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**INTRODUCTION**

This second Focus section of *CoSMo* collects essays that have been commissioned in an attempt to address the question of cultural memory in many ways, according to different disciplines, and points of view. Following a conference organised in May 2015 at the University of Torino, where several of the papers appearing here were presented at various stages of early research, the editors are attempting to generate debate on the status and direction of recent developments in dealing with the topics of reworking historical memory.

In his article, Alexander Etkind focuses on the concept of “mimetic mourning” as a recurrent response to the loss of relatives, that entails a symbolic re-enactment of that loss. A typical example can be found in the Victims’ Balls, organised by relatives of aristocrats who had been guillotined during the French Revolution. Starting from the assumption that expressions of cultural memory and cultural mourning change from generation to generation, depending on how far removed they are from the catastrophic event, Etkind points out that if survivors and the first generation of their descendants come together physically in a ritual of collective mourning, in later generations the victims’ mimetic performances migrate to the increasingly virtual spaces of theatre, art, literature, film and social media.

Etkind further addresses the question of mourning in contemporary post-Soviet Russia where Russian authors complain about their country’s “historical amnesia”. As opposed to Nazi terror that established a clear boundary between the victims as “Other” and the perpetrators, Soviet terror was suicidal: the perpetrators of one wave of terror more often than not became victims of the next. Unlike their peers in the colonial domains of the socialist empire such as the Ukraine or the Baltic states, who felt oppressed by a foreign power, or the peasants in Russian villages who perceived collectivization as the imposition of an urban and therefore foreign order, the victims among the Russian intelligentsia and party members perceived this terror as senseless precisely because it was self-inflicted.

Where victims remain “unburied”, the dialectics of repetition and remembering studied by Freud produces a kind of warped imagery, which combines the analytic, self-

conscious exploration of the past with its reverberations and transfigurations, as Gerhard Friedrich shows in his article “Between Psychiatry and Popular Fantasy: Trauma, Ghosts and Revenants in the ‘New German Domestic Novel’”. Contemporary German authors attempt to re-engage emotionally, within the private sphere, with the German past through the memory of – real or fictitious – relatives who became victims of the Second World War in various ways, and thus, at least ‘partially reconciled’ with this past, so as to be able to shape the present and future of united Germany. However, it appears that the attempt has left them with the conundrum of the magician’s apprentice: they cannot rid themselves of the ‘ghosts’ that they, literally, called up.

Following up Etkind’s contention that “the desire to know” lies at the heart of mourning “in order to share its burden, to express it in clear words or images”, in his essay “My unburied Father”, Carol Sauerland narrates the events that dramatically marked his father’s life. Kurt Sauerland was a well-known intellectual and member of the German Communist party who was arrested in Moscow in 1937 and soon executed in the (in)famous Lubyanka prison, a victim of Stalin’s purges. Kurt Sauerland had fled Nazi Germany in 1933 first to Paris then to Moscow where he was invited to take up a post in the Communist International. Only in 1963 his wife, herself a member of the Communist party, was informed of her husband’s death. In Kurt Sauerland’s case, the conclusion to be drawn is that “he is not only waiting for rehabilitation, but resurrection – resurrection in the sense of the course of his life being presented as it really was”.

Echoing Etkind’s performative view of both individual and collective memory, Jens Brockmeier’s article demonstrates that the autobiographical process is not a teleologically directed process towards the discovery of a historical past, but rather a continuous stream of discursive interactions and interpretations. Individual memory is inextricably interwoven with collective cultural memory opening up an endless and beginningless symbolic space made up of life narratives, actions, language, artifacts, circulating in a culture. However, there are sudden fractures in which the unaware becomes aware. This article offers two models for reading those fractures: revelation and simultaneity. Out of sudden revelations - in which the cultural unconscious comes into view - the work of autobiography may begin, as shown in Karol Sauerland’s contribution to this collection. Conversely, in the model of simultaneity there may be painful contradictions between layers, but one may flow unconsciously among different, but simultaneously present realities, when one acknowledges that a life is intermingled with narrative, and that one’s autobiographical consciousness is grounded in various possible lives. Possible lives are part of our identity projects. In various situations more than one identity project is performed, showing no clear-cut borderlines separating fact and fiction.

As first discussant, Karol Sauerland agreed with Etkind’s argument that emphasised the keen difference separating the Russian and the Nazi victims’ discourses. If we disregard the Hitler assassination attempt in 1944, only once perpetrators became victims in the Nazi regime, when Röhm and his followers were unexpectedly

prosecuted for homosexuality. On the other hand, in the Soviet system it was not uncommon for victims to become offenders: in their belief in Communism as a new social order, the victims themselves saw it as no surprise that so many mistakes were made, in order to fight against the imperialist fascist world. Although the Victims' Balls may yield some optimistic view, this seems hardly possible in post-Soviet Russia, where pride and humility overlap as a consequence of the system's inability to work through the "unburied memory" of past horrors, producing instead, a ball of the perpetrators.

Alexander Etkind's and Karol Sauerland's presentations are at the core of the next three discussants' comments. Declaring that Etkind's and Sauerland's papers would require a wider discussion, Guido Franzinetti, as historian of East-European Countries, restricts himself to a few remarks. In "Remembering Communism" he welds the topics of Communism and remembrance, by focusing on three points: first, echoing Brockmeier's paper, Franzinetti maintains that all memory, even the most traumatic, reflects first of all one's subjectivity, and that the present explains the past, and not vice-versa. Second, referring to Etkind's view that "Making sense of the memory of the [Communist] past does not require sharing its weird presumptions" he adds that experience [like memory] cannot be inherited. Third, he suggests that Sauerland's attempt to present his father's life during Communism "as it really was", should be used as a starting point to discuss, and remember, Communism as it really was, pointing out that the opposite of remembering is not forgetting but the "incoherence" that defeats rational ways of understanding the past. In the case of Russian Communism, as Etkind maintains, only other forms of culture, such as literature, music, film can present post-Soviet warped mourning, or the melancholic dialectic of re-enactment and defamiliarization.

Diana Osti connects Etkind's theory of "warped mourning" to Adorno's cultural criticism as formulated in his "negative dialectic", referring to Adorno's conviction that "unspeakable" memories may run the risk of being aestheticized, once critical discourse brings traumatic experiences back to rational expression. By applying trauma theories to postcolonial literature, Osti points out how the "unspeakable" surfaces in the latter's use of language.

By relying on the notions of hyper-mediated memory and post-memory, Alice Balestrino applies Etkind's theory to the way in which the 9/11 Memorial Monument in New York narrates the historical experience of that trauma through contemporary media, enhancing sentimental, as opposed to cognitive, involvement and emphasising the active role the visitor is called to play in the construction of the narrative event. However, while Etkind's reading of cultural memory covers a three-faceted transgenerational response based on loss, trauma, and warped mourning, these "three energies structuring post-catastrophic world" seem to simultaneously interact in 9/11's warped memorialization, recalling Brockmeier's definition of cultural memory as intertext.

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