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Introduction

Carola Heinrich
Austrian Academy of Sciences; Comenius University in Bratislava
Carola.Heinrich@assoc.oeaw.ac.at; Carola.Heinrich@uniba.sk

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 represented the end of the Warsaw Pact and indicated for Russia not only a traumatic loss of power but also the end of its cultural and moral authority both within the former Soviet borders and in the former socialist countries. The historic turning point of 1989 also meant the disappearance of the systemic border between the "East" and the "West" as a defining axis of European self-perception in the twentieth century and led to processes of renationalization and the need for new self-definitions in the post-socialist states. These transformation processes have taken place in different ways in the countries of Central and South-East Europe because of varied political, social, and economic conditions. Nevertheless, developments in these countries have shared a common horizon, based on the experience of socialism, totalitarianism, and radical change.

From the 1990s onwards, Central and East European countries, which were closely integrated into the Soviet sphere of interest after World War II, mostly orientated themselves towards the "West" and integrated into Western organizations such as NATO and the European Union. However, twenty-five years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, recent political events seem to be re-solidifying positions again, reinforcing the apparently not obsolete contradiction between the "East" and the "West" and reasserting still prevalent stereotypes. Can we argue that the region occupies a position "in-between," that it is caught in a net of tensions between constructions of the "East" and the "West," between Eurocentrism and Orientalism, as Maria Todorova has argued concerning the Balkans in her famous book *Imagining the Balkans* (2009)? While Todorova focuses on the semi- or quasi-colonial relationship of the Balkans to Western Europe, this publication looks towards the East, towards the former "Big Brother," and considers the Soviet Union and its successor state Russia as a hegemonic, post-colonial power. New geographical, social, economic, and cultural circumstances related to the dissolution of the USSR motivated reinterpretations and reevaluations of this Russian hegemony. The articles in this

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issue aim to trace the transformations and translations of roles, representations, and characterizations of "the Russian" in the states of the former Soviet Union and its satellite nations after 1989.

Research on postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe mainly focuses on the popular phenomenon of nostalgia, building on Svetlana Boym's pioneering monograph *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). Highlighting the attractiveness of the concept, Maria Todorova paraphrases Marx, arguing that "a specter is haunting the world of academia: the study of post-communist nostalgia" (2012: 1). But nostalgia is just one form of remembrance and only partially answers the questions of how the communist past and the Soviet Union are perceived today. Despite having a system and ideology in common, socialist experiences differed considerably and produced different post-Soviet responses. This interdisciplinary publication aims to offer a more differentiated view on distinctive forms of memorialization: How has the idea of "the Russian" been incorporated into negotiations of national self-definition and what has been its function within these debates? How have interactions between the Soviet center and the Eastern and Central European periphery been remembered? Why have artists and writers been revisiting this period and what has been remembered? In sum, contributors reflect upon how they understand the Soviet Bloc's influence from today's perspective.

Translating "the Russian"

During Soviet rule, relations to the Soviet Union were described officially using family metaphors – "the big brother" or "mother Russia." However, in the private sphere it was assessed rather more ambivalently and was viewed a lot more critically. In the post-Soviet context, the supposed former "sister nations" insist on their cultural and ideological differences and national particularities. Hence, the image of "the Russian" is subject to a process of (cultural) translation through its transfer to a new political, economic, social, and cultural context. Cultural translation is understood here as a process of de- and re-contextualization between historical epochs and various identity constructions (see Rössner and Italiano 2014: 11–12). Based on Homi K. Bhabha's ideas, translation is not understood as a simple transfer but as a process of negotiation between cultural differences, between elements of the old and the new context. The concept of cultural translation was generated in a postcolonial context and therefore always deals with uneven power relations and questions of hegemony and colonialism. Bhabha highlights the performative character of translation; cultural translation not only reflects political circumstances, but actively interferes in social and political processes, and this is "how newness

enters the world" (Bhabha 1994: 303). Articles in this issue apply Bhabha's concept to an analysis of different forms of translating "the Russian" in Eastern and Central European countries after the transformations of 1989. They focus on the particularities of these articulations, on local specificities, and on national political circumstances.

Contributions in this Issue

Different forms of staging and narrating the post-Soviet experience are the focus of this publication. Four case studies in different fields apply postcolonial and translational concepts to literature, film, theatre, music, photo-journalism, and the arts. By bringing together academics from different disciplines, this thematic block offers a differentiated view on translations of "the Russian" as a transdisciplinary and transnational phenomenon. More concretely, case studies from Ukraine, Romania, the former GDR, Hungary, and Slovenia are presented by scholars from the fields of history, Slavic and Romance studies, and theatre, film, and media studies.

In the opening article "The Empire Writes Back – Writing Back to the Empire," Stefan Simonek confronts two geographical regions, Galicia and Eastern Ukraine, and two generations of contemporary Ukrainian writers. He analyzes different strategies of deconstructing the cultural legacy of the Soviet Union in the works of Yuri Andruchovych, Serhiy Zhadan, and Lyubko Deresh.

In her essay "Humor and Memory: Romania's Strategy of Coming to Terms with the Past," Carola Heinrich traces the deconstruction of prevalent stereotypes through humor in three contemporary Romanian plays and films by Vlad Zografi, Matei Vişniec, and Horaţiu Mălăele, and shows how "the Russian" is instrumentalized in order to expound on the problem of Romania's own communist past.

Eva-Maria Hanser raises the question of "How the East Sees the East." She examines three different artistic approaches to staging "the Russian," taken from three decades in the work of the Slovenian art collective *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. On the one hand, these use "the Russian" to indicate the experience of totalitarianism and to highlight the eclecticism of Slovenian culture, and on the other hand to deconstruct the dichotomy between "the East" and "the West."

Petra Mayrhofer studies the narrative structures of visual remembrance of the regime changes in 1989 in various European memory cultures. Her analysis is based on pictures that appeared in quality mass media publications in 2009. According to her results, these images mostly represent attempts to erase the visibility of the former communist system through iconoclastic actions and the elimination of symbols.

Case studies can never be exhaustive, therefore this publication shall not be understood as a complete or extensive study, but as an intention to generate new discussions. However, the case studies here are representative of similarities and differences between national narratives as well as of continuities and ruptures in the image of "the Russian." These articles share an ambivalent view of "the Russian" that is located between fear and reconciliation, between disorientation and self-affirmation, but they also share in common an attempt to look beyond, to overcome stereotypes, and to deconstruct still prevalent prejudices.

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