

Sensuous (Re)Collections: The Sight and Taste of Socialism at Grūtas Statue Park, Lithuania

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ABSTRACT The present paper is about Grūtas, a Lithuanian park–museum featuring recuperated Soviet-era artifacts. This museum is examined as a locus of public memory where the nation's Socialist history is invoked through visual representations (recovered statuary) and by implicating the sense of taste ("Soviet" drinks and dishes served at the museum's cafe). The paper suggests that seeing the Socialist past at Grūtas activates memories of trauma and loss, while tasting that past summons up more nostalgic reminiscences. It is further argued that this museum constitutes a visual and gustatory critique of Lithuania's increasingly commodified

and “modernized” present. It is also proposed that collective memory in today’s Eastern Europe affords a productive ethnographic site in which to investigate the ongoing systemic transformations in the aftermath of Communist rule.

Who said we didn’t live well?
Like everyone else we ate, slept, and drank,
Lamented, laughed, and loved . . .
Who said we didn’t live well?

(Samuel Volkov, a Russian poet
reminiscing about socialism)

These memories were not simple ones; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. . . . He told me: “I alone have more memories than all mankind has probably had since the world has been the world.”

(Jorge Luis Borges, *Funes the Memorious*)

Introduction



After the demise of the socialist bloc in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, erasing the Communist past from collective memory became one of the most pressing preoccupations throughout Eastern Europe. In postsocialist Lithuania, forgetting the legacy of Soviet-Russian colonialism entailed very specific reconfigurations, or “reorderings,” of the public realm (Verdery 1999). Reclaiming differing spaces from the state and cleansing them, as it were, of Marxist–Leninist imagery constituted one strategy of forgetting the era of Communist rule that spanned almost five decades.

After the declaration of independence from the USSR, in Lithuania, as in many other Soviet republics, massive panels portraying robust workers and peasants were promptly taken down, red flags with images of hammers and sickles were folded, Lenin’s voluminous writings disappeared from library shelves and statues of various distinguished comrades were removed from the nation’s squares and parks.¹ By the mid 1990s, Lithuania’s post-Soviet landscape was thoroughly cleansed of all referents to disvalued socialist history. At the time, this landscape became increasingly dominated by slick billboards advertising Coca-Cola and Calvin Klein, McDonald’s and Mazda, SONY and Swatch among many other transnational brand names and their associated commodities.

While ideological insignia of the socialist past were out of public sight, socialism was not out of people’s minds. Reordering immediate environments by erasing all referents to an undesirable past may aid forgetting, but it does not guarantee instant and complete amnesia.

Letting go of the past is an inherently ambiguous and paradoxical process, one that hardly ever follows a straight trajectory toward a complete deletion of particular memories. Forgetting is often complicated and made problematic by recurrent moments of recollection. To put it another way, amnesia perpetually implicates memory and vice versa. These two features of consciousness coexist in a mutually constitutive and competing relationship – one is the dialectical partner of the other (Antze and Lambek 1996: xxviii–xxix; Davis and Starn 1989: 4; Terdiman 1993: 22).

In the late 1990s, after gathering dust for some time, the statues, busts and bas-reliefs of various renowned Party activists began to stir again. In 1998, a special parliamentary committee announced a nationwide competition for initiatives that would ensure careful recuperation and preservation of the “unduly forgotten” iconographic legacy of socialism. A former collective-farm administrator turned capitalist entrepreneur with a successful mushroom-pickling business, Mr Viliūmas Malinauskas, won the competition.

Over the next few years, socialist icons of every shape and size traveled from Vilnius and other cities and towns toward Grūtas, a sleepy village off a two-lane highway in south-western Lithuania. Executed in the style of imperial socialist realism, larger-than-life effigies of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, as well as countless other ideologues, activists, bards, heroes and heroines began to populate a wooded, swampy terrain of twenty hectares owned by the enterprising mushroom mogul. Behind the peaceful village where time seemed to stand still, Grūtas Park – “a museum of Soviet sculptures” (*sovietinų skulptūrų muziejus*) – was established in 2001.²

The park officially opened on April 1st – April Fool’s Day – suggesting that it was a “joke” of sorts and as such should not be taken too seriously (see below). The opening ceremonies attracted a crowd of several hundred visitors who were entertained by a popular actor impersonating Lenin and by a group of “pioneers” (*pionieriai*) – invited guests masquerading as members of the defunct League of Communist Youth identifiable by the triangular red scarves tied around their necks.

Not everyone, however, found the idea of Grūtas amusing or entertaining. The park ignited a fierce national debate which polarized Lithuanians into those who applauded this commemorative initiative and those who saw it as a sacrilegious and “criminal” act.³ Social memory hardly ever unfolds as a monologue. It is usually a heteroglossaic polemic animated by a multiplicity of remembering voices striving to be heard.

This paper is about Grūtas as a *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989) that recalls Lithuania’s socialist past in the increasingly commodified and transnational milieu of the so-called transition to capitalist modernity. Remembering and its alter-ego forgetting interest me here as situated social practices, that is as phenomena that are shaped by processes of historical change and which in turn shape those processes. I suggest

that memory as a practice and a generator of social knowledge (to remember is to know) affords a productive site in which to investigate and to better apprehend the ongoing postsocialist transformation with its many unintended and bewildering consequences.

Grūtas is also interesting as a site of commemoration where the period of Soviet rule is externalized, objectified and made meaningful by using predominantly non-verbal media of recollection. Specifically, this “museum of Soviet sculptures” is intriguing not only as a site of memory where the socialist past is made present through visual representations but also as a locus of commemoration that implicates the sense of taste. In other words, this museum makes it possible not only to see but also to savor Lithuania’s Communist past. Ethnographic in its approach, this paper attempts a “senso-memography” of Grūtas, one that insists on investigating sensuous recollections as “embodied within *persons*” who are “always part of dynamic living processes” (Howes 2003: 44; original emphasis).⁴

Using a broader temporal perspective, this paper begins with a discussion of the key features of public recall in Soviet Lithuania. Then it moves on to examine – empirically and theoretically – practices of remembering at the present post-socialist moment of unsettling systemic change. In the second half, I take the reader for a stroll through Grūtas – down the proverbial memory lane to the socialist past. The excursion concludes with a Soviet-style lunch at the museum’s cafe (*kavinė*). I pay particular attention to the manners in which differing artifacts displayed at Grutas, as well as dishes and drinks on offer at the *kavinė*, work to activate the sensoria of sight and taste as means for memorializing socialism. Finally, I reassemble the themes and arguments of this essay for a concluding discussion.⁵

(Un)making Memory in Socialism

According to the “scientific” reasoning of Party ideologues, socialism was an intermediary stage in humanity’s progression toward equality, justice and material prosperity – a utopian social order known as communism. This socioeconomic evolution was theorized as a natural and inevitable outcome of historical development on the global scale. In other words, the future of all socialist nations and eventually of the entire world was envisioned as inevitably Communist. Claiming that humankind had no other alternatives, paternalistic “people’s” states used this unilinear conceptualization of time to reproduce and reinforce their legitimacy (Davis and Starn 1989: 4; Kanef 2004: 8; Watson 1994:1–2).

While there was little doubt as to what the future held, the past was more problematic and as such had to be reconfigured to conform to Moscow’s ideological orthodoxies. Shortly after Lithuania lost its independence in 1940 its history was rewritten, many individual memories were silenced. As Edward Casey (2004: 25) has observed, “every revolution, no matter how radically it questions the official public memory of the ancien regime, immediately establishes ... a new version of such memory.”

In state-sanctioned historiography, for instance, one read that Lithuania, like the other Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia, was not forcefully annexed to the USSR but joined it “voluntarily” after a popular referendum supposedly revealed the people’s overwhelming endorsement of the geopolitical alliance with the Soviet Union. For another example, in “official” versions of history these nations were not occupied by the Red Army, but were “liberated” by it at the end of World War II, and so forth. Citizens who publicly questioned the socialist state’s faulty memory and dared to remember differently were subjected to severe reprisals (Skultans 1997; Kiaupa 2002; Kaneff 2004).

Memory under socialism was by no means “monologic” (Watson 1994: 2). Contesting the official accounts of history were multiple voices of counter-memory that recalled various unsanctioned pasts either via remembrances of particular historical facts or through practices perceived to represent tradition. In Lithuania, clandestine commemorations of February 16th (the date on which, in 1918, independence was regained from Russia, now National Independence Day), memoirs of the “golden age” between the two World Wars (1918–1939), reminiscences of the KGB atrocities committed after the Soviet invasion in the 1940s, illegal celebrations of Christmas Eve (*Kūčios*) and Easter are but a few examples of resistive remembering that persisted under socialism. In Soviet Lithuania, as in other Baltic republics of the USSR, this underground or “shadow” memory was central to national identification which was reproduced in the intimate settings of family and home, a domain largely off-limits to the intrusive state. During the socialist years, such domestic or “private” nationalism constituted a powerful counter-ideology directed against Moscow’s colonial regime.

The appropriation and reordering of various public spaces was an important means used by the state to manipulate the nation’s memory and history. Shortly after Lithuania’s annexation to the Soviet Union, removing all indices of the presocialist “bourgeois” past from the public domain was one of the top priorities on the Party’s ideological agenda. Marking “cleansed” public spaces with insignia of the new social order was an important tool for forgetting the “bourgeois” system that preceded it – statuary is an especially effective means in such endeavours. These strategies also helped establish and consolidate the regime’s hegemony.⁶

Anthropologist Katherine Verdery (1996: 39ff) has written insightfully about the ways in which the Socialist state appropriated and controlled people’s time. Compelling Socialist subjects into such activities as standing in long line-ups to obtain basic consumer goods, forcing them to participate in Party-sponsored mass celebrations, restricting employees’ workday schedules, issuing curfews and the like exemplify what she calls the “etatization,” or “statizing,” of personal time.

Various strategies employed by Communist regimes to usurp and manipulate public space, however, have received much less attention

in research concerned with everyday life in socialism. It was not only the daily temporal routines of labor, consumption or leisure that were “etatized” by the authoritarian system as a means of domination. For the authoritarian state, being in control of space was equally, if not more, important. It was precisely in “etatized” public places that socialism’s temporal hegemony was produced and sustained “for the good of the people,” as the rhetoric relentlessly proclaimed. In more metaphoric terms, to make and reproduce socialist time, the state needed a great deal of socialist space. Both were closely implicated in the politics of memory and forgetting.

City streets and village roads, squares and subway stations, classrooms and factory floors, restaurants and even chronically barren state-run stores are some of the public loci in which Marxist–Leninist temporality was manufactured and reproduced (Kanef 2004: 8–9). The Party’s complete monopoly over the public realm played an important role in forgetting the “backward” past, in legitimizing the regime’s existence in the present, and in envisioning a Communist future. After the demise of socialism, for most Lithuanians, as for many other East Europeans, reclaiming “etatized” space and time from the occupying regime signified that that regime was finally vanquished and that its presence became irretrievably past.

“A Feast of Remembrance” after Socialism

A salient feature of the ongoing “transition” from Marxist socialism to consumer capitalism in the European East is the emergence of a heightened historical and memorial consciousness. Throughout the region, multiple memories of differing national pasts – distant and recent – coexist with desires (and forebodings) of a “European, Western” future in an uneasy dialectic. In daily talk and political discourse, this future is usually envisioned *vis-a-vis* the continental alliance with the European Union as a supposed guarantor of prosperity and stability.⁷

An agent of the past, memory helps us create a sense of temporal continuity and interconnectedness between things gone by and things to be. But memory’s principal concern is the present. To put it in grammatical terms, reminiscences are primarily about “what is,” as opposed to “what was” or “what will be” (cf. Berdahl 1999: 206).

Anthropologist Rubie Watson (1994: 6) has written that “constructing the new is deeply embedded in reconstructing the old. There is ... nothing particularly novel in the idea that new environments produce ‘new pasts’.” Perhaps the production of such pasts acquires added urgency in social contexts where the present – “what is” – is perpetually unsettling and where the future is more disquieting than promising. The persistent preoccupation with the past in Lithuania, as in many other locales of Eastern Europe, might be construed as a response to the social upheaval and dislocation brought about by socialism’s demise. As Davis and Starn (1989: 5) observe, memory “is ... a substitute, surrogate, or consolation for something that is missing.”

For most Lithuanians, as for many other East Europeans, the postsocialist present is one of disillusionment, doubt and existential uncertainty. Many of my informants described their daily lives as lacking in meaning and purpose, as well as devoid of order and solid ontological grounding (cf. Skultans 1997). The themes of rupture and loss figured prominently in my informants' accounts of their everyday lives in "modernizing" Lithuania. Typically sceptical and cynical, many spoke of the ongoing postsocialist "Westernization" as a process of economic destabilization and socio-moral breakdown.

Just like forgetting, remembering entails specific reconfigurations of the immediate social milieu. Memory is a hands-on practice that entails the use of very concrete mnemonic media and their associated symbolic repertoires. Newly erected monuments celebrating Lithuania's ancient rulers, ceremonies and exhibits commemorating "heroic" fifteenth-century battles, reconstruction of family genealogies reaching back to the Middle Ages, recuperation of "tradition" exemplify some of those media employed in contemporary Lithuania. Often incorporated into the public spaces reclaimed from the socialist state – such as squares, streets, museums and the like – today images, discourses, and practices memorializing the nation's pre-Soviet history permeate much of the postsocialist existence.

Memories that under the Kremlin's rule were cautiously voiced among trusted family members and friends assembled around the kitchen table figure prominently in postsocialism in many different loci of the public realm: "unapproved rememberings are now the stuff of which new histories and new states are being created" (Watson 1994: 4). What constituted counter-memory under socialism, typically sustained in "kitchen communities" (Boym 1996: 165), today is the stuff of very public remembering and a rich resource for radical revisions of national historiographies. Invoked in personal memoirs, autobiographies and oral narratives, or objectified through individual collections of photographs, letters, personal belongings and the like, "my past" has been marshalled to reevaluate and rewrite "our past." In such recall, biographical accounts of one's life story become constitutive of broader discourses of collective remembering. In mnemonic activity, the personal is usually inseparable from the social – "individual memories are inextricably part of a shared network" (James 2003: 101).

The unraveling of the socialist bloc, in Watson's (1994: 6) words, unleashed a "feast of remembrance" throughout Eastern Europe. It is so refreshing to come across such a positive, indeed celebratory, approach to memory as the metaphor of feasting clearly implies. It seems that much scholarship concerned with mnemonic activity in social life has been governed by a paradigm that sees memory as a kind of disease. In history and sociology, in cultural and literary studies remembering is commonly conceptualized, implicitly or explicitly, as a disorder, disfunction, deviation, pathology or a disabling burden (see Stewart 1984; Terdiman 1993). Simply put, this implies that those who

remember too much are “sick.” Afflicted with a debilitating condition of consciousness these “patients” naturally require treatment. Invoking the Freudian legacy of psychoanalysis, memories have been likened to nightmarish dreams that haunt those who cannot let go of their morbid past.⁸

Rather than “medicalizing” memory as an individual or collective malady, I suggest that we think of it in more constructive terms. Andreas Huyssen (1995: 35) has observed that the resurgence of memorial practices in many locales of the contemporary world is “a sign of contestation . . . and an expression of the basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality, however they may be organized.” While persistent reaching back into the past might be viewed as an indication of existential angst and uncertainty in the present, we should not overlook memory’s potential to alleviate those states of disquiet. In other words, we should inquire into social remembering as both an indexical and instrumental practice. Memory is not only “a symptom of,” often it is also “a remedy for.”

Specifically with regard to postsocialist Eastern Europe, I suggest that we construe the ongoing accumulation and possession of memories as a strategy for generating a kind of symbolic capital. In this region of the world, where “hard” (or “real”) economic capital, and indeed modernity itself, remain perpetually elusive, the pursuit of the symbolic kind acquires special importance (see Verdery 1999: 33). None of my informants talked about memory in the negative terms of burden, disfunction or illness. On the contrary, remembrances of differing valorized pasts were typically conceptualized as cherished objects of great value that enriched and empowered those who possessed them. One elderly woman, for instance, confided in me that her personal memories of “the good life” in prewar Lithuania was the only thing that sustained her in day-to-day existence as an impoverished pensioner after socialism. “Now I live by those memories only,” she remarked pensively. My interlocutor did not want to remember the Communist years.

Memory in postsocialism, as is true in many other contexts too, does not seem to follow strict sequential chronologies. While some pasts are retrieved and imbued with memorial significance, others are largely disvalued and forgotten. As do many other aspects of social life, remembering works in hierarchies of significance and value. Some reminiscences are more privileged than others; still others have little or no memorial status at all.

While it is true that the past “colonizes our present whether or not we realize its encroachment” (Terdiman 1993: 48), we are not exactly passive “colonial” subjects with no agency when it comes to remembering. More often than not, we choose, if unconsciously, which specific elements of the past to retrieve and which to leave in the wastebasket of biography or history. Drawing on her research in ex-Communist Mongolia, Caroline Humphrey (1994: 22) concludes that memory in that nation “leapfrogs” selectively over vast stretches

of time, providing us with “snapshots . . . rather than a consecutive film.” We remember (or forget) – which is not necessarily a conscious process – what is advantageous to us at a given moment (Fentress and Wickham 1992). Social memory often becomes a project of incoherent bricolage that entails putting together differing pasts that are retrieved from temporally and sequentially unrelated moments in history.

The Socialist Past as a Lived Life

A notable trait in today’s reminiscences of the socialist past is the invocation of the familiar, the mundane, the banal through various objects of daily use. Socialism is commonly recalled as a person, a biography, a lived life, rather than an anonymous authoritarian system.

Illustrative of this, in the fall of 2002 a museum exhibit commemorating the 766th (!) anniversary of the founding of Šiauliai, a city of 150,000 in northern Lithuania, featured a recreation of the typical Soviet-style living room in an urban dwelling. The centerpiece of the display, titled *Soviet-Era Culture and Domesticity*, was a female mannequin wearing a high-school uniform and a red pioneer scarf, a symbol of allegiance to the Communist Youth organization and its Marxist-Leninist ideals. Big bows in her girly pigtails, the pioneer stood in the middle of the room surrounded by a Soviet-made radio called *Alpinist* (or *Mountaineer*), a television set *Temp-6*, a rotary-dial telephone, a mechanical clock, a metal baby stroller and other domestic objects reminiscent of the Soviet-style domestic modernity of the 1950s and 1960s. Some textbooks and popular magazines were spread on the table, a Soviet movie poster and some prints on the wall constituted the room’s spare decor.

Two Lithuanian museologists reviewing the exhibit noted that this socialist interior “reminds [one] of one’s childhood and youth . . .,” and “no matter how difficult they [Soviet times] might have been, it is always pleasant to return to them in thoughts” (Baristaitė and Lukošiuūtė 2002: 1).⁹ In a similar statement, an art critic writing about a recently launched exhibit of recuperated Soviet photography remarked that such displays “make one succumb to nostalgia – not for the system but for the erased personal time” (Narušytė 2003: 2).

Yet such pronouncements are not merely biographical. The nostalgia they are imbued with is neither only personal or individual but also social; to put it another way, they are marked with “collective aspects, as well as cultural and public determinants” (Casey 2004: 21). I suggest that at a deeper level the above remarks speak to a longing for “the lost position of the Soviet subject,” one that was grounded in “a clear understanding of the workings of Soviet society and its power relationships” (Krylova 1999: 249). More abstractly, such statements implicitly refer to the loss of a wealth of social knowledge that has been rendered largely irrelevant as a consequence of the profound systemic change that followed socialism’s demise.

For many people knowing, navigating, and predicting the socialist daily life constituted a self-identifying and empowering experience. It conferred an identity on persons, that is it made them “Soviet,” and at the same time enabled them to transcend, evade and conquer a system that perpetually controlled and circumscribed their lives. Socialism’s collapse and the pursuit of capitalism has rendered this knowledge and the sense of identity it engendered largely obsolete and irrelevant. The Soviet way of life with its distinctive materiality and domesticity, quotidian routes and routines, social roles and sociability, notions of value and moral worth – all of which are the stuff of identity-making – is now irretrievably part of the past (cf. Krylova 1999: 248). It is this patterned and routinized knowing and doing – *savoir-faire* and *savoir-vivre* one might say – as well as a sense of well-defined self that is yearned for in the destabilizing and largely unknowable milieu of the current “transition” to capitalism. This yearning is nicely captured in the first opening quote above: “Who said we didn’t live well?”

As museologists Baristaitė and Lukošiuė (2002) point out, remembering the socialist era today is “a complex matter” (*sudėtinga*). Memories of socialism are “complex” because they operate at the intersection of the biographical and the ideological, of the individual and the collectivist, of longing with nostalgia and loathing with disdain. I now return to Grūtas, my principal ethnographic site, for a closer examination of these issues.

Spectacular Memory of Socialism

The late December day is grey and snowless. I stand at the entrance to Grutas Park. Above me a billboard in red and white reads in Russian: *С Новым Годом, Товарищи* (“Happy New Year, Comrades!”). The display window of the Park’s ticket office is cluttered with tourist brochures and postcards featuring colorful snapshots of Grūtas exhibits. A recently published anthology of Soviet Lithuanian poetry stands in the window amidst red paper flags sporting overlapping images of hammer and sickle. A row of four drinking glasses with miniature portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev runs along a shelf suspended at eye level. Complete with dates indicating the periods during which these leaders were in power, the set commemorates – in a chronological fashion – the history of Soviet socialism.

As I walk deeper into the swampy park, this history unfolds before me in a more detailed visual narrative. Effigies of Marx, Lenin and Stalin, as well as dozens of icons of various Lithuanian Communist leaders and activists recount without words the nation’s recent Soviet past. Removed from the pedestals that once dominated “etatized” public spaces of the nation’s cities and towns, these idols have been reduced to mnemonic curiosities at a sideshow of socialism. After decades of privilege and dominance, these monuments now stand relegated to the margins, both literally and metaphorically. To paraphrase Susan Stewart (1984: 89), no longer situated “above and



Please supply caption.

over,” they afford the viewer “the transcendent position.” Lowered to ground level from superhuman heights they are now within easy reach by sight and touch. (I saw many visitors approaching the statues, touching them and often posing for photographs beside them.)

A number of my interlocutors conveyed a sense of victory and conquest, as they described to me their experiences at Grūtas. Indeed, while walking through the museum grounds and gazing at the immobile effigies of “great” socialist men and women one derives a feeling of momentary superiority in relation to them and the political regime they once served to sustain and legitimize. Overseeing the entire socialist history of Lithuania in a brief period of time (two hours or so is usually sufficient to explore the exposition) and within

a circumscribed space makes for an empowering experience (cf. Grever and Waaldijk 2004: 18). At Grūtas the gazing visitor-voyeur assumes a position of power *vis-a-vis* a coercive authoritarian system that for decades kept him or her under close surveillance. The subject is now boldly staring back at the vanquished regime. Beholding a vast collection of Communist icons, which stand dislodged from their original contexts and assembled in a single peripheral location, affirms that Communism is conquered.

This victory is reaffirmed by an eclectic display of Soviet-era artifacts assembled in a nondescript one-story building located just off the park's main trail. Imitating the interior of a Soviet-style "house of culture" (*kultūros namai*) – public places designated by the socialist state for collectivist education and leisure – the single room in this structure is crammed with portraits of Lenin and Stalin, busts and figurines of war heroes, red flags and medals, copek coins and rouble bills, clippings from defunct Soviet dailies, boxes with Soviet-era newsreels and documentaries; the list goes on. A well-worn KGB uniform hangs displayed on the flimsy plywood wall. Another building located in the park's grounds and called *The Art Gallery (Meno galerija)* boasts an impressive collection of Soviet-era paintings and stained-glass works. Like their monumental counterparts displayed in the open air, these objects attest to the end of an era. Removed from their original settings, ideologically neutralized and "de-etatized," as it were, they are, today, mere mementoes of a deposed social order.

In her discussion of an analogous statue park-museum in Hungary, Anne-Marie Losonczy (1999) invokes the metaphor of cemetery. Szobor Park near Budapest, she proposes, is a place where socialism lies dead and buried. While the trope of interment is compelling, I suggest that we think of such expositions of socialism not so much as burial grounds but as places of imprisonment. They speak of the defeat, rather than execution, of the Socialist system. After all, most Communist ideologues, or more precisely their bodily images, stand upright suggesting that they are "alive" – they are not laid out horizontally as dead corpses. At Grūtas, the sense of being at an institution of confinement, rather than a graveyard, is enhanced by several watch towers set up throughout the park's territory, making it into a kind of "penitentiary panopticon" (Foucault 1995). As well, its perimeter is circumscribed by a network of wire fences and drainage canals, as if to prevent the "inmates" from escaping.¹⁰

In some sense, Grūtas is a gulag upside down where the Marxist-Leninist state, visually objectified through museified Party propaganda, is held captive as a punishment for the many crimes it committed against its own people. One of those crimes – deportations of innocent Lithuanians to Siberian labor camps during the Stalin era – is memorialized at the park by a freight-train car on display at the main entrance. Exhibited outside the museum's territory, the rough-hewn wooden car stands attached to a locomotive on a stretch of rails. Its sliding doors are flung wide open revealing a glum, austere

interior: a single berth at the far end and a small barred window beside it. A sign attached to the car explains: “This is a Soviet relic, a horrific symbol that takes our memory back to the 1940s and 1950s. During this period the repressive Soviet regime was carrying out massive genocide of the Lithuanian nation.” The train of deportees and the statues of Communist ideologues on the other side of the park’s fence are allegoric representations of contrasting yet complementing memories: one recalling the victim and the oppressed, the other – the victimizer and the oppressor.

Memory politics is often synonymous with identity politics. Remembering is often central to processes of self-conception and identification. As Richard Terdiman (1993: 7) puts it, “what precedes us seems to constitute the frame of our existence, the basis of our self-understanding.” As we establish links with our individual or collective pasts through differing practices of memorialization, we assert who we are or who we are not. The past made present via memory often helps reconfigure and delineate the contours of persons and collectivities. In doing so, it binds and differentiates, includes and excludes. To put it simply, we remember in order to become and to be someone. When our sense of self is threatened or undermined, we often turn to the past (Gillis 1994; Antze and Lambek 1996).

Museums, which objectify the past and operate as preeminent loci of memory, are commonly implicated in the maintenance and assertion of identity, whether ethnic or national, pertaining to social class or to gender (Handler and Gable 1997; Grever and Waaldijk 2004). While Grūtas certainly is about identity, it suggests that memory may not always work constructively with regard to self-conception and identification. Rather than reproduce and reinforce identity through commemoration, most exhibits at this park–museum, I propose, seek to suppress it. More pointedly, the statuary and other recovered artifacts remind one to dissociate from the socialist past in order not to become Soviet or Communist again. Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and their many followers are commemorated so as to “dis-identify” from them and their legacy. Kendall Phillips (2004: 5) has recently written that “publics have a responsibility to remember certain things. The most poignant instances of this responsibility lie in the almost universal urge to remember shameful events . . .” Grūtas can be seen as a locus of such responsible and “dis-identifying” commemoration.

Savoring the Soviet

Much of Grūtas’s success and popularity can be attributed to its effort to activate memories of socialism not only through visual means but also by implicating the sense of taste. The trail snaking through the museum’s grounds takes the visitor to the park’s cafe specializing in “Soviet cuisine” where his or her visual experience is complemented with a gustatory one.¹¹

Passing a gigantic “Soviet soldier” at the door, a machine gun firmly in his grip, I enter the park’s cafe (*kavinė*). Its interior is modest

but welcoming. I sit down at one of the long, wooden tables and read the menu. Herring and onion rings “the Russian way,” a beet soup called *Nostalgija*, meat patties called “Goodbye, Youth!” (*kotletai*), a thick cranberry drink (*kisielius*) “Remembrance” and “Vodka USSR” (*CCCP*) are among my choices. I order the *kotletai* and *kisielius*. At the end of my lunch the waiter, a red pioneer scarf around his neck, brings the bill with a complimentary chocolate in a red wrapper sporting assorted images of the Grūtas statuery. Dominating the visual collage is a diminutive Lenin staring pensively into the distance.

While both sight and taste are mobilized for “remembrance work” (Ten Dyke 2000) at Grūtas, these senses serve to evoke two distinct kinds of socialist memory. Writing about visual representations as media of recall, Barbie Zelizer (2004: 157) has argued that “different vehicles of memory offer different ways of making sense of the past” (see also Kuchler and Melion 1991). Taking off from this claim, I propose that we think of ways in which different senses become implicated in recovering different, at times conflicting, dimensions of the same lived experience.

As argued above, to behold the demoted statues and other discarded material artifacts is to recall the Soviet state, as well as the suffering and injustice it inflicted on its citizens. The dejected effigies and smaller objects displayed at the Park are mementos of that state’s demise. They activate memories of socialism as a system based on an untenable utopian ideology and simultaneously remind that that system is no more.

To taste socialism, however, is to stir up more nostalgic memories of it. The dishes and drinks on offer at the Grūtas café are in many respects catalysts of what Debbora Battaglia (1995: 178) calls “practical nostalgia” with “a connective purpose.” More specifically, this nostalgia “connects” the consumer to the daily life in the Soviet past, a great deal of which was sustained through quotidian commensality and sociability produced in networks of kinship and friendship.

When I inquired of Aldona, a retired teacher in her late sixties, what she thought of the food served at Grūtas, she told me that “after staring at those monsters [statues] for an hour ... it was so good to sit down for some lunch... It just refreshed my body and soul [*kūnas ir dvasia atsigavo*].” Aldona, told me confidently that she had also ordered some vodka to help her “wash down” and forget the unnerving experience of looking at the demoted Socialist idols. My interlocutor also pointed out that the beet soup was “good ... very simple but good.” After a long pause she added: “Beets! ... We ate beets often then and were so happy to get them!” These statements were followed by Aldona’s other reminiscences of “then” – the long line-ups for basic consumer goods, rationed food packages at the school where she taught Lithuanian for thirty years, the monotony of the daily diet and so forth. “It was hard but we made do... My husband, mother, even my children chipped in in the daily quest for food... We were together in this.”

As I listened to Aldona, I could not help but think of Marcel Proust. Not entirely unlike the oft-invoked French madeleines, the soup of Lithuanian beets – remember, it is called *Nostalgija* – slowly unleashed a stream of memories of a lost time. Edward Casey (2004:21) has observed that when we remember “things” – they could be madeleines or beets – we often invoke “whole environmental complexes, auras, and worlds (and how these are given).”

Under socialist command economies of chronic shortage which “gave” little, networking among family members and friends often was the only way to obtain foodstuffs and consumer goods needed for daily use. Whatever was purchased was often shared with close relatives in anticipation that they would reciprocate with goods they bought through their forays into the barren state-owned stores. For essential produce or homemade vodka (*samagonas*), many urban Lithuanians frequently relied on their rural kin with “private” plots of land in the collectivized countryside. Such consumer practices constituted loci for (re)producing a sense of connectivity and camaraderie, which was typically experienced in the realm of the home and in opposition to the hostile regime.

As theorists tell us, consumption not only creates “community” but is often an effective marker of boundaries, be they defined in terms of social class, ethnicity, age, or, in the case of socialism, through the dualism of “people vs. state” (Verdery 1996). It is this communalism among kin and friends, produced inadvertently by the authoritarian system (it promised communism) that many of my interlocutors missed with a sense of nostalgia. The profound fragmentation of postsocialist societies along the lines of gender, generation and especially social class is one of the consequences of the ongoing “transition” (Hann 2002).

To eat thin beet soup and bland meat patties, to drink *kisielius* or vodka or – all of which were part of the Soviet daily diet – is not so much to go back to socialism as a de-humanizing system, but to return to the humanity of the home embodied by one’s family and friends. For people who lived the better part of their lives under Communist rule, consuming such “foods past” (Sutton 2001: 7), as opposed to encroaching fast foods, is also deeply biographical. A comparison with the exhibit at the Šiauliai museum I described above seems apt here. Like the modest interior of that reconstructed room, the simple dishes served at the Grūtas cafe invoke memories of a person’s childhood, adolescence or youth (the patties, remember, are called “Good-Bye, Youth!”). Reminiscences summoned by the “Soviet” dishes and drinks bring to the fore, as commemoration and consumption usually do, issues of identity. But the identity they speak to here has more to do with the personal and familial rather than with the collectivist, with sociability rather than socialism. The two, of course, are intimately intertwined.

Similarly to Aldona, an unemployed engineer in his late forties, when reminiscing about his visit to the Grūtas cafe, pointed out

that the food there was “perhaps not very tasty, but not bad [*gal nelabai skanu, bet neblogai*].” Then he added emphatically: “Natural! [*natūralus*] ... not what we usually get these days at all kinds of *makdonaldas*.” This remark alludes contrastively and sarcastically to various “Western” foodstuffs and drinks that have flooded Lithuania’s free market after the fall of socialism. A great deal of such imports have been typically perceived as “full of preservatives, chemicals, contaminated,” in other words, “unnatural” or “unreal” (*netikra*). I often heard these two qualifiers used in daily talk not only in relation to foreign consumer goods but also to the broader politico-economic and cultural changes brought about by the postsocialist “transition.” To illustrate, referring to the daily life in today’s Lithuania in a sweeping existential statement, one intellectual pessimistically concluded: “There’s hardly anything *real* left here” [*Nieko tikro čia nebeliko*].

Through its commemorative dishes, Grūtas offers a riposte to the “unrealness” of postsocialism. Its café can be seen as a site of memorial counter-consumption, one that specializes, so to say, in the nation’s Soviet history. The park commodifies that particular past and contrasts it with the present. During my fieldwork, I came across a number of other recuperated foodstuffs and drinks that were marketed as “Soviet,” typically with a touch of humor and nostalgic irony.

While such consumer longing for socialist goods *vis-a-vis* current imports has been documented by ethnographers in other locales of Eastern Europe, nowhere is it as prominent as in the former German Democratic Republic. Over the past decade this ex-Communist nation has witnessed a virtual explosion of what is known as (*n*)*ostalgie* – “the birth and boom of a nostalgia industry that has entailed the ... (re)production, marketing, and merchandising of GDR products...” (Berdahl 1999: 192). Polyester clothing and popular music, laundry soap and the infamous Trabant, soft drinks and champagne – consumer goods that some two decades ago were produced and consumed in the administered economy of the socialist GDR – are all the rage again.¹²

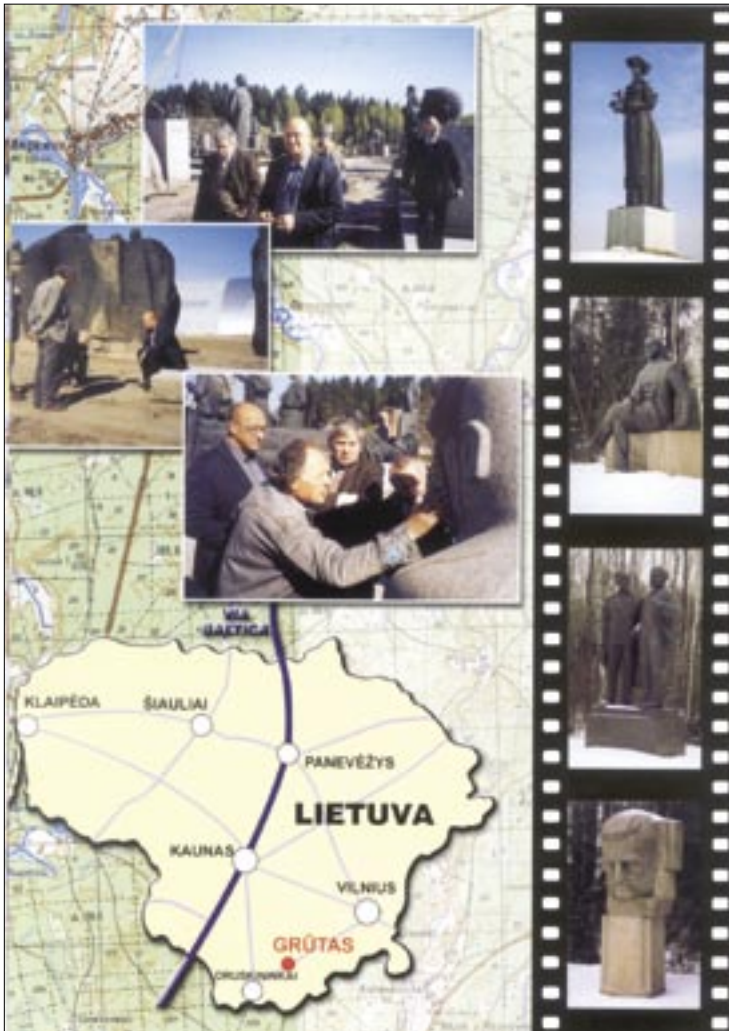
This nostalgic consumption has acquired such massive proportions for two principal reasons which contrast with its manifestation in other postsocialist locales. First, citizens of Communist East Germany had more consumer choices than their comrades living in Moscow’s other colonial peripheries. Simply put, as there was more to consume under socialism in Germany, there is more to remember today after its collapse. In the context of the so-called socialist Commonwealth, the GDR economy had a relatively productive industrial sector with a comparatively efficient distributive system. As a “more developed” socialist country, East Germany was usually held up by the Kremlin as a model of command economy. Second, in the unified Germany (*n*)*ostalgie* is booming also because various products are “remembered” and marketed not only by small local companies but also by large transnational manufacturers who have

quickly transformed consumer memories of socialism into a lucrative capitalist business.¹³

A “Funny” Past

In their commentary on the Socialist living room described above the reviewers also note that this particular display should be approached with some irony and good humor (Baristaitė and Lukošiuūtė 2002). Similarly, many of the people with whom I spoke described their experiences at the Grūtas cafe – referring specifically to the food, the menu and the “pioneer” waiter – as “funny” or “fun” (*juokinga, smagu*). Also, recall that the park opened on April Fool’s Day.

This suggests that socialism was also a kind of “joke” and could be commemorated as such. In the USSR and elsewhere in the Bloc,



Please supply caption.

jokes (*anekdotai*) – many of which were political – were a powerful means of symbolic resistance *vis-a-vis* the authoritarian system (Krylova 1999). They circulated among trusted family members, friends and colleagues and were constitutive of what might be seen as a kind of “civil society.” Joke-telling pertained to the unofficial culture of laughter which defined itself in opposition to the official state-sponsored culture of seriousness, to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1988) terminology. As *anekdotai* challenged and deconstructed, albeit symbolically, the dominance of the alienating state, they at once operated as means for constructing and reproducing networks of more intimate daily interaction and sociability. While after the demise of socialism the political joke has inevitably lost its power and all but withered away as a genre, humor and irony live on in people’s reminiscences of the now defunct system.¹⁴

Soviet citizens mocked socialism as they lived it. Today they often snicker, smirk or laugh out loud when they remember it. Perhaps this humorous–ironizing disposition toward the Socialist era is a means with which to diffuse the “complexity” and unease that recuperations of this recent past entail and to simply make them more “pleasant” too. Freud (1976: 238) once remarked that we commonly resort to jokes “to gain a small yield of pleasure” (see also Douglas 1991: 291–310). The “pleasure” of laughing at socialism today, just like gazing at it, might be construed as constitutive of the same empowering (or “conquering”) experience I discussed in the foregoing pages.

“Funny” memories of socialism in post-Soviet Lithuania and the other locales of Eastern Europe, might be seen as representative of marginal, indeed “carnavalesque” remembering, to invoke Bakhtin again. Whether objectified in ritual, discourse or imagery, carnival with its distinct aesthetic of incongruity, ambiguity and paradox is always an instance of liminality. Commemorations of socialism, then, can also be theorized as liminal recall. In many respects, recollections of socialism constitute a kind of alternative remembering, a counter-memory that coexists today with multiple reminiscences of the nation’s other, more distant historical pasts in an uneasy, contentious relationship.¹⁵

By Way of Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine one form of memory in today’s Lithuania – reminiscences of socialism. Among its objectives has been to foreground the paradox and ambiguity that inform recollections of this particular national past. Liminal and “complex,” memories of socialism illicit anger and shame, provoke laughter and derision; they activate feelings of rupture, trauma and loss, and conjure up images of injustice and victimhood. At the same time, more positively, they give those who remember a sense of victory, triumph, closure.

Grūtas Park is an apt *lieu de mémoire* in which to examine these multiple and seemingly contradictory dimensions of socialist memory which operates between empathy and estrangement (Boym 1999).

This “museum of Soviet sculptures” is especially interesting as a public locus wherein reminiscences of the recent Communist era are activated predominantly by non-articulated or non-discursive means, notably via the “bodily ways” of sight and taste (Guerts 2002). But seeing socialism at Grūtas is not the same as savoring it. While for most of my informants beholding the dejected socialist icons constituted a distancing and hence dis-identifying experience, partaking of the recuperated “Soviet” dishes and drinks at the café typically invoked sentiments of nostalgic longing and yearning – not for socialism as an oppressive system but for the quotidian sociability centered around kin and friends that that system inadvertently produced and perpetuated.

Grūtas is not only about the recent Soviet past of Lithuania. It is also a visual and gustatory critique of the nation’s increasingly commodified and “Westernized” present, a present that many Lithuanians construe as baffling, disorienting, or “unreal.” In many respects, this “prison” of socialism is an evocative counterpoint to the imagery of capitalist display which is becoming increasingly prominent in many reordered and “de-etatized” public spaces of the nation.¹⁶

Rather than an instance of morbid or pathological recall, Grūtas exemplifies “constructive” remembering. Memories of socialism conjured up by the park might be seen as constitutive of Lithuania’s symbolic capital in a milieu where real economic wealth and social well-being remain perpetually elusive. A kind of social knowledge, those memories work not only as strategies of “enrichment,” but also as a resource for constructing cognitive frameworks in which to anchor oneself existentially at a profoundly disorienting moment of liminal transformation.

While offering an alternative reality to capitalist commodification and consumerism, Grūtas at the same time, of course, is a pre-eminently capitalist enterprise, one that commodifies, packages, markets and sells the socialist past. Its business is both memory and money.

Finally and more abstractly, Grūtas is an apt ethnographic locus in which to critique simplistic unilinear approaches to the ongoing postsocialist change or “transition,” approaches that remain remarkably enduring in the study of contemporary Eastern Europe. This park suggests that “modernization” in Lithuania is not exactly a straightforward progression from socialism to capitalism. Rather, the pursuit of Western-style “modernity” in this nation, as in many other locales of the ex-Soviet bloc, is a multidirectional process which is perpetually complicated by practices of remembering and forgetting, by preoccupation with multiple pasts and visions of an uncertain future.

Notes

1. The “lift-off” – on August 23, 1991 – of Lenin’s twelve-foot statue from its granite pedestal, where it had stood across from the

KGB headquarters in the capital of Vilnius for many years, is one instance of such removal. As legless Lenin (his lower limbs remained stubbornly stuck to the bronze base) dangled in the air suspended on a crane cable, thousands of jubilant participants applauded and cheered on. This iconoclastic event was picked up by the media around the world as an evocative symbol of the end of Moscow's rule in the Baltic states and in Eastern Europe in general (cf. the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in downtown Baghdad in April 2003, a representation that appeared countless times on various TV newscasts covering the Iraq War). Once taken out of the public domain, Lenin, the principal ideologue of Soviet socialism, and dozens of his followers ended up in municipal basements and garages or were deposited in sites of industrial waste on the city outskirts.

Ritualized acts of disposal of a despised ruler's body, be it in image or in flesh and blood, are an especially powerful means of indexing the end of a social order. Imagery of Nicolae Ceaușescu's dead body, beamed by the broadcast media across the world immediately after his public execution in 1989 Romania, is another example.

2. A private enterprise, Grūtas is run by Mr Malinauskas and his family members who live in a three-storey mansion sprawled out just several hundred meters from the Park's entrance. All exhibits at Grūtas, however, remain state property.
3. See, for instance, *Grūto Parko Tiesa*, April 1, 2002, p.2; cf. endnote 5 below.
4. Ethnographies of memory produced since the mid 1980s or so have focused predominantly on the contents of remembering rather than on the media through which it is objectified. What groups and individuals retrieve through memory is of paramount importance of course. Obviously there is no memory if nothing is remembered. But the various ways in which social actors differentiate, conceptualize and display their memories to themselves and to others as they negotiate their past, present and future should not escape our attention. In other words, we need to document and understand better not only *what* but also *how* people reminisce. To quote David Sutton (1998: 3), "the past comes in many different containers bearing different labels." Those multiple "containers" are often as significant as the mnemonic messages they carry.

In explorations of memory, oral narrative and text have been the most privileged objects of analysis. Indeed, it is through these verbal media that a great deal of remembering is externalized (see Humphrey 1994; Skultans 1998). Yet we also need to record and explain how the past is made present via various performative, representational, and sensorial – that is, non-verbal or non-articulated – means of memorialization. This can be accomplished only by shifting away from the logocentric methodologies that

dominate much of memory research (but see Abercrombie 1998; Sutton 2001; Lambek 2002).

5. This paper draws on ethnographic research undertaken in Lithuania in 2003 and 2004. My first visit to Grūtas in the fall of 2003 consisted of a guided tour given by the staff and included an extended interview with the owner of the museum, Mr Malinauskas. I returned to Grūtas on two other occasions for more “phenomenological” and sensory experiences of it.

Furnished with big, wooden tables that seat up to twelve people at a time, the cafe proved to be an effective ethnographic site not only for tasting “Soviet” dishes but also for participant observation, informal interviewing and simply for casual talk with its employees and customers. One of the waiters, a group of high-school students and their teachers, a young family with two children and a German tourist with his young son were among my interlocutors at the *kavinė*.

I also interviewed individuals of different generations in Vilnius and Kaunas, Lithuania’s second-largest city, who had visited Grūtas on one or more occasions. As well, I talked to several people in their sixties and seventies who claimed they had no desire to travel to “that place of crime” (*nusikaltimo vieta*) as one of them referred to the park with disdain. For these interlocutors, Grūtas, paradoxically, was an evocative reminder of what should be forgotten; they seemed to want no memories of socialism. While some of my informants strove consciously to suppress the park’s memorial effect, for others, especially the younger generations of Lithuanians born in the late 1980s or early 1990s, Grūtas was hardly more than a theme park featuring quaint memorabilia that referred to a past of little value, relevance, or interest.

Print, broadcast, and electronic media were also used in this project as valuable data sources (see, for instance, the Park’s official website at www.grutoparkas.lt). All translations from Lithuanian and Russian are mine.

6. Such practices in post-revolutionary, and more recently, post-socialist Russia are discussed by Susan Buck-Morss (2002:80–5); Sergei Eisenstein’s classic film *Oktyabr* (“October”), released in 1927, is rich in vivid images portraying the demolition of the statue of Tsar Alexander III in “people’s” Petrograd in 1921. Produced by Laura Mulvey and Mark Lewis, the documentary *Disgraced Monuments* (1994) thoughtfully examines the ways in which the life of various monuments was shaped by changing regimes in the ex-USSR.
7. The resurgence of memory is, of course, not exclusive to the former Soviet bloc. Recuperation of the past, one can safely conclude, has become a transnational phenomenon *par excellence*. Ethnographers have provided a wealth of evidence attesting to the vitality and heterogeneity of mnemonic practices in differing local contexts. More specifically, researchers have documented various

ways in which social actors recall, reproduce, or “invent” the past, as well as how they mobilize memory to identify, to accuse, to demand accountability, to dispute state-sanctioned master narratives of history and so forth (Antze and Lambek 1996; Sutton 1998). As well, today’s mass media are replete with discourses and representations that invoke differing pasts. Closely implicated in the politics of identity, memory is certainly not losing its social value and relevance in the face of advancing capitalist modernity and its associated visions of the future. “Modern societies” are not becoming “hopelessly forgetful,” as Nora (1989: 8) pessimistically concludes. Memory is constantly on our minds not because there is so little of it left, as he claims, but precisely because there is so much of it.

8. Sigmund Freud once concluded that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (cited in Terdiman 1993: 3). James Joyce, Freud’s contemporary, wrote: “History is the ‘nightmare’ from which Western man must awaken if humanity is to be served and saved” (cited in Sutton 1998: 13); and Karl Marx famously proclaimed that “the tradition of all generations weighs like a nightmare upon the brain of the living” (in Terdiman 1993: 48–9). These, of course, are preeminently evolutionist pronouncements that valorize futuristic ideas and ideals and denigrate the past, often subsumed under the concept of backward “tradition,” as crippling ballast to be cast off in the name of “modern” social progress.
9. In post-apartheid South Africa, the idea that all statues representing white male supremacy should be “jailed,” rather than “executed,” was voiced by satirist Pieter Dirk Uys who wrote: “All Afrikaner [Boer] monuments [should] be removed from the mainland and placed in cells in the prison on Robben Island. It could then be called “Boerassic Park”(cited in Coombs 2003: 19). A cartoon depicting such a “park” appeared some time later in the South African *Mail and Guardian* February 1, 1996.
10. “Multisensory” exhibits, fairs, museums, and other sites of public display are certainly nothing particularly new; see Grever and Waaldijk 2002: 117–23; Handler and Gable 1997. For an interesting discussion of how sight and taste operate as complementary and mutually reinforcing memory media in a museum setting, see Joy and Sherry (2003: 275ff).
11. An excellent cinematic illustration of (*n*)*ostalgie* is a German feature film entitled *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003). In many ways, this film is also about remembering and “sensing” socialism. It examines, explicitly and implicitly, the nostalgic longing to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste the socialist quotidian life. To illustrate, one of the main characters of the film, a woman in her fifties, has a nagging craving for a specific brand of “Socialist” pickles (*Spreewald Gurken*) that have been displaced by their “capitalist” counterparts.

12. See Blum 2000; food as a commodified nostalgic past is examined in Duruz 1999; Sutton 2001; Kugelmass 1990; remembrances of “tastier” pasts in modernizing Greece is discussed in Seremetakis 1994.
13. Writing about contemporary Russia, Anna Krylova (1999: 260) notes that the Soviet joke, while now devoid of its political clout, has become a significant site of socialist memory. She reports that over the past several years many thousands of jokes have been sent by individual citizens to Russian publishing houses, newspapers, and magazines as “an aggregate attempt to (re)write Soviet history within a public forum.”
14. The marginality of Grūtas Park as a locus of liminal counter-remembering is spatially indexed by its location – a forested terrain removed from major urban centers. Similarly, Szobor Park in postsocialist Hungary is spread out in a semirural area at the edge of Budapest; see Losonczy (1999: 446).
15. Such displays, or perhaps more precisely performances, are not only visual but also increasingly aural, olfactory, haptic and gustatory, as exemplified, for instance, in ritualized launches and presentations of various “Western” products at the new, glitzy supermarkets of Vilnius and sometimes in the city’s squares and parks. These interactive marketing events might be seen as pertaining to the so-called experience economy, which seeks to activate and exploit different senses in an attempt to make consumption more engaging, satisfying, and – significantly for this project – memorable (see Pine and Gilmore 1998; Schmitt 1999).

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