Sekend-Hend Europe

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Does an entity exist if it has no name? In the abstract, the question sounds like one of those thought experiments concocted by early modern epistemologists. True modern epistemologists would ask whether it exists just because there is a name for it. Postmodern epistemologists, if there are any, would wonder what is it that exists that has garnered so many names, and the more picky among them would add, how does one adjudicate among these competing claims? The editors of this special issue have struggled with variants of these questions from the moment they conceived of it. They have not settled on a name, just adopted one for the mundane purpose of identifying this issue of the journal. And yet . . .

Nearly twenty-five years have elapsed from what some historians have taken to call "the revolutions of 1989." These revolutions saw the disintegration of the Second World and the emergence of what we are calling "Second-Hand Europe." Traditionalists will be reassured by the continuity of reference to secondariness, finding solace in its persistence. The more perspicuous may wonder how a second-handedness could emerge even if the earlier state of affairs had fallen into chaos. When the world was divided like

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Gaul into three parts, the shape of the general order was easily discernible. The Cold War had created political fault lines between a First World led by the United States and a Second World directed by the Soviet Union. The rest of the world, the Third World, was a place of indeterminacy given to seismic upheavals caused by friction between the two dominant tectonic plates. In a play on Aristotle, in this world tertium datur, but only provisionally. The countries of the Third World were destined to be absorbed by one or the other of the contending parties.

If the Third World was a place of considerable seismic activity, the other two, by contrast, were plates of stability. The seismologists of the day, variously called Kremlinologists and capitologists, tried to detect even minimal tremors, and they found them: economic crises in the West and muted cries of freedom in the East, sometimes erupting into the open, as in Budapest in 1956 or Prague in 1968. And yet, in spite of the very sophisticated theories and instruments both sides had elaborated in the well-funded think tanks, whether parastatal or state run, neither side predicted the collapse of this tripartite world. In fact, to this very day, the prevalent doxa holds that it is the Second World that collapsed, and it pays little attention to the remaining two parts, pretending that a whole amputated by a third is still a whole. The only way that such a pretense can be upheld is for the First World to extend its hegemony over the Second, so that the latter does not endure as ruin but disappears without leaving any remains. Such a strategy was indeed attempted, most notably in Germany, where the Ossies seemed to be more than willing to become Wessies, and the Wessies were equally willing to tax themselves, and their European Union colleagues, including the Greeks, to help them do it. Twenty years later, most Ossies remain Ossies and are no longer eager to turn into Wessies, going so far as to cultivate nostalgia for the Trabant, arguably the least comfortable and most polluting automobile ever produced, and the Wessies have come to believe that there may be an ontological difference (they have learned from history not to claim a biological one) between them and the citizens of the former German Democratic Republic.

A version of this strategy was adopted in much of the rest of the European part of the Second World: the countries that had once formed part of the Eastern bloc would be absorbed into the European Union and NATO, turning their inhabitants into Europeans and members of the Atlantic Alliance. The inhabitants of these countries were quite eager to be absorbed in this way. At a purely phenomenological level, they experienced liberty as mobility: required by the old order to stay put where they were assigned to

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live, and required to produce documents authorizing them to travel even within their own countries, with passports for foreign travel a rarity delivered for a special purpose and limited in time, they became the proud possessors of maroon-covered European Union passports that allowed them to travel without hindrance to all the countries of the European Union and even to work in them legally. Similar moments of exhilaration were produced by the sudden availability of Western medicines and books.

What these anecdotes mask is that there was no blueprint, no plan, for the construction of a new society. Forty years of scholarship, punditry, rhetoric, and propaganda had not produced any plans for the aftermath of the longed-for collapse. Many in the West expected a vast outpouring of creativity, not just in literature and the arts but in the social and political imagination. The famous drawers that were supposed to hold suppressed masterpieces proved to be empty, just as empty as the idea vaults in the Western think tanks. To be sure, ideologues and charlatans saw their opportunity and jumped into the fray, advocating outlandish ideas, sometimes with success, such as the adoption of a flat tax in several countries for the raising of state revenue. In retrospect, what is most surprising is that the expected grand debate on the future of the newly autonomous countries did not materialize, and the very fact that it did not materialize hardly caused a ripple. What happened?

The collapse of the old order was not simply the withdrawal and eventual decline of Soviet military power. The institutions and the order left standing were too dependent on this power to survive. The most interesting moment in the recent history of the Eastern bloc occurred then: the ruling authorities, Communist in origin but now deprived of Soviet backing and challenged by popular forces, sometimes organized and sometimes not, resorted almost everywhere to the strategy of the "round table." In a modernized version of the Arthurian prototype, representatives of various social forces, from unions to the church, sat down with the Communists and negotiated the latter's exit from power, the drawing up of new election laws, and a calendar for the implementation of change. These negotiations, still little studied, did not revolve around competing conceptions of the future; they focused on process, and specifically on the process of transition from the current collapsing order to a provisional one that would examine and debate conceptions of the future. The round-table negotiations were remarkably fast and their decisions implemented even faster. Countries learned from each other. The sense of a historical wind was palpable. Swedish observers began to use the term *societies in transition*,

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and the usage spread among political analysts both within and without the countries.

And then something odd happened. The promised debate did not take place, and hardly anyone minded. The reason is that the collapse of the old order had taken with it the political dimension of social life—not just the institutions and the persons associated with the old Communist order, but the political itself. There was no debate because there was no conceptual space for debate. Everywhere, the economic was replacing the political. The economic is the domain of analysis, calculation, projection, and decision. It is not a space of debate. To be sure, economists do debate among themselves about their models and their analyses, their conclusions and their recommendations, but these are technical discussions confined to the members of a community with highly selective rules of admission and restricted access. The term *freedom* does not have much traction in economic discussions, except when referring to freedom from the state—that is, from the political. The Eastern bloc was undergoing a mutation rather than a transition; it changed from a politically driven set of societies to an economically directed one. The only constant was that what the French call "la pensée unique" was as "unique" under the economic as it had been under the political. The power of this hegemony was plainly articulated by Lech Wałęsa during his successful campaign for the presidency of Poland: as a simple union organizer, I am totally ignorant of economics, he proudly proclaimed, and thus will not interfere with the economic process. The Socialism enforced in the Communist societies of the Eastern bloc had been premised on the domination of the political over the economic, and the subservience of the political to the social. The grand mutation of the 1989 revolutions was to emancipate the economic from this two-tier domination, so that the economic could function as it was meant to: as a form of necessity, a second nature, and everyone knows that one does not debate the laws of nature.

The governments formed in the early nineties were everywhere dominated by economic technocrats, who quickly understood that the only way to avert complete collapse was to make their economic systems compatible with the European Union so that massive forms of aid could flow from the European Commission to them. Social programs could easily be axed because they lacked legitimacy: hadn't they been introduced by the Communists? And if they did retain some support, it was quickly eroded by tales of corruption benefitting leading members of the old regime. The social net was reduced to the bare minimum; the retired and the elderly

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were forced into poverty; life expectancy plummeted; living standards declined; birth rates fell dramatically, but the countries were given public accolades for their "progress" in the implementation of the neoliberal agenda. They were becoming "integrable" into the European Union, and indeed by 2004 most of them were integrated, with Bulgaria and Romania, who had been found wanting on anticorruption measures, gaining accession in 2007. Some were even admitted into the more rarefied circle of the single currency, and others are still striving to do so.

The process of integration marked the real end of the Eastern bloc, and the designation, already rarely used after 1989, disappears in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The general assumption was, and in some parts still is, that the countries of the former Eastern bloc do not need a special designation; they are now part of the European Union in the same way that the Netherlands and Portugal are, and neither of these two countries needs any other designation than their national one and one marking them as European. In principle, this assumption makes sense. The different countries have followed different paths, and one would be hard put to say what they have in common except the fact that they are members of the European Union. But they do differ from the Netherlands and Portugal in that they are former members of the Second World, and some have taken to calling them postsocialist societies as a result. The term is more popular outside of the region than within it and has widely different degrees of acceptance. It is apparent that it is coined on the model of "postcolonial," and many argue that the postcolonial approach is not appropriate to them. Some object on the stronger ground that Socialism has not necessarily been forever forsworn in all of these countries and that it may make a return in the not too distant future. Just because they are no longer socialist does not mean that they are postsocialist, goes the argument.

In broader terms, the eviction of the political by the economic has resulted in a double crisis: what happens to the political when it is displaced by the economic, and what is the identity of these countries, individually and collectively? This double crisis has led to the invention of a particular form of politics, some of which are described in detail in this issue: the politics of memory. Memory is the object of political debate in many different guises and stakes. The most urgent concern manifest in all the countries is to produce a memory of the recent, Communist-dominated past. Just as important is the recovery of the past, recent but also more distant, suppressed by Communist regimes. Then comes the concern with the production of a past that the future can use. This third concern marks a return

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of the question of the future suppressed by the mutation from the political to the economic, and it could potentially lead to challenges to the hegemony of the economic, particularly at the present time when the triumphalism of economic neoliberalism has been muted in view of the 2008 collapse and its continued impact on the eurozone and indeed on Europe as a whole. The three distinct forms of the politics of memory deserve individual consideration.

The suddenness of the collapse of the Communist regimes in the years 1989–91, while exhilarating, generated its own form of anxiety: how strong were the emergent forms of governance? And would they be capable of resisting a reversal of fortune or an unexpected play for power by the apparently defeated, but not crushed, Communists? This anxiety prevailed in all the countries, but in none as much as in what was then still Czechoslovakia, where the memory of the coup by which the Communists gained power in 1948 was still very vivid.

Quite unexpectedly, an old Roman ritual was revived and embraced throughout the region: the *lustrum sacrificium*. In prerepublican, monarchical Rome, the habit was taken of conducting a census every five years. When the results of the census were compiled, the officials responsible for it (the Censors, usually two in number) held a formal public ceremony of atonement for any transgressions Rome and its subjects may have committed since the previous census. The ceremony culminated in an animal sacrifice. The period of five years separating two censuses was called a *lustrum*, hence the name *lustrum sacrificium* for the occasion. Psychohistorians may speculate for a long time as to what led Central and Eastern European nations, and eventually Balkan ones as well, to revive the practice of "lustration," as it became commonly known. In its simplest form, it consisted in determining the degree of participation and involvement in the Communist regime by individuals holding state or state-supported positions. The most obvious targets of lustration were the agents of the security services of the Communist regimes and their informers. State archives were declassified and opened in order to track such individuals. But the process spread and included officers of state run banks and savings institutions, the media, the universities, research laboratories, and so on. Since many mid-level appointments and nearly all higher-level ones had required membership in the Communist party, suspicion fell on a great many people.

Lustration was carried out in differing ways. The Czechs took the strongest line: the process was adversarial, accusations were proffered; if found valid, dismissal from all state functions, from holding office to

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employment as the proverbial dogcatcher, ensued and was permanent. The Czechs drew upon the example of the Germans, who applied to their Eastern cousins the methods developed immediately after World War II in their campaign of denazification. By contrast, the Poles relied on a process of self-denunciation and public confession, and were generally more forgiving. They looked to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process, carried out contemporaneously, for inspiration. Other countries adapted practices from both examples. Lustration has not been without its dangers: personal revenge has figured in some denunciations; documents have suspiciously disappeared from the archives; few prominent public figures have been spared accusation; extreme nationalists have seen the process as indeed one of sacrificial purification and have employed extralegal means, such as the invasion of university lecture halls, to advance their own agenda.

Lustration, while generally recognized as necessary, has had perverse effects and has caused collateral damage. It has fostered a climate of suspicion toward persons in public life or wielding some form of authority. It has eroded the feeling of collective solidarity and contributed to the rise of cynicism. Perhaps most important, it has led to the unspoken assumption that experience and competence gained in office are culpable. It has provided institutional underpinnings to growing forms of populism that appeal to the inherent righteousness of the untainted: the more rasa the tabula, the more trustworthy it is. Incompetence is a mark of innocence just as much as expertise provides grounds for suspicion. Lustration has fostered the emergence of a class of politicians who take vociferous pride in their self-proclaimed, and unfortunately averred, ignorance. Although Hungary provides the most pathogenic example of this tendency, no country is immune.

The second form of the politics of memory is revisionism, although the term is never used because of its association with Marxist debates over doctrine. It consists in attempts to set the record straight about the past, particularly about the behavior of Communists before and during World War II, with particular attention to the alliance between Stalin and Hitler sealed in the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement. For obvious reasons, Communists did not dwell on these events and stressed instead the heroic role of the Soviet Union in liberating Central and Eastern European countries from Nazi conquest. Official Communist countries invariably played down the role of nationalists in the resistance to Nazi rule, frequently accusing them of fascism and of war crimes. Correcting this record is a matter of considerable importance: in many countries, almost every family has lost at least one relative in the war, and it is a matter of family honor, and of duty

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to the victims, to attribute their death to the right motives and the right perpetrators. The number of massacres that took place in this part of Europe dwarves the losses of lives in the Western part of the continent. Millions of people were killed, some on the battlefield, others in "cleansing" campaigns of one sort or another. The crimes were perpetrated by the Nazis as well as by the Soviets, and a great many by troops mustered from the local population, mostly by the Nazis, with the promise of independence from the Soviet Union. The massacres targeted Jews first and foremost, but also Gypsies, and very frequently minority populations, such as Poles in parts of Ukraine, Slovaks in Hungary, or Protestant Hungarians in Romania.

In some instances, formal apologies and ceremonies of reconciliation have been held and are periodically repeated, though some of them are marred to this very day by the irruption of extreme nationalists who pelt the officials, foreign and national, with eggs, tomatoes, and balloons filled with paint. Ethnic and national antagonisms play an important role in such events and precipitate discussion about identity, territory, historical records, and official memory.

One of the most famous of the massacres was the killing of more than twenty thousand Polish army and police officers, priests, and intellectuals in the forest of Katyń, in present-day Belarus, in 1940. The Soviets always attributed the killing to retreating Nazis. Germans denied responsibility, and Poles became convinced that the massacre took place on the orders of Stalin. Several years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders briefly acknowledged Soviet responsibility and then tried to take back the admission, finally reiterating it officially and letting it become part of history textbooks. The attempt to seal a reconciliation over the matter was marred by the 2010 crash of the plane carrying the president of Poland, his wife, the army chiefs of staff, and more than half of the government ministers, in the very forest in question, with no survivors. Conspiracy theories abound in Poland, many propounded by the twin brother of the dead president and his successor at the head of his political party. The event has revealed how raw the wounds of World War II continue to be.

The history of the Communist parties of Eastern Europe is a particularly fraught one. Many of their leaders were the victims of the purges precipitated by the Moscow trials of the late thirties. Their fate, ranging from Siberian exile to summary execution, was known but never publicly discussed in the years of Communist rule. Hostility to the Communist parties is still so strong that historians tread with extreme caution discussing these matters, fearing that their attempt to establish historical truth will be inter-

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preted as an exercise in apology for the Communists. The exact role of various underground armies is equally sensitive and the object of considerable self-censorship. While there is a very broad agreement that the true history of the years 1930 to 1960 must be told, it covers only a highly sanitized version of this history: we were all victims and our victimhood must be acknowledged; none of us was guilty. The guilty party are the others. And the rest should be silence. There is no consensus as to who the others are or who "us" is, but there is consensus that the question should not be posed. It's the kind of question that only an "other" would ask. And so, while there is debate, very often quite heated, the important issues are foreclosed. Among them, of course, is the question of complicity in the Holocaust and the persistence of anti-Semitism after the war so that it was easily manipulated by Communist authorities who denounced Zionism and often sent into exile their own citizens because they suspected them of "pro-Zionist" views. Some current political parties, such as Jobbik, in Hungary, are openly anti-Semitic and yet are allowed to form an alliance with the governing FIDESZ party. Figures of the "Just," who helped save Jews, are properly recognized though hardly celebrated; on the other hand, scholars who reveal postwar pogroms and other horrors, such as Jedwabne, where Jews were gathered in a barn that was then set on fire, are denounced as traitors to the nation and as slandering a people who had suffered enough. It is admittedly difficult to acknowledge a history that includes crimes as well as feats of heroism and examples of valor, but to exclude the former from the national account is to replace history by mythology.

The tug-of-war between myth and history is the stake of the third type of politics of history. Every society feels the obligation to provide its future with a representation of its past. The nature of this representation tells a great deal about the future it sees for itself. Some have spoken of the need for a "usable" past, suggesting that it is possible to constrain the future by offering it a specially chiseled tool. Others have recognized that this representation must perforce be highly selective: its responsibility does not lie with the past, and therefore it needs to be only marginally concerned with the accuracy of the representation.

What is striking about this third type of politics is how little it is concerned with the nation. This is at once surprising and fully understandable. Surprising, because the nation, and even more specifically, the nation-state, has historically represented the highest aspiration of ruling elites and the intellectuals they relied upon. Understandable, because the nation, and particularly the nation-state, has been the source of conflict with neighbor-

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ing nations and states. As improbable as it may seem, the reference to the nation is muted in these discussions, or rather given an unexpected spin that allows for both rupture and continuity. With some exceptions, such as the Hungarians and, to a lesser extent, the Czechs, the countries of the region envisage not a national future for themselves but a European one. The contest in these politics is not for the elevation of the nation but for the claim of being the most authentically European. In a part of the world where authenticity is systematically perceived through the lens of origin, these politics revolve around the claim of who were the first Europeans. The advantage of this claim is that it does not admit of a national answer. In fact, the less national it is, the better. The politics revolve around a simple narrative: we may be latecomers to the present-day European Union, but unlike the Dutch and the Portuguese, or the French and the Germans, we were Europeans before we were Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, or Albanians. In fact, we were the first Europeans, the original ones, and so it is only proper that we be European once again. You, Western Europeans, ask us to prove that we are worthy of becoming Europeans. You make us meet accession criteria, but we were Europeans not only before you, but before we became what we are.

A version of this narrative circulates in nearly every country of the region. At no time have ancient historians, who may be dubbed Greek ethnographers for the occasion, been read with such attention to detail and their descriptions matched with archaeological evidence. There is a broad consensus that the area that extends from the Caspian Sea in the East to the Vistula and the Danube in the West was inhabited by a people descended from the offspring of Scythians and Amazons. These people, the Sarmatians, were seminomadic horsemen, perhaps the original European horsemen, and they were peace loving but fierce warriors, who fought the Medes and the Greeks, and blocked the Romans from expanding into their territories beyond Pannonia. Their vast polity, probably a loose assemblage of clans and tribes, was broken up by the invading Huns and further scattered by various Germanic peoples, from whom the rest of the Europeans are descended. On the basis of linguistic evidence, and no doubt soon to be reinforced by mitochondrial studies, the only remaining Sarmatians are the Ossetians, who became known as the Alans at the time of the Germanic invasions. Romanians, that is Valachs and Dacians, Bulgarians, Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenians, Lemkos, and others too numerous to mention, are the descendants of these Sarmatians, Europeans before there was a Europe.

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The details of this conjunction of textual analysis, archaeological remains, and exercises in historico-anthropological imagination may be entertaining, but the intent behind them is most serious: the future is being provided with tools to determine who will be included and who excluded, and who is qualified to make the determination. Those latecomers, the Germans, the French, the Dutch, will have to be accommodated, as will the perhaps even older Celts, but can there be any doubt about the unsuitability of the Turks? This third type of politics, a politics of long memory, arrogates onto itself the right to determine who is a European, who is entitled to be called a European, bypassing the rules and regulations painstakingly negotiated in the various treaties, from Rome to Maastricht and Lisbon. President Bush's secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was right to distinguish between a new and an old Europe—he just got them wrong.

The place given to the three types of politics of memory is sometimes interpreted by outside observers as evidence that the region suffers from too much history. Just as Athens and Rome challenge attempts to build new roads or subways because every square inch of land preserves some artifacts or traces of the past, Eastern Europe is overlaid with historical narratives, some of which are not yet ready to be excavated—reserved, or perhaps preserved, for the future. What is undeniable, however, is that this obsession with history, with the need to revise it and to reinterpret it, displaces a discussion of the values that post-1989 societies should embrace. Societies define themselves in political debates; they argue over competing visions of the future and not just about straightening out the past. They ponder what they are and try to imagine what they would like to be.

The space for such considerations is largely preempted by the politics of memory. This type of politics produces a particular type of politician: an individual who wants to be seen as emblematic of the representation that she upholds. She is not a leader because there is no discussion of where the polity should go. She tries to become a representation herself. Such politicians are very much at home in the media, particularly on television. They deal in representations and are themselves the product they want to sell. They are supremely comfortable in the two-dimensional world they inhabit. They want to resemble the heroes of the television serials whose broadcast they interrupt: they are not historical figures but creatures of folklore, embodiments of values perceived as perennial and therefore beyond discussion.

One of the most scathing criticisms directed at Communist societies is that they were totalitarian, and they were totalitarian because they lacked

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the institutions of civil society. One of the measures applied to determine whether a post-Communist society was making progress toward democracy was the development of civil society. Yet these societies were far more familiar with civil society than is generally recognized. The Solidarity protests, the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia, the gatherings organized by the Lutheran ministers of Leipzig, the repeated attempts to honor the memory of Imre Nagy—all these were civil protests, not political protests. Political protests would have been immediately suppressed, as happened to the workers of Poznań in 1956. Civil protests were more easily tolerated because they were not challenging political power. Since 1989, this tradition of civil protests continues, with exceptions such as the Republic of Moldova. While civil protests are commendable, they do not have the power of political action and can even preempt the space in which political activity could be deployed. The recent protests about Gezi Park in Taksim Square were political and not civil, as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan immediately recognized, prompting him to crack down, which fueled more protests.

Civil protests must be complementary to political protests, not a substitute for them. Far too often they have taken the place of political protests, further eroding political space. When such an erosion takes place, the sense of democracy changes. Instead of being a system in which alternatives are debated, it turns into one in which assent is either given or withheld. Furthermore, mobilization around an alternative becomes very difficult if not altogether impossible. Collective action is thwarted. The paradox of democracy in the former Communist states is that it has stymied the very forces that have brought it into existence: some of the largest mass movements ever seen anywhere, such as the Polish Solidarity or the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, have been replaced by a form of atomism. The individual citizen becomes the measure of political action.

This transformation has been observed in the way that integration into the European Union has been presented and handled. Ireland has been seen as the model: any changes to the basic treaties of the EU are subject to a referendum. Campaigns for or against the changes precede the vote. The Irish procedure of treaty ratification has been hailed by opponents of the EU as a model of democracy, and other countries have been urged to adopt it. What the proponents of this procedure fail to realize is that a process based on referendums requires that individual citizens appropriate what is being proposed. More accurately, they do realize it and see it as desirable, failing to notice that the reduction of decision to the individual

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level eliminates the need for political space because there is no polity to occupy it. Although the device of the referendum has not been adopted in the post-Communist states, the concept of democracy that inheres in the practice has. It is in the name of democracy that individual citizens are called upon to appropriate the policies that are being presented to them. Inevitably, such policies are presented as forms of necessity. The rejection of the proposed policies is described by their governmental proponents as unthinkable, threatening the well-being of the nation, leading to disaster. “There is no alternative” is their slogan. Citizens may have doubts about the policies and may even dislike them, but they have progressively been conditioned to believe that there are no other options.

This form of democracy is congruent with a society in which the economic has replaced the political: just as economic policies are presented as exercises in necessity, obeying economic laws that function as if they were laws of nature, political options are presented as further exercises in necessity. Either the proposed policies are adopted or chaos will engulf society. A democracy of this type, if it still can be qualified as such, functions on a politics of affect. Fear is the dominant sentiment and the principal motivation for political action. Historically, democratic societies have flourished when vigorous debate took place and an open deliberative process preceded decision. The very core of deliberation was the consideration of alternatives, a discussion of “what if” options. Deliberation was the occasion for the expression of desires, the invocation of utopias, a place where individual dreams could receive collective sanction. But dreams have been replaced by nightmare visions. Thinking about the future has been delegated to others, those who know better, who live in an elsewhere where the future can be glimpsed and who give the rest of us an image of what it may look like.

The form of democracy practiced in the post-Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe does Plato’s *Republic* one better. The dwellers of the cave do not see the play of shadows that they might take for reality. They are given an account, a representation of this reality, by those who claim to know what this reality is. Their knowledge of the simulacrum is second-hand knowledge.

The Polish writer Andrzej Stasiuk, writing in a book significantly entitled (in translation) *Sarmatian Landscapes: Voices from Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Germany and Poland*, remarks on the proliferation of a widespread phenomenon throughout the region, and particularly close to his place of residence in southeastern Poland: the rise of what he calls in Polish

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the *sekend-hend* trade. Even the name of this trade is imported and distorted in the process. It consists in offering for sale in small privately owned stores or in large open-air markets used goods brought in from the West, primarily from Germany. They are mostly items of clothing but also household appliances, from refrigerators to coffee grinders, and automobiles. He writes,

> Sometimes I visit these stores. Sometimes I buy something. I like to observe the people. They are mostly thirtysomething women, wives and mothers. They are looking for something for themselves, for their children and husbands. They do not look at all poor. They are only tired, they do not smile, they are a little ashamed. They are not looking for something extra but are simply trying to save money, of which they have little. They look at and touch clothes from Paris, Berlin, Milan, London, Vienna, and God knows where else. They have never been there. They have surely seen these places on television. The distant rich world has sent its remains, its refuse, and they, the thirtysomething women of my county seat, will be able to save money, of which there isn't enough. Besides, thanks to these outfits, they will resemble a little the women from Paris, the women from Milan, the women from television. Real life mixes with phantasms, mixes with virtual life. Dreams reach here a little used. They smell of cheap detergent.[1]

A little later in this piece, Stasiuk makes clear that trade in the second-hand is not confined to material goods. Ideas and values are equally subject to the practice. Nor does he exempt himself from it: there is no perch from which moral judgment can be rendered. We are all in this together.

The fact that this piece appears in a volume entitled *Sarmatian Landscapes* is not without significance. Its inclusion under such a title is not ironic, nor is it a lament on the degradation of the Sarmatians. It is deadly serious: The revival of the Sarmatian idea is motivated by a quest for authenticity and primacy. The reality of today's Sarmatia is that it is the landscape of the second-hand, of the derivative, of the mediated, of the

1. The quotation comes from an essay by Andrzej Stasiuk, "W cieniu" [In the shadow], found in an edited collection under the Polish title *Sarmackie krajobrazy: Głosy z Litwy, Białorusi, Ukrainy, Niemiec i Polski* [Sarmatian landscapes: Voices from Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Germany, and Poland], ed. Martin Pollack (Sękowa Polska: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2008), 457; my translation. (It is worth noting that the book was published simultaneously in German by S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.)

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laundered. This is the precise nature of its authenticity. Its claim to primacy may well mean that all of Europe, the rest of Europe, is equally fated to become a landscape of second-hand goods, ideas, and values.

But lest the reader take this for a confession of despair, let this reader give a second look at the characterization of this landscape: it is *sekend-hend*. The orthography purports to render the pronunciation of this imported term, but what it inscribes is a voice speaking in its own accent, a voice that is managing to make itself heard as voice, even as it appears to ventriloquize foreign speech. This voice does have authenticity, and the accent it proffers has primacy over the content of what it utters. This may seem to be a meager consolation in a landscape of such desolation, but recycling requires that one wanders around dumps.

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