Introduction

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The idea underlying the present theme issue developed during the 1990s and was established as a project between 1997 and 1998. To some extent, our undertaking was prompted by the wave of new Soviet Russian and East European studies literature (especially from the region itself) emerging in the wake of the transformation of 1989–91, since when there has been a veritable revival of the totalitarian approach. Narratives were organised along the well-known dichotomies of passive victimised societies and victorious, omnipotent and relentlessly oppressive party-states. As in western scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s, historical and other studies of cultural and intellectual life under communism tended again to be coached in terms of conflicts between political rationality asserted with totalistic pretensions and idealised 'communities' of 'knowledge', 'professionalism', and 'arts', or in terms of conflicts between ideological and political legitimisation and 'the uncompromising search for truth' or 'artistic experimentation'. Communist attempts politically to control knowledge and artistic production, their early efforts to secure monopolistic positions for particular epistemological and aesthetic paradigms (as in class-relativist science or socialist-realist art) have been seen and presented as a one-way imposition from above.

Agency is the greatest loser in the intellectual framework of totalitarianism. Instead of the practices of historical, knowledgeable, and stake-holding individuals acting in concrete cultural and political settings, the reader is treated to a landscape inhabited by an inexhaustible reservoir of binary sets of reified aggregates and abstractions, such as 'state' versus 'society', 'power' versus 'intelligentsia', 'Marxist-Leninist ideocracy (or theocracy)' versus 'free creativity and mind', or 'organisation' versus 'individual'. Most importantly, totalitarianism removes human agency not only from the various societal fields subjected to the totalitarian party-state, but from the political sphere too. The party-state is conceived of as a homogeneous entity within which the many thousands of apparatchiks tend to think and act with high predictability as if they were ants obeying common genetic codes that provide no room whatsoever for individual idiosyncrasies.[1]

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[1] Indeed, if the tragedy of communism was to a great extent about the dysfunctional ways in which various societal fields (economy, arts, sciences, etc.) operated, then this tragedy applied to politics too.

No doubt, there are a number of ways of restoring human agency to the history of the communist era in eastern Europe. Nevertheless, we believe that the study of patronage and informal networks is a particularly important and intellectually rewarding way of doing so.

First, it enables students to focus on questions and issues ignored by both the old and new versions of totalitarianism. How may we explain the continuity of scholarly and artistic work in many fields and many countries even after the communist takeover? And how are we to understand at least the revival of professional attitudes and practices during the post-Stalin era? Obviously, political discrimination in favour of particular schools of academic or artistic activity in many fields was not necessarily to the good (especially if it went hand in hand with discrimination against all divergent paradigms). But, again, as there were beneficiaries and stake-holders of such policies within the scholarly and artistic communities, such practices can hardly be properly described merely as acts of oppression by the cultural party-state. These matters were surely much more complicated, and only if the simplistic ideas of a unitary 'power' and homogenous artistic and academic fields ('communities') are abandoned can we start doing justice to their actual complexity.

Second, focusing on patronage and informal networks allows us to develop an understanding of the internal dynamism of state socialist regimes. Within the intellectual framework of totalitarianism no change seems possible without substantial external shocks. Yet, this contradicts just about everything we know empirically and theoretically about modern and modernising societies as well as the life-experiences of the people who lived under eastern Europe's state socialist regimes.

Third, the study of patronage and informal networks promotes problem-oriented historical research and writing. It emancipates our question-generating power from under the narrow confines of particular institutions and organisations. One of the benefits of this is that we can problematise (raise questions about) the issue of institutional boundaries (such as those between 'art' and 'politics', or 'science' and 'politics') instead of assuming that such boundaries exist and can be located. Patron–client relations and/or horizontal networks (where cohesion may be generated by some common experience in the 'illegal movement', in higher education, by common values of a professional character, and/or by common professional or other interests) did often provide the platforms upon which major trans-institutional coalitions emerged, uniting groups of policy-makers, scholars and high-level bureaucrats. Such coalitions constituted a necessary condition for policy change and played a major role in making feasible the introduction of economic reforms in Hungary during the 1960s, to name only one significant example.

The communist dictatorship perverted the state just as much as other areas of society – as Paul G. Lewis rightly reminds us in his 'Democracy, Civil Society and the State in Contemporary East-Central Europe', in Peter J. S. Duncan and Martyn Rady, eds., *Towards a New Community. Culture and Politics in Post-Totalitarian Europe* (London, Hamburg, and Münster: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, and LIT Verlag, 1993), 29–30. On the other hand, an interpretation of the history of state socialism under communism dominated by victimology reflects the societal (artistic, scientific, political, and other) experience under communism just as one-sidedly as the dualistic constructs based on the supposed antagonism between 'state' and 'society'.

Fourth, the study of patronage and informal networks prompts us to refocus (i) from the history of high political decisions (and their makers) to the history of everyday life (in the sphere of high politics as well as in other segments of society); (ii) from Kafkaesque, alienated and alienating 'machineries' or 'mechanisms' of power to the actual practices of interaction involving rulers and ruled alike; and (iii) from sterile and preconceived system-models to complex, historically and culturally contingent settings or contexts.

The fifth feature supporting the study of patronage and informal networks is that it helps to develop a more dynamic and realistic understanding of the emergence, nature, and reproduction of the communist party-state. The papers of Michael David-Fox, Maruška Svašek and Kiril Tomoff suggest that the distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' (or 'official' and 'unofficial') may cause more confusion than clarity. This is partly because patronage and formal communist authority were, like Siamese twins, symbiotically related. The main resources that the communist patron could rely on were those which his formal hierarchical position could yield. On the other hand, access to such 'informal' resources as protective networks and loyal clients was a necessary precondition for a communist official in securing efficiency and maintaining his position or/and attaining advancement in the nomenklatura. However, the 'formal'–'informal' distinction is of little help because historically this borderline appears to have been completely blurred. Indeed, rather than having been an alternative or complementary to the cultural party-state, in many respects we found patronage to be *constitutive* of it. As Vera Tolz's and Barbara Walker's excellent papers show, patronage was a major form through which the mutual obligations and rights (the 'patronage contract', to use the term coined by Walker) between the creative intelligentsia and the state were negotiated and defined. Patronage could thus rightly be seen as the cultural party-state *in statu nascendi*.[2]

The sixth important feature of our perspective is that it helps to reveal some significant commonalities in the experience of modern capitalist democracies and state socialist dictatorships. Some arguments see patronage and informal networks in communist societies as a symptom of backwardness or (new) traditionalism.[3] To my mind, the study of patronage and informal networks under communism does not separate the Russian and east central European experience from the experience of the rest of the modern world. On the contrary: the significant role assumed by patron–client relations and other personalised connections is to some extent a phenomenon characterising all modern societies. In East and West alike, late nineteenth- and twentieth-century states have taken an increasing role in providing the necessary funding for science and the arts. In capitalist democracies as well as in

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[2] This finding seems to resonate with Geoffrey Hosking's view that one should 'look upon the Russian political system in both its major hypostases, tsarist and Soviet, as being a statised network of personal power'. G. Hosking, 'Patronage and the Russian State', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 78, 2 (April 2000), 301–20.

[3] Barbara Walker discusses some works inspired by the model of 'neo-traditionalism' in her '(Still) Searching for a Soviet Society: Personalized Political and Economic Ties in Recent Soviet Historiography' (review article), *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43/3 (July 2001), 631–42.

the state socialist regimes, there is a mismatch between the distribution of scientific/ artistic competence and the distribution of economic (and/or bureaucratic–political) resources required for academic and artistic activities. It is this mismatch, that is, the patrons' inability to judge the adequacy of the science (or art) they support and the scientific (or artistic) enterprise's dependence on resources possessed by agents outside the institution of science (or art), that constitutes the general background to our discussion here.[4] It seems that patron–client relations constitute the forms of the modern state's involvement in various cultural domains. Science and the arts, in their modern form, have to cope with the fundamental tension created by the institutional separation between expertise and talent, on the one hand, and discretion over the means (economic, political and sociocultural resources of often high inter-convertibility) that are, directly or indirectly, the necessary prerequisites of artistic creativity and of the production of new knowledge, on the other. In general terms, then, the role of the patrons is exactly to bridge this mismatch.[5] Patrons can rightly be seen as Schumpeterian entrepreneurs of modern intellectual and artistic production, combining economic, political and cultural–symbolic resources with scientific or artistic creativity, thus promoting the continuity of already established paradigms as well as the emergence of new forms of expression, new artistic or epistemological programmes, new knowledge and new aesthetic values. The modern individual patron in bureaucratic societies acts first of all as an interface between different societal institutions organised according to different rationalities and using, in their internal communication, different, often highly specific idioms. S/he is, therefore, located, by definition, along the borderlines between various cultures, where not only new combinations but also encounters and conflicts with the 'other' occur. Last, but not least, the patron is – as is the broker of the capitalist market economy – the lubricating element in all modern cultural production. S/he is the broker between disparate institutional cultures, the agent who actually makes things happen by virtue of being able to comprehend and to speak authoritatively interpreting such differing idioms as that of politics, bureau-cratic administration, various groups of professionals and various academic and/or artistic fields. Indeed, the makers of modern cultural and scientific policies tend to implement their objectives – if and when they want to achieve anything – via patrons who pursue particular projects over particular sets of clients rather than rely on neutral rule- and norm-abiding bureaucratic executives of the cultural resort. No modern regime of cultural and science policies can fully be understood and assessed without due attention being paid to its capacity to give a home to and rely on a set of patrons who both enable two-way communication between politics and the

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[4] The discussion following was inspired by Stephen P. Turner, 'Forms of Patronage', in Susan E. Cozzens and Thomas F. Gieryn, eds., *Theories of Science in Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 185–211.

[5] This mismatch is clearly in evidence in Kiril Tomoff's study, in the present issue, of the role of patrons, brokers and clients in Soviet musical life under Stalin, especially in his illuminating discussion of the role of political–bureaucratic patrons in asserting professional–creative authority!

various academic/artistic fields and act as catalytic agents of the country's intellectual endeavour.

Last but not least, as the seventh advantage to be mentioned in connection with the study of patron–client relations, I wish to emphasise the great potential of this kind of 'micro-historical' investigation to bring to the surface longer-term tendencies in the cultural patterns characterising European societies. John Connelly's *srodowisko*[6] and Barbara Walker's literary *kruzhki* constitute compelling case studies demonstrating the embeddedness of significant segments of Polish academic and Soviet-Russian literary patronage in a historical culture of solidarity and cohesion dating back, in both cases, at least to the nineteenth century.

Serious *historical* study of patron–client relations in the region covered by the present issue is by and large restricted to Soviet Russian history,[7] although even in this field there has been little systematic empirical work done and published as yet. Practically no research has been conducted and published on communist east central Europe.

The present theme issue makes public a series of articles presenting empirically solid new work in the field – four of them on Soviet Russian and two on east-central Europe's cultural life. The authors and the editor hope that their work will provide new impetus and inspiration for further research and writing in a field that they believe to be of crucial importance to our understanding of the communist era in Russia and east-central Europe.

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[6] See chs. 8 and 9 in John Connelly, *Captive University. The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 142–79. The first draft of these chapters was presented at our workshop in Brekstad, Norway, 13–17 August 1999.

[7] I am thinking of two important essays in this respect: Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Intelligentsia and Power. Client-Patron Relations in Stalin's Russia', in Manfred Hildermeier, ed., *Stalinism before the Second World War. New Avenues of Research* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998), and Hosking's 'Patronage and the Russian State'. There is a much more impressive body of scholarship (and proportionately larger number of publications) from sociology, political science and economics discussing various aspects of informal society (second economy, *blat*, etc.) in Soviet Russia and communist east central Europe from the 1970s on. However, this literature yielded little or nothing in terms of studying the politics and sociology of everyday life in the cultural–academic spheres.