

Past Discontinuous: Fragmenty restavratsii. By Irina Sandomirskaia. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2022. 516 pp. Notes. Appendix. Index. ₹900, hard bound.

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Irina Sandomirskaia's monograph presents a sustained analysis of the uses and abuses of heritage in the Soviet Union, informed by cultural theory drawing on Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and others. With reference to European approaches to heritage from Eugène Viollet-le-Duc to John Ruskin, Alois Riegl and the various twentieth-century international heritage conservation charters, Sandomirskaia treats heritage broadly, tracing its expansion from tangible object to immersive staging of the past, manifested as a nostalgia for unbroken continuity. She tackles the complex intersections and permutations between revolution, conservation, restoration, restitution, rehabilitation, and recreation. One salient theme that comes across her analysis—a kind of political unconscious of heritage—is the violence and destruction that accompany attempts to repurpose and revalorize heritage objects, which end up being evacuated of much of their history. Another original thread running is the inclusion of economic approaches to heritage, from Marx to his Soviet successors, which aimed to appraise heritage without reference to market exchange value. This is then a bitterly lucid approach to heritage in its soviet specificity, where collective means of ownership, the absence of a consumer market, and the ideological pressure to reject the past created unique conditions for the pragmatic deployment and significance of heritage.

The volume is divided into two parts. In the first, Sandomirskaia offers an extended theoretical essay on heritage, which puts theory in dialogue with literary typologies of heritage consumers (including Konstantin Vaginov, Marcel Proust, Robert Musil, and Francis Ponge). She draws inspiration from recent critical heritage studies, for example the productive work of architectural historian Françoise Choay, who highlights the narcissism of the patrimonial syndrome through which users of heritage indulge their own subjectivity. Whereas early on in the essay Sandomirskaia tries to unpick the facticity and materiality of objects from their memorial exploitation, she then tracks the steady dilution and expansion of heritage into abstract spectacle in late capitalist postmodernity.

Part Two of this volume then tackles Soviet contexts. The analysis proceeds roughly in chronological order, starting from Lenin's ambiguous approach to heritage and continuing with the strategies by Igor' Grabar' to save pre-revolutionary heritage by redefining it as national heritage composed of works of art rather than religious cult objects. Socialized in Parisian bourgeois salons and close to the World of Art movement, Grabar' was an unlikely candidate to organize the institutions of early Soviet collective memory production; yet he succeeded in swaying officials to his views. This he did at the cost of instituting the practice of stripping objects to their imagined original state and replacing formal analysis, expert knowledge, and positivistic art history with erudite impressionistic statements about the subjective effect of notionally "authentic" works of art. Sandomirskaia devotes many pages to the intricacies of post-WWII reconstruction of palaces near Leningrad, which are not about re-construction but about the creation of a memorial to overcoming the losses inflicted by the war: more about resurrection than reconstruction. Materially the palaces become aestheticized objects through which a mirage of wholeness and eternity in fact destroys disruptive memory. Illuminating pages are devoted to Dmitrii Likhachev and the memorialization or rather aesthetic neutralization of the Solovki camp. Sandomirskaia also holds Likhachev's famous book on gardens up to scrutiny as a Russophile idyll of organic intergenerational transmission.

Attention is also devoted to late socialist reconstruction, for example the work of heritage cult figure Petr Baranovskii and his attempts to reclaim notionally “medieval” churches out of nothing, as he did in Chernihiv while dismantling the ruins of a seventeenth-century baroque church. The monograph ends with a tangentially related annex, consisting of an extended essay on Viktor Shklovskii’s treatment of anachronous figures of speech and thought, which partially seeks to reclaim his work of the 1930s–40s.

Overall, this book is best conceived as a meditation on heritage treated both narrowly and broadly, highlighting how the variegated Soviet deployment of temporality through memorial objects, experiences, and discourses ultimately controls if not destroys memory. Whilst there is much impressive original analysis, the course of the argument is not always apparent, contributing to a certain hermetic quality. Chapter headings are often un-descriptive, if evocative. The volume is clearly not designed for the casual reader, requiring total immersion and undivided attention, perhaps aiming to stage an experience of time through the reading process—of rich and slow time—that counteracts the disruptions and destructions at the heart of soviet heritage deployment. Those who plunge into it will reap many rewards.

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Nabokov Noir: Cinematic Culture and the Art of Exile. By Luke Parker. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022. 516 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$47.95, hard bound.
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As David Lodge pointed out long ago, scholars tend to overlook about Vladimir Nabokov what is most obvious to practicing fiction writers. Unusually for a high modernist, his plots draw on genre fiction and film: murder-mystery, detective stories, screwball, slapstick, horror, and more. Alfred Appel’s richly illustrated, probing, if rather madcap book *Nabokov’s Dark Cinema* (OUP, 1974), praised by Nabokov himself, explored Nabokov’s relation to the European and American cinema he saluted in his interviews: “serious” film-makers such Fritz Lang, Friedrich Murnau, and Joseph von Sternberg, “comics” such as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy, and the Marx Brothers. Appel’s work was carried forward by Barbara Wylie’s undervalued *Nabokov at the Movies* (2003), which makes richly rewarding comparisons of passages in Nabokov to specific camera movements, images, reveals, wipes, and more.

Luke Parker’s *Nabokov Noir* brings to this subject a depth of research nearly unparalleled in Nabokov studies. Parker has plunged deep into the writings of the Russian emigration and brought back pearls: a map of the cinemas of Berlin; the many film reviews in *Rul’* of the young Nabokov’s bosom companion Georgy Gessen; the writings on cinema both of his early mentors Iulii Aikhenvald, Vladislav Khodasevich, and other related émigré film theorists: Pavel Muratov, Andrei Levinson, and Evgenii Znosko-Borovskii. The first two chapters of this book use this research to recontextualize Nabokov’s early writing of the early 1920s and early 1930s: stories, plays, poems, and his first three novels, *Mary; King, Queen, Knave*; and *The Luzhin Defense*. In the second half of the book, Parker focusses on Nabokov’s fifth novel *Camera Obscura*, as it gradually developed into its American version, *Laughter in the Dark*, drawing especially on the archives of Nabokov’s engagement with his American agent, Altagracia de Jannelli, and on the internal records of the publishing house Bobbs-Merrill.