

Memories of Communism in Central and East Europe: New Work by Janaszek-Ivaničková, Modrzejewski and Sznajderman, Rév, and Spiewak

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Agata LISIAK

Memories of Communism in Central and East Europe: New Work by Janaszek-Ivaničková, Modrzejewski and Sznajderman, Rév, and Spiewak

More than fifteen years after the fall of the Iron Curtain the memory of communism in the countries of the former Soviet empire is still changing. While this memory (and memories) is shaped and reshaped by the surfacing of new files and testimonies about life in the communist system, it is influenced by political changes in the region: in all countries of the Soviet Block every administration since the "fall of the wall" seems to have its own recollection(s) -- and explanation(s) -- of communism and tries to present it as the only true version of the past events. This memory, determined by current politics as well as by historical and sociological factors and perspectives, may be called a collective memory. At the same time there are also private memories of communism, different for each individual who experienced the former system, built on elements of personal lives, such as childhood games, school lessons, the first job, births and deaths of relatives, etc. This type of memory is not as much (re)shaped by new historical publications, the public discourse, or changes on the political scene as by photographs, songs, food, smells, and other "Proustian" triggers of -- mostly nostalgic -- recollections. The beginning of the new century brought numerous publications that deal with both discussed types of memory (see, e.g., the recent 2006 collected volume, *The New Central and East European Culture*, edited by Tötösy de Zepetnek, Andras, and Marsovszky, a volume with several papers on various types of memory). Whereas the collective memory of communism is described and analyzed in political, historical, and sociological studies, private memories of the previous system are portrayed predominantly in *belle lettres*, film, and theater. The intensified attempts by Central and East European authors at breaking through the elusiveness of memory may be explained in a number of ways. First of all, the tenth and the fifteenth anniversaries of the peaceful revolutions of 1989 elicited broad public discussions and reflections on the recent past. Secondly, some historians and sociologists wanted to convince others to their own understanding of communism and the new political and social realities that followed it. Thirdly, there was (and still is) a need to discuss new trends that appeared in Central and East European literatures after 1989 and -- since many of them deal with communism in one way or the other -- to demonstrate how the memory and memories of communism are related to in fictional works.

What follows here is a review article of two single-author studies, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Communism* by István Rév (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005) and *Pamięć po komunizmie* (Memory after Communism) by Pawel Spiewak (Gdansk: *slowo/obraz terytoria*, 2005) and two essay collections, *Transformacja* (Transformation) edited by Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2005) and *Nostalgia. Eseje o tesknocie za komunizmem* (Nostalgia: Essays on Longing for Communism) edited by Filip Modrzejewski and Monika Sznajderman (Wolowiec: Czarne, 2002). The former two deal with the collective memory of communism and analyze it from historic, sociological, and political perspectives; the latter two relate to how private memories of communism influence and become part of life in Central and East Europe after 1989 and, consequently, not only make their way through to the literatures of the region, but also set out new literary trends, themes, and motifs. In the introduction to his book, Rév suggests that the collective memory of communism remains elusive and changeable primarily because of the unreliability of historic sources that could otherwise help substantiate it. Millions of files stored in the dungeons and endless halls of the buildings where the communist authorities used to dwell contain fabrications and misinformation that complicate the historian's task. Therefore, Rév proposes that the official documents be juxtaposed with those produced by the former opposition in an attempt "to remake the world" (9). Rév introduces his book, *Retroactive Justice*, as "a chronicle of the endeavor" (9) of politicians, historians, and experts to decipher and disclose the unknown past. At the first glance, however, the text appears to be a different kind of chronicle, namely that of the 1956 Revolution in Budapest. The Hungarian uprising is the leitmotif of Rév's book and the participants of the 1956 tragic events, both victims and persecutors, are the protagonist, who disappear and reappear re-

petitively as the author is digging through the numerous layers of the past, at times reaching as far as the eighteenth century. "Digging in the dirt" seems to be an appropriate term to describe Rév's extensive research and may be understood not only metaphorically, but also quite directly: the author preoccupies himself with the underworld, the world of the dead, their burials and reburials. The structure of the book and the chapter titles call to mind a journey through a necropolis, although the author prefers to see it as a collection of stories of various remakes: remakes of "the dead body, the name of the dead, the cemetery, the holy day, the criminal, the underworld, the funeral, the political transition" (8). The stories (re)told by Rév are mostly disturbing and at times even unbelievable yet hardly surprising as "the recent history of Central and East Europe is the history of bad times" (3). The described times are so atrocious that they resemble Greek tragedies (or US-American soap operas): "The leaders of the small left-wing and later the Communist movement ... betrayed, imprisoned, then stabbed in the back, executed, and buried each other over and over again; they married each other's wives, slept with each other's husbands and with the widows of their victims" (5). Two main characters of this complex drama are Imre Nagy, the prime minister of the 1956 Revolution, and his executioner, János Kádár, the secretary general of the Hungarian communist party from 1956 till 1988. Despite his focus on the Hungarian experience of communism, Rév digresses and draws comparisons between the situation in Hungary and the state of affairs in the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other countries of the Soviet empire. Therefore, the author suggests that the atrocities and absurdities, which were part of Hungarian communist reality, were also characteristic of other regimes in Central and East Europe.

Rév rewrites the communist world with the use of various perspectives -- historical, psychological, philosophical, political, cultural, anthropological, religious, and sociological -- in order to present the reader with a broad and exhaustive view on the recent past. The author readily compares the communist reality to other periods in world history, reaching as far as the middle ages, or even antiquity. This multifaceted approach results in thought-provoking observations and adds to the intellectual attractiveness of Rév's study. Here is one of his most noteworthy remarks that explains the author's preoccupation with the dead as the crucial aspect of (re)creating collective memory of communism: "The post-World War II regime presided not only over the present, the actual subjects of the state, but also over the past, over the dead souls, as well. Unlike the power of bishops of late antiquity that derived partly from the tombs of the saints, the strength of the Communist Party stemmed not only from its dead martyrs, the Communist heroes, but also from the unmarked graves of unburied, nameless victims, the persons not talked about. So long as the graves remained unmarked, the victims unnamed, the prosecutors could suppose that they ruled the company of the hanged" (32). The case study supporting Rév's characterization of communist systems is Nagy's fate (before and after his death). Nagy was buried -- together with other revolutionaries -- in an unmarked mass grave in the prison courtyard and his remains were later quite unbelievably mingled with the bones of exotic animals from the Budapest zoo (27). For decades Nagy's name remained a taboo and Rév points out that ever since 1958 -- the year of Nagy's execution -- "Kádár almost never referred to Imre Nagy by name" (55). Even in his last speech, shortly before Nagy's celebrated reburial and his own death, the sick and senile Kádár referred to Nagy as the "dead man" and "the man who died since" (Kádár qtd. in Rév 54). Ironically and despite Kádár's fierce refusal to let his name be associated with the name of his victim, in 1989 "Kádár lost his proper name and acquired a necronym instead: 'Imre Nagy's executioner'" (55). Extensive historical research, quotations from archival documents, and application of various political, philosophical, and anthropological theories give a matter-of-factly and objective tone to Rév's work. Furthermore, through his inquisitiveness -- each story is based on questions: what? where? when? who? why? -- and a skillful management of information overflow, Rév's style and language resemble those of a journalist. At times, however, the author's personal opinion seems to sneak through the thick layers of footnotes and quotations, most noticeably in two instances: when he describes and assesses the House of Terror exhibition in Budapest and when he refers to the socialist (or post-communist) parties formed in and after 1989.

To Rév, the House of Terror is "a monument of Fascism" (293) and a mere election trick on the part of the "radical right-wing party ... to win over the electorate of the Hungarian Truth and

Life Party" (299). Rév's judgment on the exhibition is harsh and leaves no doubt about the author's personal opinion: "History writing is not the morally uninformed art of chronicling isolated events of the past, understood as unrepeatable particulars located in space and time. A noticeably arbitrary selection and sequence (and omission) of a few disconnected brute facts in support of an obvious ideological preconception, which aims at constructing a worldwide, racially grounded conspiracy theory, from the perspective of actual political needs, in order to stigmatize an all-too-well defined group of humans, is offered by the House as history" (290). Similarly, Rév's evident distrust in both the socialists who have their roots in the Hungarian communist party and the anti-communist nationalists makes the author's political antipathies clear to the reader. Rév, a child of "the party elite" and a member of the opposition (4), does not hide his disgust at the attempts of "the postfuneral government of post-Communist Hungary ... to (re)construct a fictional historical continuity in order to erase the whole period of Communism from national consciousness" (43). He clearly disagrees with post-communist revisionists that "Communism in Hungary was the tragic result of a conspiracy organized from abroad ... and, as such, was no part of Hungarian history" (44). To Rév, Hungary was not "merely the plaything of external forces" (44), but, rather, is responsible for its history. At the same time, however, Rév notices the decisive role of Hungarian and other Central and East European communists in prompting the revolutions of 1989. In his mind, the cooperation between communists and anti-communists that led to "bringing down the regime and ... facilitating the transition" (308) was not rooted in "a well-ordered conspiracy," but rather in "a lack of foresight on both sides" (312). Although he recognizes the decisive role of the members of the communist party in bringing about the system change, Rév does not believe that - as numerous conspiracy theories suggest -- all events of 1989 were cleverly staged. Remarkably, despite his anti-communist past, Rév seems to accept "the surprisingly large number of former Communist secret agents in the post-Communist governments" (311) as a fact. The Polish sociologist Pawel Spiewak in his book reviewed here -- *Pamięć po komunizmie* (Memory after Communism) -- on the contrary, expresses his outrage at the coexistence of the former communists and the former anti-communists in the parliament and in the government. Spiewak advocates repeatedly the necessity of a thorough "screening" and purge of former communists on all levels of government in Poland and gives the screening actions in the former East Germany (GDR) and the former Czechoslovakia as examples of how the communist past should be evaluated (and punished). Spiewak, who -- like Rév -- was active in the opposition in the 1980s, often participates in public debates and made himself well-known as a fierce anti-communist.

Spiewak aims in his *Pamięć po komunizmie* (Memory after Communism) at analyzing the presence of the heritage of "real socialism" in the language of politics and in the language of the media run by the former oppositionists. He tries to show how Poland's communist past was dealt with in the public discourse in the first years after the system change (the analysis covers the years 1989-1995 until the formation of the government by the social democratic party [SLD], the successors of the communist party) and, hence, attempts at clarifying the processes of Polish collective memory of communism. Despite professional, comprehensive analyses of the Polish media and a scientific, seemingly objective language, the text leaves the impression that the author tries to impose his own private memory of the previous system on his audience. The black-and-white cover is more meaningful than it may appear at first glance: Spiewak sees everything in black and white, there are no shades, no in-betweens, which seems to suggest that those who are not with him are against him. Even if Spiewak mentions a number of newspapers and magazines that belonged to the former opposition, his main focus remains set on the largest Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and its chief editor, the former dissident Adam Michnik. Spiewak's preoccupation with Michnik's newspaper appears obsessive and compels the reader to question the author's reliability as an objective scholar of media. *Pamięć po komunizmie* is not what we would call a socio-political study, but rather a fierce and not always well-argued critique of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and Michnik. For example, Spiewak accuses Michnik of using a "pompous style" (52; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine), "stylistic of struggle and a clear Manichean language" (65). In Spiewak's mind, Michnik's texts are designed strategically to motivate their readers to action and manipulate "the recipient to fear what you are going to say, to desire what you promise, to hate what you

condemn" (52). In my view, Spiewak not only overestimates the presence of these rhetorical tricks, but also seems to consider them characteristic solely of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, as if other politicians and journalists did not use them. It is true, however, that *Wyborcza* shaped (and -- to a large extent -- still is shaping) the public debate in Poland after 1989. Its opinion-making impact on society is connected undoubtedly with an enormous responsibility on the part of its editors and, apparently, in Spiewak's view Michnik abuses and misuses this responsibility. Spiewak remarks sarcastically that "Whether we deserved the name of a democratic nation was determined not as much by respecting the legal procedures as by electing the president according to the moral canon presented in Michnik's essays" (75). Basically, Spiewak disapproves of any statement published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and is appalled by Michnik's reconcilable approach to the politicians of the previous system. According to Spiewak's research, words such as "communism," "communists," and "party leaders" are absent from Michnik's articles and the former enemies are no longer seen as political opponents (50-51). Spiewak disagrees with Michnik's identification of the new enemy of democratic changes, namely "nationalism and the idea of 'a Catholic state of the Polish nation'" (65). Still, the sociologist does not advocate extremely right-wing attitudes and criticizes anti-communists, whose "rhetoric of distrust and disclosure often intensifies or activates yet another language: the language of conspiracy theories" (105).

In *Pamięć po komunizmie* almost all heroes of yesterday -- members of the former opposition, freedom fighters, dissidents -- are portrayed as disappointing and deficient. Spiewak criticizes especially intellectuals, who consider society "immature" (68), but -- in his opinion -- fail to guide the masses through the strenuous processes of transformation. Spiewak disagrees with the group of intellectuals who gathered in Krakow in early 1990 and published a memorial on Polish public life, "in which the main problems were identified: nationalism (particularly right-wing nationalism), intolerance for minorities, demagoguery, and partisanship" (67). To Spiewak, the main problem and threat to democracy remain exactly the same as before 1989 -- "communists." Therefore, Michnik's reconciliatory attitude, which Spiewak associates with the Spanish system change of the 1970s, is clearly condemned in his book as the road leading to "collective amnesia" (51). In Spiewak's picture of the Polish public scene in the first years after 1989 there seems to be only one positive character: Jaroslaw Kaczynski -- the chief editor of *Tygodnik Solidarnosc* (Solidarity Weekly), the former oppositionist, and a close co-worker of Lech Walesa. We may agree or disagree with Spiewak's appraisal of Kaczynski's early political movements, but it is undoubtedly a remarkable example of how not only the memory of communism, but also the memory of post-communism changes. In the early 1990s, Kaczynski advocated the creation of numerous parties from the former opposition instead of having only one and warned against the engagement of the Catholic Church in state politics (62). Fifteen years later, after elections won, his conservative party Law and Justice (PiS) overtook all most important political positions in the country. Furthermore, PiS is openly supported by the Catholic Church, who largely contributed to its victory in the fall of 2005. Interestingly, Spiewak was elected to the parliament as a non-party candidate connected with the Civic Platform (PO), the party who stems from the same political tradition as PiS, but eventually opted out for staying in the opposition. Since the dramatic transformation of Kaczynski's political strategy, Spiewak has been critical of the party leader and describes PiS as a threat to liberal democracy. What both Spiewak and Kaczynski still agree on is the urgent necessity of a thorough purging, the opening all files of the former secret police, and the cleaning of all levels of state politics of former communists. In *Pamięć po komunizmie* Spiewak follows Kaczynski in saying that "no state can tolerate agents in its structures" (117) and disagrees with the famous former dissident Jacek Kuron on a possibility of innocent people getting hurt as the result of frantic purging. Here again *Gazeta Wyborcza*, whose editors and writers remained skeptical about the possible gains of a thorough purging, stays in the center of Spiewak's criticism: he scorns the symbols used by Michnik and other editors in the public debate on procedures of screening/purging, such as "the metaphor of revolution" and "the Greek myth of Pandora's box" (127-28). In Spiewak's mind, *Gazeta Wyborcza* was trying to divide Poland into two antithetical camps. On reading pronouncements of critics of a purge of communists, one may get the impression that they refuse persistently to discuss the real effects and heritage of communism, treating all anal-

yses regarding secret service agents and de-communisation not as much as non-existing problems, but as things that are not worth talking about and should not be talked about. They are not talked about, principally, because they remain in opposition to the liberal rhetoric, which presents a sharp and clear division in two mentalities, two societies, two types of human standpoints: liberal, open, critical, independent, forgiving opposed to xenophobic, hating, closed, nationalistic (159-60). Spiewak believes, evidently, that the almighty *Gazeta Wyborcza* steers not only the public opinion, but also goes deep into the minds of its readers and changes their memory/memories of communism. Rather than helping retrieve the lost collective memory, however, the author seems to present his own memory of communism and his own viewpoints on the past as the only sensible one. Naturally, Spiewak has the right to express his personal opinions, however, they appear somewhat awkward when he presents them wrapped in the language of scholarship. Perhaps then, instead of writing a publication that aspires to a socio-political study, Spiewak should have written a memoir or a diary, thus expressing his frustrations.

Just as there are an endless number of memories of communism, there is no unanimous opinion when it comes to the evaluation of the transformation processes that followed the revolutions of 1989. Central and East European authors relate to both of these issues and -- as they are trying to come up with the right artistic means to describe the communist past and the new reality -- create new literary trends and styles. The amount and variety of literary works published after 1989 explain the attempts by literary scholars to define new genres, tendencies, and developments in Central and East European literatures. One of the most recent publications in the field of literary studies that deal with these new trends is *Transformacja* (Transformation) edited by Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková. The 2005 book is the first volume of a planned series, *Literatury słowiańskie po roku 1989. Nowe zjawiska, tendencje, perspektywy* (Slavic Literatures after 1989: New Phenomena, Tendencies, Perspectives). The other three volumes to follow are *Feminizm* (Feminism), *Podmiotowość* (Subjectivity), and *Mniejszości* (Minorities). In her extensive introduction to the volume, Janaszek-Ivaničková observes that unanimity in evaluation of the transformation is impossible as of yet because the process is still in progress (7). At the same time, however, Janaszek-Ivaničková states that she "attempts at achieving a consensus" (7) in this matter by demonstrating how literature judges the post-communist reality. The collected essays analyze various national literatures and present the reader with a broad overview of the newest trends in Slavic-language *belle lettres*. A comparative perspective applied by the editor and some of the authors helps notice similarities between the national literatures and the logic behind the development of new trends and genres. Still, whether the volume reaches a "consensus" remains questionable. *Transformacja* seems to prove, rather, that a common agreement on the evaluation of the transformation is unattainable as judgments are influenced by private memories of communism and post-communism and those are often at odds with each other. Despite a comprehensive description of the new literary trends and placing them in cultural and social contexts, Janaszek-Ivaničková's introduction could perhaps function better as an independent article rather than as an opening to an essay collection. The text seems to have been written on the basis of the author's extensive knowledge of the subject, independently of the papers that follow it. The editor hardly ever refers to the collected articles directly and -- when so -- only in passing. Still, the introduction offers the reader a good starting point to more detailed analyses. Janaszek-Ivaničková enumerates and shortly discusses the most important characteristics of Slavic-language literatures (mainly prose) after 1989. The editor observes --somewhat nostalgically -- that the book is no longer a "cult object" it was but merely an object of a "free-market game" where state subsidies for writers became scarce and countless literary journals disappeared from the market (Janaszek-Ivaničková 12; a frequent observation by scholars in all post-1989 Central and East European countries: see, for example, Fast and Kisiel on Poland; Pilar on the Czech Republic; Deltcheva on Bulgaria; Lefter on Romania; Tötösy on Hungary). It was also the market economy, however, that came up with new solutions -- the phenomenon that the editor acknowledges, but is rather skeptical about. Already in the 1990s Central and East European newspapers and magazines started issuing literary supplements and new publishing houses appeared on the market replacing the former state-owned establishments that went bankrupt after the system change. These private businesses started responding

to public demands while at the same time shaping readers' tastes. All these new occurrences have changed not only the public perception of literature, but also literature itself. Whether it is a change for the better or for the worse is a matter of the readers' taste and expectations, and thus Janaszek-Ivaničková refrains from judgments.

Janaszek-Ivaničková's criticism surfaces only when she refers to relations between literature and the media and between literature and politics. She yields to conspiracy theories about "various cultural and political lobbies who use the press and aggressively impose -- with the use of so called great moral authorities they create themselves -- new, solely righteous truths" (14). In Janaszek-Ivaničková's mind, literary critics are connected to power centers and literary prizes go to those who belong to "the social-dissident structure" (24) -- at least in Poland. Most of the papers gathered in the volume offer a general overview of national literatures (Janaszek-Ivaničková, Machala, Skoropanowa, Agiejewa, Sinkowa-Koran and Tyczko, Duda, Gjurcinova) or an analysis of prose works in national literatures (Žilka, Scholze-Šolta, Mochizuki, Reiman, Nowosad). The choice of such general topics presents the reader with a broad view on the situation in Slavic-language *belle lettres* after 1989. Still, Janaszek-Ivaničková decided to include a couple of essays that focus on one author (Pospíšil's article on Michal Viewegh), one book (Crnkovic's article on Arsenijević's 1995 novel *U potpalublju. Sapunska opera*), or one issue, such as war (Kazaz), cultural self-definitions (Zielinski), or national identity (Dabrowska-Partyka). Combining general sketches with more detailed analyses does not allow for a thematic cohesion of the volume and invites to a random and fragmentary reading rather than to a thorough study of all articles. Nevertheless, once the reader reads through all the papers, it becomes clear that *Transformacija* points at and analyzes general trends and new phenomena in Slavic-language literatures after 1989, and therefore the volume reaches the goal identified by the editor. Furthermore, the book gives a positive answer to the question formed by Janaszek-Ivaničková in the introduction: have social and cultural changes of the system transformation generated a breakthrough in Slavic-language *belle lettres*? (11). Apart from "transformation" and "transition" that appear repeatedly in all of the papers, another concept/word that pops up continuously is "postmodern(ism)." Janaszek-Ivaničková argues that Slavic-language postmodernism after 1989 is different from the "empty linguistic and intertextual games" (20) so popular in Western literatures in the 1960s. Still, on reading articles by Pospíšil and Dabrowska-Partyka we may get the impression that "postmodernism" is not a literary/cultural term, but rather -- presumably for the lack of a better fitting expression -- a fashionable word (over)used to describe the prevailing chaos in the Slavic countries during the transformation. This misuse of the term "postmodernism" becomes even more evident after reading Mochizuki's excellent text on Russian postmodernism, in which the author not only enumerates and analyzes the characteristics of Russian-language postmodern literature, but also explains their occurrence.

Interestingly, the gathered essays show that despite numerous similarities and common trends in Slavic-language literatures not all literary transformations have been prompted by the overcited year 1989, which was a breakthrough point in Poland (Janaszek-Ivaničková), Bulgaria (Nowosad), the former Czechoslovakia (Machala), and the former GDR (the Sorbian literature after 1989 -- Scholze-Šolta), but not necessarily in other Slavic-language cultures. Agiejewa as well as Sinkowa-Koran and Tyczko argue that in the former Soviet Republics of Ukraine and Belarus three different breakthrough dates may be distinguished: 1985 (the beginning of Gorbachev's *perestrojka* and *glasnost*), 1987 (the nuclear accident in Chernobyl), and 1991 (the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of new independent states.) Whereas the new chapter in Slovenian literature started -- according to Reiman -- already in 1991 with the proclamation of independence, the literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina was determined crucially by the war of 1992-1995 (Kazaz). And Duda argues that the transformation of Croatian literature started only as late as 2000, with the creation of the Festival of Alternative Literatures (FAK). Serbian literature is marked by continuous wars with its neighbors and the collapse of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia -- the processes that went on throughout the 1990s (Zielinski). No matter whether prompted by a peaceful system change, a bloody war, a disintegration of a country, or the establishment of a new state, the recent political, social, and cultural transformations have dominated life (as well as the perception of life) not only in Slavic-language cultures, but in all Central and East Europe. The prevailing

chaos, the unpredictable reality, and the disappointment with the new system have had their impact on the perception of the communist past and, consequently, found their way into the literatures of the region. As a result, Central and East European cultures and societies became prone to nostalgia. The chief editor of the Polish publishing house Czarne, Monika Sznajderman, spotted this tendency and -- together with Filip Modrzejewski -- compiled an anthology of essays on nostalgia by some of the most prominent authors of the region: *Nostalgia. Eseje o tesknocie za komunizmem* (Nostalgia: Essays on Longing for Communism). Most of the texts were written especially for Czarne and carefully edited, therefore the reader receives an excellent and homogenous anthology.

In the publisher's note the editors of *Nostalgia. Eseje o tesknocie za komunizmem* observe that nostalgia is visible in such aspects of Central and East European life as politics, society, and culture. They also claim that the omnipresent nostalgia is "the most telling proof" that the transformation process in the region is still unfinished and that it "will be continuing for many years to come" (308). Sznajderman and Modrzejewski do not explain, however, why they believe nostalgia proves the incompleteness of transformation. In my mind, this is, rather, a result of the unfulfilled "expectations of a new and better future for the newly liberated nations" (308), as the editors also suggest. Furthermore, Sznajderman and Modrzejewski perceive nostalgia as "a burden and a problem," one of the "unresolved problems" that will need to be dealt with in the future together with unemployment, wide gaps in social status, ethnic conflicts, etc. (308). The anthology aims at showing "various faces of the ever-living nostalgia" (308) and almost perfectly reaches its goal. The only shortcoming of the essay collection is -- in my opinion -- the placement of Svetlana Boym's article at the end of the book. The text is a fragment of Boym's well-received 2001 book *The Future of Nostalgia* where she analyzes (post)communist memory and, as such, provides a good background for a discussion of nostalgia. Putting it in the anthology as first could have given the reader a better idea on the intellectual debates on the subject. The papers in the volume prove that nostalgia for communism functions similarly in various parts of Central and East Europe. Ivaškevičius argues that there is no nostalgia for the previous system, but rather for the previous life characterized by stability (42-47). Similarly, Sauter claims that it is not the red flag or Lenin's photos that trigger nostalgia, but the type of vodka people drank in the USSR or the brand of cigarettes they used to smoke (84). Ugrešić adds that nostalgia for the products characteristic of the communist everyday life is encouraged by their complete absence from the market: "Whereas Warhol's Campbell soup may still be bought in every American supermarket, the icons of the Soviet everyday life irreversibly disappear" (259). Interestingly, market economy identified nostalgia for communism as a prospective source of income. Already in the 1990s the products that used to be considered unattractive and hated miraculously reemerged in some stores in Central and East Europe. In his essay Trenkner describes an underground (sic!) shop located in the subway station at the Alexanderplatz in Berlin, which sells products from the East (*Ostprodukte*) that no one used to want to buy precisely because of the "Made in the GDR" label -- the same that became their (perhaps only) advantage in the late 1990s (16-17). Like Trenkner, Brussig points at sources of nostalgia for the GDR -- also called *Ostalgia* -- in people's memories and private stories. After the collapse of the East German state its citizens felt ashamed of their communist past, especially when they compared it to the successful past of their Western compatriots. Since no one likes to feel ashamed, people started inventing heroic stories (Brussig 28). Furthermore, as disillusionment with the reunification of Germany increased, East Germans began to claim that "not everything was bad" (Brussig 31) and to cherish their memories of the GDR, which chancellor Schröder bluntly labeled "necrophilia" (Schröder qtd. in Trenkner 26).

The anthology is filled with anecdotes and insightful comments, which make the publication an easy and satisfying read. The editors keep their promise that in such a multitude of perspectives and voices, one may find common features of those nostalgic images and longings, processes affecting the collective memory of societies in post-communist countries and attempts to comprehend them (Sznajderman and Modrzejewski 309). We may only hope to see more such impressive publications coming from Czarne, the Polish publishing house that focuses on Central and East European literatures. Both collective and private memories of communism remain widely discussed

issues in the cultures of the former Soviet Block -- they enter public debates as well as *belle lettres* and, hence, reach a broad and diverse public. The publications reviewed in this article demonstrate that there is no unanimity on how the communist past should (not) be remembered. Memories of communism are often contradictory depending on people's personal experiences in the former system as well as in their political and ideological affiliations. The combination of the books discussed above shows, however, the different ways of remembering communism and helps define trends in collective and private memories of a world disappeared.

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