

# THE POST-SOVIET SPHERE

BY MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

Until 1989, the conventional wisdom about the Soviet Union and the nations it had conquered could be summarized in three sentences: The Soviet Union was an inflexible totalitarian regime incapable of change. The Soviet economy, half as large as America's, was capable of producing a minimal amount of goods but would never be transformed into a capitalist system. And what opposition to communist regimes existed largely consisted of intellectuals whose critiques were noble, inspiring, and ultimately futile.

Why did the think tankers turn out to be so wrong in their predictions? A major reason is the enduring power of nationalism. The Soviet empire has split into a thousand states (or statelets); each emerging nation has its own epic, a romance of glorious conquest over its perfidious neighbors. The Romanians compose diatribes about the wickedness of the Hungarians; the Hungarians counter with ballads about the vileness of the Serbs; and the Serbs decide to hate everybody they can think of.

Each nation also plots for expansion; the Poles dream of "Greater Poland," the Hungarians scheme for "Greater Hungary," and a neo-fascist crank named Vladimir Zhirinovskiy acquires several million votes in the Russian elections by telling that nation's electorate of the sunny future that would result from the reconquest of Alaska.

Such petty feuds would be of little interest were it not for the Serbs, who, in their lunatic quest for a "Greater Serbia," have sent their legions into the newly independent Bosnia-Herzegovina. Because the Serbs crossed an international frontier (albeit one that had only been established a few months before), the think tanks thundered that Mighty Superpower America should *do something*.

On the campaign trail, Bill Clinton decided to show that he liked force by

calling for the bombing of Sarajevo. And seven of the nine pundits queried by *Policy Review* for their fall issue thought some show of American force was in order. (Only Amy Moritz of the National Center for Public Policy Research and *The National Interest*'s Michael Lind opposed U.S. involvement.)

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But the saber-rattling pundits failed to answer several pertinent questions. What, exactly, were "Bosnians"? How did they differ from Serbs and Croats? And why should America go bombing Europe when the European nations decided to react to the conflict by sending token forces and expelling most Bosnian refugees?

As Aleksa Djilas of Harvard's Russian Research Center observes in the September 21 *New Republic*, "Bosnians" are equally divided among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims; most of the region's history consists of two of the three groups gang-ing up on a third. Because no ethnic group was large enough to dominate, both the Turkish and the Austro-Hungarian empires kept the region as a separate province unattached to either Serbia or Croatia. The only empire that gave the Muslims power were the Nazis; they promptly

formed an Islamic S.S. division that spent World War II slaughtering the Serbs.

Were Western armies able to establish an independent, Muslim-dominated Bosnia, Djilas contends, the result would be an artificial state that could only survive if "a foreign power sent several thousand soldiers to police every valley in perpetuity."

In the August 1 *Spectator*, G. M. Támas, leader of Hungary's Free Democrats, a conservative opposition party, notes that the frontiers between central and eastern European nations may well become more artificial in the future, as ethnic members living in a particular nation gain the right to vote in their homeland's elections. If the Hungarians in Serbia, Romania, and Slovakia can vote in Hungarian elections and the Romanians in Moldova can vote in Romanian elections, Támas asks, what effect will this have on Hungarian or Romanian frontiers?

Támas contends that the ethnic squabbles will continue indefinitely, and that these age-old conflicts have very little to do with such Western notions as democracy or the rule of law. "Modern armies and modern politicians cannot prevent village neighbors shooting each other in their back gardens, short of stationing a tank in each of the millions of back gardens of eastern Europe over the next thirty years," Támas writes. "So please keep out, stand aside and do not imagine in that tiresome rationalistic way that there is a solution to every problem. There is not."

The problems of the post-communist world's economies seem as insoluble as their politics. Some parts of the former Soviet empire—the Czech lands, Hungary—are doing well in their journey toward privatization. But most of these countries face a dilemma. Most noncommunist governments seeking to sell state-owned businesses have spent years

ensuring that these businesses were both viable and profitable. But what do you do when the whole economy is made up of antiquated, state-owned firms that can't be made profitable?

In the August/September *The World Today*, Roland Schönfeld reports the problems that the Germans have had in selling off state-owned businesses in the eastern part of Germany. Most service-based companies—hotels, stores, restaurants—have been sold. West German electrical power companies have bought their eastern counterparts, and west German construction companies have found that buying an east German firm ensures lucrative government contracts. But most of the firms the German government owns in that nation's eastern part have a hard time finding buyers.

In many cases, the *Treuhandanstalt*, the German quasi-governmental agency that owns thousands of eastern German businesses, has allowed Communist managers of these firms to keep their jobs, even though these managers couldn't compete in a free market. West German unions, backed by corporate heads fearing the entry of lower-cost east German rivals, have called for equal pay for their eastern counterparts. And some east German states have subsidized failing firms as a way of keeping voter loyalty.

The result, says Schönfeld, is that the *Treuhandanstalt* is ensuring that thousands of inefficient businesses are allowed to continue. "Scarce capital is being wasted," Schönfeld writes. "Workers are being kept in the wrong jobs and deceived about their chances to remain there. Private enterprises are pushed out of the market by heavily subsidized competitors underselling them."

In the July/August *International Economy* Gabriel Schoenfeld of the Center for Strategic and International Studies observes that something similar appears to be happening with Russian agriculture. While the number of private farms in Russia has increased from 231 in April 1990 to about 95,000 in April 1992, these farms are still dwarfed by huge collective farms and an inefficient state-run distribution system that ensures that private

farmers have a hard time getting fertilizer and other supplies. (The efforts of the Yeltsin administration to stop hyperinflation by restricting credit also hurt private farmers, who need access to money to expand.) Moreover, polls say that only about 10 percent of the people who work in collective farms want to leave them for private ventures.

Schoenfeld reports that food production in Russia will tumble by 18 percent in 1992 and that a third of Russian cities don't have meat in their stores. And many collective farms, under pressure to privatize, decided to stop describing themselves as collectives; instead they call themselves "joint-stock companies," "people's enterprises," and "cooperatives" while resisting substantive change. (For more of Schoenfeld's reports, I recommend *Post-Soviet Prospects*, an excellent newsletter that Schoenfeld edits.)

**D**oes this inertia and stagnation mean that the nations of central and eastern Europe are doomed to economic misery and tribal warfare? Not necessarily. Tina Rosenberg highlights one promising development in a hard-hitting article in the September *Harper's Magazine*.

Rosenberg describes the Hungarian Federation of Young Democrats (FIDESZ). The only political party in the world with an age limit (no one over 35 can join), FIDESZ parliamentarians do things that the older generation finds shocking. The women wear miniskirts! The men wear earrings! FIDESZ members read F. A. Hayek—for fun!

For the older Hungarian dissidents, who spent their days lying in their garrets and dreaming of Sweden, such tactics and principles were quite shocking. For FIDESZ leaders saw the idea of a "third way" or "socialism with a human face" as tired old rhetoric. In the 1990 Hungarian elections, the former Communists ran advertisements with photos of Spanish socialist Prime Minister Felipe González and French socialist Prime Minister François Mitterand. Other parties ran ads "stylistically reminiscent of the agriculture ministry's announcements on potato production."

FIDESZ ran rock videos and a poster

showing two couples kissing. The top half showed Communist tyrants Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker bussing each other in fraternal passion; the bottom half showing a young couple kissing in a park. The two photos were separated by a slogan—"TESSEK VÁLSZTANI"—Make Your Choice. The voters did, giving FIDESZ 22 out of 386 seats and several mayoral positions.

Once in power, FIDESZ continued to produce an uncompromising libertarian message. Their message and their youth, says Rosenberg, ensured that the party became more popular than ever—and may well win Hungary's 1994 elections. While Rosenberg doesn't agree with FIDESZ's devotion to the market, she argues that FIDESZ's tactics and programs may well be the only ideas that "lure people away from a far more dangerous path" of socialism and nationalism.

"The continent of the Prague Spring has vanished," Rosenberg writes. "Today the most important ideological figure in Eastern Europe is Margaret Thatcher."

Rosenberg illustrates her point with a Czech joke comparing that nation's one-time president, social democrat Václav Havel, with his more market-oriented prime minister, Václav Klaus. Havel sees a beggar who tells him that he is so poor that he lives on grass. Havel gives him a wad of bills. The beggar then goes to Klaus and repeats his story. Klaus gives him a subway ticket, saying "the grass is better downtown."

The joke is harsh, but it makes an important point. Eastern and central Europe are going through a hard time. Many people there will have little to eat, and many more will suffer because of fratricidal wars. But in the long run, the parties of the future, led by FIDESZ and Václav Klaus, will ultimately triumph over the parties that promise only nostalgia and inertia. The best way to help the entrepreneurs of the East is by buying their goods. The nations of eastern and central Europe need customers. They don't need any more rhetoric, guns, or bombs.

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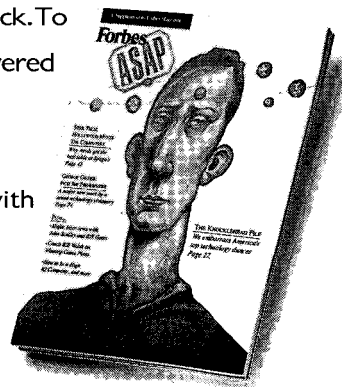
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## Paglia's Personae

BY CATHY YOUNG

**Sex, Art, and American Culture**, by Camille Paglia, New York: Vintage Books, 337 pages, \$13.00

**"T**he thing about Camille Paglia," a friend of mine recently remarked, "is that she's really a performance artist." Indeed, the latest work by the author of *Sexual Personae*, who has been called a maverick feminist, a woman-hater, an intellectual terrorist, and "Ayn Rand on mushrooms," is best understood as performance art—circles above Karen Finley.

A collection of essays, op-ed pieces, and reviews, *Sex, Art, and American Culture* also includes excerpts from Paglia's interviews and a transcript of a lecture at MIT (complete with "ums" and "likes" and stage remarks such as "*imitates smug, airy woman professor*"). An appendix features "cartoon personae" of our author/heroine and an 11-page bibliography of Paglia-related media items ("Moody photos of a warlike Paglia at the Providence airport"). It's a tribute by Paglia to the Paglia phenomenon.

This relentless self-aggrandizement and egocentricity—references to "the author as Amazon epic quester," descriptions of her "transsexual" childhood Halloween costumes—would be unbearably obnoxious if Paglia weren't so charmingly candid about it, characterizing herself as an "egomaniac." Underneath the histrionics, there is a wealth of dazzling ideas about sex, art, American culture, and anything else that comes along—ideas that make you want to cheer one minute and scream the next.

As befits a "pagan mythomane," Paglia displays enough personae to justify every label. There's the rugged feminist invoking Amelia Earhart as a symbol of



Camille Paglia is a lifelong rebel against conventional sex roles.

"female freedom, thought, and movement" ("She is woman alone. Not woman hand-holding in a group and whining about men"). There's the misogynist who extols male homosexuality as "the ultimate point on a track of intensifying masculinity shooting away from the mother" and sees culture as a product of man's "revolt from woman." There's the neocon who fears that the dismantling of social controls leads to barbarism: "We painfully discovered that a just society cannot...function if everyone does his own thing....Everyone of my generation who preached free love is responsible for AIDS." There's the sexual radical, "pro-pornography, pro-prostitution, pro-abortion" (no "pro-choice" wimp-out for her!), sneering at the narrow-mindedness of gay activists who label a married man with occasional male lovers as a closeted gay: "What if he's just married and likes to sleep with men now and then? What's *wrong* with that?"

Paglia also calls herself a libertarian, opposed to "intrusions of the state into the private realm" of sexual behavior and drug use (though she strongly condemns the latter as destructive to body and mind). She is obviously less interested in state intrusions into the marketplace, and she offers a few wacky ideas like federal subsidies for rock music. But she also pooh-poohs leftist whining about heartless American capitalism ("I know that, in America and under capitalism, I am the freest woman in history") and warns that a risk-free society cannot exist "except in a totalitarian regime of bloated centralized authority."

**W**hen Paglia criticizes modern American feminism, "trapped in a princess mentality of snippy entitlement," she is on target most of the time. Having recently attended an academic feminist conference, I can vouch for the accuracy of Paglia's assessment: "Women's studies is a comfy, chummy morass of unchallenged group-think....Feminists are always boasting of their 'diversity' and pluralism. This is like white Protestants...when they controlled American politics, finance, and academe, claiming diversity on the basis of their dozens of denominations."

If her goal, as she claims, is to save feminism from itself—from the whine of victimization and the puritanical suspicion of beauty and sensuality—I'm with her. Nor am I fanatically opposed to the possibility that some sex differences are rooted in biology and hormones. But Paglia's endeavor to revive sexual archetypes comes close to biological determinism (a charge she denies). We are all, she says, a mix of male and female traits—but basically men are aggressive, creative, ego-driven while women are passive, placid, mysterious. Forgetting her own rapturous description of feminine glamour as "a supreme artifact of civilization," she pronounces, "A woman simply is, but a man