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Review Public Spheres in Soviet-Type Societies: Between the Great Show of the Party-State and Religious Counter-Cultures/ Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs: Zwischen partei-staatlicher Selbstinszenierung und kirchlichen Gegenwelten

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Public spheres in soviet-type societies. Between the great show of the party-state and religious counter-cultures / Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs. Zwischen partei-staatlicher Selbstinszenierung und kirchlichen Gegenwelten
Gábor T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf & Jan C. Behrends (Eds), 2003
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What do communal apartments in the Soviet Union have in common with church organizations in Hungary or newspaper correspondents in the People's Republic of China? All three—together with the other contributions to the bilingual (German and English) collection of papers edited by Gábor T. Rittersporn, Malte Rolf, and Jan C. Behrends—draw on a concept of 'public sphere' that, albeit different from that of western society, is seen to exist in spite of ubiquitous and pervading socialist state power. However, the concept is disentangled from the Habermasian, normative notion of a public sphere, and instead defined rather broadly in terms of spheres of potential action—outside the state-defined public sphere, but not necessarily opposed to it.

Throughout the volume, the 'Soviet-type' societies are characterized as consisting of different public spheres, instead of being marked merely by the opposition of public and private spheres. Some contributors—such as Ingrid Oswald and Viktor Voronkov—speak of two different public forms: the 'official public' and the 'private public' (p. 48). Others use the idea of an intermediate or silent public sphere, such as (maybe even officially sanctioned) gatherings. According to the editors, this broad concept of public sphere is meant to narrow the gap between the governing and the governed, emphasizing the role of the actors on both sides. The Foucauldian image of power as 'currents surfacing at certain moments and disappearing at others' (p. 305), as employed by José M. Faraldo in his chapter on national narratives and the socialist public sphere in Poland, may further help to avoid stereotypes on either side of the actors.

The contributions to the volume are important for comparative or international education for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is an almost tautological fact that public sphere and education/schooling are deeply intertwined. In this regard, the volume can sensitize the reader's understanding of the prerequisites of education in different political, social, and cultural settings. Anybody involved in education in socialist states knows that it is impossible to avoid examining the concept of public sphere when talking about education. Secondly, if education is conceived from a broader perspective, then the role of state power in the societies under consideration—or the actors representing it—is first and foremost to educate the masses. They institute, to use a phrase from the Soviet 1920s, a 'school of the people outside the classroom' (Orest Veniaminovich Tsekhnovitser, 1927, p. 3).

Geographically, the case studies assembled in the reviewed volume range from the prototype of the Soviet Union to the satellites of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary,

and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and finally Communist China. Each chapter is arranged along the lines of its geographical focus. Thematically, they approach the phenomenon of public sphere from three different directions: firstly, the opposition of a Socialist Party public sphere to alternative public spheres; secondly, the conception of the public sphere as public space or public places; and, thirdly, the public sphere as a Party-defined, but not necessarily entirely Party-controlled, scope of action. The first perspective—Party public sphere vs. alternative public spheres—comprises the majority of contributions, focusing mainly on the role of the church (in the GDR, in Poland, and in Hungary) and of art (in the GDR and in Czechoslovakia). In these analyses, not only is how these counter public spheres worked against the state investigated, but also how they negotiated with the state with regard to their position in society, and how the state in turn perceived these potentially dangerous counter public spheres.

The second perspective—public sphere as public space or public place—concentrates on the interaction between the state and its citizens in settings such as communal apartments, entertainment parks, and newly constructed architectural designs (all in the Soviet Union). These studies investigate the extent to which the state succeeded in communicating its message to a participating public. It is revealed that this communication did not function without some interference and transformation, both by the mediators between the state and the people, and by the targets of the messages, the people.

The third perspective introduces a much narrower concept of public sphere, namely an arena of potential action that from the very outset is strictly defined by the Party. For the Soviet Union, this is the ritual of criticism and self-criticism within the Party under Stalin; for China, this pertains to the recruitment of news correspondents from the masses, who are expected to make the Party a more credible representative of workers and peasants. Both the Soviet and the Chinese limited public spheres were instituted in order to bring the Party closer to the masses (or rather, the other way round), and both are marked by a highly ritualized use of language—'Newspeak' or 'officialese' as it is referred to in the Chinese case study (pp. 366, 374).

This collection of case studies from diverse sociocultural backgrounds demonstrates that it is highly problematic to label these societies as 'Soviet-type'—an attribute which the editors believe to be more adequate than slippery labels like 'socialist'. However, it is worthwhile asking whether the vagueness of the term 'socialist' is not better suited to capturing the heterogeneity of the investigated societies, while 'Soviet-type' suggests a uniformity (with the Soviet Union as the model to follow) that existed only superficially. This is not just a question of naming; it also highlights two issues that the reader might miss when being confronted with the richness of the case studies.

Firstly, one wonders if a more encompassing conceptual model of public sphere would not have been more useful in understanding the notion of 'public' in different social and cultural settings. The Habermasian model is certainly framed too strongly along western democratic lines; but does the strict adherence to a presumed 'Soviet' model not pose the same problem, only to the other extreme? Many features defined

as 'Soviet-type' in the volume, such as actors assuming different roles depending on which public sphere they belong to, are surely not exclusively restricted to 'Soviet-type' societies. It would be highly rewarding to expand the range of case studies to include also other forms of societies, in order to arrive at a more general theoretical framework.

Secondly, the 'Soviet-type' approach tends to neglect those forces that make a society more idiosyncratic than Soviet. What distinguished Soviet state socialism from that of Poland, the GDR or China? (Hypothetically, the reader may wish to include North Korea or Cuba as well.) Which roles do tradition, or traditional public spheres, play when public spheres are negotiated? How is socialism, and how are 'Soviet-type' public spheres appropriated in each context? What exactly does 'reference' to the Soviet model mean (p. 23): how is this reference being executed, and whose interests does it serve? Again, these questions can only emphasize the necessity of extending the existing studies both empirically and theoretically.

Reference

Orest Veniaminovich Tsekhnovitser (1927) *Demonstratsiya i karnaval* [Mass demonstrations and carnival] (Moscow, Doloi negramotnost).

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Internationalizing higher education. Critical explorations of pedagogy and policy
Peter Ninnes & Meeri Hellstén (Eds), 2005
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US$32, 231 pp.
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In a useful review of the Australian literature on international education in chapter 6 of this book, Grant Harman notes (pp. 119 & 132) that research in government and university circles has been largely shaped by the economic imperatives of the Australian commercial fee-paying international programme. This programme enrols more than 10% of the world's cross-border students and generates US$4 billion per annum. Thus the main research work has been on policy and regulation of the export industry; global trade, global competition and comparative costs; cross