembering Communism* are complementary works that take up different aspects of popular memory's mediation of the Communist past: nostalgia and the role of textual forms and other artifacts in the construction of historical accounts. Both volumes are at least partially edited by Balkan historian Maria Todorova. For *Post-Communist Nostalgia* she is joined by sociologist of Hungary (and her colleague at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) Zsuzsa Gille.

Before reading *Post-Communist Nostalgia* I had been skeptical about the value of studying nostalgia, wondering if it represented an attempt to cling to a radiant recent past for some scholars when studying "socialism" and its transformation seemed a hotter topic than it might today. Are "nostalgia" and "memory" what you get books on when the authors themselves are lamenting the sunset of their field? Indeed, in her concluding essay, Gille acknowledges this possible sentiment among her colleagues. But complementing other recent strong arguments for continued scholarship on late socialism and a post-socialist present, the authors make clear that a discourse of Eastern European post-Communist nostalgia would be out there whether or not they investigated it.[1] Popular media in the West and the reception of cultural artifacts from the East (such as the film *Goodbye, Lenin!* [2003]) have been fascinated with Easterners' alleged longing for a past that the latter was supposed to have abhorred when it was their present. This volume makes a convincing case that such a reading of illness within post-Communist Eastern European bodies politic

is mistaken. The corrective, they propose, is a closer reading of nostalgia's manifestations from a more ethnographic and comparative perspective. Only by doing so, the volume and its contributors argue, can we see nostalgia's true diversity of form and function.

The authors of *Post-Communist Nostalgia* are almost entirely North American-based or -educated. They include several North American anthropologists with their own monographs (Dominic Boyer, Gerald Creed, and the late Daphne Berdahl), established scholars of literature, and a few doctoral students. The chapters show us that nostalgia has been projected on to a people by Western observers (Boyer); served transnational projects of neoliberalism (Creed); dialogued with global trends in the arts (Buchanan, Szemere, and others); and articulated the late socialist state's understanding of itself (Cristofer Scarboro). "Nostalgia" is a potentially slippery phenomenon to study, but the breadth of approaches brought together in this volume–including psychoanalysis, literary studies, cultural studies, and anthropology–suggest that handling this slipperiness nimbly is better than attempting to extract this property and reduce nostalgia to a limited set of features, conditions, and effects.

Post-Communist Nostalgia reminds us that nostalgia is but one label for certain acts of remembering. For instance, Maya Nadkarni offers that nostalgia in Hungary might be a way "to not talk about the past while talking about it" (p. 205). Reading *Post-Communist Nostalgia* alongside *Remembering Communism* in fact elaborates on Pierre Nora's argument that history in a postmodern world is less "naturalized" and more self-conscious and mechanistic (see Todorova in *Remembering Communism*, p. 394), even if the manifestations of that self-consciousness vary widely. While Todorova's contribution to *Remembering Communism* demonstrates problems with such a tidy separation, the two books document collectively some of the many ways that popular memory today *is* a spectacle of itself, at the very least due to the interventions of memory professionals (historians, journalists, filmmakers, novelists, and purveyors of consumer culture). These specialists often end up discussing the content of memory within publics that do not include many of their compatriots (in *Remembering Communism*, see especially the essays by Galia Misheva and Todorova), but it would be hard to deny their collective influence on "memory" as a cultural object of discourse.

Remembering Communism is a survey of genres through which popular memory is created. The book is organized by sections, according to general approaches, such as oral history and anthropology; archives and memoirs; education and textbooks; and visual artifacts, such as film and monuments. Contributors are almost entirely European-based (exceptions being Todorova and historian Frederick C. Corney), many of them participating in a Volkswagen-funded project with the same title. They document the sweeping array of memory-making activity taking place in (for this book, predominantly) southeastern Europe upon which the work of traditional historians seems to have often little influence. For those who would lament the devolution of this expertise and its preferred source (the archive), chapters point out the biases of the archives (Corney) and textbook authors (Augusta Dimou, Hranova, Peter Vodopivec), as well as the virtues of initiatives to fill in "blank spots" of history through the method of oral history (Petrović, Van Boeschoten, Boneva, Nina Vodopivec) and variations on the memoir (Marcheva, Misheva). Importantly, seemingly "popular" initiatives to fill in blank spots often meet with indifference or disinterest: post-Communist Bulgarian cinema has registered less interest among moviegoers than films from the late socialist period (Stoianova) and other events have seemed to draw more interest from the media than the general public (Misheva, Todorova).

Like all edited volumes, I found these two to have their stronger and weaker contributions. Given the interdisciplinary nature of these volumes and their intended audience, readers' agreement with my own opinions will vary. *Remembering Communism* feels to this reader that it could have been scaled back to the length of *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. Todorova openly acknowledges its Balkan and particularly Bulgarian bias as part of the volume's contribution to existing scholarship, but the volume feels too Balkan-specific for a reviewer such as myself who works on Central Europe. The single pieces on Germany (Dimou) and Russia (Corney) stand out starkly, leading me to wonder if the volume might have been stronger if conceptualized as an attempt to bring coherence to a loose "Balkan School" of contemporary history–assembled for a project reflecting on genres–that complements German and Czech networks. Todorova in fact alludes to existing publicity of these last two networks as justification for focusing on her set of less publicized Balkan authors; however, much of the Czech and German scholarship that she claims has already been published may not exist in English translation or be known to the publisher's North American audience.[2]

A more robust conceptual framework, as laid out in an introduction and conclusion, could have corrected this (such as synthesizing what this group of Balkan scholars has offered in comparison to recent output by Czechs

and Germans), but Todorova provides a chapter of her own research in lieu of a conclusion. We are offered a cornucopia of genres, but little reflection on their limits compared to "traditional" historical work.[3] I further found (and I suspect that other scholars trained in the study of language and discourse will find) the framework of "genres" unfortunately underdeveloped. The authors study different textual genres through which people consciously attempt to construct their own look back (memoirs) as well as period artifacts that express no such narrative of the past (period visual advertising); the authors also attempt to construct their histories through genres of historical method (e.g., oral history). Miglena Nikolchina's chapter on late socialist underground seminars (like Milla Mineva's on consumer culture in the 1960s) is much more a study of earlier genres of a certain kind of tacitly political intellectual activity than a study of the making of memory today. With the notable exception of Misheva's chapter on the Popular Memory Project (which to me could have worked very well much earlier in the volume to help frame the rest of the book, as might have Corney's for different reasons), I was left unclear on how much awareness of the genre(s) studied in a chapter mattered for ways in which history was narrated through them by the authors or their subjects. Ultimately, the authors utilize "genres" much less than "memory" as an analytical tool.

These books serve an invaluable function by capturing the rich complexity of nostalgia and marking a moment when questions of postmodern historiography can be applied to a past, the recent Communist one, for which the pressures toward absolute evaluations are immense. Together they summarize some of the scholarship that one might include with the "contemporary history" of the region. Although read productively together with *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, to be stronger *Remembering Communism* could have used greater internal synthesis or even stronger linkages to *Post-Communist Nostalgia*'s obviously complementary project on the mediation of memory. Besides one common editor (Todorova) and one common contributor (Petrović), the essays in *Remembering Communism* make several allusions to nostalgia and share at least one intellectual ancestor with *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (Svetlana Boym). I found myself thinking of two paired volumes on the region from the turn of the millennium: Susan Gal and Gail Kligman's *Reproducing Gender* (2000) and *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (2000). Like the two volumes under review here, Gal and Kligman's collections were the outcome of a conference. Unlike them, however, they were the outcome of a single conference. *Reproducing Gender* bound together the projects of diverse scholars from East and West without imposing a single framework on them. *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* drew on this research to offer a pithy set of six essays on gender, reproduction, public and private spheres, the state, and political action. The topics of nostalgia and memory have enough commonalities and popular interest to merit such a volume. The bits of synthesis that do appear throughout these two volumes (parts of Todorova's two introductions, as well as Boyer's essay in and Gille's postscript to *Post-Communist Nostalgia*) left me hungry for more, although leaving us with that hunger may have been part of the books' method.

To sum up, these volumes should have broad general appeal across a market for post-Communist cultural studies and the study of memory.

Notes

[1]. Among them are Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, "American Stiob: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West," *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2010): 179-221; and Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," *Contemporary Studies in Society and History* 51 (2009): 6-34.

[2]. Indeed, a November 2011 discussion of an H-Net HABSBURG review of *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (2011) brought up some of this very Czech scholarship (coincidentally, by scholars recently collaborating on another Volkswagen-funded project (Sinnwelt der Kommunistischen Diktatur) by pointing out recent research that the author, Mary Heimann, neglected. Alexander Maxwell, review of *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed*, by Mary Heimann HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews (November 2011).

[3]. Current scholarship on normalization and the Velvet Revolution in the former Czechoslovakia has reminded us of how valuable archival work can be for *correcting* popular memory, including of the recent past. See Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) and James Krapfl, *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou: politika, kultúra a spoločenstvo v Československu po 17. novembri 1989* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009).

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