

Shadows of the Past

The impact of communism on the way people think in postcommunist society

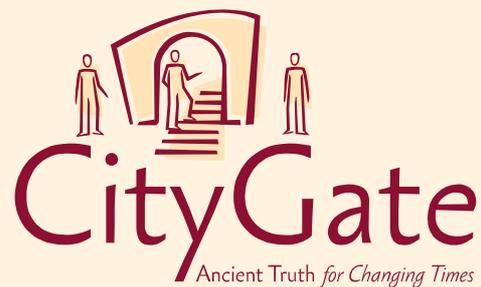
A CityGate Field Study

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This is the first edition of this paper. We would like to thank all who shared their experiences and helped us with their insight. We would appreciate all your comments and critique. They might help us to fill the gaps we left out, and correct our unintended mistakes.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
POLITICS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS	3
POLITICAL LIFE IN COMMUNIST CENTRAL EUROPE	3
<i>From the Fifties to the Eighties</i>	3
<i>Ideological Politics</i>	6
Consequences:.....	9
Unwillingness to compromise	9
Suspicious of ideologies and manipulation	9
<i>Division Between Public And Private</i>	10
Consequences:.....	10
Double Ethics	10
Lack of Responsibility for Public Affairs.....	11
The Development of a Substructure	11
EAST MEETS WEST - POSTCOMMUNIST COUNTRIES IN A NEW EUROPE.....	11
<i>We are not Them - The Search for an Identity</i>	12
<i>The Significance of the Past in the Present</i>	13
<i>Strong Expectations from the State - Economic Utopia</i>	15
<i>Egalitarianism</i>	16
<i>The Shattered Myth of Capitalism</i>	17
POSSIBLE FUTURE TRENDS	17
BUSINESS AND ECONOMY	20
MACRO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS	21
MICRO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS	22
<i>Structure</i>	23
<i>Financial Management System</i>	23
<i>Leadership style</i>	23
<i>Human Resources</i>	24
<i>Technology</i>	24
<i>Strategy</i>	24
<i>Vision</i>	25
<i>Values</i>	25
CONSEQUENCES - IMPACT ON THE PRESENT BUSINESS CULTURE	25
RELIGION AND THE CHURCH.....	28
CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE	28
THE IMPACT OF COMMUNISM.....	28
<i>Theology</i>	29
Consequences:.....	29
<i>Mentality of Christians</i>	29
Consequences:.....	30
<i>Traditions</i>	31
Consequences	32
<i>Structures</i>	32
Consequence	32
<i>Activities</i>	32
Consequences:.....	33
<i>The Church/State Relationship</i>	34
Consequences:.....	36
ART AND CULTURE.....	37
ART IN THE YEARS OF COMMUNISM.....	37
<i>Historical Overview (1950 - 1989)</i>	37

<i>The First and Second Cultures</i>	39
Consequences	40
NEW TEMPTATIONS, NEW POSSIBILITIES	42
<i>Back to (European) Traditions</i>	42
Consequence	43
<i>Commercialization</i>	44
Consequences	45
POSTMODERN CULTURE IN POSTCOMMUNIST COUNTRIES	46
Consequences	47
CONCLUSIONS	48
APPENDIXES	49
APPENDIX I: POSTMODERNISM	49
APPENDIX II: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNIST CZECHO-SLOVAKIA	51
APPENDIX III: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNIST HUNGARY	52
APPENDIX IV: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNIST POLAND	54

INTRODUCTION

Most of us in Central and Eastern Europe¹ have spent the better part of our lives living in totalitarian socialist societies. The changes introduced by a series of revolutionary events in 1989 were deep and profound. Adjustment had to be made to a multi-party parliamentary democracy and free-market economic system, but more important was the new way of thinking and a new approach to the life we have to face. The new did not simply replace the old. A significant residue of the communist past remains as a great shadow. A shadow of the past.

Beside political and national changes are other less visible changes. They are significant and deep. These changes, taking place inside our minds, are expressed by our attitudes toward important issues of life. These changes influence how we understand the world around us; what we actually see when we look at something, changes of paradigm.

This paper aims to help enhance understanding of the current political, spiritual, economic and social situation in Central and Eastern Europe by identifying the profound impact of forty years of communism.

The essential questions of this paper are:

- How does the experience of communism influence the way people in postcommunist Central Europe think now?
- What do the shadows of the communist past look like?

In order to better understand it we will examine four areas of public life:

- Politics and Public Affairs

¹Throughout this paper, the terms *Central*, or *Central and Eastern Europe* are used. We are aware of the academic discussions going on about the definition of Central Europe. For the purposes of this paper *Central Europe* refers to the countries of the Visegrad Group: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. *Eastern Europe* refers to the former communist countries in Europe (including Central Europe).

- Business and Economics
- Church and Religion
- Art and Culture

In each we try to understand the impact of communism on the way people think and feel, to understand what could be behind their often contradictory or unexpected attitudes.

This research paper is based on the observations and experiences of people living in the region as well as on local and foreign literature and periodicals available to the authors. Although we have tried to be as objective as possible, the ideas and observations mentioned in this paper are certainly biased by our own experiences, presuppositions and paradigms. As citizens of postcommunist Central Europe, we too are not able to escape the shadows of the past.

POLITICS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

We will address two areas:

1. public life in a communist regime
2. present issues in postcommunist societies

In order to better understand the situation we will start with a brief description of the four decades of communist rule.

POLITICAL LIFE IN COMMUNIST CENTRAL EUROPE

FROM THE FIFTIES TO THE EIGHTIES

I will start with two personal illustrations:

It was sometime in the first half of the seventies. I was about 8 years old, attending elementary school in central Slovakia. It was the fashion those days in our class to collect and wear all kinds of badges. I had a small collection at home and each day I chose one badge that I stuck in my T-shirt before going to school. One day I chose a big metal one with somebody's portrait on it. It was a success in the school because it was really big and eye-catching. When my parents came to pick me up from school my father immediately took it off my shirt and my mother almost collapsed. When she got her breath again, she apologized to the teacher and softly blamed her for not taking it off of my shirt herself. I was then (not so softly) rebuked although I honestly did not understand why.

It was neither John Lennon, nor Adolf Hitler on my badge. It was a portrait of a smiling Alexander Dubček.

It is more than possible that the teacher, as well as the parents of all my classmates, had the same picture in their private collections. And it is almost certain, that most of them used to wear it proudly, just some five years previously.

At about the same time I found an older map of Czechoslovakia that was a bit strange. For example, the highest mountain in the country was not named “Gerlachovsky Štít” (Gerlachov is a local village), as I knew it, but “Stalinov Štít” (Peak of Stalin). When I asked my parents why that was, I got a strange answer: “Those were the Fifties. You will learn about it later.” I was to hear this answer many times before I learned what it meant.

The Communist parties of Central Europe came to power soon after World War II. Although the steps leading up to this were different in each country, there were very important similarities. This is no surprise since all national Communist parties were guided from Moscow (where their leaders spent the better part of the War).

Three major issues which led to the victory of communism in Central European countries were:

- The division of the spheres of influence between the Soviet Union and the USA at the end of World War II;
- Communism understood as a reaction against fascism;
- The inability and naiveté of non-communist politicians and citizens.

By 1950 Communist parties (Stalin style) had power throughout Eastern and Central Europe firmly in their hands.

The Fifties will be remembered as a dark and bloody decade in the account of Communist history. It was a time of ideological struggles, “monster processes²”, long-term prison sentences and executions. A dichotomy between private and public life, or better, the protection of a small piece of private life, usually within the family or a close group of friends, was necessary. Fear of other people, a priori distrust for politicians and the secret struggle for survival subtly influenced every-day life. Reality was not so very

²Pre-arranged processes against political (or “class”) enemies that were meant to be a threat for other potential opponents to the regime. They often resulted in long-term imprisonment or life sentences.

different from Orwell's 1984 utopia. The most important historical event that occurred in the Soviet realm during the Fifties was the death of Stalin in 1953. It took a few more years and dramatic events until its impact become visible.

By the beginning of the Sixties it was clear that something new was coming. The softening of ideological pressure was first felt in culture. The world-wide wave of idealism found its way into communist politics also. The most famous expressions were “socialism with human face” or “the third way”, usually connected with Alexander Dubček, the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the famous Prague Spring of 1968. The Sixties ended quite abruptly with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Twenty-years of “existing, realistic socialism”³ followed. It was characterized by a total lack of idealism, general apathy, and compromise in all areas of public life. Both the Fifties with their “red terror”, and the Sixties with their reforming idealism, were over. The loss of the ideal - of a genuine reformation of socialism - was perceived as especially painful. Very few people believed that something significant would ever really change. Everybody, from the top Party official to the most outspoken samizdat⁴ publisher, agreed on one thing: this is the system they (and their children) would have to live in and it was not at all likely to change.

If one followed the rules and limits of the public game, he or she could live quite a comfortable life. Whether you believed in Marxism or not was not important. It was necessary just to pretend that you did. And “they”, of course, knew you were just pretending. And they knew that you knew that they knew.

It was also a period of relative prosperity, at least in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, although it is now clear it could not last long⁵.

During the Eighties, significant, though not always visible, changes started to take place in Central European communist countries. The brave resistance of the Polish independent trade union Solidarity, which resulted in the shooting of workers at the Gdansk docks in

³An official term used by Eastern European ideologists

⁴Samizdat - from Russian *samoizdatelstvo*, self-publishing. “Forbidden” writers used to type their books on typewriters, which were then re-typed, copied in small amounts and distributed to a small circle of trustworthy friends.

⁵A relatively high level of welfare was made possible by taking the profit from state-owned companies and, instead of investing it into expansion and improved efficiency, using it to patch up the most urgent needs of the population, creating an impression of “the good life“. Communist economies lived on credit the next generations were supposed to pay for.

1981, probably became the most famous. This was followed by martial law, tough political struggles, round-table discussions, and finally, winning the election in 1989. Not as visible, but equally important, was the slow introduction of private enterprise into the Hungarian economy (“goulash capitalism”), especially during the second half of the 1980s.

Czechoslovakia was the one place where nothing changed officially, although illegal or semi-legal political and cultural activities were booming (beautiful samizdat publications, politically “dangerous” rock music festivals, demonstrations, mass pilgrimages of Roman Catholic believers, etc.). But whether one was a Hungarian private entrepreneur, a Polish worker or a Czech dissident, he or she tried to do as much as was realistically possible within the limits and opportunities of realistic socialism. Soviet *perestroika* meant hope to some, a smart but evil tactic of the Communist Party for others. Only a few people expected major changes in public life during their or their children’s lifetime.

Each decade had its own special atmosphere and each contributed to the “shadow of the past” in the minds and attitudes of people. Let us look now at two significant aspects of public life in a communist regime and their impact during the time of transition to a free market economy and democracy.

IDEOLOGICAL POLITICS

“It was not until the beginning of the second half of the 20th century that many Europeans became bitterly aware that the sophisticated and, for common men, too complicated philosophical books had a direct influence on their lives.”⁶

Public life in communist countries was, in a sense, a large scientific experiment. The ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and many local ideologists were tested in real life. But it was more a religion than a science. It was built on a set of absolute axioms one was supposed to believe without asking why. Some of the axioms were philosophical (matter as the ultimate reality, quantitative changes producing qualitative changes, etc.). Others were economic (such as the theory of capitalism and exploitation, etc.) or political (the working class, by definition represented by the Communist Party, as the leading force of society; history interpreted as the history of class struggle, etc.). To doubt any of the accepted axioms meant to doubt the foundation of the whole system. A system which was believed to be the best available, the only possible alternative. No doubts were permitted.

⁶Czeslaw Milosz: *Captive Mind*, quoted from Czech translation, p. 18, TORST, Praha 1992.

Public life and its institutions (political parties, parliaments, municipalities, banks, etc.) were not supposed to serve society but the Party. In real life there was just one force - the Communist Party. The Party that had its hands in each and every political, economic and even sports or religious organization⁷.

The Soviet constitution (1977) put it quite plainly:

“The leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organizations and public organizations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.”

All Eastern European Communist (“Workers”, “People’s”, “Socialist”) parties had their roots in the Russian Bolshevik party led by Lenin. The main goal of the Party was not only to govern society but to bring about a totally new era, to bring communism⁸. In order to do that they had to change society. That is impossible without changing the minds of individual men and women. The development of humankind was finally objectively understood. It was, as they said, a sequence of “socio-economic formations”: starting with a primitive classless society, followed by slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism and finally, reaching the ultimate goal of history - communism. This interpretation of history was firmly based on “Marxism-Leninism” and “historical materialism”, the overarching body of knowledge that contained all of the answers to all philosophical, political and economic questions, being at the same time both the Goal and the Way (the Method)⁹. Since this was the only true, “scientific” knowledge, to question it, to doubt it, even to re-interpret it was either tolerated as a remnant of the past¹⁰ or understood as a lack of intellectual ability (with brainwashing-style education and propaganda being its remedy). Or, in the worst cases, it was understood to be a hopeless effort to overthrow or weaken the progressive historical forces. Punishment, sometimes quite cruel and humiliating, soon followed.

Public life (and to some extent life as a whole) was perceived as a black-and-white, right-or-wrong struggle based on ideological concepts usually expressed in very simple definitions and slogans¹¹, such as:

⁷Even the captain of the Czechoslovak national ice hockey team had to be a Party member.

⁸A famous saying of Marx: “Until now philosophers were *explaining* the world, our goal is to *change* it”

⁹This statement may sound exaggerated, but it is not. One could find statements like this in many textbooks of Marxist philosophy or political economy until the very end of communist era in 1989.

¹⁰That was usually the case concerning religion and churches in Central European countries

¹¹Most of them created by Karl Marx, who was very gifted in this area

- History is the history of class struggle;
- Capitalism is based on the exploitation of workers by capitalists;
- The basic rule of communism: everybody works according to his abilities, everybody is rewarded according to his needs;
- Imperialism is the highest (last) stage of capitalism.

Consequences:

Unwillingness to compromise

Some people believed in the ideals of communism, some did not. But the assumption that public life and politics are arenas for ideological struggle became deeply rooted in people's minds. The word compromise has a connotation of something bad - an expression of weakness and the inability to stand behind one's convictions and beliefs.¹² Maybe as a result of this a compromise as a meaningful way of solving political deadlocks is still rare in the postcommunist world.¹³

Suspicious of ideologies and manipulation

This point appears to be contradictory to the previous one. A large part of the Central European population is deeply suspicious of any imposed ideology or manipulation. It is especially clear in the case of young, well-educated intellectuals. Although they played a major role in the democratic revolutions, they were either not interested in political struggles, or lost public support¹⁴. The main reason seems to be that they did not want to be ideological or manipulating. This gave a free hand to the populist politicians with the qualities they lacked.

¹²It may have something to do with a feeling of guilt - so many of us made compromises every day under the communist regime.

¹³With respect to this, there is an interesting comment by the former Russian minister of finance Boris Fedorov made shortly before he resigned: "I am sick and tired of our half-way policy, of endless compromises, of the necessity to sit at the same table with people who are my ideological enemies." (quoted in *The Economist*, 6.11.93,p.25)

¹⁴That is the case of the Association of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) in Hungary, the Civic Democratic Union (ODU) in Slovakia or the Civic Movement in the Czech Republic. All of them had popular support during the change of the regime, but lost it soon afterwards.

DIVISION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

One of the strongest, "most successful", strategies of the Central European Communist parties on their climb to power was to permeate all areas of society. Immediately after World War II communists, usually very active in anti-fascist resistance, created "national fronts"¹⁵ unifying all registered political parties and most public organizations. The official reason was to create a cooperative environment which was necessary for the reconstruction of countries damaged by war and to de-activate the fascist political parties at the same time. It provided a legal tool for overruling democratic decision-making (elections, parliament, the government) in the case of unwelcome (for the communists) developments. The parties forming the Front were either permeated by closet communists¹⁶ or scandalized. This helped Communist parties to grab power in spite of having lost the elections and not having a majority in parliament. Before long each official political organization or institution was led by the Communist Party. This was officially legalized in the early Fifties by putting "the leading role of the Communist Party" into the constitutions. Each public organization (political, cultural, folklore, scientific, sports, etc.) had to have a similar statement in its statutes.

The effect on public life was twofold:

- Those who were relatively high in the Party structures were able to use (manipulate) any of these organizations for their own goals¹⁷;
- Those who were not high enough, or did not have "uncles" in the proper offices were disgusted by "official" public life (although most of them would use the same tactics as the first group whenever it was possible) and tried to preserve their privacy.

For both groups public life was an arena in which one must act in a proper way to reach the expected results. One had to be careful about what to say to whom and when. It was "their" territory. "Politics is a dirty business" used to be a common attitude to public life.

Consequences:

Double Ethics

¹⁵Hungarian Independence-Popular Front in Hungary, Czechoslovak National Front in Czechoslovakia

¹⁶That was usually the case of Social Democratic, or left-wing parties

¹⁷A classic example was getting prominent children enrolled in university.

A great gap developed between public and private attitudes. People tried to create a sphere of trust and truth in their homes, built nice houses, had beautiful gardens and showed great skill in producing all kinds of homemade things. But the same people usually did not care for national property, did not show any big commitment or initiative in their workplace, did not mind stealing or lying when it was necessary¹⁸. “Who does not steal from the state, steals from his own family,” was a common saying. Actually, not only a saying, but a principle.

Lack of Responsibility for Public Affairs

Since the areas of politics, economy and social issues were in the hands of Party bureaucrats, it was almost impossible to have significant responsibility for them. It was definitely very difficult. During the long period of communist rule an entire generation of people adopted the attitude that this responsibility is, in principle, attached to professional politicians. It is, in principle, “their” and not “our” responsibility.

The Development of a Substructure

All kinds of unofficial structures were necessary in the old regime. They provided not only economic supplies but also small islands of freedom, culture and confidentiality. This tendency survived the fall of communism. Besides the many positive aspects of unofficial substructures, there is also a negative one: instead of influencing a broader society, these groups tend to be closed and exclusive. The strong intellectual potential was usually concentrated in them and their impact on society was very small.

EAST MEETS WEST - POSTCOMMUNIST COUNTRIES IN A NEW EUROPE

The new co-existence of complex issues with a mentality and attitude inherited from the communist regime created a unique mixture in the postcommunist social atmosphere. Now we will look at some of its most significant expressions.

¹⁸For example, when asked where we were going on Sunday morning by somebody we met on the street, my parents and I used to say, “We are going to visit our friends.”, instead of clearly saying that we were going to church. The moral inconsistency was explained away by saying, “We actually are going to see our Christian friends in the church, aren’t we?”

WE ARE NOT THEM - THE SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY

A powerful slogan of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia was “We are not like them!”. “WE” meant the crowds gathered in the squares, while “THEY” were the Communist party leaders, secret police agents, and other “ugly” people identified with the former regime. The basic question of identity is, “Who am I?”. This question is not at all new and there are many possible answers.

The question of identity was “unofficially forbidden” under the Communist regime. National awareness was covered by the official philosophy of “proletarian internationalism”, based on an assumption that real differences are not between different nations but between different classes. And even these were being wiped out on the way to a classless communist society.

After 1989 many people began to discover that they are Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians, Slavs, Central Europeans, Europeans, etc. The positive aspect of this process is discovering one’s own history and culture. The negative one is xenophobia and the tendency to create the image of an enemy to accompany it.

The problem with nationalism lies in the fact that it is not only a political or cultural movement, but it is tied with the very identity of its followers. Not, “Which side are you on?” but, “Who are you?” becomes the crucial question.

Although the countries of Central Europe seem to be more tolerant and much less aggressive towards each other than their Southern and Eastern neighbors, nationalistic tendencies are a visible and sometimes even decisive force in their policies.

Practically all of the Hungarian political parties agree on the importance of protecting Hungarian minorities in Romania and Slovakia and most ethnic Hungarians feel a stronger affinity towards Budapest than Bucharest or Bratislava. The former Hungarian Prime Minister, the late Jozsef Antal, said he felt himself to be the representative of 15 million Hungarians (10 million in Hungary, 5 million in neighboring countries)¹⁹.

¹⁹The new Hungarian prime minister, Mr. Gyula Horn did not repeat the same mistake and in what was understood as a direct reference to Mr. Antal’s statement, clearly stated he is the premier of 10 million Hungarians.

Another example of nationalism playing an important role in Central European politics was in the split of Czechoslovakia. The initiative that led to the split came from the Slovak part of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic, in spite of the fact that it was clear that Slovakia would be the economic loser at the end of the day. The conviction that each civilized nation should have its own nation-state was the strongest force behind it.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Central Europe has experienced a dramatic history, especially in the last one hundred years. It is not uncommon to find an 80 year old person that has been a citizen of 5 different states in his or her lifetime without ever moving from his or her village.²⁰

It is only understandable that people identify themselves with some historical periods more than with others and that they try to justify the present with the past. A good example is southern Slovakia with a strong ethnic Hungarian minority. The more “nationally aware” groups of ethnic Slovaks (interestingly enough, not so much from the regions with an ethnically mixed population) think it would be a “historical injustice” if ethnic Hungarians had the same rights as Slovaks, since Slovaks were second-rate citizens under Hungarian rule for a thousand years.

Very interesting examples of dealing with “historical injustice” are involved in making restitution and retributions. Both of these processes are taking place in each Central European country and they follow the same pattern:

- **restitution:** whoever had property that was taken by the communist authorities may apply for its return or, at least, financial reimbursement;

²⁰Take for example the (now) eastern Slovak city of Košice: up to 1918 it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, between 1918 and 1938 it belonged to Czechoslovak Republic, between 1938 and 1945 it was part of Hungary (according to The First Vienna Award on 2.11.1938), between 1945 and 1992 it was a part of Czechoslovakia (called the Czechoslovak Republic, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, then the Czecho-Slovak Federate Republic) and since 1.1.1993 it is a part of the Slovak Republic.

- **retribution:** parliament passed a solemn statement declaring communism to be a crime, the most outstanding communist leaders were imprisoned (if they were still alive).

The basic problem is usually connected with the date when the period of communism "officially started". Was it right after World War II, or in 1948 (when communists officially imposed the totalitarian regime)? What about the property of Jews, taken from them during the Holocaust and not returned after the War? But if they receive their property back, what about the Germans (especially in the West Bohemian "Sudetenland") who were forced to leave their homes since they were declared to be "collectively guilty" for the war? And so on.

"Historical justice" is not easy to find.

STRONG EXPECTATIONS FROM THE STATE - ECONOMIC UTOPIA

Lenin taught the State would cease to exist when a communist classless society came about. The opposite became true. The State, identified with the Communist Party, became the only official employer, protector and monolithic political power.

The reduction of the massive role of the State in economic and political life is one of the goals of the transforming postcommunist societies. A major problem is that people still have strong expectations from the State. The State is most often expected to provide jobs and social welfare, as well as general law and order. People seem to prefer political leaders promising these things²¹. One must not forget that the Central European version of communism (especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia) provided a relatively high level of health care and social welfare system (officially²²) for free.

Churches and other non-governmental organizations, who in other countries are traditionally involved in charity and social work, are just starting to define their role in society. The present situation is caused by the lack of understanding of the proper role of the State and lack of experience with political systems other than the Leninist/socialist one.

Expectations from the State are quite often expressed in conflicting attitudes:

- “most economic problems would be solved by large-scale privatization, but most businesses should be State-owned”;
- “we are against raising the tax rate in order to have resources for social welfare, but the state should be responsible for, and have the means to provide for, each citizen”;
- “wages should be regulated, but they should be increased”.²³

²¹See the neo-communist parties coming to power through ballot boxes in Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. According to a survey done just after the Russian general election by the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, “what distinguishes Zhirinovski’s voters from other members of the Russian population is their concern about the breakdown of law and order in Russia.”

²²Although free healthcare was guaranteed by law, it was often necessary to pay a doctor (by discreetly putting into his pocket an envelope with the expected amount of money) to get a proper level of care.

²³For more details see Dr. V. Krivy: Slovensko: hodnotové orientácie občanov, Bratislava, 1993

This shows how many people in Central Europe do not understand how basic economics and politics work, although they do not seem to be aware of their ignorance. A significant part of the population tends to adopt attitudes typical for “economic romanticism”²⁴. These people believe that it is somehow possible to have an economic system in which everybody is affluent, with no unemployment, low (regulated) prices and full shop shelves. It is clear that most of these ideas are based on the behavioral patterns acquired during the time of communism.

EGALITARIANISM

The differences between rich and poor were relatively small during the last 40 years. If somebody became rich, it was commonly understood that he or she must have been doing something immoral (although sometimes it was not true). Employment and free medical treatment were rights guaranteed by the constitution. Since private enterprise was not allowed²⁵ things like “success in business” or “making money” were unknown.

Now, with a growing social class of rich business people, the most common attitudes towards them are jealousy and envy.

According to a survey carried out in the Czech Republic in the fall of 1993

- 80% of the respondents thought that financially successful business people became rich through dishonest means,
- 76% of the same sample thought they used contacts and information they got during the former regime.²⁶

According to a survey done in March 1993 in Slovakia, 69% of the adult population would prefer it if the differences in personal income were narrower²⁷.

²⁴Krivy, 1993

²⁵Private farms in Poland and small-size private companies in Hungary were tolerated

²⁶According to Respekt 50/93.

²⁷Aktuálne problémy Slovenska po rozpade ÈSFR, Bratislava, Centrum pre sociálnu analýzu , 1993

These two examples show that while it is difficult to transform the economic or political system, it is much more difficult and takes much more time to change a paradigm in people's minds. The deeply rooted dreams of a classless welfare society as the supreme justice are still vivid.

“The triumph over communism risks being at the same time a triumph of the simplistic views.”²⁸

THE SHATTERED MYTH OF CAPITALISM

“Capitalism is unjust, exploitive, ugly, and anyway, it is fading away.” So several generations were taught in all levels of school in the Soviet Bloc. This primitive propaganda turned out to be counter-productive. The same people used to watch western TV (if possible), were willing to pay relatively large amounts of money for western goods, listened to western music, watched western films and dreamed about traveling to Western Europe. They privately believed in the myth of capitalism.

Many believed that when politics and economic life were liberalized (which happened in a relatively short time), capitalism would start to work. They discovered very quickly that it is not so simple. They found that liberalized private business is impossible:

- without losing some of the social security they had under communism;
- with the same prices for the same product wherever you go;
- without hard work.

POSSIBLE FUTURE TRENDS

What do we mean by a postcommunist society?²⁹

²⁸Attila Ágh, Transition to Democracy in Central Europe, Studies in Public Policy 186,

We mean a society that is not communist anymore, but it is not yet on the “other side” either. The other side could generally be defined as a society with a multi-party democratic political system and free-market economy. The speed and success of the transformation will very much depend on people’s expectations and attitudes toward public life. These attitudes are changing all the time. And the change is not happening in a vacuum, but in the context of skeptical post-modern Europe. It is not a very encouraging picture. Serbian snipers shooting women and children, French farmers burning tires and destroying their harvest, Italian fascists voted into the government, as well as a Russian political lunatic dreaming about a Slavic superstate. All of them belong to that picture. It is not only postcommunist Eastern Europe that is changing. The whole of Europe is going through a crisis of its own values, of its own spirituality. The postcommunist societies, consciously trying to build their own foundations, are only more sensitive, more open to all kinds of chaos and instability.

²⁹Václav Havel answered the same question given to him by the author by saying that “postcommunist societies are the countries with a communist experience in which the democratic institutions have not yet been created and/or do not work properly. In that sense”, he added, “most of the former communist countries in Central Europe are normal democratic countries with an experience of communism in the past.” (V. Havel during a discussion of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in Bratislava, May 1994)

In Central Europe, these seem to be possible **future trends**:

- **Towards consensual democracy.** This is the most optimistic scenario. It is based on the assumption that a growing number of people will believe in the basic principles of a democratic society and a majority of the population would share a set of basic values and principles such as: the value of human life and personality, the value of private property, solidarity with handicapped and dependent fellow citizens, the culture of political life, etc. This can be achieved only through long-term education and through re-discovery of the spiritual foundations of society in private as well as public life.
- **Long-term instability.** Public life would become an arena for all kinds of scandals. People would express their wishes through legal but powerful ways (strikes, mass demonstrations, etc.). Polarization of the society would be a permanent phenomenon. This would be tied to a painful and slow economic reform, with a significant part of the population being relatively poor. One Slovak politician called it an “Italian scenario”.
- **A strong-handed government.** This could be a solution for political and economic chaos and instability. A necessary pre-condition is a strong charismatic political leader who is able to verbalize the simple, even irrational desires of a major part of the population. The strong-handed government does not necessarily have to be overtly coercive or authoritarian. It could be based on democratic elections and the ability to manipulate public opinion (for example, through media).
- **Extremism.** This scenario is based on the assumption that the silent majority would, by its apathy and lack of involvement in public life, let smaller aggressive and noisy groups create the impression that they speak for the people. The most probable ideology seems to be nationalism. The most fertile soil for nationalism is a lack of awareness of deep personal identity among a major portion of the population.
- **Geopolitical problems.** This could happen either if long-term instability, a strong-handed government, or extremism would lead to an international conflict, or by “exporting” a conflict outside of the country. It could also start with an insensitive discussion about sensitive international issues like borders, national minorities or historical justice.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

Sometime in the 1980s, a team of well-educated computer specialists worked in a computer center of a large state-owned mining company in Bratislava. One of their responsibilities was to prepare tables and charts for the financial management. The difference between them and their colleagues in a Western European city was not in their skills or (in this case) in the technology they were using. The difference was that they knew exactly how the tables and charts should look even before the sophisticated programs they developed were run. The economic results were planned by the government. And they knew that the tables and charts printed in their computer center could show results better than planned, but never worse. Since they were good professionals they wrote comprehensive programs that were bound to give real data. But since their chief had to submit “proper data” (i.e. a bit better than the government planned) to the general director of the company, they had to “put the tables in order” (i.e. to change the numbers to fit the expected results) before the computer printed it.

The computer center with expensive technology and skilled personnel was a mere decoration that was to give scientific credibility to the wishful plans of the government and the top management of the company. This was not an exceptional example. It was almost the rule in the so called socialist economy. In the following paragraphs we will look at the characteristics of this type of economy and its implications.

Marxism is one of the more extreme modern philosophies put into practice in communist countries in the form of a totalitarian ideology, pathetically called historical materialism. The cultural paradigm connected to it can be roughly identified with the paradigm of the late industrial economic system³⁰. Marx’s theory of communist economics had several important characteristics. In particular, a human being was understood in terms of his or her relationship to economic realities. Several important issues of **Marxist economic theory** should be mentioned here:

- man is defined as a cross section of economic relationships and fully determined by them;
- the development of man is tied to the development of the economy;
- it is crucially important to control the economy, because to control the economy means to control everything, including the spiritual aspects of human life;

³⁰The development of communist economies was always connected with fast industrialization - which usually meant the building of huge environmentally polluting factories connected with arms production or heavy industry.

- if necessary, the interests or needs (economic, cultural, spiritual) of social groups that do not understand the historical necessity of the development of communism should be suppressed;
- the totalitarian control of the whole infrastructure is justified by the responsibility of the State for an equal development of society.

Many other characteristics could be mentioned, but these should be enough to understand the way of reasoning that theoretically justified the centrally-controlled economies of Central European communist countries. To understand better the impact of communism on the way people perceive economics and business activities we must list several crucial macro- and micro- economic aspects of the East European economic system.

MACRO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

- Revenues to the state budget, as opposed to profit making, was the highest priority of all economic units. The safest way to guarantee this was to reduce private property as much as possible through nationalization.
- The existence of basic economic transactions was questionable since the State is the only owner and/or it dictates all conditions for transactions, such as: prices, competition, decisions about what to produce and in what volumes, who may buy it and in what quantity, etc.
- It was a paradox, that by trying to get rid of shortages by dictating prices and volumes of production, shortages on a massive scale became one of the strongest features of communism.
- The State assumed responsibility for the well-being of its citizens.
- Full employment was guaranteed by the constitution.
- To create an atmosphere of (relatively) good welfare and a successful economy, prices were kept artificially low. They were the same in the entire country and could change only by a decision of the highest Party committee. One of the most important functions of price - price as a source of information about value and/or scarcity of a product - was lost.

- Access to hard currency was very limited. As a consequence the black market of money changers was one of the most profitable sectors in the society. There was a big difference between official and unofficial rates.

MICRO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

We will look at eight basic factors characterizing any business model: in each of them we will list characteristics typical of a company operating in a communist centrally-controlled economy.

STRUCTURE

- Fragmentation and compartmentalization of work and roles - strictly defined job descriptions are seldom used.
- Strict hierarchical management structures.
- A tension between workers and management³¹ as well as between manufacturers and consumers³².

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- Financial systems based on spending and redistribution, not on generating profit. A company was allocated a certain amount of resources that it was supposed to spend in a fiscal year. If the money was not spent it could not be carried over to the next year. All of the income was transferred to the State budget and then redistributed as was politically convenient.
- Inventory and stock systems designed to reduce stealing - connections with financial transactions were minimal.
- Non-existent quality control systems - the number of products was all that mattered. In a situation of permanent shortages, quality was understood as something “extra”.³³

LEADERSHIP STYLE

- Activities, decisions and transactions were highly centralized.

³¹This was strengthened by the fact that most of the higher management positions (director, deputy director, etc.) were so called *nomenklatura* positions, which meant that the persons having them had to be approved by the Party committee and had special privileges and security.

³²Because communist economy was not based on an “allocation of scarce resources“ but on permanent shortages, consumer and producer were rivals eating the same piece of cake.

³³Huge and ugly blocks of flats in all Eastern European cities are a good example: In spite of their ugliness and low standard of accommodation people appreciated they have a place to stay. The quality of an apartment was not so important. “To have an apartment” was the critical issue.

- Quotas, quantitative results, status reports and tangible assets were basic tools for decision making.³⁴
- Top-down decision making processes - goals were imposed from the top (usually by the State administration).
- Absent landlord - division of responsibility and authority.

HUMAN RESOURCES

- People were not used to:
 - conceptual thinking;
 - handling information;
 - authority structures, such as boards (in the non-profit sector), owners, executive officers, etc.;
 - making responsible decisions;
 - pushing decision-making down the system.
- De-motivated workforce not trained but “shouted at” to increase productivity.
- Relationship of productivity to work and income unclear to many workers.

TECHNOLOGY

- Creativity suppressed - engineers usually followed developments and trends in the West.
- Limited financial resources for innovation and development of technology.

STRATEGY

³⁴Communism was obsessed by numbers - news about the economic situation consisted usually of information about how many pairs of shoes were produced, how many tons of coal were mined, how many pigs were raised, etc. Plans were usually officially 180% fulfilled or something like that.

- Practical emphasis on short-term solutions, although long-term (usually 5 year) plans were officially followed.
- Actual results were modified to fit the plans.³⁵
- Short-sighted exploitation of limited natural and capital resources.

VISION

- Economic results were supposed to serve the political interests of the Party.
- Personal goals were submitted to a system one did not necessarily believe in.

VALUES

- Manipulation and exploitation of nature.³⁶
- Personal competition and aggressiveness (in spite of declared cooperation and equality).
- Problematic philosophy of work - officially defined as the highest privilege and “mother of progress”, practically understood as a necessary evil.

CONSEQUENCES - IMPACT ON THE PRESENT BUSINESS CULTURE

- Fear of social problems.* The social situation is perceived as something unalterable. An individual is a mere helpless subject of the economic (and political) environment and his or her relationships. People often say: “There is nothing we can do to change the situation.” Responsibility for one’s own life is rare.
- Lack of creativity in economic activities.* An unwritten rule of communist economic activities was: “Anything not allowed is forbidden.” Creative

³⁵“What is impossible to do is always possible to plan.” was a common saying.

³⁶Based on a classic Communist principle “to command wind and rain”.

ways to “make money“ were limited and deeply suppressed. This attitude is still very common. The postcommunist societies of Central and Eastern Europe are still not mobile and creative enough to properly handle the complexities of a free-market economy.

- *High risk avoidance.* The majority of the population would prefer safer, although less effective, ways of economic activity before riskier, but more profitable, ones.
- *Strong remnants of a collectivist culture.* Individualism is still treated as something strange, almost evil. Social “empathy” with the unemployed is strong and officially supported by most of the political parties. Trade unions are quite influential, although strikes are rare (with Poland as an important exception).
- *Hierarchical thinking.* Many companies, especially the larger, (formerly) state-owned ones cling to outmoded hierarchical models of management. That causes many problems in the new, changed situation in which more up-to-date, team-based management models fit much better. Also, people in the lower levels of a management hierarchy tend to be passive, feeling they cannot influence anything or very little.
- *Biased ethical values.* It is very clear in the attitude to work, employers, customers and the State. Work, although officially glorified under communism, is still understood as a necessary evil. There are big problems with discipline, quality control, financial mismanagement, etc. Employers, whether state or private, are perceived as potential enemies who exploit their employees. That is why cheating them is not seen as such a bad thing after all. Customers are not “always right”. This is particularly evident when dealing with the bureaucratic monsters of state administration and big state-owned companies³⁷. Customers or clients are treated like intruders who disturb the peace and comfort of the employees. And finally, the State is still recognized as an economic enemy, taking unjustified taxes from its subjects. That is why tax evasion is generally justified in public opinion.

The centrally planned economy attempted to reach an ideal. The economy would be highly productive, run smoothly, and satisfy each citizen without any “risky business”, like a well-functioning robot. That this ideal was never reached and that even the most fundamental principles were never really followed, that they were very often perverted by uncontrollable corruption is clear. But this ideal took deep root in the minds of the citizens of communist countries.

³⁷For details about bureaucracy in the postcommunist countries see Marsh Moyle: “Bureaucracy”, CityGate Research paper, Bratislava, 1993.

Many more practical examples of the impact of communism on business culture could be mentioned. The stress is on the fact that communism did influence the way people understand work and money matters and this influence seems to be crucially important now during economic transformation.

The economies of the Central European countries are showing the first signs of growth. The private sector in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia produces more than 50% of each country's GNP. In each of these countries the extremely important process of "civilizing the economy" is taking place and the future of economic growth depends on its success to a significant degree. Social (household production, barter system, helping friends and relatives, etc.) or even illegal (use of foreign currency, bribing, money-changing, etc.) use of the economy was an effective and sometimes unavoidable way of survival in the crumbling communist regimes. In the short-term it still may be seen as an effective way of dealing with the material or financial problems of an individual or a family. As Professor Richard Rose of Strathclyde University says, "a civil economy is a precondition for the success of the market. The alternative, and uncivil economy, is a mixed economy of illegal and legal activities. Petty entrepreneurs can flourish in the shadows of an uncivil economy, and households that shut out intrusive communist authorities may want to shut out tax collectors of a democratically elected government."³⁸ Creating a civil economy obviously depends on the attitudes of people to, and their understanding of, the legality of financial and business transactions. The last four years have possibly shown that relatively positive attitudes of the population towards these issues are one of the most significant differences between Central Europe on the one hand and Southern and Eastern Europe on the other.

³⁸R. Rose: Eastern Europe's Need for a Civil Economy, in *Finance and the International Economy*, 6/1992, Oxford University Press

RELIGION AND THE CHURCH

Christians from Central and Eastern Europe feel something is lacking in the many books and articles trying to assess the impact of the communist regime on religion and the Church³⁹. Maybe it is an objective evaluation of what really happened, of how Christians behaved, and of what was right and what was wrong.

In this section we mention several characteristics and consequences of communism seen in the lives of Christian communities in Central European societies.

To avoid any allegations of one-sidedness, favoritism, or a lack of objectivity we would like to make it clear that although we are trying to be objective and not limited by our own experience, it is important to know that both of the authors are members of the Free Evangelical Church in Bratislava, Slovakia. Even if unintentional, this creates limits in our insight and a certain level of bias.

CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Most parts of Central Europe were “Christianized” between the years 800 and 1000 ad. (when the Pope sent a crown to the Hungarian king, Stephen, thus recognizing him as a Christian ruler). After the initial struggles between Byzantine and Roman influences, most of the region was under political and religious influence from the West. The prevailing confession has been Roman Catholicism ever since then. The effects of the Reformation were most significant in the western part of the region, in what is now the Czech Republic and part of Hungary. While in Czechia it was mostly the Lutheran Reformation, with its political and military expression in the Hussite movement, in Hungary it was mostly the Calvinist branch of the Reformation. In both countries, the counter-reformation was very strong, so the Protestant and Reformed Churches did not become “national” state churches, as in Scandinavia, although the initial reform movement was very powerful and influential.

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNISM

This section describes six areas of Church life that were influenced to the greatest extent by communism. Following are more details which deal with the sensitive issue of the Church/State relationship.

³⁹By “Church” we mean generally a community of Christians, not a specific denomination, if not specified otherwise.

THEOLOGY

Genuine theological education was almost impossible under communism. One or two theological seminaries were officially registered in each country (one Roman Catholic, one Protestant). The quality of theological education was very liberal and student enrollment was strictly limited. Good theological literature was practically non-existent. Very few students had the possibility to study abroad and even then only during the last years of communist rule. There were times when having a small Bible study group was dangerous and some Christians were sentenced to several years in prison just for doing that.

Consequences:

- A lack of theological thinking led to many inconsistent concepts and a general underestimation of the role of theology in the Church. Many Christians believed that it was something completely irrelevant - all that was needed was to walk with God in one's life and to do His will.
- Problems and questions resolved on an "ad hoc" basis.

Some of the consequences of this situation became very obvious directly after the fall of communism:

- Naive openness to all kinds of movements and activities imported from the West.
- No theological foundations to face the new set of problems brought by a free society.

In both cases skepticism and apathy followed.

MENTALITY OF CHRISTIANS

To be an active Christian in a communist society meant to be a second-class citizen, with everything that comes with that (prejudices, limited opportunities, etc.). This had a tremendous impact on attitudes and ways of thinking.

Many Christians had a special kind of “inferiority complex”. To be recognized as a believer was something similar to living with a physical handicap. In spite of the responsibility to “go out and preach the Gospel”, they tended to spend most of their time with fellow Christians, preferably from the same denomination. To keep the faith and pass it on to one’s children was the supreme goal - and of course, not easily achieved.

There was strong pressure to keep faith and religion in the private sphere which had nothing, or very little, to do with public life (political or professional). In the minds of many Christians this dichotomy became deeply rooted. Just to identify with Christianity, to say “I am a Christian”, was usually a brave act, sometimes with existential consequences (being dismissed from university or scientific institutes, lower wages, children not allowed to study, etc.)⁴⁰.

Consequences:

- Five years after the revolution there are many Christians trying to integrate their faith with what they are doing, but a majority still live in two separate worlds.
- Few articles in Christian magazines deal with important issues in society, such as nationalism, crime, privatization, unemployment, or other economic, social or political problems.

There were a few people for whom identification with Christianity and church service attendance was a manifestation of personal freedom and integrity. They were living examples of a holistic approach to life lived in truth and dignity even in the gray reality of “existing socialism”. Perhaps the lives of these people helped more than was ever acknowledged to bring an early end to communism.

⁴⁰There was a clause in the law, strictly forbidding “religious propaganda”, i.e. any public identification with Christianity.

TRADITIONS

The strength and influence of traditions grew during the forty years of communism. This was in keeping with the general atmosphere towards anything new or innovative. Outreach and communication between the Church and the society around it were limited or non-existent. This helped preserve older traditions as well as create new ones.

The subcultures created by various denominations had their roots in the Fifties when the churches had to struggle seriously for survival under stiff Stalinist oppression. But traditions played an important role even when it was not so necessary. They gave many Christians a certain level of identity. Certain traditions were actually misunderstood as a sign of separation from a sinful world. The result was sometimes on the edge of absurdity. Wearing jeans or having a beard was, for example, considered to be a serious sin in some communities.

Consequences

- A specific language was created by a ghetto mentality (especially among the smaller evangelical denominations). It was usually very different from the common language spoken by the rest of society. While the Catholic and Lutheran religious languages had their roots in old national traditions that people at least vaguely remember, evangelical language was confined to its newly developed subculture and, as such, was perceived as totally alien to the secular population.
- Empty traditions are becoming barriers for the modern skeptical population.
- Accepting traditions is often mistaken for accepting Christianity.

STRUCTURES

It is repeating the obvious to say that Communist countries were organized and governed centrally. It is also no surprise to find out that all other registered organizations, including churches, were forced to be structured and organized in the same manner. The centralized structure of the church was soon understood to be quite natural and, after all, the only right (biblical) way a church should function.

Consequence

- A lingering tendency to “keep the church under control“ even now, when pressure from the outside takes a very different form, and when the younger generation is extremely sensitive toward imposed control and manipulation.

ACTIVITIES

The activities of Christians were considered inherently to be very problematic by the Communist authorities and as such they were very limited. Those activities that were legally possible were pushed behind the thick walls of churches and Christian communities. In Central Europe, most Christians were not persecuted in the traditional meaning of the word (the 1950s being a dark exception). One was “allowed“ to be a believer as long as he or she kept it only in his or her private life. The same was true of registered churches or Christian organizations.

The State also decided which forms were acceptable and which were not. A Church choir, for example, was “permitted”, a Bible study group was not. A logical solution was to have a choir that would sing nice songs but the point was the Bible study program behind it. This was common not only in evangelical communities, but also in Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, especially in bigger cities.

One of the essential ambitions of the Christian church is to reach out from itself into the secular world. It is interesting to see the development in this area during the Communist rule. In the 1980s it began to be possible to meet regularly with a small group of friends in one’s home. It was never officially allowed but it was usually tolerated⁴¹. The movement of small home Bible study groups grew. In principle, statistics are impossible to achieve because it was very informal and sometimes conspiratorial. Some young people, especially students, tried to communicate their faith to their non-Christian friends and conversions no longer were so unusual.

It is obvious that any ideas about any outreach beyond national borders were very rare under the communist regime. Church in the communist bloc was seen more as a “mission field” than as a base for sending missionaries abroad. Most of the denominations and local churches were receiving significant material help from the USA and Western Europe. A similar responsibility for other countries started to emerge only after the fall of communism and is still uncommon. The prevailing attitude is that “we first need to evangelize our own nation and then to think about people living farther away”. Foreign mission is seen as an extra, as something Christians may do when they have fulfilled their tasks at home. There is also an assumption among East European Christians that a certain level of material wealth must be reached before they can think about sending missionaries.

Consequences:

- Christianity was understood to be a private matter.
- Since it was not easy to hide “real” activities behind “official” ones, many leaders of the Church became quite adept at “hiding” all kinds of activities behind a smoke screen of acceptable traditions.
- Christians are not prepared to live spiritually in a free-market pluralistic society.

⁴¹The situation in the Roman Catholic Church was much more difficult - all activities of laymen were strictly forbidden until the very fall of communism. There was actually a parallel Catholic Church structure, called the “secret Church”, consisting of non-conforming Catholic dissidents.

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Ambivalent attitudes exist towards foreign mission. |
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THE CHURCH/STATE RELATIONSHIP

The last, but probably most controversial, aspect of Church life under communist rule is its relationship with the State during those difficult years. It is not easy to describe because of the following:

- The Church did not have an official, uniform attitude towards its relationship with the State. In each country and each denomination were people who held ideas about it ranging the entire spectrum.
- Very few people held clearly defined attitudes towards this issue and could not openly communicate them if they were critical of the communist establishment.
- The problem of the Church/State relationship under communism is still too sensitive to be dealt with rationally and with historical precision. Many people who were emotionally involved still have memories too fresh to achieve the distance necessary for an objective evaluation.
- The Church/State relationship was understood to be one of the most sensitive and, at the same time, one of the most important issues Christians in Central Europe struggled with.

Most Eastern European Christians understood the problem of the attitude towards the State to be important but very complicated. There were absolute biblical principles on one side and the complicated, controversial, and confusing reality of every day life on the other. It was generally clear that Christians should not lie. They should be honest and live in truth, however high the price. But they were often faced with situations when they had to decide between an uncompromising stand for truth and being responsible for, and protecting of, their families and friends. It was not easy, for example, to join the dissident movement (even if it was clear, that truth and justice were on its side) knowing it would lead to persecution of one's children and friends. Ethical compromises were sometimes hard to avoid.⁴²

⁴²Every pastor was regularly summoned to the secret police and besides other things, was always asked if there had been any foreigner in his Church recently. The answer was usually a resolute "No", although it was (usually) a clear lie.

Another "classic" example was literature smuggling.

Some Christians (even high-ranking Church leaders such as: Cardinal Vishinski in Poland, Cardinal Tomá_ek in the Czech Republic or Cardinal Korec in Slovakia) took part in the political opposition movement during the entire period of communism.

Other Christians were overtly loyal to communist authorities, took part in their organizations⁴³ and encouraged others to do the same.

The majority of Christians in all denominations belonged to neither of these groups. They honestly tried to find a dynamic balance between the absolutes of Christian faith and the pragmatic approaches to life that seemed necessary under the communist regime. The philosophy supporting this attitude was: “The root of the problems of communist societies is not political nor economic, it is spiritual. That also means that the way to help society most effectively is to communicate the Gospel to as many people as possible and to strengthen Christians in their faith.” In order to do that it seemed to be unwise to disqualify oneself by being active in overt political opposition even if one believed in its meaning, and appreciated the moral integrity of its representatives. Ethical compromises in the name of strategy and tactics were sometimes necessary.⁴⁴

It is important to note that many of these Christians got into conflict with the authorities simply by uncompromisingly doing what they believed was important - to communicate the Gospel in whatever environment they found themselves. It seems to be proper to call this group of believers “a spiritual opposition”. There is no question about their role in bringing the communist regimes closer to an end, although this role was hidden much more than the “official” dissident movements within Eastern Europe.

⁴³ A typical example of a Communist led religious organization was Pacem In Terris, an association of Roman Catholic priests, that had in its statutes acknowledgment of the Communist Party being a leading force in Czechoslovak politics.

⁴⁴ Most of them were in the nature of not doing something one felt would be the morally and politically right thing to do - for example not to sign a petition to free a dissident who is in prison or not to attend an underground meeting of dissident writers, etc.

Consequences:

- **A division between secular and sacred.** Since involvement in public life was practically impossible, or at least was not understood as the best choice for a Christian in communist Central Europe, even now, after the changes it is often treated as something “worldly”, “not spiritual enough”, something which is, in principle, secular. The issues of politics and economics (such as taxes, government or privatization) are rarely discussed in Christian literature and periodicals
- **Lack of responsibility for public life.** Responsibility for public life is critically underestimated, especially in smaller Protestant denominations⁴⁵. This is caused by the seemingly hopeless efforts to change, or at least influence, anything. Campaigning and lobbying are very unusual practices - although it is slowly changing. Another reason could be an insufficient theological background for such actions.
- **Simplified understanding of politics and economy.** This is a general problem in all postcommunist societies, as was mentioned in previous sections. Christians get lost in the complexities of public life simply because they do not ask fundamental theological questions. There is an openness to all kinds of populist (nationalist, neo-communist) political movements.
- **The illusion of Christian politics.** Contradictory to the previous point, there are groups of Christians who are trying to institutionally define “Christian politics”. This is usually (although not exclusively) the case of the Roman Catholic church in each country. In spite of many positive results, Christian political parties and movements tend to be actually “confessional”. To declare that a party is based on Christian ethics and values is often misused as a trick to gain voters.

⁴⁵Since the Roman Catholic and, in the case of Hungary, also the Reformed churches are so closely intertwined with national tradition and culture, their official involvement in politics and culture is naturally very strong.

ART AND CULTURE

ART IN THE YEARS OF COMMUNISM

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (1950 - 1989)

The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was not only the business of workers and sailors. Among the most committed supporters was a large group of very intelligent and skilled artists. They gave vent to anger against meaningless tradition, cruel social injustice, oppressive religion and the aesthetic deadlock of bourgeois art. They also tried to express their hopes for the coming new classless society to meet their dreams of a righteous world order with no suffering and equally distributed wealth. Film director Sergei Eisenstein, poets Vladimir Mayakovski and Sergei Yesenin, author Ilya Erenburg, composer Sergei Rachmaninov and many others should be mentioned here with due respect for their artistic qualities. Personal integrity led many of them to suicide in total despair (Mayakovski, Yesenin), and others to the GULAG archipelago in Siberia where many of them died. The more fortunate ended up in exile.

From the very beginning, Marxist ideology was reflected in culture and the arts. "Socialist realism" was the only progressive artistic style allowed. An artist should depict reality as it actually was, he or she should be socially aware by unveiling the evil character of capitalism and/or stressing the progressive achievements of communism. Large pictures of landscapes with factories, portraits of workers, bigger-than-life statues of Stalin and other leading comrades, poems glorifying the Party and 'the Father' of the nation, theater performances condemning capitalist exploitation and the glorious victory of the working class were created, along with large housing projects and big hydro-electric power stations. They depicted the spirit of the age: heroic, unnatural, megalomaniac and absurd.

Culture and the arts were understood as supportive tools of the ruling ideology of the Communist party. Creativity and discussion of existential questions, so essential for the arts and for artists, were practically impossible. Art equaled propaganda carried out using artistic skills. "Ideologically neutral" works of art or of an alternate ideology (such as any religion, any modern western philosophy, or existentialism) were not tolerated. It is hard to believe now that many artists produced their socialist art out of genuine enthusiasm but it was probably so. Others were simply afraid. All they wanted was peace and relative prosperity for themselves and for their families. The smallest group of all consisted of brave artists who followed their conscience and tried to keep their integrity. Some of them spent years in prison, others withdrew from public life into lonely privacy.

Looking at portraits of Stalin, reading simple rhymes glorifying achievements of the working class or listening to heroic marches of that time, one has an impression of something unnatural, something that could not last long. The death of Stalin in 1953 and, especially, Khrushchev's "secret speech" in 1956 on Stalin's abuses and "the cult of personality" slowly created at least some space necessary for the artistic and philosophic activity that paved the way for the "colorful Sixties", in Central European clothes, of course⁴⁶. In Czechoslovakia, for example, it started with congresses of writers and the launching of independent literature journals in the second half of the 1950s. That was followed by the experience of relative creative freedom together with the world-wide "cultural revolution" which gave birth to many excellent books, films, pictures, theater performances and music. This atmosphere of openness, creativity and great hope for the future was stopped quite abruptly by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968.

The Seventies and the Eighties were quite different in each Central European country:

In *Hungary*, the Communist led government under János Kádár slowly introduced economic reforms and allowed a significant number of Hungarian students to study in Western European and American universities. Space for a (politically) independent culture as well as contact with Western Europe was growing⁴⁷. It was possible to buy banned Czechoslovak samizdat and exile literature on the booktables in downtown Budapest in the late Eighties. At the same time, in Czechoslovakia, one could be put in jail for just possessing those books.

The last twenty years of Communist rule in *Poland* were very dramatic indeed. After the suppression of the 1968 protests and the purges of the reformist intellectuals in the early Seventies, KOR (Workers' Defense Committee) in 1976, and Solidarity in 1980, were established. In October 1978 Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected as Pope John Paul II. In 1979 he visited Poland. Martial law, imposed on December 13, 1981, caused a real national frustration. Finally, in 1988, a wave of strikes forced the government to begin a dialogue with Solidarity. All of those dramatic events had its reflection in traditionally

⁴⁶I do not want to create the illusion that everything went smoothly and that there were no differences in the respective Central European countries. For example, in the same year that Khrushchev read his secret speech, and worker's revolts helped to topple Beirut's Stalinist government in Poland, the Hungarian Revolution was put down by the Soviet military.

⁴⁷Pilgrimage-like trips of Czechoslovak youth for rock concerts in Budapest during the Eighties are good example.

brilliant Polish art, especially film, theater and music⁴⁸. The area of art and culture remained relatively independent during this period⁴⁹.

The story of *Czechoslovakia* was different. Immediately after the Soviet invasion and the appointment of new political and Party leaders (headed by Dr. Gustáv Husák) a period of *normalization*, as it was officially called, started. Things were supposed to return to the pre-1960s situation. A very rigid, although less cruel, political regime was established. Since those who initiated the changes leading up to the Prague Spring of 1968 were mainly intellectuals, Husák's regime was specifically concerned with them. All the reformist politicians, artists and other publicly renowned personalities were forced to either "confess" their political mistakes or leave public life⁵⁰. Intellectuals were forced to take up menial work, such as working the night-shift tending the centralized heating systems of large apartment blocks. This became a tradition. The first foreign minister of a democratic Czechoslovakia, Jiří Dienstbier, actually had his last night shift as a heating system tender after he was already appointed minister. Morale: a country can last one night without a minister, but a block of flats cannot last without heating.

THE FIRST AND SECOND CULTURES⁵¹

The most important feature of the Czechoslovak version of "realistic socialism" was that although (practically) no one really believed it (almost) everyone pretended he did. The division between official and private became quite obvious both in personal life and in the public square. In the area of culture, there was always an official mainstream consisting of artists loyal to the regime and an unofficial subculture embracing political and artistic nonconformists. While "unofficial" artists did not receive official recognition they were well-known, especially among the younger population.

The difference between the two cultures was not so much in artistic or aesthetic criteria but in the non-compromising authenticity of the artists.

Writers who were officially forbidden (i.e. their books could not be published or sold) "published" their books in samizdat, typed on old-fashioned typewriters in up to 10 copies which were then given to a circle of reliable close friends and read in small groups

⁴⁸Films and theater pieces by Andrzej Wajda (Man with the Iron Mask, Danton) are probably the most famous in the Western world. But melancholic Polish jazz (Zbigniew Namysłowski, Ursula Dżudziak) and beautiful contemporary classical music (Krzysztof Penderecki, Witold Lutosławski) should be mentioned too.

⁴⁹The Polish Cultural Center in Bratislava used to be a window into the European culture for many Slovaks interested in these things.

⁵⁰The situation in Slovakia was softer than in the Czech Republic. It can be at least partially attributed to the personality of the Slovak communist minister of culture, Miroslav Válek, who was a very good poet at the same time.

⁵¹This chapter is devoted to mainly Czechoslovak situation.

of people gathered secretly in private houses. It was dangerous to even have a copy of such books at home - one could be legally imprisoned for up to two years.

Painters organized exhibitions in their own living rooms, garages, cellars, institutes for the mentally handicapped and other non-typical places.

Musicians [jazz, rock, classical, Christian choirs - attitudes, not style, were important] sometimes played their music at illegal or semi-legal festivals. Some of them took place in private summer houses. The most famous were rock concerts at Václav Havel's summer house in Hrádeček - now the place where the Czech president invites his foreign visitors. Others happened in small villages, usually in the Moravian (now part of the Czech Republic) countryside.

What did all these events and activities have in common?

It was the desire for authenticity and integrity of all who were involved - authors, performers, organizers, audience. And, of course, a willingness to take a risk. There was always something more than art there. It was almost a way of life. It was no surprise that after the Velvet Revolution so many writers, actors and even rock musicians became involved in politics (especially those around Havel). They represented an uncompromising approach to the communist past as well as creative, non-traditional ways of dealing with present problems.

In contrast to this ragged, shabby, sometimes impolite, but always substantial and honest (the second, alternative, underground) culture, there was the "official" high culture. Its distinguished representatives entertained the population via television and had books published in huge print runs. It did not really matter how many would sell. Their music, often overtly dedicated to the Party, was performed in big pompous concert halls, and heroic sculptures and pictures were commissioned by special order of the Party *nomenclature*.

Consequences

- A skeptical attitude towards all kinds of ideological art (including the Christian evangelistic use of it), as well as an attitude of the high appreciation for the authenticity and integrity of an artist among Eastern Europeans. *Who* the artist is very often becomes much more important than *what* he or she accomplishes.

- “All that glitters is suspicious”. People value integrity and honesty in any art form more than a perfect, “glittering” form.

NEW TEMPTATIONS, NEW POSSIBILITIES

BACK TO (EUROPEAN) TRADITIONS

“Back to Europe” was one of the most common slogans in all of the postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In the area of arts and culture it meant that these nations were aware of the fact that their excellent cultural traditions were interrupted by forty years of communism (with a short-lived liberalization in the 1960s) and that they were willing to go back to their cultural roots. There are roughly two ways of dealing with this issue:

- The “Historic” approach
- The “Modern” approach

The two terms are in quotes in order to avoid confusion with their traditional meanings. What they mean here is:

The Historic approach

Postcommunist Central Europe is looking back to the distant past to find a framework for a national culture lost by the Communist hiatus. Christian tradition is emphasized along with the better (or more suitable) periods of national history - be it the times of King St. Stephan, the historic Polish Kingdom, or Greater Moravia. It is naturally tied to an increase in nationalism (sometimes softer, sometimes more crude), especially in Slovakia⁵² and Hungary. Or at least, an increase in national awareness.

A good example would be the general understanding of Christian values and principles and their meaning in society. Christian symbols and Christian vocabulary are used extensively by most of the new political parties (excluding the former Communists and the new Liberals) and by many artists. Christianity itself is understood as a body of moral teaching, a historical achievement giving a nation a solid identity. Any personal or spiritual dimension is usually neglected. It is not far from being a state religion or even a state ideology.

The Modern approach

⁵²Two of the best Slovak literature journals (*Kultúrny život*, *Slovenské pohľady*) lost their financial support from the State in 1993 because they were “not Slovak enough”.

It is not a return to where Europe was in the past but to where Europe is now. In politics this attitude is represented by the Liberal parties. In the area of culture and the arts it is followed by young cosmopolitan artists catching up on the latest philosophical and artistic streams, as well as by the general public watching American action movies on their TV sets and VCRs, or reading Stephen King's best-sellers which are mass marketed on the streets of each Eastern European city. Along with it comes an awareness of global issues (environmentalism, rejection of ethnic wars, etc.), the external excesses of Western humanistic culture (pornography, drugs, the homosexual movement, etc.), as well as western ideals of conformism and consumerism.

Consequence

- In spite of outspoken political rhetoric about belonging to Europe there is a lack of consensus about what that means in terms of values, ideals and general culture. This is not only a consequence of eastern communism but also of a western spiritual and cultural crisis of direction.

- National and Christian symbols are very often used in contemporary works of art. They express a new ideology trying to take the place emptied by official communist art.

- As an opposition to the nationalist art, a cynical culture prevails - especially among the younger generation.

COMMERCIALIZATION

Free-market forces, however undeveloped, are a totally new phenomenon in the arts and culture. Culture and economics have nothing in common under communism. To be an artist and to make money through one's art was considered to be almost immoral. Money was generally understood as something dirty - a lesser evil one had to live with⁵³. High-quality culture was accessible and free.

The commercialization of culture came as a shock for many good people. It pushed many valuable magazines, program cinemas and literature editions out of business. Many famous samizdat publishers found it easy to make their books in garages and cellars, under the permanent threat of imprisonment. But to go out and sell the same books in the "official" marketplace was an insurmountable barrier for them.

Here is one very typical example:

Jazz Section was registered as an association of Czech and Slovak jazz fans and musicians in the 1970s. It slowly became an independent, though still legal, organization of like-minded people interested in contemporary music, literature, theater, and fine arts thanks to brilliant leadership by its active members. *Jazz Section* published about forty books, and organized dozens of exhibitions, concerts and theater performances. In 1987 it had more than 80,000 members, most of them young people for whom it was the only window into current philosophy, theology, art and music. And, of course, it was a "classic second culture organization", built through a network of personal relationships and affinity⁵⁴. The Party-State did all it could to charge the organization with breaking the law and ban it. Numerous investigations were made into its auditing and finances. They found nothing until a famous "monster process" began. All of the *Jazz Section* board members were sentenced. After the Velvet Revolution these same people wanted to continue in their activities. But the results were totally different - after several unsuccessful attempts, resulting in huge financial losses and mismanagement, they ended up as frustrated wrecks, disappointed with "Czech capitalism", hostile to politicians and politics as such⁵⁵.

⁵³This attitude may have been caused by successful communist propaganda depicting capitalism as a dirty game of money changing, or by a lack of basic understanding of economy, since economic decisions did not touch the money.

⁵⁴Any new member had to have two members of the Section guarantee him - a simple way to keep it independent.

⁵⁵The only defamation case brought up in the post-communist Central Europe was against Petr Cibulka, one of the former leading personalities of Jazz Section, who said publicly in the court room that president Havel (Cibulka's former dissident friend) is "swine".

Consequences

- A growing awareness of costs, values and prices even in the area of culture. A well developed and growing private publishing business, including high-quality literature in each of the Central European countries, is a good example.
- Commercial success is often perceived to be equal to quality. The most typical example is probably the flood of financially expensive, but artistically cheap, American action films that have taken over Eastern European cinemas and TV programs.
- A lack of clear understanding about the eventual State involvement in the financial support of art and culture.

Art and culture is always a good mirror for a society. Postcommunist Central Europe is not an exception. Due to the possibilities of communication and travel across borders, the shadows of the communist past are mixed with postmodern Western Europe. The following chapter describes the characteristics of this mixture.

POSTMODERN CULTURE IN POSTCOMMUNIST COUNTRIES⁵⁶

Central European communist societies had all the characteristics of a modern society (a universal, all-embracing system of thought; industrialism; an official optimism proclaiming that there are no unanswerable questions; etc.). As such, they were going through the same crisis of modernity evident in Western Europe and North America today. The paradigm shift towards postmodernity is not only a “Western phenomenon”.

The reason postmodern culture is very important in postcommunist countries is that it is dominant just when they are building the foundations of their political and economic systems. It is interesting to find a mixture of very traditional and very (post)modern attitudes present in the population of this region.

A good example is an ambivalent **attitude towards the State**.

A major part of the population in each Central European country believes that the State should play an important role in the economic and social spheres. This could be labeled as a traditional paternalistic approach. But at the same time (very probably) the same people show very inconsistent and irrational attitudes towards taxes (the less one pays the better) and legality (everything is OK until you are caught). The State should provide, but we are not willing to pay the price.

Another example is the **attitude toward religion**.

The former communist countries in CEE are traditionally very religious. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches are identified as symbols of national identity. According to the latest censuses, a large majority of citizens (about 75% in Slovakia, about 93% in Poland) still consider themselves to be Christian. During the communist period the Christian church (generally) had a very good reputation. It was naturally expected that after "the poor years" of communism, years of rich spiritual growth would come. Almost the opposite is true.

"When a Christian is treated as an enemy of the State, his course is very much harder, but it is simpler. I am concerned with the dangers to the tolerated minority; and in the modern world, it may turn out that the most intolerable thing for Christians is to be tolerated."⁵⁷

⁵⁶For a brief introduction of postmodern philosophy see APPENDIX I.

⁵⁷T.S.Eliot: *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Faber and Faber, London 1939

In spite of all the hardships and suffering to be a Christian, to be a member of the Church, was much simpler in the "simple" black-and-white world of ideological totality. Although masses are still members of big churches, the same masses are very skeptical of any ideology, ideological Christianity included. That is why so many people are open to the "non-ideological" and not so institutionalized religious movements such as New Age or Bahai⁵⁸.

Postmodernists (of all colors) consider the freedom to choose to be one of the most valuable accomplishments of contemporary society. Freedom of choice means that one has to have the possibility to choose at any time and the more possibilities the better. That is exactly the position of the young, secularized generation towards religion or, more specifically, toward Christianity. Suspicion against all kinds of propaganda, of somebody wanting to change your mind - to change *you*, is very strong, especially in private life. But in many Christian minds the framework of approved (by government or parliament) and non-approved denominations and religious movements is still very much alive and it looks like they can be either ideological or lost. "National" churches, usually with the largest percentage of members, in several countries even lobby parliament in order to legally ban other denominations, sects or religious movements.

Consequences

- The biggest barrier on the way from communism to democracy is a relativist culture, resulting from both communism of the past and postmodern Europe of the present.
- Traditional approaches to politics, economy, sociology and religion cannot be always applied in postcommunist Central Europe.
- Strong appreciation of personal relationships and integrity.

⁵⁸In the Romanian Transylvanian city of Cluj there are about as many Bahais as Evangelicals (cca 3.000).

CONCLUSIONS

The impact of communism on the way people feel and think is clearly very complex. We must remember, while trying to understand it, that the postcommunist societies of Central Europe are changing with great speed. And so are the attitudes of their citizens.

Another important aspect of the postcommunist transformation is that it is taking place in the context of a much broader transformation of the cultural paradigm of the entire Western world. There are respected writers who describe it as the end of a western civilization based on Christianity.

To describe the process that is taking place in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism many people used the metaphor “catch up train”. The communist countries dropped off the “train” of European countries some 40 years ago and now they are doing their best to catch it again. Not many people use this picture now. The reason is that there is no consensus about the direction of the train, indeed even about the existence of such a train.

There are many different assessments about possible future trends in this region - from the most optimistic (a growing economy, a well-functioning democracy with a deep awareness of ethical issues) to the most catastrophic ones (the “Yugoslav scenario”). What seems to be clear even now, is that there will be no lack of unexpected surprises.

As this paper is being written, Slovakia has a broad coalition government consisting of, among others, the neo-communist Party of the Democratic Left and the conservative, pro-capitalist Christian Democratic Movement (headed by former dissidents). After parliamentary elections in Hungary a government of almost the same types of parties is being formed (the neo-communist Hungarian Socialist Party and the liberal Association of Free Democrats). Who would have even considered this as a possibility 2 years ago?

A Slovak book publisher recently wanted to find out what kind of literature high school kids would like to read. He made a representative survey in which he asked the question, “What is the book you would like to read most?”. The book with the highest score was - Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Not a very post-modern choice. We have to be very careful making final verdicts about a young generation that is totally cut off from classical tradition by popular TV culture.

These two examples illustrate the relativity of general, large-scale trends and developments. Although they may be extremely helpful, they may also make us blind to things or ideas that do not fit into them.

The hope is that this paper will help us to understand people living in postcommunist Central Europe a little more, without reducing individuals to wheels in the machine, to respondents of a sociological survey.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I: POSTMODERNISM

Though the term "postmodernism" is widely used it is never quite clear what it means. It is more often felt than rationally described. The word has several "levels of meaning". Most postmodernists would agree that it is a very contemporary trend in culture and thinking and it came (or is coming) after the historical modern times.

Postmodernism was first used in literature to describe decadent philosophy and the general atmosphere of crisis. Later it was accepted as a term describing the paradigm shift that many people felt and could not find a name for⁵⁹. As in many times before, the concept began in the study rooms of philosophers and artistic studios until it became widely used, although vaguely specified, in practically every area of life.

The postmodern attitude is defined as a negation of (certain aspects of) modernity and a return to (certain aspects of) pre-modern understanding and attitudes. While modern times were characterized by **rationalism** and **universalism**, postmodernism can be understood as "a revolt against the domination of rationalism/universalism in culture, caused mainly by historical experiences, with realizations of projects of modernity and dialogue with an alternative understanding of the world (especially non-European and pre-modern)"⁶⁰. Postmodernism is radically pluralistic, against all totalitarian ideas of a Unity or Whole. The entire process of learning or knowing is actually a communication and discussion process. Anything systematic (i.e. science) is perceived with great skepticism.

"Postmodern knowledge is not a tool in the hands of authorities. It shapes our sense and understanding of differences and strengthens our ability to tolerate what is non-comparable."⁶¹

Probably the most important issue in any philosophical system is its *concept of truth*, or epistemology. While the classic concept of truth says there is just one Truth, valid all the time and in all places, the modern concept of truth says there are many relative truths. A typical postmodernist would say truth does not really matter. Everything is just a heterogeneous communication, a collection of texts, a language game.

In the area of ontology, or the *concept of man*, the classic understanding says man is created by God, which is also the source of his or her value. Modernists would say that man is an autonomous personality, responsible only to himself (highly organized matter, in the materialist extreme). For a postmodernist, the origin and essence of man is not important - it is impossible to tell between the conscious and unconscious, reality and the

⁵⁹History : A. Toynbee: A Study of History; Science: F.Capra: Tao of Physics; Philosophy: J.F.Lyotard: Post-modern Condition; P.Sloterdijk: Kritik der zynischen Vernunft, etc.

⁶⁰Stanislav Hubík: Postmoderní kultura, Praha 1992

⁶¹J.F.Lyotard: The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Manchester 1987

dream. When we deal with people, both they and we use a set of masks (consciously or unconsciously) and it is impossible to tell which one is essential or the most important.

In *theology*, after the classic understanding of one "universal" God and modern atheism or the humanist religion, postmodernism comes with the radical pluralistic concept of tolerance to all religions and spiritual schools, believing that all of them have something important to say. Since postmodernism has its roots in Western Euro-American tradition and one of the main driving forces is to deny that, it is much more open to non-European and pre-modern religions.

While classical art first tried to serve as a catalyst of worship to God and later to depict reality as it was seen through the artist's eyes, modern artists tried to depict feelings, emotions, and ideas (all of them practically non-depictable). Postmodernists have only contempt for the profound (whether or not it is depictable). A creative event, not the final product or message, is important. There are no rules or standards. Everybody is free to perceive and/or produce art. Eclecticism, incompleteness and confusion (as seen in videoclips) are very typical. History (not only of the arts) is viewed and quoted with a mixture of nostalgia and irony.

APPENDIX II: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNIST CZECHO-SLOVAKIA

- 1943** December: Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Support and Post-War Cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the USSR signed in Moscow
- 1945** April 4: First “Czechoslovak Government of the National Front” consisting of anti-fascist parties (but led by communists) formed in Ko_ice.
- 1946** May: General elections; the Democratic (non-communist) Party won in Slovakia, whilst the Communist Party won in the Czech Republic⁶²; a coalition government (with the communists having all “power” ministries as well as the post of prime minister) was formed; Klement Gottwald became Prime Minister.
- 1948** February 25: Communists created a constitutional crisis resulting in a coup d’etat marking the beginning of a Stalinist one-party communist dictatorship. The series of so called “monster processes” with “class enemies” immediately starts; many democrats but also leading communists are executed or imprisoned.
May: General elections, for the first time with a “unified list of candidates”, meaning that there is just one (communist) candidate in each district.
May: Klement Gottwald becomes President.
- 1953** March 5: The death of Stalin.
- 1955** May: Czechoslovakia becomes a founding member of the Warsaw Pact
- 1968** Spring: Alexander Dubèek became Chairman of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia introducing his program of “socialism with human face”; the grassroots reform movement is growing very rapidly.
August 21: Invasion of Warsaw pact troops into the country.
- 1976** Members of the underground rock band Plastic People of the Universe (PPU) are imprisoned for “public disorder”.
- 1977** January 1: As a protest against the imprisonment of PPU members, Charta 77 was formed with Václav Havel, Jan Patoèka and Václav Benda as its first spokespersons; strong persecution soon follows.
- 1988** March 25: A “Candle light demonstration”, demanding religious freedom and the keeping of human rights takes place in Bratislava - the first mass protest against the communist establishment in Czechoslovakia; it is brutally suppressed by the police.
- 1989** January 11-16: “Palach’s Week” - a series of mass demonstrations at the Wenceslav square in Prague, commemorating the death of Jan Palach who burned himself in January 1969 and protesting against human rights abuses; brutally suppressed by the police.
November 17: A demonstration of students in Prague started the events of the “Velvet Revolution” in Czechoslovakia.
December 28: Václav Havel unanimously elected as Czechoslovak President by a (still) communist dominated parliament.
- 1990** June 10: First free multi-party elections in Czechoslovakia.
- 1993** January 1: Czechoslovak Federative Republic ceases to exist - Czech and Slovak Republics created.

⁶²Czechoslovakia was a unitarian state until 1968. Slovakia had a significant level of autonomy though.

APPENDIX III: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNIST HUNGARY

- 1918** November 24: Founding of the Hungarian Communist Party
- 1919** March 21: Proclamation of the Soviet Republic of Hungary led by the communist Béla Kun.
August 1: Removal of Béla Kun and his Revolutionary Council; end of the Soviet Republic in Hungary.
- 1944** September 12: Refounding of the Hungarian Communist Party.
October: the Communists and the Social Democrats established a united anti-fascist front.
December: Budapest surrounded by the Soviet army.
- 1945** November 4: General election.
- 1948** February 10: Signing of Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Support between Hungary and the USSR
June: Official “merger” of Communists and Social Democrats, in reality a communist take-over; the new formation is called the “Hungarian Workers’ Party”.
- 1949** February: The trial of Cardinal József Mindszenty (sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of anti-State activities) starts a series of show trials resulting in many executions and long-term imprisonments.
September: The trial of László Rajk, a communist minister of foreign affairs (sentenced to life and executed for high treason).
- 1953** March 5: The death of Stalin.
July 3: Imre Nagy, representing the reform wing in the Communist Party became Prime Minister.
- 1955** April 14: Imre Nagy removed from his post and expelled from the Hungarian Workers’ Party; a dictatorship led by communist hard-liner Matyás Rákosi re-introduced.
May: Hungary becomes a founding member of the Warsaw Pact.
- 1956** October 23: revolutionary uprising sweeps away Rákosi; Imre Nagy became Prime Minister again and formulated a program of democracy, national sovereignty, end of the collectivization of agriculture; Hungarian Workers’ Party was replaced by Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party founded by Imre Nagy, János Kádár and their associates.
November 4-11: The revolution was suppressed by Soviet military and political intervention; János Kádár left the Nagy government and announced the creation of a new government in Szolnok, he requested Soviet assistance.
- 1958** Imre Nagy and his closest associates executed, thousands of individuals given long prison sentences.
- 1960s** Kádár proclaims: “Those who are not against us are with us.”; slow economic reform and the softening of political persecution began.
- 1968** January: “A New Economic Mechanism”, aimed at more realistic development of the economy put into effect.
- 1988** May: The “Monopoly of power of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party” was constitutionally abolished.

- 1989** June 16: Imre Nagy, officially re-buried.
September: Hungary opened its borders to East Germans emigrating to West Germany.
- 1990** March 25: First free multi-party elections (won by Hungarian Democratic Forum, led by Jozsef Antal)

APPENDIX IV: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNIST POLAND

- 1939** August 23: Poland partitioned by the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact.
September 1: Poland invaded by Germany.
September 17: Poland invaded by the USSR.
- 1943** Warsaw Ghetto uprising, virtually all remaining Jews in Warsaw killed.
- 1944** July 22: Lublin Committee (Polish government led by communists) formed under Soviet patronage.
August 1-October 2: Warsaw uprising; Warsaw demolished by the Germans although the Soviet Red Army stands across the Vistula River. Beginning of liberation, with complete occupation of all Polish lands by the Soviets
- 1945** February: Yalta Agreement among Allies sets up postwar borders.
Germany defeated by Allies
Formation of Provisional Government of National Unity
- 1948** Formation of Polish United Workers' Party unifying communists and socialists: establishment of one-party state.
Gomulka ousted; hard-liner Bierut takes over as first Party secretary.
Moderate "Polish road to socialism" rejected for copying Stalinist social, political, and economic institutions.
- 1952** Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland.
- 1953** March 5: Death of Stalin.
- 1955** May: Poland becomes a founding member of the Warsaw Pact
- 1956** Khrushchev's "secret speech" on Stalin's abuses; reformers in the Party are first among the world's communists to begin circulating copies.
June: Worker's revolts in Poznan help topple Bierut's government (Bierut dies of heart attack).
October: "Polish October"; Gomulka reappointed first secretary, instituted economic and political reforms.
- 1968** March: Students and intellectuals protest, put down by government with some help from workers; anti-Semitic campaign and purge of reformist intellectuals.
- 1970** December: Baltic riots over food prices, dozens of workers killed.
Gierek replaced Gomulka as first secretary.
- 1976** Constitutional amendments formally enshrine the "leading role of the Party" and affirming Poland's "unshakable fraternal bonds" with the Soviet Union.
June: Demonstration in Radom and Ursus provoked by price increases, which are rescinded.
September: Formation of KOR (Workers' Defense Committee), an organization intended to assist workers being punished for the June events, and the first organized opposition to communist rule,
- 1978** October: Cardinal Karol Wojtyla elected Pope John Paul II.
- 1979** June: Pope John Paul II visits Poland.
- 1980** July: Price increases again provoke nationwide protests by workers.
August: Strikes lead to formation of Solidarity, which the government legally recognizes.

- 1981** December 13: Martial law; Jaruzelski's government began persecution of Solidarity.
- 1983** End of martial law.
- 1985** Mikhail Gorbachev selected general secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union.
- 1988** Strikes in May and August lead the government to begin dialogue with Solidarity.
- 1989** February-April: Government engages in roundtable talks with representatives of Solidarity concerning economic and political reform. End in an agreement to hold semi-competitive elections in June in which 65 percent of the seats in the Sejm (the lower house of parliament) are reserved for the communists and their allied parties, with 35 percent being open to competition; all 100 seats of the Senate opened to non-communists.
- June: Solidarity wins 99 of the 100 Senate seats, and all 161 seats open to competition in the Sejm. Most of the communist candidates running unopposed failed to receive the 50 percent of votes cast necessary to take office.
- August: After the communists failed to form a government, Solidarity forms a government with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as prime minister.