сидит на перевернутом мертвом коне. Таким образом, говорит Пейсис, скульптор хотел показать, что святой Вацлав утратил свою силу и значение в современном чешском обществе (С. 240).

Разбирая подобные сюжеты в хронологическом порядке и опираясь на широкий пласт источников, автор провела фундаментальное исследование "мест памяти" Праги. Монография "Панорама Праги: национальная память и святые места в XX веке" показывает, что коммеморация в Чехословакии в XX в. была поставлена на службу политическим целям – утверждению чехословацкого (чешского) национализма. Пейсис с успехом удалось проанализировать то, как в сложные периоды чехословацкой истории (образование государства в 1918 г., период немецкой оккупации, строительство советской модели развития) актуализировались разные памяти, определявшие новую идентичность властей и общества и новые планы на будущее. Таким образом, книга предлагает версию истории чешского и словацкого народа в XX в. через призму исторической памяти. Монография Пейсис представляет ценность для исследователей национализма в странах Центральной и Юго-Восточной Европы, а также для тех, кто занимается изучением пространств памяти данного региона.

Serguei Alex. OUSHAKINE

Museutopia: A Photographic Research Project by Ilya Rabinovich, Ed. Huub van Baar and Ingrid Commandeur (Amsterdam: Alauda Publications, 2012). 184 pp. ISBN: 9789081531405.

In the past decade, visual arts have emerged as one of the most effective forms of engagement with the remains of the Soviet past. From online photo collections of Soviet memorabilia[1] to critically acclaimed film documentaries[2] and catalogs,[3] these visual projects relentlessly bring back images and representations of the period that in the early 1990s seemed to have vanished irrevocably. It would be wrong to

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[1] See, for example, the Web blog Objects of Soviet Life/Predmety sovetskoi zhizni, http://soviet-life.livejournal.com (last visit: December 31, 2012).

[2] Vitaly Mansky's Gagarin's Pioneers (aka Nasha Rodina, 2006) would be the primary example of this trend: http://manski.ru/kino/index.php?id=rodina (last visit: December 31, 2012).

[3] See: Born out of Necessity: 105 thingumajigs and Their Creators' Voices, from the Collection of Vladimir Archipov. Moscow, 2003; 100% Ivanovo. Agitatsionnyi tekstil 1920-kh–1930-kh – iz sobraniia Ivanovskogo gosudarstvennogo istoriko-kraevedcheskogo muzeia im. D. G. Burylina. Moscow, 2010 (http://1p.fondpotanin.ru/projects/agittkani/. Last visit: December 31, 2012); Michael Idov (Ed.). Made in Russia: Unsung Song of Soviet Design. New York, 2011.

dismiss these projects as merely nostalgic. Yet it would be just as wrong to ignore a significant affective charge that authors and audiences of these postsocialist explorations of socialism invest in material and visual traces of recent history. Often done outside the frameworks and conventions of professional history, these assemblages of representations usually offer neither coherent narratives, nor convincing interpretations, nor consistent critique. Instead, they pile up one piece of historical evidence after another, creating in the end fascinating catalogs of symptoms of socialism, which have yet to be decoded.

The book under review is an interesting example of this emerging trend. Like many other publications of this genre, *Museutopia* is also a catalog. It offers us an important glimpse into a process of active manufacturing of the past by tracing a dizzying transition from "a Communist monoculture" to the chaotic bricolage of post-Communism (P. 39). A set of 135 annotated photographs by Ilya Rabinovich meticulously preserves for future generations the content of Moldova's major national museums put on display in 2008. Room after room, Rabinovich followed the exhibits in order to retain the historical narratives created

by the curators. These photos are as informative as they are dispassionate and distant. Rabinovich is no Rodchenko: he does not manipulate his camera in order to modify the situation visually. The photos offer no unusual angles or other photographic devices able to "reveal" the photographer's message. Instead, to convey a sense of documentary objectivity, the photographer heavily relies on front- and three-quarters shots that present museums' interiors with almost anatomic precision.

This cool distancing is even more striking given that at the core of *Museutopia* is a personal quest. In 2008, thirty-three-year-old Ilya Rabinovich, an artist who resides in Amsterdam now, visited Chişinaú, hoping to reconnect with the city of his birth, which he left in 1973 with his parents for Israel.[4] As Rabinovich recollected it, for him and his fellow immigrants from the USSR, growing up in Israel meant forgetting, ignoring, or denying his (Soviet) past in order "to become the desired 'true Israelis'" (P. 21). It was precisely this formative traumatic struggle with masking his "Russian accent while talking in Hebrew" (P. 21) that ultimately resulted in Rabinovich's attempt to restore links that were cut out from his biography and identity during the years of assimilation in

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[4] Some background information about Ilya Rabinovich and his projects is available on these archival sites: http://ilyarabinovich.blogspot.com and http://www.ilyarabinovich.com/pages/000001.html (last visit: December 31, 2012).

Israel and elsewhere. Rabinovich's search for his own past was as predictable as it was unusual: to alleviate the pain of "having no history," he did not just visit the country, he examined Moldova's national museums. At least initially, the nation's history was seen as a potential explanation for the individual's biography. Rabinovich explains: "…by means of my artwork, I try to track traces of the past. They are still there, but they are hidden and need to be revealed and recontextualized carefully. … At the same time, however, I tell an alternative story about Moldovan national identity. …My hope is that by sharing the process I have been going through, others might get another, more ambivalent and less unproblematic picture of the places where they live" (Pp. 17, 20).

It is precisely this conflation, this amalgamation of two planes that makes Rabinovich's project both interesting and important. The personal and the political become inseparable here. Yet this amalgamation is of a peculiar sort. The two planes are brought together by their profound embeddedness in the operation of historical erasure: returning to Moldova to discover his

roots abandoned twenty-six years earlier, Rabinovich faced the state-sponsored industry of "organized forgetting" (P. 9). As in Israel a few decades earlier, the Soviet past in contemporary Moldova was plastered over by new languages, codes, and accents. Rabinovich's hopes of finding traces of his family's history were quickly displaced by a research interest in documenting the ghostly presence of Moldova's Communist past in its museumified history. As he puts it: "Photographing museum exhibitions from the angle of the pasts they hide, I try to… challenge the official narrative of the country" (P. 20). In *Museutopia*, the individual's trauma of a life without accessible origin meets a nation's preoccupation with creating voids and absences in the history of its own formation.

By photographing collections of major museums in Moldova's capital,[5] the artist documented a post-Communist edition of the institutionalized history available in this newly independent state. In 1991, all the museums went through a serious change. A few of them were permanently closed (for instance, the Museum of Gregory Kotovsky and

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[5] The book includes photos from the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, the National Museum of History and Archaeology, the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Glory of Labor Museum of the Union of the Public Transport Workers, the former Museum of Friendship Among the Peoples, the former Museum of Gregory Kotovsky and Sergei Lazo, the former Museum of the Chişinaú Underground Publishing House of the Leninist Newspaper Iskra.

Sergei Lazo now hosts a college of choreography and ballet). Others were significantly repurposed (the former Museum of the Chişinaú Underground Publishing House of the Leninist Newspaper *Iskra* is occupied by the editorial offices of the newspaper the *Communist*, published by the Moldovan Communist Party). In some cases, new museums moved into previous headquarters of the Soviet party and state authorities. Rabinovich follows this transformation, presenting photographs of places with erased, disguised, or ignored biographies.

To emphasize the displaced presence of the socialist past, the artist creates a striking interhistorical linkage by interspersing photos of current exhibits with archival images of the museums' interiors from earlier periods. For instance, a 1953 photo of the entrance hall in what is today the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History depicts a marble sculpture of Joseph Stalin, surrounded by emblems of Soviet republics and a carpet floating in the air that depicts an isolated map of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. The current exposition is not devoid of a political message, either; but it is structured very differently. The figure of the Communist leader is, of course, gone, yet busts of Prince Stefan the Great, the defender of Christianity, and Dimitrie Cantemir, twice crowned (philosopher-) prince

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of Moldova, pointedly suggest a welcoming ideological alternative and punctuate the unfolding of the historical narrative from the Mesozoic Era (in a nearby hall) to the display of horse-ranching equipment later on.

Titled *Nature–Man–Culture*, this permanent exhibit (unveiled in 1994) merges nature and nation together in yet another interesting way: the central room of the Museum of Ethnography and Natural History contains nothing but four huge wall murals that depict the Apocalypses, with Moldova's identity being represented as "a kind of organic growth of the nation resulting from the cosmological development of the universe," to use the description of Huub van Baar, a research fellow at the Amsterdam school for Cultural Analysis, and a coeditor of the book (P. 37). The theme of the Apocalypses is picked up again in the museum's underground where the so-called Crisis Hall interweaves into one major epics of loss and suffering multiple stories about the disappearance of traditional folk crafts, various documentations of ecological pollutions produced by industries (and epitomized by a mummified two-headed calf, and bottles of pesticides), and a showcase of images of churches destroyed during Communist rule in Moldova.

For Rabinovich and other contributors to the volume, this trope

of self-victimization emerges as the main device for ordering and structuring Moldova's national history today. Perhaps more important is the ideological consequence of this frame: victimization functions as a particular representational strategy of self-evacuation from the available history, as a way of avoiding moral and political responsibility for what has happened. These new "black holes" that have been retrofitted in the recent past, as the editors of the book put it, "ambiguously but powerfully created the ground for new forms of cultural nationalism" (P. 10).

Erasure, in other words, acts as a promise of a new beginning. Self-alienation from history is also a form of self-induced oblivion, and photos of the permanent exhibit at the National Museum of History and Archaeology is good evidence of this. The former location of the Museum of Military Glory now suggests a new point in the nation's origin: today the front steps of the museum proudly exhibit a replica of the statue *Lipoaica Romei* (Roman Wolf), a gift from Romania to Moldova in 1991 as a symbol of their common Latin ancestry. Inside, however, the narrative is less streamlined. Soviet Moldavia's participation in World War II has given way to "a disturbing picture of the Moldovan people as powerless victims" caught between Stalin's regime and Nazi

rule (P. 151): a confused view of history is materialized as an incoherent collection of artifacts, in which belongings of Red Army soldiers are mixed with those of Romanian soldiers; possessions of prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau – with those of the Soviet Gulag. When the socialist past could not be erased or diluted, it was bypassed, ignored like a huge diorama *Iasi-Chisinau Operation* that presents the battle between the Soviets and the Germans in 1944. Left intact – its total size is more than 800 square meters – it has not been integrated in the overall narrative of the museum in any meaningful way.

These silences, erasures, and avoidance, as Rabinovich suggests, are crucial for understanding the "way history is manipulated to create a 'different' present" (P. 31). And the importance of *Museutopia* lies precisely in its effort to archive the uneasy process of inventing new traditions and imagining new forms of collectivity after the collapse of the USSR. Moldova's situation is, of course, hardly original in this respect. My own recent visits to museums of national history in Yerevan, Tbilisi, Minsk or Bishkek could provide a very similar picture. It is tempting to frame this "recursive turn to history" – as Stefan Rusu, an artist and curator puts it in the book (P. 161) – as an indicator of the crisis of national identity (and a few contributors to the book take this path).

Another possibility is suggested in a perceptive essay by Bogdan Chiu, though. What if the idea to build Moldovan national identity "upon a void, upon an absence," so clearly documented by Rabinovich's work, is nothing but a study of the increasing impotence of the museum as an institution capable of delivering a meaningful social, educational, and/or political effect (P. 171)? Could it be that this active "production" of missing links in the nation's history, this constant preoccupation with loss and absence is also a sign of the museum's own demise, a gesture of the museum's own self-distancing – both from history and from its audience? These questions remain pretty much unanswered in the book. But by pushing them to the fore *Museutopia* invites us to rethink the ability of the "military-museal complex" to play a crucial role in producing and sustaining national identities today.

Museutopia opens up a promising field of inquiry and form of research. Unlike the majority of recently published inventories of socialist memorabilia, the photos in *Museutopia* are accompanied by a series of reflections and interviews that helpfully contextualize the collected materials, eliciting meanings and associations that might not have been apparent otherwise. In fact, the photo collection is framed – literally and metaphorically – by two kinds of texts. The two interviews with the author conducted respectively by the Russian art-critic Victor Misiano ("The Gaze, Diaspora, and Trauma") and the Dutch scholar Huub van Baar ("Out of Place: Haunting Pasts, Withering Presents") precede Rabinovich's photographs. In both interviews, Rabinovich is prodded by his interlocutors into locating his project within different sets of references. Thus, Misiano – deeply steeped in the language of the visual theory of the 1990s – invited Rabinovich to think of his photographic research as an example of the diasporic gaze of a traumatized artist (P. 21). In turn, van Baar, informed by critical museum studies, pushed the photographer to contemplate the role of museumification in the nationalizing of history.

The two short essays that follow the photo collection are structured as an afterword, presenting somewhat opposite views. Stefan Rusu, a Moldova-born artist and curator, outlines in his "History on the Move," what is by now a well-familiar narrative, in which the rewriting of recent history is presented as a step – unavoidable if not necessary – on the way "towards a new 'European' identity" (P. 165). Writing from a different theoretical position, Bogdan Chiu, a Romanian cultural critic and theorist, in his complex essay "Modern Museum or Museum of Modernity," suggests reading Rabinovich's project not so much as the story of a par-

ticular national tradition but rather as an example of a much larger trend: a striving toward "historic inoccupation," a desire to maintain a subject position "at once on the border and between borders" (P. 177).

Taken together, the photos and the texts produce in *Museutopia* a refreshingly hybrid result: the visual documentation of documents, dispassionately performed by Rabinovich, is emotionally recharged in interviews and essays. Published by Alauda Publications, a new publishing house based in Amsterdam, *Museutopia* is a successful example of the productive cooperation of a thoughtful artist, innovative scholars, and adventurous editors. It would be great to see this type of intervention in the studies of post-Communist identity and history politics continue.

Ion MARANDICI

Kimberly Kagan (Ed.), *The Imperial Moment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). xii+250 pp. Index, Bibliographical references. ISBN: 978-0-674-03587-4.

Is America an empire? After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, critics of American foreign policy have often pointed out that the unilateral use of American military force on the world stage resembles the behavior of past empires. While the term is not part of the American mainstream narrative, this inconvenient question still awaits an answer. The very fact that the question on the imperial analogy is raised points to the transformation processes that marked the end of the Cold War, and namely, the expansion of American international influence. Whether the current world is a unipolar one or not, matters less, since scholars still struggle to grasp the nature of the hegemon. Internationally, the United States is still the dominant military power, outspending the next ten countries combined, but, domestically, political actors constantly refer to America's economic decline, and some of them ask for military spending cuts. This declinist theme is a recurrent one in American politics mirrored even in the 2012 presidential debates. Is the United States at the peak of its power on the global stage or is the unipolar moment gone?