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Afterword: From Big Brother to Big Burger (And What’s the Grand Narrative Got to Do with It?)

“Benni Goodman”

To two pairs of authentic legs

a nasiba niska nenapisana
sama v prostranstvo zhe skita.
— N. Vaptsarov

We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.
— Paul Ricoeur

[T]hose things about which we cannot theorize, we must narrate.
— Umberto Eco

First PS, November 1996:
The Muse and the Grannie; the Communist Sausage;
Bracing Writing

Today, in the era of the Small Narratives, good academic taste dictates that we must commence every great revelation with a jazzy personal confession. For instance, if you want to coddle your reader, begin with something pure and innocent like your earliest memories of the Eucharist, describe the crumb
"Benni Goodman"

quivering on the mustache of Uncle Ben, and then make an elegant transition toward your topic—Hamlet as a leftover tragedy. But if you scheme to scandalize the reader (you adore Dada and Derrida and suspect that the reader might be a prudish hypocrite), start by revealing your secret agony when you discovered the inevitability of pubic hair when you were barely eight, interwine this pubic-cubic hair with nudity in Braque and Picasso, and launch a retributive attack à la Orlando Furioso at depilation as a misogynist construct. I presume that a paper whose theme is the invincibility of the Grand (Anti)Communist Narrative should also open with a series of teasing and highly instructive Small Narratives that . . .

Oops! I Hear My Western Reader: "Define Small and Grand Narrative!"

"Do you remember Augustine? There are few things, in fact, which we state accurately; far more we express loosely, but what we mean is understood. Isn't this odious?"

"Jeez, I want to understand you really well! Dialogue, my friend, let's keep up our dialogue!"

First Small Narrative: In 1949, the first collection of poems by Valerii Petrov appeared, Stikhovoreniia (Poems). It ranks among the best in Bulgarian post–World War II poetry. But the book was castigated by the pseudo-Marxist critics for its lack of correct ideological views, intellectual individualism, petty-bourgeois and decadent sentiments, and formalism. At one point Petrov, an ardent communist himself, thought that he might really have been wrong and that his mentors might have been right. The poet's next two collections (1952 and 1954) testified to his honest efforts to conform to the literary standards of the time. In the first of these books, in the poem "Prosveta" ("Enlightenment"), he contrived the following memorable quatrain:

Uchat redom baba s vnuchie,
uchii shloser mlad;
i Chervenkov sibsto uchi;
Stalinov doklad.

The grannie and her grandchild study side by side,
A young mechanic studies,
And Chervenkov also studies
Stalin's report.

In 1952, Vukol Chervenkov was the good guy—the general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1952 to 1956; after that he became the bad guy—the initiator of a personality cult. Petrov masterfully suggests (I'd rather skip the close reading) that the grannie, the grandchild, and the mechanic study the same text as Comrade Chervenkov—the Grand Communist Narrative of tvarishch Stalin. (Poor Valerii! He satisfied his critics but not his Muse. He paid for the compromise with several years of artistic silence, restoring his artistic self-confidence.) The moral of this Small Communist Narrative

is that the Grand Communist Narrative is protean and omnipresent, and even the best mittds of the time are not immune from it. Therefore, rejoicings at the death of the Grand Communist Narrative along with the death of communism may turn out to be premature. Verily, verily, Valerii, Iosif Vissarionovich is dead, but his deeds live on!

Oops, the Western Reader again: "In an anthology about the post-1980 era you speak of the post-1949 times?"

"Yeah, our Anthology!"

Communismo sat on the Wall,
Communismo had a great fall;
And all Ph.D. experts, all the Ph.D. men
Couldn't construe past/post Commu. Again.

In November 1989, intoxicated by freedom and red wine in the center of Sofia, I thought that 1989 was a beginning. It took me years to realize, lulled on amber waves of grain, swinging like a rusty gate, that 1989 and post-1989 were but a continuation of 1949 and post-1949. To speak of the present is to remember the past. I'm an assiduous student of history, but I can't remember a single successful revolution. Revolutions explode in euphoria but expire in despair. I know, I know—the cadaver of the Grand Communist Narrative is very handy for scholarly dissection and makes fantastic fat-free, cholesterol-free, speech-free academic sausages. I'm nostalgic, though; I feel like resurrecting it. Isn't this odious?"

Second Small Narrative: In Bulgaria, immediately before the collapse of communism, the Grand Communist Narrative was seriously challenged by the Small Narratives in the spring of 1989, when some young intellectuals, through samizdat, started publishing their own magazines. The challenge, in spite of—or thanks to—its halo of heroism and martyrdom both in the eyes of the authors and their closest friends and only readers (besides the guys from the secret police, of course), seems downright comic today. Most of the good poems and articles published there had already appeared in the official literary journals, which in the years of glasnost opened their doors wide to innovative texts. The other contributions in the samizdat magazines were either by people suffering from graphorrhea or else by illustrious thinkers with Bulgarian names who had settled in Western Europe decades before. On the pages of the samizdat magazines, as if in a fool's paradise, Mr. Nobody Nobodov danced cheek to cheek with M. Tzetan Todorov in a carnivalesque embrace. What made the samizdat magazines a cultural phenomenon was not their content but their mere existence. Freedom of speech in Bulgaria started not as freedom of saying but as freedom of speaking. The first moral of this second Small Narrative is that the Grand Communist Narrative, if we judge from the energy spent by the secret police in hunting down the authors and readers of the samizdat periodicals, when challenged for the first time, could be scared to death by the Small Narratives. However, the second moral, which
will be disclosed in the final postscript, is that the Grand Narrative, in its wise adulthood, is not afraid of Small Narratives but lovingly proliferates them.

"I'm starting to enjoy your bracing writing . . ."

"When the secret police invited me to report on some samizdat colleagues of mine I went absolutely berserk: in a democratic paroxysm I explained to them that all men were born free and equal, and . . . and shifted in my pants. That was not fear, oh no, that was protest! 'Open the window, we need some bracing air,' said somebody in the room. Isn't this obstructive?"

Third Small Narrative: Shortly before and shortly after the breakdown of the dirty communist system, everything in Bulgaria was political. Wives were leaving their husbands after forty years of happy marriage because they suddenly discovered that he was "red"—a communist and antidemocrat, whereas she was bluish if not absolutely "blue"—democratisch and anticommunistische. (Bye-bye, Auntie Bonka! Uncle Petko gets drunk every evening, weeps, and swears at our sweet dawning democracy . . .) Immediately after 1989, public space was crammed with vociferous political commentators swarming into the media. Their divinations were in the genre of the Small Narrative and were short lived like the daily papers, which they inspired and where they expired. But on a beautiful day in 1994, as unexpectedly as they had fallen from power before, the communists unexpectedly came back to power as socialists who, in just a few years, had evolved into the biggest capitalists in the country. Why did the majority vote for the communists-socialists-capitalists—and not only in Bulgaria but also in the rest of the ex-communist countries? The Small Narratives of the political commentators (and the rococo-like diagrams of the Western experts on Eastern Europe that I later contemplated astounded and soothe after that started drawing myself) helplessly shrugged when they encountered the suicidal electoral preferences of the population.

In literature and culture, a similar paradox took shape. Post-communist literature started to be analyzed within the framework of postmodernism [sic] and postcolonialism [sick]—ah, this Latin prefix "post"! In the West, such scholarly ruminations became marketable (cf. "From Big Brother to Big Burger" by one Penny Goodman, Ph.D., a political singing single and expert on postisms, banalism, jive, jazz, and all that jazz). Nevertheless, within this paradigm, it is difficult to explain how the pauperized 80–95 percent of the population of the post-1989 Eastern European countries, struggling on a daily basis with the abdominal-visceral void, embraced the postmodern void (which is literally void) after living for decades within the communist void (modeled after the Platonic-Christian-romantic-modernist void, which presupposes a second, true Being either in the form of a "bright communist future" or a transcendental hyperonarian domain). The moral of the third Small Narrative is that the epistemological potential of the Small Narratives—in politics as well as in literary and cultural studies—is often small, and other approaches to post-communist realities must also be explored.

**Second PS, December 1995:**

**Svetlana and Sauvignon; Hadj to Theory; Die Geburt der Limerick**

In anno domini nineteen and ninety-one, on the thirtieth day of the merry month of May, around 5:37 p.m., while strolling with Svetlana in Sofia (at that time there was still no shooting in the streets, a glass of white wine was an affordable pleasure, and, what was most important, this was Svetlana’s birthday), I concocted a naïve analogy between mythical cosmogony and communism. I improvised a jocular alternative to the limited epistemological capacity of the Small Narratives of the political and cultural analysts. (I like it when Svetlana laughs, you know, and she likes my fantastic fantasies, fancies, and phantasmagorias, which are her birthday presents.) I felt that the miniatures of these experts were daubs lacking historical perspective and depth. The political soap opera of Auntie Bonka and Uncle Petko, the suicidal electoral choices, the meiotic character of communist culture, even my boast that you are reading now—all these pieces had to fit into the mosaic of the Grand Communist Narrative, we thought, fishing the fictitious bits of cork out of our fictitious glasses of Sauvignon.

I unfolded my argument as a sort of a footnote to Nietzsche, who, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, thinks that even the state does not know more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connections with religion, its growth on mythical notions. In this endeavor I was encouraged by Hayden White, who writes, “The very notions of explanation and enplotment [in Nietzsche] are dissolved, they give place to the notion of historical representation as pure story, fabulation, myth conceived as the verbal equivalent of the spirit of music.” Between 5:37 and 8:12 p.m. on the thirtieth day of the merry month of May in the year of our Lord’s Incarnation nineteen and ninety-one, the parallel between the communist state and the realm of myth, suggested by the German thinker, was so palpable, so much in the fragrant spring air and Svetlana’s perfume, that I never bothered to ask myself about the methodological footing for viewing reality as a narrative. Unconsciously, I was following a major principle of phenomenological narratology, which, through Paul Ricoeur, pleads for the precedence of narrative understanding over narratological rationality.” Today, on the thirtieth day of the merry month of May in the Year of Grace nineteen and ninety-seven, at 11:34 a.m., the possibility of a relation between reality and narrative can be based, as the French philosopher suggests, on three theoretical premises. The first is mastery of the conceptual network of action, which means the achievement of practical understanding. The second anchorage of narrative composition in the practical understanding is the symbolism in the practical field. “If . . . human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated.”
The third feature of a preunderstanding of action is the temporal elements onto which narrative time bases its configuration: "in action [there are] temporal structures that call for narration."

Nietzsche and Ricoeur, therefore, provide a theoretical framework for interlacing narrative and praxis. The German philosopher suggests that practical reality grows on the basis of archetypal mythic narratives, whereas the French thinker argues that our praxis provides prefigured narrative patterns, which, through writing, become configured narratives, and finally, by means of reading, are transfigured into enriched praxis.

Once I have completed my hadj to the Kaaba of Theory, I feel free to return to my unlightened groping on the thirtieth day of the merry month of May in the year of the Word made Incarnate nineteen and ninety-one, toward the Grand Communist Narrative and my half empty glass of Sauvignon. (Sorry for the touch of dialectic, which may enrage the adherents of the Small Narratives but, good Lord, how can one discuss the Grand Narrative without dialectic?)

"Your subtitles are postscripts. Why?"

"We tell the biography of our ideas in the genre of the postscript. We don't rewrite an old text—we add a new one to it. The latter explains the former. Prospective traveling as a retrospective journey. Phenomenological Rückfrage, if you like. Isn't this odysseous?"

But before continuing, I must define some of my main terms, you're right. (My Western Reader puts me on the back.) This explanation is true to the classics of Marxism-Leninism:

There lived a Reader in the West,
   For whom communism
   Meant both communism
   And socialism.
But for me, one who has been barbecued in the hell of socialism,
   Socialism
   Is not communism.
Socialism
   Is the first phase of communism,
   Whereas communism
   Is the second and true phase of communism.
Before falling, socialism
   (i.e., communism, part I)
   Had only reached the stage of "ripe" socialism,
Or, in other words, the phase of gradual transition from socialism
   To communism.
The party that guides the building of socialism
   Calls itself communist.
After the final goal of its destination—communism.

Logically, the party that buried Bulgarian socialism
   Calls itself socialist.
   Because its final aim is civilized capitalism
   Achieved through jungle capitalism.
   Oh, poor Reader in the West!

Third PS, May 1991—May 1997:
Telescopes and Microscopes; the Non-Aristotelian Lizard's Plot:
Tears in the Ink: Is There Communism in This Anticommunism?

Succeeding in a single country, as Lenin predicted, socialism and the Communist Party that identifies itself with it and its state in reality takes on the role of the mythical culture hero and demigurges, a role which socialism and the Party before that have had only in potential—in the theories of the proletariat as a class-in-itself, which will become a class for itself. The culture hero and demigurges has two major functions: (i) that of a Supernatural Being and, (ii) that of a Deus/Dea faber.

(i) The culture hero is an omnipotent Supernatural Being who wrenches the cosmos, the universe, order from chaos, nothingness, and the primal void. He divides the firmament from the waters, orders the celestial bodies and the seasons, and creates the first men and women. With these cosmic activities the culture hero, historically and semantically, develops toward God as a creator (in the case of the undeveloped socialist countries, God who creates ex nihilo).

(ii) The culture hero also teaches humans of crafts, hunting, and the arts, presents them with fire, the tools of labor, and cultivated plants; he or she regulates matrimonial rules, rituals, and holidays. With these craftsmanly and practical activities the culture hero acquires features of the epic hero. The Communist Party, when in power, and the socialist state proceed and mythologize themselves in the same two fashions. The first is ideal and changes reality by creating meanings. The second is material and transforms reality practically.

(i) The divine meanings in the cosmogony of the Communist Party are most perspicuous in the humanities. In philosophy and ideology, unsophisticated rationalism takes the upper hand and starts preaching social progress—in other words, changing reality according to a plan. In mythical terms, this means creating cosmos from chaos. Socialist realism as an artistic method stressing "the presentation of reality in its revolutionary development" (to refer to the famous definition coined at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934—or thereabout; with age memory starts to fail me) is the aesthetic analogue of philosophical rationalism. The "positive hero" in Bulgarian socialist prose fiction and the narrative arts (cinema, theater, TV serials) exists in several variants emulating the roles of the Party as a culture hero. The character of the Party secretary and, later, in the 1970s and 1980s, of the intellectual who
thinks about how "to mend the shortcomings and deformities of the System" (as the official criticism used to put it), are closest to the mythical god as an abstract force that creates in a magical way—ex nihilo or by word. The character of the engineer, the leader of a big socialist construction site, resembles the mythical craftsman. The socialist twins of Agent 007 remind one of the ingénue epic heroes who kill the chthonic—capitalist—monsters.

The generation of Bulgarian poets born around 1925–1935 is called the "April generation." This critical label connects these poets with the post-Chervenkovian era of Bulgarian socialism, which parallels the Soviet post-Stalinist "thaw": the Party plenum at which Chervenkov was replaced by Todor Zhivkov as a Party leader took place on April 4–6, 1956—or thereabout—did I mention supra that with age memory starts to fail me? See supra. Through these poets, the ordering spirit of the Party culminates in the domain of literature. They are the ones who, from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, imposed the excavator and the hoist as the main lyrical heroes in Bulgarian poetry and who invented the entrancing rhymic, "concrete—ferrocement."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Well, this picture of socialist art is a caricature illustrating my thesis of the omnipotence of the Grand Communist Narrative. But isn't this thesis also yours?"

"??"

"Don't you equate socialist art with socialist realism? Don't you impose the Soviet model of socialist art and realism over the rest of the socialist cultures—the cultures of the 'Socialist satellites,' as you astronomically express yourself? Don't you comfortably live with works that fit in the paradigm of socialist realism in Western culture but condescendingly mock the same paradigm in non-Western art? Don't you think that in cultural studies one needs not only telescopes but also microscopes? Does the Big Bomb mean Big Culture?"

The paradox of the Grand Communist Narrative is that its consolidation is its disintegration. The supremacy of the Grand Narrative consists in its ontological priority to the Small Narratives: they need it in order to exist themselves. In this sense, the culture of "ripe" socialism (1970s–1980s) is split: the Small Narratives try to outwit the Grand Narrative. The outmaneuvering is allegorically coded: the work says "apple," but the reader or viewer understands "orange." The culture of "ripe" socialism is a secret alliance of the Author and the Perceiver against the Censor. This alliance presents itself as a collaboration with the Censor. The Small Narratives try to pass for the Grand Narrative. This hide-and-seek strategy provides the existential content of this art, the exhilarating blessedness of always living on the edge between being silenced by the censor and being heard by the clandestine ally. The fact that the Small Narratives live in the guise of the Grand Narrative explains why after 1989 Bulgarian art did not produce the Great Dissident Oeuvre out of the drawer: this Oeuvre had already been publicized as allegorical Small Narratives. The Eastern freedom of allegorical speech is the counterpart of the Western freedom of speech. Bulgarian poetry, prose fiction, drama, and cinema during socialism are not solely different expressions of the Grand Communist Narrative but also allegorical Small Narratives. Here, however, I want to illustrate my point by bestowing voice on the silent art of the visual images.

During early socialism in Bulgaria—from the mid-1910s to the mid-1960s—in painting, the still life and landscape, genres that follow nature too closely, are superseded by the industrial landscape where the struggle with nature is underscored. Still, in the 1960s and 1970s, socialist art, which is hostile to modernism in principle, sub rosa reinvents some of the tenets of Bauhaus in the architecture of Bulgarian Black Sea resorts, while the monuments of the national heroes and revolutionaries of that time remind one of the copulent figures of Fernand Léger. In the 1970s and 1980s, the most resourceful and successful painters develop a style that is a hybrid of socialist themes and Western modernist modes of representation. The workers and peasants, for instance, are depicted in the fashion of Picasso's classical period from the early 1920s, or the industrial sites are painted with American abstract expressionism in mind. In the 1960s through the 1980s, the still life, the landscape, and private interiors are reintroduced under the guise of "chamber" art, a critical term of the time denoting more personal, even intimate, works using smaller canvas formats. The artist who wants to be officially noticed and praised executes a state commission and paints for the sanctioned exhibitions in the grand socialist style (the recognizable heroic type and topic are a must), whereas at his one-man or smaller shows he exhibits "personal" views in the form of landscapes, still-life paintings, and female nudes in interior settings.

The syndrome of the late socialist artist as his own Doppelganger culminated in the summer of 1989 in the case of Svetlin Rusev. Rusev started his career in the 1960s with impressive big-format works on historical and revolutionary subjects treated introspectively. By the 1980s, he had established himself as the most powerful figure in Bulgarian painting—not only through the quality of his art oriented both to official expectations (the large-scale paintings on heroic topics) and to connoisseurs ("chamber" art) but also through his key positions in the artistic and political hierarchy. In spite of that, in spring and summer of 1989, this pillar of the artistic orthodoxy confronted the communist dignitaries. A national campaign against Rusev was organized, he was kicked out of the Party, he lost most of his positions, and he fell into such disgrace that his colleagues were forced "from above" to convene meetings and ostracize him unanimously. But his colleagues who feared him when he was on the top defended him when he fell to the bottom. Svetlin (this name means "light") began to shine with the halo of an anticommunist martyr. Question: How can this paradox of the tyrant who becomes a martyr be explained? Answer: by the double nature of late socialist culture. In the culture where the Grand Com-
Benni Goodman

"Benni Goodman is pregnant with Small Communist Narratives, the Tyrants and paragons of socialist art are also the Martyrs and paragons of antisa-

It is only a small step from the 'ripe' socialist culture to post-communist culture—the Artist must contumeliously pretend or unfeignedly believe that he (or she or we or you or they or I) has never made Orthodox Art by his own will, that he was coerced for decades to paint or write this Bad Bad Bad Socialist Art, that he had been dragooned into holding cardinal artistic and political positions, that he was pressured to take the money for the state commissions and to indulge in the privileges of power. The plot of the triumphal birth of the Great Post-Communist Artist from the Great Late-Socialist Artist would have baffled Aristotle: the Martyr murders the Tyrant. The Small Narrative slays the Grand Communist Narrative. This plot was followed by most of the first-tier Bulgarian intellectuals who, by 1989, had established solid artistic and institutional résumés. Like lizards they bade their communist tails adieu and with dignity crawled into postcommunism.

"What about the younger intellectuals born from the 1940s to the 1960s?"

"I'm going to publish a separate article on that. I need publications for my vita, I need a job and tenure, you know. I'm wondering why I have put so many ideas in one single article instead of peddling them postscript by postscript . . . ."

"Because you, the East-European intellectual, rave about the social mission of the writer. You write and cry; you mix the ink with tears. You put all your 35 years on 35 double-spaced pages, courier, and rise them in the sky as a holy goyafon. You think that you'll be seen and heard. Wrong, buddy! Forget your mawkish East European naïveté and write not to be read but to be published. And, by the way, shorten your paper to 7,527 words and add a bibliography of some 40–50 titles."

By now even the apprentice in semiotic symbolism should have figured out that the difference between late communism and early postcommunism is one of nuances, not of essence, because the mentality and culture of these two oddly parallel eras are both forms of allegorical signification. (Watter, another bottle of wine, please, and no bits of cork this time! In Sauvignon veritas!)

(ii) The second role of the Party, Deus/Doe Faber—the creator in his form as a craftsman or artist—can be seen most clearly in the practical field. In the Party programs—the fairy-tale version of the Grand Communist Narrative—the economy is always thought of as developing at an accelerated pace and on a huge scale. In Bulgaria, Party leaders dream of building "the largest plant in the Balkan peninsula," while their Soviet masters build industrial complexes that are "the biggest in the world." During socialism every city in Bulgaria acquires a badge of practical creativity, which, as a rule, is an industrial construction. In the ideal case, the human settlement is a workshop. Nikola Vaptisarov, a great poet who was shot by the fascists in 1943, by drawing on some modernist ideas, expresses this notion in the following way: "Shite strom zavod za chivota!" ("We will build a factory for life!"). In the 1950s, his poetic dream became a reality:

the industrial city of Dimitrovgrad (the City of Dimitrov) was built in the middle of the fertile Thrace Valley. In this unique case, the human settlement, industry, and the sacred name of Georgi Dimitrov, the hero from Leipzig in 1934 and the country's first communist leader, coincided.

Now, once we are done with the two major roles of the Party and the socialist state, let us turn to four bagatelles (To your health, Svetlana! My God, time flies so fast when we're together . . . .): (i) the socialist cosmogony; (ii) the socialist organization of time; (iii) the socialist organization of space; and (iv) the post-communist peripetia of (i), (ii), and (iii).

(i) Every myth tells how something came into existence. Cosmogony, which tells how the cosmos came into existence, enjoys particular prestige because the creation of the world precedes all others. This is why cosmogony is a model for all myths of origin. The major function of the myth is to provide exemplary models for all rites and all meaningful human activities. Hindu ritualists in "Sāpata Brahmana," for instance, say, "We must do what the gods did in the beginning."

(ii) The sacred time of myth is the time when the Event—the creation of cosmos—took place for the first time. Socialism invents its own calendar. The axial moment in it, the moment in reference to which every other event is dated, is the point when the Communist Party comes to power. This is also the sacred temporal point in the new calendar and the new national holiday. This holiday is a ritual repetition, a relarming of the creation myth of socialism.

(iii) The center of mythical space is the temple, the man-made cosmic mountain, the navel of the world from which creation started; the Temple stands for the life principle in its fundamental level. The axial point in the socialist space is the Party House or the Party Palace in the center of the capital. It imitates and supersedes the former national center: the national cathedral. In the exemplary case, the new sacred center coincides with the traditional one—the Palace of Congresses in the midst of the Kremlin churches in Moscow. The urban architecture of socialism in many respects rests on this mythological basis. The Party House in Sofia epitomizing the urban thinking of early socialism emulates the basic characteristics of the national cathedral St. Alexander Nevski, which stands five or six hundred yards from it; the orientation East-West, the tripartite vertical structure symbolizing the three dimensions of the cosmic mountain—the chthonic, the human, and the divine—and a "face" that, when one sees it, rises as a cosmic mountain. The organization of the whole public space follows similar principles. Every city and village,
every office and classroom have their own sacred centers: the local Party House, the monument of the local communist heroes, and the portrait of the Party Leader.

In late or “ripe” socialism (Svetlana: "Ripe for rape! . . . ’), the second urban center of Sofia became the People’s Palace of Culture (opened in 1981), based on opposite architectural principles: open straight-line park spaces in the central part (implying continuity with the straight Party line) but closed curved-line park spaces on several levels in the periphery (implying the Party’s maneuvers in deferring the arrival of communism; the recognition of a certain privacy and opacity in the lives of the socialist subjects). The building lacks a “face”; it does not rise like a cosmic mountain but respects the mountain of Vitosha behind it (one of the initial projects was for a high edifice that would have hidden Vitosha). The interior is subdivided into numerous seemingly disorderly scattered secluded spaces (cf. the “chamber” act). The walls are covered with frescoes and tapestry, and they revive the Romantic spirit of empathy through art (cf. the intimate interiors).

(ecxxexxxviii) (Svetlana, we’re running out of time, and I jazzyed my story up. I must have skipped some numbers. . . . Can you follow me?) Without bearing in mind the cosmogonical and the temporal-spatial aspects of the Grand Communist Narrative, it is impossible to understand what happened after 1989. The most notable and noticeable change in the temporal sphere is the return of the precommunist national holiday, March 3rd, the day on which the third Bulgarian state was officially born in 1878 after the liberation from the Ottoman yoke (1566–1878). September 9th, the day when Bulgaria overthrew fascism under the “leadership of the Communist Party and with the decisive help of the Red Army” — to employ the formula of pre-1989 history textbooks — which during socialism was the national holiday now remains a holiday solely for leftists (who, in recent years, are more and more ashamed to celebrate their victory over fascism).

The most grandiose expression of the temporal shifts is the resurgence of old — and often obsolete — values immediately after 1989. In the early 1990s, politicians emerged with speeches spelled as if the orthographic reform in 1945 had never taken place. After a short spell of political sentimentalism, these jazzyed back into oblivion. But before that their ideas, smelling of mothballs, fueled the initial triumph and collapse of the newly hatched Bulgarian democracy. When the first democratic and anticommunist Parliament and government of the SDS (the Union of the Democratic Forces) took power in 1991, its activity was guided by nostalgic appetites. Their main exploit was restitution for property lost under socialism by a small bunch of former real-estate owners. The hopes for a large-scale positive change were dashed and the SDS ignobly lost power, while the socialists (the former communists) took over.

The Socialist/Communist Party itself was torn apart between the past and the future. The first act of its rejuvenation was a reverential excursion in its own past. The Party excoriated its communist skin and started radiating the primal beauty of socialist— even social-democratic! — ideals as they were (ostensibly) formulated at its founding congress in 1891. Between 1990 and 1994, several factions existed in the Party, which veiled the struggle for power within the Party with the democratic principle of “free debate.” Early in 1994, the three major factions published drafts for a new Party program that was to be compiled from the best of every draft (Svetlana: “How?”). That was the unmistakable syndrome of the nostalgia for the Grand Communist Narrative that now, the socialists thought, could be created not autocratically “from above” but democratically “from below” (Svetlana: “Yeah, right!”). The project of the first faction, the pragmatic majority of seasoned apparatchiks, was a highbrow raimorale of leftist slogans spelled out with rightist phraseology borrowed from the West. Its authors were scholars in the Party’s Center for Strategic Research. (No wonder, the head of the Center was the same sapientissimus vir who authored the Party program documents before 1989. His transition from “ripe” socialism to postcommunism also followed the plot of the lizard.) In the first draft, the catchword was “relative.” The document “scientifically” predicted that Bulgarian capitalism would have a human socialist face — another Party linierick. The second faction, the minority of idealistic intellectuals attracted to politics by the noble cause of instructing and leading the nation in times of trouble, offered a draft whose pivot was “dialectic.” It enacted post factum the spirit of Soviet perestroika. (Zhivkov ruled from 1956 to 1989, and this explains why in Bulgaria there was no perestroika in the Soviet sense — perestroika presupposes a change of Leader. In Bulgaria, the plot of the lizard was the rule. Zhivkov erected his own monument in the early 1980s as well as a monument to tovarisch Brezhnev, but when Gorbachov came to power the sly Bulgarian leader dismounted his and Brezhnev’s monuments. The monuments, like the lizard’s tail and tale, were guilty for the “aberrations” from the “true” principles of communism. Cut off the tail, retell the tale, destroy the monument, and rule as a reborn post-communist leader! In memoirs published in 1997, shortly before he passed away in 1998, Zhivkov reveals that from the very start of his rule he knew that Marxism was nonsense but had no other choice but to keep silent. Thus, the epiphany of the venerable fighter for the ultimate triumph of communism all over the globe illuminates the peculiarity of Bulgarian Marxism: it was not of the ilk of Karl, but of Grouch!) The third faction, a cohort still living in the olden days, stuck to the formula of “class struggle.” This draft prophesied that the future battle against Bulgarian capitalism and world imperialism would be a resplendent repetition of the past victories of the proletariat. The drafts were Small Narratives, and no amount of spunk under the sun was able to lump them together in a new Grand Party Narrative. When the first faction regained power in 1994, the program project was abandoned.

During socialism and immediately after 1989, the past was also yearned for as the time of true spirituality — only in times of atheism does religion have a
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virtual immortality. The Patriarch was condemned as a communist collaborator, and a group of high clergy proclaimed themselves the new Holy Synod unmarrined by the communist leprosy. For the first time in more than ten centuries of Christianity, Bulgaria had two Orthodox churches. By that time industrial output had decreased by 50 percent compared with 1989 but the number of the Patriarchs had increased by 100 percent—an optimistic index of spiritual growth. The battle for the true faith took place in the center of Sofia. The holy fathers of Synod A, with white beards flying in the air, led a gang of (bruised-) intoxicated believers against their opponents barricaded in their headquarters across the square. Half an hour later, the holy fathers from Synod B, with white beards flying in the air, counterattacked and dragged the loot (inkpots, candles, saucepans, etc.) back into their fortress. (The precious icons and goblets were smuggled out of the country by naughty parishioners for hard currency.)

“And I stood in the middle of the square, but I beheld no seven angels with seven trumpets, only seven paparazzi from seven tabloids. And no mountain or island was moved out of their places, only an hundred and forty and four thousand children were dancing with the Californian missionaries, and were singing with a loud voice: ‘O Lord, I love you, yeeeeeaaaaah!’ ”

In the spatial domain, the battle with the Grand Communist Narrative was even more spectacular. First, the sacred urban center of Sofia was switched from Ninth of September Square, which is in front of Dimitrov’s mausoleum, back to the square around the national cathedral, St. Alexandr Nevski—the meetings of the SDS started and still take place there, whereas the socialists prefer to meet in the park of the People’s (now renamed National) Palace of Culture, the epitome of “ripe” socialism.

Next, in August 1990, the Party House was set on fire in mysterious circumstances. In the mutual accusations between the socialists/communists and the anticommunists/democrats (“red” references to the fire in the Reichstag in 1933 and “blue” retorts alluding to the Molotov Ribentrop pact in 1939), nobody perceived that this was a symbolic incineration of the previous temple of national life. Soon after that the Party House, the People’s Palace of Culture, and the mausoleum lost their sacred status. The armed guards—together with Dimitrov’s mummy—disappeared. The white limestone walls of the mausoleum were covered with motley inscriptions, the whitest of which read, “This is the largest public shitter [kenef] in the Balkan peninsula.” In the late 1990s, the mausoleum was blown up. Boom! BOOOMM! BOOOOOOMMM!!!!! The Party House, a phoenix bearing the scars of the fire, became a place where grannies and their grandchildren watched Disney movies and drank Pepsi. The Palace of Culture, in good biblical tradition, was flooded by merchants of suspicious goods from the neighboring Balkan countries. Ninth of September Square, a pedestrian mall until 1989, was turned into a parking lot by the first SDS mayor of Sofia. The portraits of the forever-young frowning Party Leaders were superseded by posters of forever-healthy macho cowboys smok-

ing “ONLY MARLBORO” and forever-happy negligence gals who “NEVER SUFFER CONSTIPATION, WOW!” From Big Brother to Big Burger!

Third, all monuments—socialist and presocialist—were also profaned. Memorials were ruined by angry democrats, by smart gypsies earning a buck by selling the head or the arm of a bronze hero for recycling, or by studious teenagers exercising their English by writing with spray cans on the granite, “FUCK OFF!!!”

“BLEEP!!!”

“In the beginning of postcommunism was the English Word, and the English Word was not the To-Be-or-Not-to-Be Word or the Declaration-of-Independence Word, but the Four-Letter Word. I, the English Tutor, am guilty for the fact that my Bulgarian students learned what a Big Mac is but didn’t learn what teamwork is; I am guilty for the fact that my students learned where Palm Beach is but didn’t learn where Silicon Valley is; I am guilty for the fact that my students learned who Michael Jackson is but didn’t learn who Abraham Lincoln is. All forces of History are my fault!”

The Grand Communist Narrative struck back as a Grand Anticommunist Narrative. As Marx (Karl, but why not Groucho as well?) used to say, atheism is a negative repetition of religion.

Fourth PS, May 1992—April 1997:
The Dinosaur as the Doubting Thomas; the Empty Glass; Everlasting Camaraderie

It would have been wonderful if the cosmogony of the Communist Party and the socialist state had perished together with the social and political reality that gave birth to it and to which, reciprocally, it gave birth. Alas, the postcommunist man continues to be a captive of this myth even when the socialist reality is no longer real. This man cannot distinguish between the cosmos of the Communist Party and the cosmos in general. The principle of his thinking is pars pro toto—he believes that the Party is the whole. For the socialist man, the Party is the cosmos and the cosmos is the Party. That is why when the Good Party Leader passes away, the tears of his socialist subjects give birth to rivers deeper than the Nile. And, conversely, when the Bad Party Leader falls from power—like Stalin, Brezhnev, or Ceausescu—this automatically becomes a social revolution. In both cases, what passes away is not the concrete person but the Party, its order, its cosmos. This explains why the socialist man has an apocalyptic vision of social change: the fall from power of the Communist Party is not thought of as a catastrophic solely of the Party’s cosmos—which is one of the many possible cosmoses—but the end of the cosmos as such, the Apocalypse.

The myth of the Communist Party as a culture hero sanctifies the triangle Leader-Party-Cosmos, and it turns its three constituents into complete syn-
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omnus. This tripartite unity is the last, but most powerful, lever through which the communist or the reformed Socialist Party controls the ex-socialist man. In Bulgaria, immediately after the fall of Zhivkov on November 10, 1989, the general secretary of the Party and chairman of the State Council—while the communists were still in power, however—Party propaganda threatened that if the Party fell from power, there would inevitably be a civil war.

The myth of the Party as a culture hero, when taken as "true," is the dinosaur decease of the ex-socialist man. But this man is also a doubting Thomas: he must see with his own eyes the new nonsocialist cosmos in order to be convinced that, besides the cosmos of the Communist Party and state, there are other possible cosmuses. The problem with the new cosmuses in the ex-socialist countries is that they are carnivalesque, reversed, oxymoronic, and unconvincing qua cosmoses. (The German term for the transition from socialism to postcommunism and from DDR to DRB—die Wende—is an excellent expression of this new carnivalesque cosmos.) Because of this the socialist parties, which generously promise "capitalism with a human face"—the ideological counterpart of the perestroika slogans of "socialism with a human face"—are back in power after a short spell of democratic rule in the early 1990s. (Svetlana: "These dudes swing both ways!") The nostalgia for the communist cosmogony is a hermeneutic paradox: in his future, the ex-socialist man sees only his prejudices from the past, that is to say he perceives his new capital cosmos as his old socialist cosmos. The outcome of this dinosaur schizophrenia is a dinosaur outcome.

"I emptied my glass, Svetlana paid the bill, and we rushed to her place. Our flesh shivered under the burden of urgent questions..."

"Jeez, now I understand you really well! Dialogue, my friend, let's keep up our dialogue! So you were jazzed to jazz him?"

"Uh... Svetlana is... is a woman, you know..."

"Oh, I missed that... Sorry..."

The Grand Communist Narrative struck back. As they say, to repeat is to negate oneself. From 1994 to 1997, the socialists/communists irrevocably ruined Bulgaria and their backers, the good old doubting Thomases, started to die of malnutrition, exhaustion, lack of affordable medical help, and despair. Why do the scientists still iterate that they have but hypotheses about the extinction of the dinosaurs?

"Hello, Svetlana... No, I'm not in Sofia... from Swingville... America, America... And how are your parents?... Yes, I sent them the medicine... Of course I remember the faded ink inscription on the yellowish, oblong photograph that we, in our indecent curiosity, discovered in the wallet of your father: 'To comrade Rasho—a sign of everlasting camaraderie. His comrade Liuba. September 9, 1944.' Kiss Auntie Liuba and Uncle Rasho for me!... No, not miss but kiss!... Yes, yes, I sent you Songs for Swingin Lovelies... Svetlana, dear, Slüchniebe... Operator! Operator!! Damn it!..."

Fifth PS, March 1997:
The Russian Renaissance; Divine and Demonical Commercials; 100,001 Dalmocrats

Soliloquy of the pious and holy Maximus the Greek on his deathbed written down by his humble pupil Big Bando of Clarinetburgh, a wretched sinner and a man of little understanding: 'And when I, as a young man, arrived in Muscovy from Constantinople that had fallen to the pagan Turks for its sins, the Grand Prince Ivan III invited me to his palace. And he asked me, 'What is going on in the world?' And I told him, 'The earth is round, and a man named Columbus has discovered America.' The Grand Prince didn't believe me, and Metropolitan Macarius condemned me as a heretic. And I was chained and exiled to the Volokolam Youth. And I wrote a letter of repentance, and Macarius allowed me to return to Moscow. The Russians wore animal skins and didn't know Greek. And I decided to enlighten them, and I learned Church Slavonic and wrote many books in their own language. And Macarius said to me, 'You have translated the Psalms from Greek into Church Slavonic wrongly!' And he condemned me. And they put fetters on my ankles and sent me to Tver. And I again repented in a letter and was allowed to come back to Moscow. And there I wrote many books on Slavic grammar. The Russians didn't know anything about paleohistory, and used to say gorod and golova instead of grad and glava. And Macarius blamed me. 'You don't know South Slavic. The South Slav write gorod and golova just as the Russians do.' And this time I was exiled farther North. And I repented and returned to Moscow. And there I organized the first press in Russia, and when Macarius saw the first printed book he sniffed it in horror and said, 'This thing smells of sulfur, it is the work of Satan!' And the machines were burned down, and they put shackles on me again, and sent me still farther North where there were no men but only wild beasts and the things and places didn't have names. And I ate bark from the trees. And one day I was very lucky and killed a beast for food and in its belly I found a piece of parchment, and it read, 'Recite in the name of Thy Lord who created.' He heard this and ran to Khadija crying in horror, 'Cover me, hold me, hide me ' What was this? For the first time in my life I didn't know something. And I scraped the strange words off the parchment. And the ink was frozen and I wrote a letter to Macarius with my blood on the piece of parchment. And he pardoned me, and I came back to Moscow, and this time I organized the first Censorship for the Grand Prince. (And later the sons of the censors became the first Oprichniki of the great tsar Ivan the Terrible, God bless him!) And then Macarius and I collected in the twelve books of the Great Menology all the knowledge of the world and wrote that the earth was flat. And then we wrote 'The Book of Degrees, and portrayed all Muscovite Princes as men full of virtues pleasing the Lord.' And we burned the heretic books that stated otherwise and ordered the tongues of the unbelievers
to be cut off and thrown to the dogs. And the chronicler of the Grand Prince wrote, 'And the Renaissance commenced in Russia. Maximus the Greek brought it from Florence where he burnt Girolamo Savonarola at the stake.' And my letters of repentance were collected, and I became the inventor of the epistolary genre in Russian literature. And at the top was the letter I wrote on the strange parchment. And I said to myself, beating my golova against the wall: 'Maximus, Maximus, why don't you forget your orinate and convoluted hypotaxis? This is the speech of Satan! Start expressing yourself simply and in parataxis as in The Primary Chronicle.' And I stopped dreaming of the iridescent firmament of Aith, and the gray sky of Moscow became much sweeter to my heart. And the epiphany of old age enlightened the blindness of my youth. And I'm so grateful to die here praising the Lord. Glory be to God. Into Thy hands, oh Lord, I commit my spirit. Amen.'

Recently I showed my American students a Bulgarian film about a sculptor in the 1960s whose artistic career and personal life were ruined by a political joke. During our discussion, quite predictably, the students reiterated that the central issue in the movie was the lack of freedom of speech and expression under communism. I asked them whether they had seen any TV commercials. The answer, predictably again, was affirmative. We sketched the communicative models in a society where freedom of speech reigns and in a society where censorship reigns. On the right half of the blackboard we drew people with mouths but no ears. On the left we portrayed people with ears but no mouths. Freedom of speech versus freedom of hearing. In my pedagogic inexperience, I started pleading that if in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, this might have happened only on the left side of the blackboard. Had the Word been with God on the right side, in the next commercial Satan would have appeared with Another Word, most probably about the Deluge, promising to amend God's Imperfect Creation from the previous commercial—in a mere forty days, guaranteed!

The Small Narrative is a narrative born in the milieu of freedom of speech. Its final goal is to be heard and recognized among a multitude of other competitive Small Narratives. This is why its slogan is “political correctness.” Every Small Narrative is centripetally oriented—it is obsessed only with itself, and thus it does not threaten the status quo. Conversely, the Grand Narrative exists in the realm of freedom of hearing. Its ultimate aim is not to hear another Grand Narrative, because this is the end of both Grand Narratives. This is why its slogan is “political eructness.” The Grand Narrative is centrifugal, it envelops in its network the whole of social reality, and in this way it constitutes the status quo.

But the Grand Narrative and the Small Narratives are not absolute opposites. In both the postindustrial and the post-communist world, the Grand Narrative and the Small Narratives live in peaceful symbiosis. In the post-industrial world, the Small Narratives seem not to frighten the Grand Narrative of those in whose safes and computers the real power resides. The Small Narratives—through committees, institutions, foundations, departments, publishing houses, TV stations—are bred, multiplied, reproduced, propagated, procreated, proliferated, spawned, cloned, and crowned. In my third postscript, I suggested that the Small Narratives in “ripe” socialism try to pass for the Grand Communist Narrative by means of elaborate allegorical techniques. Conversely, the Grand Postindustrial Narrative tries to pass for Small Narratives through intricate sponsoring techniques.

When one enters a postindustrial country, he or she is kindly invited to fill out a special form at the airport. Side A explains that everybody—no matter what one’s racial, sexual, ethnic, gender, etc. characteristics (i.e., no matter what one’s Small Narrative)—is welcome. On side B the visitor is warned that the entrance of members of a Communist Party is forbidden (no smugglers of a Second Grand Narrative, please!).

Once hot-blooded Bulgarian democrat visited the postindustrial world in order to specialize in social and political sciences. As a studious novice, he began his education at the airport by carefully reading the aforementioned form and taking copious notes. After his specialization, the democrat returned to Bulgaria and applied his Western expertise there. Through certain complicated legal procedures he proved that the Socialist/Communist Party was, in fact, illegal because it had never been properly founded in 1891. Therefore, this Party had never existed at all. Alas, the enthusiastic apprentice of democracy and analytic philosophy was too late in his struggle against the Grand Communist Narrative. In the post-communist world, the Grand (Anti)Communist Narrative, nurtured by the deep social practices and traditions and hidden by multitudinous bubbly Small Narratives, was already ruling in the guise of a socialist-capitalist-criminal-democratic social order. The fellowship of the Bulgarian democrat was for only two years of foreign study—a period too short to learn that a Grand Narrative cannot be superseded by Small Narratives but only by Another Grand Narrative (helas, professeur Jean Francois!).

“So what has been going on in Bulgaria since 1989?”

“I’d like someone to ask me what’s been going on in the Bulgarians since 1989. Kierkegaard used to say that in Hegel’s system there was a place for everything but the individual. Sartre, following in Kierkegaard’s wake, grafted existentialism onto Marxism to make the latter truly human. Vapisarov, in the early 1940s, addressed History in this way:

Shte khvanesh konturi me samo,
a vitre, znam, shte bude prazno
i niama nikoi da razkazva
za probsta chovekshka drama....
a nadahta minka nenapista
sama v prostranstvo shte skita.

You will sketch only the contours
But inside, I know, will be empty
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And nobody will narrate
The simple human drama....
And our unwritten suffering
Will wander alone in space.

One day in January 1997, the major American papers had stories about Bulgaria on their front pages: the streets of Sofia were filled with hungry and angry people clattering pots and pans, the socialist/community rulers were agonizing, democracy was advancing with flying banners, history was being made in this Balkan and Balkanized corner of the Earth. A week later I received a short letter from my parents, with no jazz. ‘Dear son,’ they wrote, ‘today we were at the meeting in Aleksandar Nevski Square. There were many beautiful speeches. At the end, the leader of the democratic opposition said, “Those of you who refuse to jump are communists!” And 100,000 people started jumping for five minutes. We didn’t jump. We are well and hope that you are well, too. And don’t write too much, spare your eyes. Kisses, Mom and Dad.’ I’m sure that had my old-fashioned parents known what performance art meant, they too would have jumped like two young gazelles on their arthritic legs. What would you do, my Western Reader, my democratic Bruder who swing impeccably in all sort of performances and jog five miles a day, if you were in the square?”

Swingville, 1990–1997

NOTE

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