

*Dystopia* exciting and useful reading for specialists in East European and Ukrainian studies, diplomats and development practitioners, as well as all those seeking to learn more about the political dynamics in the region.

**Maryna Rabinovych**

PhD Candidate

National I.I. Mechnikov University of Odesa

Sander Brouwer (ed.), *Contested Interpretations of the Past in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Film: Screen as Battlefield*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016. 187 pp.

For a long time now film has been present in the academic debate as an important source for memory studies and as an identity shaping tool. Film is an appealing but also challenging object of study, especially when it comes to its capacity as visual representation of the past. *Contested Interpretations of the Past in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Film: Screen as Battlefield* is a notable collection of post-conference articles dedicated to complex issues related to representations of the past in the Polish–Russian–Ukrainian memory triangle. The conference “Suffering, Agency, and Memory in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Film,” held in March 2012 at the University of Groningen, was itself a part of the research project “Memory at War: Cultural Dynamics in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine,” led by Alexander Etkind in 2010–2013. The volume includes contributions by scholars from a number of disciplines. Film studies, cultural studies, and media studies researchers as well as Slavists and anthropologists apply different methodologies and provide findings. The volume is an intriguing example of work in progress in post-socialist studies and is an inspiration for the debate on cinema as a tool, agent, and source in memory studies.

Although all nine chapters are very different, we can spot some key notions and phenomena which the authors circle around. One of the core problems tackled in the volume is the postcolonial perspective on the Central and Eastern European region (Lars

Kristensen, Mirosław Przyłipiak, Ewa Mazierska). The contributors to this volume successfully demonstrate that David Chioni Moore's influential argumentation about the applicability of a postcolonial perspective to Eastern Europe can be effectively used to describe the identity shaping process, as well as to illuminate several other concepts depicted in the movies discussed in their studies.

Trauma is another one of the central issues addressed in this volume. It is discussed from different perspectives here: as "foundation trauma" (Olga Briukhovetska); as a cultural trauma of the transition period, highlighted in the cutting-edge paper by Mariëlle W. Wijermars; and as postcolonial trauma, addressed by Mirosław Przyłipiak in his chapter covering Polish documentaries on the Smolensk plane crash.

Another very contested matter which the authors focus on is the issue of the historical truthfulness of cinematic representations of the past (Mazierska, Briukhovetska, and Wijermars). They draw our attention to some elements of representations that stray far from the narrative offered by documentary sources or by individual memory. Discussing cinema's relationship to "historical truth" (Briukhovetska), and cinema's "superiority to the official, depersonalized history" (Mazierska), scholars tackle the challenge of examining cinematic narratives about the past that may stand in opposition to source-based narratives.

Language features are another core problem discussed in the volume, especially when it comes to Ukrainian and Belarusian cinema (Vitaly Chernetsky, Olga Briukhovetska). For Ewa Mazierska, language is an element that allows a movie to be assigned a specific—national— narrative. However, as Lars Kristensen's chapter argues, the origins and character of cinematic representation may become more complicated when it comes to co-productions determined also by international financial support and influence. A number of questions regarding identifying cinematic representation as "national" still remain to be addressed. The cinema of the former Soviet republics poses particular issues here, especially when it comes to Ukraine, to mention the most striking example. Is a film made before 1991 a Ukrainian film, or a Soviet film? When it comes to these questions, the experience of the Eastern bloc countries

differs from those of the former Soviet republics, whose cinematic traditions raise a particular set of questions about change and (disputable) continuity.

An important topic, but one that is only covered briefly in this volume, is the contextualization of film production. The cinematic context and related governmental memory politics are relatively well examined here, for example by Sander Brouwer, but issues around reception and therefore the real influence of movies on viewers in the long term require further research. For instance, audience survey results are problematic to verify as the Internet has become the most powerful content sharing medium. Film reviews, examined by Ewa Mazierska in this volume, are only one part of a movie's reception and are limited to journalists' and film critics' opinions. They can be perceived as an interesting starting point for further media studies research connected with the debate on the past.

In this volume the authors tend to focus on the content of the movies, while methodological issues frequently remain unclear. The authors apply methodologies drawn from film studies, anthropology, and political science, while neglecting the conceptual approaches to film as historical source developed by Marc Ferro, Pierre Sorlin, and Hayden White. This seems to be a problem related to the mutual recognition of methodological achievements between different disciplines. Another issue relates to the use of Ukrainian-language sources. It would appear that this is not considered essential when analyzing Ukrainian film. This seems problematic, since drawing exclusively upon English- and Russian-language literature and sources on Ukrainian cinema while neglecting these available only in Ukrainian (as in the case of Brouwer's chapter) affects and may determine the interpretation. A minor shortcoming of this volume is connected also with the general problem of using internet sources. Some links provided in the footnotes have expired and are now unavailable.

As regards more general issues, the value of the detailed information about the historical background and social context of the main topic provided in each chapter cannot be overestimated. This aspect of the volume facilitates a useful introduction for a wider group of readers not necessarily familiar with this field of studies.

The volume can therefore serve to promote and inspire further research.

The lack of mutual recognition mentioned by Olga Briukhovetska in the case of Ukrainian and Belarusian cinematic representations of the past seems to be a much more general problem in the Central and Eastern European region. Further research with a view to bridging this gap would be very welcome. Ideally, this would include methodological work aimed at leveling out the proportion between film studies and other research fields, including history, political science, and media studies.

Perceiving screen as a battlefield, as this book's title suggests, is not the only option. Cinema may also become a contact zone and a way to overcome traumatic experience (as Mariëlle W. Wijermars argues in her chapter). Not just feature films, but also testimonies used in documentaries can serve this purpose. The question of whether cinematic representations will be used for reconciliation and not only as tools in memory wars remains open. This volume is certainly a valuable contribution to this debate and helps us to understand the processes whereby different narratives about the past are being established in the region.

**Olga Gontarska**

PhD candidate

The Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History  
Polish Academy of Sciences

Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 278 pp.

In this monograph, Moscow correspondent for the *Guardian* Shaun Walker examines the relationship between Russian national identity, as constituted in the Putin years, and recent political developments in the post-Soviet space. The author argues that a resurgent national idea, focusing on Victory in the Great Patriotic War, has promoted social unity and the return of Russia to the ranks of major world players. However, Walker condemns the problematic