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The Television Revolution: Television as a Domestic Object in Socialist Eastern Europe

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Privacy and domesticity possessed an uncomfortable place within the communist vision of society. In the early decades of Cold War, communism was a radically public-oriented ideology, which demanded sacrifice of domestic comfort and private interests for the construction of a better tomorrow. With this in mind, several scholars have emphasised the dominance of public over private spheres under state socialism, and noted the extent to which privacy was either severely restricted or virtually eliminated. Yet by the 1960s, citizens across much of the communist-led world became avid television viewers, and television came to occupy a central place in their homes and in family routines. How did communist authorities react to the rise of this ostensibly domestic medium, designed for private consumption? Did they manage to harness the potential of this new communication technology to link the individual, domestic lives of state socialist audiences to the collective aims of communist politics? Or did television rather initiate a revolution of its own, setting in motion developments that ultimately proved detrimental to the communist project? To answer these questions, this paper draws on a combination of archival sources, historical audience research and over 170 oral history interviews with TV audiences from across Eastern European. The first part of the analysis examines the proliferation of television receivers as material objects central to the organisation of domestic spaces and routines, while the second part turns to the perceptions of television as a symbolic link between domestic and public spaces.

Brief bio: Dr Sabina Mihelj is Reader in Media and Cultural Analysis at Loughborough University. Her main areas of expertise include media and nationalism, comparative media research, television studies, and the cultural Cold War. She is the author of *Media Nations: Communicating Belonging and Exclusion in the Modern World* (Palgrave, 2013) and *Central and Eastern European Media in Comparative Perspective: Politics, Economy, Culture* (with John Downey, Ashgate, 2012). She is currently completing a major research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust, which investigates the relationship between popular television and everyday life across five socialist countries, which forms the basis of the proposed paper. For more information please see the project website: www.lboro.ac.uk/screening-socialism.