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**Careers Precipitated and Shaped  
by the Velvet Revolution:  
An Oral-Historian Analysis of Individuals**

Diploma thesis

Prague 2021

Supervisor: PhDr. Přemysl Houda, Ph.D.

I hereby declare that this diploma thesis was solely written by me and that I properly quoted all my sources. All the references and source materials I used are listed in the Works Cited section, which forms an integral part of this thesis. I furthermore agree that this dissertation may be made available for public use in the Charles University library and may be used for study purposes in accordance with copyright law.

Prague, July 7th, 2021.

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Bc. Yveta Lizatović

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to all narrators and most of all to my supervisor, PhDr. Přemysl Houda, Ph.D., for his patient guidance and advice he has provided throughout my work on the present thesis.

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## **Abstract**

The work examines and compares personal values, behavioral patterns, personal motivation, and career choices of six individuals from the Velvet Revolution period using interviews obtained by the oral-historical method. The main aim is to answer the question where people who helped transform one regime into another had come from and how they coped with tasks they could not have been prepared for in advance.

In late 1989, the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia collapsed. One way of running the society was quickly replaced by another, but the society did not collapse, and life went pretty smoothly on. All of a sudden, many opportunities opened up as well as many responsibilities to generations of people who could not have been prepared to take either of them. Yet at least some of them did so. How did they manage?

## **Keywords**

Czechoslovak society 1989–1992, career decision-making, Velvet revolution of 1989, network of social acquaintances, transformation of society

## **Abstrakt**

Práce zkoumá a porovnává hodnotové systémy, vzorce chování, osobní motivaci a kariérní rozhodování šestice protagonistů z období sametové revoluce metodou rozhovorů získaných orálně-historickou metodou. Hlavním cílem je zodpovědět otázku, odkud přišli lidé, kteří pomohli transformovat jeden režim v jiný, a jak se vyrovnali s úkoly, na které nemohli být předtím připraveni.

Koncem roku 1989 se zhroutil komunistický režim v Československu. Jeden způsob řízení společnosti bleskově vystřídal jiný, společnost se však nezhroutila a život šel celkem hladce dál. Jen generacím lidí, kteří na něco takového nemohli být nijak připraveni, se náhle otevřelo mnoho příležitostí, a také s nimi svázané odpovědnosti. Někteří se těch příležitostí i odpovědnosti chopili.

## **Klíčová slova**

Československá společnost 1989–1992, kariérní rozhodování, sametová revoluce, síť známostí, společenská transformace

# 1. Introduction and Methodology

## 1. 1. The Topic

There are some important aspects of breaking historical events which documents can hardly capture. As Přemysl Houda puts it: “Historical facts formed solely on the basis of period documents fail. The positivist approach of doggedly seeking the truth by accumulating documents has proved inadequate, though it has yielded many partial insights.”<sup>1</sup>

After the 1989 revolution, Czechoslovak society underwent a huge transformation from a socialist economy into a capitalist economy based on free trade. All of a sudden, many opportunities opened up, accompanied by many responsibilities, to several generations of people who were not expected to have been prepared to take either of them. Yet at least some of them did. How did they manage? Were their achievements merely coincidental? Did they make part of some structural shifts? Might they even have been mere puppets in some hidden master’s hands who would pull their strings? Or, on the contrary, did everything that happened come about as the overall result of individual participants’ improvisation skills?

As one of the funny posts on Facebook states: No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Historical documents of all kinds provide us with names and accounts of the deeds of those in charge, what remains mostly hidden is how did they manage. The objective of the thesis is to find answers to at least some of the questions listed above by analyzing interviews done with six protagonists of the events of the time (see Chapter 3). It does not propose to gain a complete picture but hopes to shed some light on some principles and mechanics of social transformation.

The present thesis does not come with some theory to be verified. On the contrary, it poses a simple question which in turn generates other questions along the way and which might be formulated as follows:

*What was it that allowed for some people to play significant roles in transformation of the Czech society in the late 1980s and early 1990s?*

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1 HOUDA, Přemysl. *Intelektuální protest, nebo masová zábava?* Praha: Academia, 2014, p. 7. Unless specified otherwise, all translations from Czech sources were made by the researcher for the purposes of the thesis.

## 1. 2. The Theory: Structuring the Research

In an attempt to answer the question above, the *grounded theory*, as described by B. Glaser and A. Strauss in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*<sup>2</sup> seems to be an appropriate initial approach. According to it, the field of research is supposed to introduce hypotheses based on the observation itself. The data from informants is collected, evaluated, and interpreted in this order. Hypotheses are supposed to emerge from the data and thus be grounded in it. However, while Glaser and Strauss recommend immersing into facts right away, J-C. Kaufmann advises to come up with an idea first, which will serve as guidance and prevent the researcher from getting lost in stories. One can even begin their research with an initial hypothesis, auxiliary question(s), and only then determine the object and the field.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, there are two basic principles in approaching research. Either the researcher develops a hypothesis and sets off for the chosen field armed with a fixed set of questions or they dive into a field for whatever kind of data they can collect, and build a general theory based on those data. There are strong and weak points to both methods, and either is more relevant on different occasions. As for the strong points, a fixed questionnaire allows for more or less precise comparison of the data and somewhat extensive research field, while collecting data without presumptions allows for discovering something which was not thought about before. As for the weak points, presumptions in the form of a theory to be tested restrict the results of the first type of research into mere verifications or falsifications of theories developed in advance, while in the second case, diving into a field of data unarmed with a concept may raise questions about the relevance of the extracted data, as well as easily result in drowning in the ocean of unstructured discourse.<sup>4</sup>

The objective of the present research is not to discover any truths regarding either the revolution or the people affected by it. It rather attempts to access the value systems of a given set of individuals, gain some insight into the range of their knowledge and/or behavior patterns, and, if possible, draw conclusions based on the established facts.

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2 GLASER, B. – STRAUSS, A. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine Transaction: London, 2006.

3 KAUFMANN, Jean-Claude. *Chápající rozhovor*. Sociologické nakladatelství: Praha, 2010.

4 DISMAN, Miroslav. *Jak se vyrábí sociologická znalost*. Karolinum: Praha, 2020, pp. 284-290.

### 1. 3. The Field: Criteria for Choosing the Narrators

Both the number of narrators and the basic criteria for choosing actual individuals had to be determined right at the beginning as the outcome of the research depends on it. Considering the necessary depth of interviews made in several rounds, a minimum of five and a maximum of seven people was chosen as appropriate. On the one hand, it should allow for rich enough material to compare and work with, and, on the other hand, it was unlikely to overwhelm the researcher or prove impracticable under the social restrictions caused by the reaction to the pandemic of Covid-19.

Furthermore, the narrators were chosen to fit preferably to most of the following characteristics:

*Age.* The person should have spent all their formative years under the Communist regime to be as such considered a kind of a product of the previous era. That directly excludes all students who played some important roles during the revolution, as young people generally form their attitude within given circumstances and naturally tend to go against the established flow.

*Experience.* A suitable respondent had to face challenges during the period in question for which they had not been formally educated or prepared under the previous regime. Which, interestingly enough, excludes among others priests, who also played quite important roles during the upheaval.

*Influence.* Achievements of the given person had to have some general impact on the society, whether or not this was common knowledge at the time or has become since then.

*Variety.* The chosen individuals should preferably come from different social strata, so that the researcher does not end up with a stock of, for example, intellectual-stokers-turned-politicians with similar careers, biography, and inclinations.

Apart from the above, the availability of the individual played an important role (especially under the pandemic restrictions) as well as whether they actually consented to be the subject of the research.

## 1. 4. The Questions: How to Approach the Interviewees

In their book on theory and practice of oral history, Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Mücke make a distinction between an interview and a life story. Quoting a German sociologist Gabriele Rosenthal, they also point out that biographical narratives have the undeniable advantage over interviews in that they do not confront the subject with prepared questions, thus allowing for the uncovering of subjective meanings and structures that appear only through free narration and remain hidden from the researcher during purposeful questioning.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, Jean-Claude Kaufmann emphasizes that it is not enough to choose a topic for the research, however clear and inspiring. It is also very important to add one or two working hypotheses, a central question that would generate the very research field. He even suggests creating a certain guideline in advance to prevent the researcher from being lost in the excess of field material, a list of questions that is not binding (after the fashion of quantitative researches) but helps the researcher follow certain lines. On top of it, Kaufmann recommends choosing a suitable title for the study soon enough, which helps to organize the researcher's thoughts. If the title is too long, Kaufmann says, it usually means that the author still has some work on the very concept of the research.<sup>6</sup> However trivial this remark may sound, it helped the researcher set preliminary rules and to dive into the research itself.

The thesis' originally proposed title which was rather long and less to the point, indeed, had included the otherwise quite fitting term '*agents of change*', used for individuals caught in the upheaval of the revolution whose abilities, motivations, or even momentous decisions turned out to have a significant impact either on their subsequent lives or on the events of the Revolution itself (or on both, as this thesis also shows). Apart from the primary question, asking what strata of society they had actually come from, a whole set of associated questions naturally arose: Did they have anything in common? Would it be possible to extract some similar features in their behavior or life stories and draw some general conclusions? Is it something inborn that allowed them to play key roles in times of change or do those qualities stem from their family traditions and parental education, or even from somewhere else? Or is there nothing in common to them

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5 VANĚK, M. – MÜCKE, P. *Třetí strana trojúhelníku. Teorie a praxe orální historie*. Karolinum: Praha, 2015, pp. 140-141.

6 KAUFMANN, J.-C. *Chápající rozhovor*, p. 42.

and all their achievements just came about as results of merely random acts in chaotic times?

The contemporaries of the late 1980s in Czechoslovakia who had wished for change are often reported to have remembered the feeling of being helpless and stuck in the system forever. As everybody realized that even though the system might fail, there was no one to run the state in a new, different way. No one could see anyone capable of seizing the helm and steer the ship in a different direction. And yet it happened in an amazingly short time. So short that it raised a host of suspicions in the form of various conspiracy theories which tried to explain such high-gear velocity by claiming that the *agents of change* must have been some trained agents of another entity or system.

Should the research bring some genuine answers to the questions stated above, it seems impossible to formulate a starting hypothesis, as any such attempt might mislead the researcher into steering the interviews to some predesigned ends. One working hypothesis has been set nonetheless: if there is any key to those answers, it is to be found in the respondents' life stories. However, with potential traps as those mentioned by Kaufmann in mind, many more questions were prepared in advance to help find the researcher's bearings whenever she should feel lost in the narrators' stories. In other words, she decided to approach the narrators in a way Vaněk and Mücke put it: "Respecting the nature of the interviewee's experiences and attitudes, the interviewer asks questions in such a way as to keep the interviewee to the topic and get the most relevant information from him."<sup>7</sup>

## 1. 5. The Questions

The researcher worked with two sets of questions from the very beginning. The first set was a mental guideline of sorts for the researcher to define and refine the subject of the research more precisely:

1. *How do people from the old system become the new people? Do they have some special qualifications, understanding of the world? Do they have some special skills to move in the world and change it?*

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7 VANĚK, M. – MÜCKE, P. *Třetí strana trojúhelníku. Teorie a praxe orální historie*. Karolinum: Praha, 2015, pp. 140

2. *Do they gain a new understanding of the world and skills in a flash, or using the old ones in a new way? Do they use the old understanding in a new way for a while, only to end up acquiring a new one?*
3. *Do new understanding and skills come only from the outside, or are they made by reshaping the old?*
4. *Do these events have a mechanism in place that is common to all?*
5. *Is there a pattern in which active participants in landmark events act?*
6. *Do active participants share a common system of values? Access to something specific? Are basic lifestyle habits unrelated to a particular social arrangement? Where do these habits come from?*

The second set of questions was formulated to help the researcher to steer through the interviews proper. They were concrete questions aimed to gain indirect answers to the main ones, as it turned out it makes a difference to ask someone “What is your value ladder?” and “How did you know you were successful?” or “Are you happy with how your children do?”

It was a relatively long list and all those questions were formulated not to be asked each time in any particular order, but to help the researcher with orientation in the respondents’ narrations. The actual strategy consisted of creating a relaxed atmosphere during the interviews and letting the narrators talk about their lives at their own pace and manner, as values and meanings often show themselves not only in that what is said, but also in what remains unsaid. Many of the pre-formulated questions were meant to be used mostly to either bring the narrator closer to the topic or to help in void moments.

It is to be noted here that even though not all of the questions were eventually asked, the collected material widely exceeds the scope of this work. Had the author stuck rigorously to the defined field of research and tried to answer only the essential question and in a strictly concise way, much of the highly interesting material would have remained unused.

## 1. 6. The Background: Reference Fields

As Jean-Claude Kaufmann points out, confronting the established facts with the researcher's thoughts alone usually ends up in rather trivial conclusions.<sup>8</sup> In order to provide appropriate historiographic context for the narrations, the following works have been used (for precise reference, see the Bibliography):

The monograph *Labyrintem revoluce* by Jiří Suk has provided general factual context, while the memoirs *Vabank* by Michael Kocáb and *Jak pukaly ledy* by Michal Horáček provided individual insights into the crucial times of turbulent changes. The book *Vítězové? Porážení?* by Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Urbásek supplies inspiring references from the other side of the barricade.<sup>9</sup> As for theory and methodology, sociological and oral-history works were of good use, such as *Třetí strana trojúhelníku* by Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Mücke, *Chápající rozhovor* by Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Kvalitativní výzkum* by Jan Hendl, *Jak se vyrábí sociologická znalost* by Miroslav Disman, and *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss.

## 1. 7. The Researcher: A Thin Line Between Facts and Interpretation

Within the old academic tradition, the researcher's opinion has no place in a study as utmost objectivity is to be required. However, the observer forms an indispensable part of observation as has been shown even in the hardest of all sciences, quantum mechanics. Vaněk and Mücke formulated an oral-history variation of this principle: "The specificity of oral history stems from the fact that, unlike in other methods, the interviewer is directly involved in the creation of the oral-historical source and, in a way, directly influences it. There is no conversation that proceeds in the same way with different interviewers, even if the interviews are arranged in advance."<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the interviewer's role should be encouraging, motivating, and ensuring maximum comfort for the narrator at all times. In addition, the interviewer is the narrator's partner in

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8 KAUFMANN, J.-C. *Chápající rozhovor*, p. 45.

9 It was quite early that the researcher realized that those who were overpowered in 1989 had actually come to power in the very same way, i.e. totally unprepared. The idea was hinted at by Michael Kocáb quoting the last Prime Minister of the pre-revolution federal government, Ladislav Adamec: "During the times after the war, Klement Gottwald told us: 'I cannot promise anything to you, I don't have anything. But I can see how inexperienced and uneducated you are. If we win, I'll give you the education, I can guarantee that.'" See KOCÁB, Michael. *Vabank*. Universum: Praha, 2019, p. 72.

10 VANĚK, M. – MÜCKE, P. *Třetí strana trojúhelníku*, p. 154.

the dialogue, both interacting to form an oral-historical source.<sup>11</sup> As early as the first interview took place, the researcher realized how much her own life experience had actually shaped the course of narration.

The main catch lies in the fact that the interviewer not only remembers the events of the revolution but also took part in some of the activities discussed. Thus, for example, she subconsciously tended to encourage a narrator to skip several parts of his story as “obvious” and part of shared experience. Only later, when re-listening and analyzing the interview, it becomes evident that there were whole chunks missing from the story. They might have been filled in retrospect but that would have meant infiltrating the narrator’s experience with her own and confusing the collected data.

On one hand, as Kaufmann says, the data are not collected as stones in a field but are always subject to a design that allows them to be collected.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, there must be a clear line that allows the researcher to distinguish between detecting facts and interpreting them. However, such a line is hardly easy to draw once and for all in advance. In the understanding interview, it is difficult to set methodologically. After all, the originality of a fact-based theory consists in the fact that detection and verification are closely and continuously linked, Kaufmann, claims.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, a continuous self-reflection is required and the line has to be drawn and re-drawn during and after each interview, while the work itself develops in a kind of a hermeneutic circle. With each step, some new angle is revealed, a new insight gained, with which the researcher returns to the beginning of the journey and retraces her steps on the path which is never the same again.

With the chosen methodology, the interviews were expected to vary a great deal and their eventual state even exceeded the expectation. One of the difficulties consisted in the fact that there are always some taboos and areas of life the narrators are not willing or likely to talk about. As Vaněk and Mücke remark on this ethical issue, agreeing on certain taboos means setting boundaries for communication. That is to specify what must remain unsaid.<sup>14</sup> And as those areas vary from person to person, there is nothing to hint where to sense the borderline and refrain from asking particular questions, except for the researcher’s tact. On the other hand, the narrator’s silence carries information, too.

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11 Ibid., p. 157.

12 KAUFMANN, J.-C. *Chápající rozhovor*, p. 106.

13 Ibid., p. 33.

14 VANĚK, M. – MÜCKE, P. *Třetí strana trojúhelníku*, p. 157.

As for the interpretation of the collected data, it must be said that the primary question of the research would genuinely puzzle the author herself back in the late 1980s, as well as during all the time up to the point she started the research. Anybody who wished for the “change” back then can certainly confirm the dilemma: Even if the system should crumble apart, who was to take charge of public affairs? We somehow felt that there was no one left to run the state but the Communists themselves. As we will see later, the same question initially puzzled even those who actually ended up running the state. So from where had the *agents of change* come?

## 1. 8. The Structure of the Thesis

Following this methodological introduction, Chapter 2 presents a thematic synopsis of the 1989 revolution and its reflection and is followed by a brief introduction of the narrators proper. Chapters 4 through 8 make the thesis’ focus and present the accounts of narrators together with the researcher’s interpretations and are arranged chronologically (such as recollections of childhood) or thematically (the narrators’ hitherto quite disparate stories converge near or at the turning point of 1989 and 1990 and again diverge in the post-revolutionary era). Chapter 9 summarizes the conclusions drawn in the previous chapters and aims at a broader generalization of the main narrators’ themes and motifs on the background of some theoretical framework intertwined throughout the whole text.

To avoid mere retelling of six separate life stories and to interpret the collected material in a meaningful way, some theoretical concepts and ideas have been applied and used throughout the thesis’ thematic chapters that border on philosophy, psychology, semiology, history, and even business.<sup>15</sup> As Kaufmann puts it: “The researcher has to combine the close-range concepts emerged from touching the facts with more distant ones that approach the field from a different perspective. Here, theoretical reading becomes an essential tool as well as interpretive courage, which should never be overrun by facts.”<sup>16</sup>

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15 The described fields of study (in their respective order) are represented by Michel Serres’ *The Parasite*, by *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Open Work* by Umberto Eco, and *The Innovator’s Dictionary* edited by Buchholz and van Aerssen. See Bibliography for reference.

16 KAUFMANN, J.-C. *Chápající rozhovor*, p. 107.

Such theoretical considerations are meant to provide some more insight and general meaning to the individual life stories. The former regularly alternate with the latter in a way to unfold the overall concept gradually.

## 2. Understanding the Revolution

*“Now we know that order sometimes comes only from an explosion of noise. And that reason errs and cheats us when it looks for full causes and entire reasons.”*

- Michele Serres, *The Parasite*<sup>17</sup>

Before looking into the actual accounts of the narrators, some historical and cultural context should be provided as they did not operate in a vacuum before the revolution and during it. To keep this overview both concise and telling, let us build up some context for them. As regards the overall circumstances, we have been working with nothing but assumptions of the present author yet. But should we understand our characters properly we need to at least roughly outline the landscape, the environment of their lives before the revolution, as well as during the turbulent events themselves?

To keep the account concise, three texts have been chosen to illustrate the context: two analyses of the Communist system and a recent historiographical monograph of the Velvet Revolution. The first of the analyses were written in retrospect, a decade after the system had collapsed, and deals mainly with the situation in the USSR, while the other comes from Czechoslovakia during the 1970s.

### 2. 1. Everything Seemed to Be Forever

The relevance of Alexei Yurchak’s analysis of Soviet socialism<sup>18</sup> stems from the fact that it points out an important general feature applicable for all Communist regimes in Europe. Yurchak does not build his picture on traditional dichotomies (such as the

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17 SERRES, Michel. *The Parasite*. John Hopkins University Press, 1982.

18 YURCHAK, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2005.

system versus the opposition, the East versus the West, the nomenclature versus the dissidents, etc.), he points out that Soviet socialism was a modern project and as such it shared all key contradictions of modernity.<sup>19</sup>

He describes a general paradox that he claims originated in the theoretical ideals of the Enlightenment. In order to gain enough acceptance to govern the society, an ideology always claims to represent the “objective Truth” which, however, is placed somewhere outside the system. As such, it cannot be explained intrinsically, by the system itself. An Authority is therefore required to keep feeding the system with ideas, represented by the Communist party. On the one hand, the Communist ideology asks people to totally surrender to its “objective Truth”, on the other hand, it claims to bring about new, enlightened, creative humankind. This paradox is, at least in the early stages, hidden by the energy of the newly established regime, but over time it exhausts and empties the system and as soon as the external source is depleted, the regime is prone to collapse. Yurchak devotes his entire book to a detailed analysis of how the above-described principle worked in the USSR and how it contributed to the abrupt breakdown of the system, which seemed to be there forever to people living inside it. His main contribution to our understanding of the mechanics of such a system consists of the notion that it was not a simple clash between the good and the bad guys which the bad guys happened to lose. Yurchak suggests that there was something more important at play – a paradox which is inherent to a certain way of ruling and enforcing ideas which are common to both West and East, as it grows from the very ideas of the Enlightenment.

## 2. 2. Living in Truth

A corresponding though somewhat differently approached perspective is found in the famous 1978 essay *The Power of the Powerless* by Václav Havel.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Yurchak’s academic approach, Havel offers the insight of an authentic, contemporary insider. He labels the system he is living in as *post-totalitarian* and distinguishes it from traditional dictatorships where a distinct line of conflict can be drawn between social

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19 Ibid., p. 23.

20 HAVEL, Václav. *Moc bezmocných a jiné eseje*. Knihovna Václava Havla: Praha, 2019. Translations into English were drawn from Paul Wilson’s contemporary translation of the essay, see ‘The Power of the Powerless’, in *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, vol. 32, Nr. 2, May 2018, pp. 353-408.

classes, between the rulers and their subjects. “In the post-totalitarian system,” Havel writes, “this line runs de facto through each person, for everyone in his own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system. What we understand by the system is not, therefore, a social order imposed by one group upon another, but rather something which permeates the entire society and is a factor in shaping it, something which may seem impossible to grasp or define (for it is in the nature of the mere principle), but which is expressed by the entire society as an important feature of its life.”<sup>21</sup>

To illustrate the case, Havel imagines a greengrocer who places a portrait of a Communist leader accompanied with a slogan in his shop window. Neither the portrait nor the slogan has anything to do with fruits or vegetables, they are there to show the greengrocer’s loyalty to the system. It is not enough for the greengrocer to stay loyal; Havel argues, he needs to put his loyalty on display in a ritual way. By doing so, the greengrocer contributes with his small but important part to creating the network of power. While whoever refuses to do so poses a threat to the network, therefore they face troubles, may be rejected by the system, denied access to the center, and toward any social ambitions.

“You do not become a ‘dissident’ just because you decide one day to take up this most unusual career,” Havel argues. “You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibility, combined with a complex set of external circumstances. You are cast out of the existing structures and placed in a position of conflict with them. It begins as an attempt to do your work well, and ends with being branded an enemy of society.”<sup>22</sup>

Unlike Yurchak, Havel sees the conflict essentially as happening between the Lie and the Truth. Where Havel talks about “living in truth”, Yurchak distinguishes between constative and performative functions of language. The description of the system’s mechanics is very similar in both conceptions. But from Yurchak’s perspective, Havel and the prominent dissidents sail the same boat as the most devoted Communists for the members of both parties are the only ones who take the performative language in its literal meaning. And there is one more thing they have in common, i.e. referring to the Truth. Each sees it elsewhere, all of them seem to possess it from somewhere outside.

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21 Ibid., p. 121.

22 Ibid., p. 164.

Only one of the Truths is already worn out while the other is fresh and full of energy, waiting to burst out.

### 2. 3. Waiting for a Leader

When it finally does, it feels like a sudden storm. Chaos. Explosion of noise. In the words of historian Jiří Suk, “the old regime was brought to its knees by mass demonstrations that poured out of the society’s seemingly calm and self-contained womb after 17th November 1989. [...] People were flooding the area and surrounding streets, countless crowds heaving like a stormy ocean. The slogans chanted by the protesters sprung from numerous points, ricocheted off the walls of tall houses, and merged into incomprehensible gusts of sounds like the roar of the wind in human terrain. It was a unique expression of collectivity in its mass form, one that offered an almost mysterious experience. There was an end to the long-awaited historic moment that so much hoped for and so much doubted at the same time. Czechoslovakia found itself in the full spotlight with microphones aimed at the crowd. [...] The half-minute shot, needing no comment, captured the mass at the moment it completed its crystallization and radiated unique, unmatched energy. Historical potency. It was absorbing the malleable impulses, waiting for a leader.”<sup>23</sup>

An expressive account of the events by Jiří Suk nicely illustrates the present thesis’s starting point with the image of “malleable impulses waiting for a leader”. Or rather leaders, one would say. Where did they come from? “As a Civic Forum, we have fulfilled our mission. Now is the time for professionals. We seem almost to have won; in any case, we’re not up to it all,” Havel is quoted to have said on 26th November, a week after the upheaval had started, when the Civic Forum, a newly emerged political movement, apparently gained everything it had asked for.<sup>24</sup> But what kind of professionals had Havel possibly on his mind when all actual professionals of the time were with the other party?

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23 SUK, Jiří. *Labyrintem revoluce*. Prostor: Praha, 2020, p.37.

24 HORÁČEK, Michal. *Jak pukaly ledy* [online]. E-book. Michal Horáček prezident 2018 [cit. 16 April 2021]. <<https://www.michalhoracek.cz/jak-pukaly-ledy/>> p. 157.

### 3. The Narrators

The chosen narrators represent various generations, backgrounds, and career paths. Three of them are well-known protagonists of the Velvet Revolution and in the years to follow, the latter three have remained virtually unknown. However, all of them faced challenges that had been beyond their imaginations until the very moment they had to cope with them. And yet they did so successfully. Before trying to search for patterns and contrasts in their individual fortunes, attitudes, and approaches, short biographies of all the narrators are presented below.

#### 3. 1. Petr Miller (b. 1941). The Working Class Lesson

Originally a manual worker by profession, Miller organized the strike movement among workers during the Velvet Revolution. Consequently, he became the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Czechoslovakia and a member of the Parliament. His mother dying shortly after giving birth, his father remarried but died of carbon monoxide poisoning several years later in an accident. Miller left home at the age of 14, was trained as a blacksmith in Prague, and graduated from a grammar school. He also began studying at the Prague University of Economics but was expelled in 1970. From 1960 to 1989, Miller worked as a blacksmith in one of the Czechoslovak biggest industrial enterprises, the ČKD Praha. After dropping his political carrier in the 1990s, he became a manager and advisor.

#### 3. 2. Michael Kocáb (b. 1954). The Genuine Heavy Metal

Kocáb grew up in a wild region of Sokolov, his father was an evangelical vicar, his mother a psychologist. He graduated from secondary school in Mladá Boleslav and from the Prague conservatory six years later. In the 1970s, he founded a cult rock formation *Pražský výběr* which kept oscillating between official and unofficial scenes. In the 1980s, the group was banned for five years. Several months before the 1989 revolution, Kocáb started a political initiative *Most* together with his friend Michal Horáček.

Kocáb was one of the founders of the Civic Forum. He negotiated with prominent generals of the Czechoslovak Army to prevent its interference in the course of the revolution. Kocáb was arguably also the first to dare to suggest and support Václav Havel for president. He became an MP, running the parliamentary commission which supervised the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. In December 1990, he took part in a mission to Iraq to negotiate the release of detained Czechoslovak citizens. In 1991, he visited the Soviet Union and addressed the Supreme Soviet.

When the last Soviet soldier left Czechoslovakia in March 1991, Kocáb resigned from political offices and turned to music, business, and consulting. In the late 2000s, he resumed his political career for a while. At present time, he is making himself ready for the upcoming presidential bid.

### **3. 3. Jan Urban (b. 1951). The Great Disillusion**

Born into the family of a prominent Communist official, Urban graduated in philosophy and history from the Faculty of Arts at the Charles University in Prague. His father, however, lost his job and the family was persecuted. Urban was involved in the dissident movement and activities of the Obroda reform Communists' club. A secondary school teacher of history under ban, Urban went through various odd jobs and was eventually even trained as a bricklayer. In 1989 and 1990, he became the leader of the Civic Forum movement and led it to the first free parliamentary elections held in June 1990. Despite the great success of his electoral campaign, he announced retirement from political life the day after the election results were promulgated. Since then, Urban has worked as a journalist and writer and has been consistently voicing criticism of the actual achievements of the Velvet Revolution.

### **3. 4. Vavřinec Korčíš (b. 1948). The Silent Agent**

A dissident and devoted reader and book lover who never finished university studies because of being sentenced to jail for manufacturing and distributing illegal prints. He became the personal assistant to Václav Havel and after the breakdown of Communism made it to the Security Information Service (BIS in Czech). In the early

1990s, Korčíš became responsible for the development of the system of lustration in Czechoslovakia and Czechia. He stayed in the service until retirement. Interestingly Korčíš's father was a Slovak resistance fighter during WWII who allegedly taught his son never to say more than necessary and never to testify to anything in his early childhood.

### **3. 5. Igor Klimovič (b. 1960). The Hippie in the City Hall**

As a trained bricklayer with no other formal education, Klimovič spent most of the late 1970s partying in the underground scene and the 1980s winning his family's daily bread in various jobs. Shortly before the Revolution, he emigrated with his family to Austria only to come back to Czechoslovakia right after it. Klimovič became a member and later even the head of the Republican Union, a conservative party of the time. After the first free elections in the country, he made it to the Prague City Council where he dealt mainly with two issues previously not addressed: the homeless people and the foundation of the municipal police. After his mandate, Klimovič left politics and became a promoter.

### **3. 6. Lubomír Schmidtmajer (b. 1956). Tanks Rolling Out, Stones Rolling In**

Schmidtmajer founded the Mars music production company right after the Revolution and stayed in this profession along with running the Chmelnice music club with a capacity of about 200 guests. He also worked as private secretary to Václav Havel in 1992 during the latter's presidential office vacancy. Schmidtmajer organized the historic August 1990 concert of the Rolling Stones attended by 100,000 people. He is the only narrator who actually kept his job from before and after the Revolution. Nonetheless, his job as producer and promoter underwent a significant transformation and an enormous amount of personal resourcefulness was required to stand up to all challenges these changes entailed.

## 4. Childhood and Formative Years

*“Fortunately enough, I was a bullied child.”*

-- Michael Kocáb, interview with the researcher

It is a widely accepted fact that should children become successful adults, they need stability and security when growing up. It is a notion shared by laymen as well as professionals. To support it, one can randomly open any contemporary book or article on upbringing and education.<sup>25</sup>

The quotation from above was actually Kocáb’s answer to the question of what or who had the greatest influence on his and his childhood and will be subject to interpretation later in the thesis. It illustrates, however, the impact of formative years and childhood on the narrators’ attitudes in their own retrospective. This chapter examines the soil the six narrators grew up from, searching for traces of stability and security in their childhood and upbringing. One significant observation can be made right at the start: none of the narrators mention their mothers as founts of specific influence during or for their childhood. In fact, none of them talk much about their mothers in general. Although in other respects their stories vary to a great extent, it may be assumed without much of hyperbole that the two most influential and well-known of the six narrators seem to have had the least stable childhood and neither of them mentions any of their parents much when asked to relate their most formative memories.

### 4. 1. Petr Miller. Kicked Twice out of Paradise

The narrator’s mother died six months after giving birth, and his father only several years later under suspicious and never fully explained circumstances. *“With me, the beginning is very simple because I didn’t really know my mother, and just fleetingly my father. So the only thing I know about my childhood is that, at the age of about five or six years, I learned from the kids on the street that my mom wasn’t my mom.”*

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25 Such as Anna Sutherland’s ‘How Instability Affects Kids’ [online]. Institute for Family Studies. <<https://ifstudies.org/blog/how-instability-affects-kids>> [cit. 14 May 2021]. She claims that “As common sense would suggest and as research con-firms, children tend to do best in stable households, where they know what to expect and feel (perhaps unconsciously) that their relationships, health, and safety are basically se-cure. Undergoing repeated transitions can cause stress by threatening this feeling and undermining kids’ and their parents’ sense of control over their lives, which then tends to worsen parenting and to lower children’s academic achievement and mental health.”

Consequently, Miller learned that after the death of his real mother, his father being very busy with exhibitions and air shows abroad had put him to a nursery in Thomayer Hospital where the kid had been taken care of by a nurse who later becomes his stepmother and his father's new wife. *"I have to say that my stepmother had really taken the best care of me, I would say in many ways better than of her own child [the stepmother re-married after Miller's father's death in 1948 and had two children with a new husband, "a despicable man" in Miller's account] and she made a number of things possible for me. I liked to play ice-hockey ever since I was little, and virtually grew up in the Štvanice hockey stadium."*

All that time they stayed in an apartment that originally belonged to Miller's father, a luxury place in a luxury Prague neighborhood of Podolí. At fifteen, however, Miller was kicked out from that little piece of paradise. *"I started getting in the way in the apartment, and they [step-parents] were deciding where to place me. I was playing hockey for Tatra Smíchov and they found out that the club would accept a blacksmith into training, so I became a blacksmith. But only because those blacksmiths were entitled to a boarding-school accommodation, they solemnly escorted me into that particular world where I've been hanging out my whole life ever since."*

We are getting an idea of a mixture of rather good economic background combined with considerable emotional tension, which was wrapped up by the final kick-out. The way the whole story was recollected more than six decades later is also very important. There was no hint of bitterness in Miller's account; on the contrary, he told his life story with a lot of amusement as if being proud of all the obstacles he had to and was able to overcome. This significant feature will reappear in the narration again and again, as will be shown.

#### **4. 2. Michael Kocáb. Growing in a Melting Pot**

Unlike Petr Miller, Kocáb had grown up in a fairly stable relationship of an evangelical priest and a trained psychologist. That might sound like nothing particularly exciting, had the father not finished his theology studies in the late 1940s. *"Basically from the very beginning, say from that year of 1948, he was already a persecuted dissident."* That meant among other things that the elder Kocáb was soon sent to serve his draft duties in one of the ultimate peripheries of the country, namely Chodov in the Sokolov region where Michael started his school years. *"Right in the first year, on the second or*

*third day, I was thrown to the ground, they [the classmates] started kicking me, trampling on my stomach, spitting and calling me a church rat. They already had that from their parents, because we had a church right up against the primary school. The vicious bullying went on throughout that first year up to the fifth. Then from the sixth to the ninth, it got better. A kid gets reassured when he's older."*

Kocáb mentions that the district had the highest crime rate of all Czechoslovak districts of that time and talks about the varied ethnic and social strata of the local population: fanatic religious cults which attacked his father from the opposite ideological direction than the Communists did, the Roma (which the narrator refers to as the Gypsies, as was common use then), people moved from Silesia whose family members had fought on the Nazi side during World War Two. *"It was very interesting there I must say, I won't ever forget it, and I had a great time in Chodov. You never got bored there,"* Kocáb confirms.

The bullying could go really wild. *"Eventually, I ended up being beaten up in my own room, in my own bed. They [the kids] didn't hesitate to chase me down. At first, they were shy about getting into the rectory house, then they sort of found out that my parents probably wouldn't be home. Eventually, they marched straight through the whole house. A kid has a sanctuary in his room, in his bed, and I got my ass kicked right there."* Such an event poses an obvious psychological question: after an experience like that, can a person feel safe anywhere in the world ever again in his life? Yet Kocáb narrates about his childhood with enthusiasm and a similar kind of retrospective amusement as Miller.

Unlike Miller, however, he provides a direct answer to the question regarding the greatest influence of his early years: *"It was basically just my parents and my friend Jenda Nedvěd. He was like an arch friend of mine with whom I would spend all the time. I was lucky. He was a creative, truly artistic personality. He could make anything. He made snow into a statue, fixed an old motorcycle so that he could ride it again. He was like super gifted for everything. He would always give me a huge inspiration. We were friends then and we still are. There are so many stories with him. [...] He showed me that anything was possible."* To prove the case, a host of stories indeed followed in the narration. Essentially, the idea that anything is possible has stayed with the narrator ever since.

At the age of fifteen, Kocáb's family moved to Mladá Boleslav, to a place much more polished and well-kept and managed place where *"it was never to be so much fun again"*.

### 4. 3. Jan Urban. The Gilded Cage

*“Both my parents were true-believing Communists,” Jan Urban starts a very much different, and for that matter also conspicuously short account of a rally safe childhood. “In 1939, at the age of 18, my father joined the then underground Communist Party, spent six years in the resistance, and ended up a resistance fighter. At the age of 24, his hair turned white and in 1945 he became a functionary and member of the party nomenklatura. Consequently, I grew up in a luxury Prague apartment in Letná with portraits of Lenin and Fučík on the walls. I didn’t know that not everyone lived the way we did. We had a chauffeur. We had a special supply service at our disposal, too, so whenever my mother needed something she just picked up the phone. She uttered ‘103 speaking’ and, in an hour, comrades in white or blue coats brought in the shopping.”*

As a true believer, Urban’s father got into strife with the Party in the early 1960s, yet the war hero was not to be persecuted so the Party only sent him as ambassador to Finland. *“And that was a real good thing for us kids, because all of a sudden I spent three and a half years out in the West which was not exactly imperialist, but all of a sudden I could see that people there had two arms, two legs, and much better music.”*

No more significant stories from those times, indeed. Life started a little bit later for Urban but given the safe haven of childhood he was brought up in, nothing seemed to stop him on the way towards success. This was not exactly the case as some important formative events were just about to come and will be related in the chapters to follow.

### 4. 4. Vavřinec Korčíš. Father’s Lessons

Korčíš is the only of the six narrators who directly mentioned a parent’s influence, and his account of his childhood actually started with his father’s story. Apparently, Vavřinec Korčíš senior got involved in fighting during the world war despite being only a teenager and became a kind of a hero. *“It wasn’t until I had joined the intelligence service myself that I found out that he clearly must have had special training, because he would train me all my life without me even realizing that. He instilled in me that I should never let anyone take photographs of me unless necessary, that I should never give evidence or testimony. It is best to shut up, he would say, because you can never*

*remember what exactly you did say, and trained people can always dig things out of you. I had found these insights very useful later, and could confirm their validity.”*

Despite that, Korčiš junior’s childhood seemed as void of conflicts as anyone might wish, at least in his recollections. He grew up in a village in the deep north of Czechoslovakia called Horní Poustevna, another true periphery. *“I would ride my bike, go mushroom-picking, catch trout into my hands (I had even become a poacher with some deserved reputation), play amateur chess, and mainly read a lot. The teachers in the library would only lend me four books a week at a time, so I always went for the thickest ones because I soon learned to read very fast. Literally, I devoured books. Our parents commuted to work. They would as a rule leave at five in the morning and come back by train at six, so from my second year at primary school, I was in charge of my sister and we took care of ourselves all day long. It wasn’t a problem then. The village was a safe place.”*

#### **4. 5. Lubomír Schmidtmajer. Moving Around**

*“My childhood was all about moving.”* Schmidtmajer’s father was imprisoned for publishing a school magazine as a student and when he got out of jail, he was not allowed to get a job anywhere but at a building site of a Socialist Youth Construction Project<sup>26</sup>. Schmidtmajer’s earliest recollections come from a border region close to Germany where his grandfather lived who had returned from prison, and as a political offender could only find a job in marginal areas, too. *“Nobody wanted to be there. So he rented a cottage there to live in. Then, when I was about two years old, we moved out of this solitude of a house left by a German Jewish factory worker who died in a concentration camp. Then we moved to Abertamy, up to the village. Anyway, when I was about five years old, we moved to Ostrov nad Ohří where I started my first grade, but after about three or four months, we actually moved to Tišnov near Brno, which was for me... well, in Morava, I didn’t understand the people at all. I simply didn’t understand what they were telling me. I was used to the Germans and the Czech language in the borderland. Suddenly, I really didn’t know what was going on.”*

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26 The Socialist Youth Construction Projects (*Stavby mládeže*) were carried out in Czechoslovakia since 1946 by youth work brigades. In the early 1950s, they were given a mass character and a distinct political context. The regime supported and promoted these projects as they proved that “the young people’s building enthusiasm and commitment to socialism, while at the same time being a tool of influence”. See the *Stavba mládeže* Wikipedia entry at <[https://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stavba\\_ml%C3%A1de%C5%BEE](https://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stavba_ml%C3%A1de%C5%BEE)> [cit. 5 June 2021].

This is yet another quite different kind of life story and childhood: a confused boy who never stays anywhere long enough to settle properly. Schmidtmajer's parents did not tell him about his father's and grandfather's imprisonments, and so were unable to explain most for all those changes. Neither could there be a feasible explanation for certain facts the child had to face. *"I had this personal problem that I was actually the only one in my class who didn't attend religion classes,<sup>27</sup> and at the same time the only one in who wasn't admitted to Jiskry<sup>28</sup> because I was naughty."* However, apart from that, his was a rather standard childhood. *"We would just hang around outside casually and make noises. In that sense, the stay was pretty good because the woods were nearby."*

The family stayed in Moravia for four years and then again moved to Příbram where Schmidtmajer finished his primary school in a pretty standard way, except for the last year. It was right after the Warsaw Pact military invasion of Czechoslovakia. *"I brought to school the farewell speech by František Kriegel<sup>29</sup> to inform my classmates. It was three or four sheets of paper. One of the young teachers got interested in it, too, so I lent it to her but signed it with my name so it did not get lost."* Interestingly, without even knowing about his father's destiny at that time, Schmidtmajer junior got into a very similar kind of trouble. Only he did not end up in prison as a minor and the times have changed since the really rough 1950s. He was merely *"not recommended to study at any secondary school in the country."*<sup>30</sup> [...]. *I went to study, and since I was sick of Příbram by then, I wanted to go to Prague. I looked up the first apprenticeship available in Prague, and that was the carpenter. So I was trained carpenter at the Prague Construction Works."*

But how would a fourteen-year-old get the notion that it was necessary to inform his classmates in the first place? *"I read a lot, which was what my grandmother led me to do. But I also noticed things that touched my sense of justice terribly. I noticed that*

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27 Religious practices were still quite common in various regions of Moravia even during that period.

28 *Jiskry* or 'the Sparks' was a Communist institution for the youngest cohort of children and precursor for the *Pionýr* (considered mandatory though the actual practice was different)

29 František Kriegel (1908–1979) was a Czechoslovak politician, physician, and member of the Communist Party reform wing during the 1968 Prague Spring. He was the only one of the Czechoslovak delegation who refused to sign the Moscow Protocol which was to ratify the invasion of Czechoslovakia. See <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franti%C5%A1ek\\_Kriegel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franti%C5%A1ek_Kriegel)> [cit. 5 June 2021].

30 Enrolment to school was a delicate matter during the Socialist period. In 1971, the regime announced that "The selection of applicants must clearly be political in character. We make no secret of the fact that we want to do this at the schools in a manner that will guarantee that future graduates will support socialism and that they will place their knowledge at the service of socialist society." See <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Czechoslovakia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Czechoslovakia)> [cit. 5 June 2021].

*when the Commies started with that rehabilitation stuff in 1968, they actually did it only for the former Communists. It didn't apply to other people, who they had hurt far more. So every now and then, I felt this discrepancy between the way they talked and the way it really was."*

Since the likelihood for dissidence is hardly inherited biologically in a family, we must conclude that there must have been a strong cultural and educational influence in Schmidtmajer's forebears that brought three generations of men towards similar ends without any apparent direction.

#### **4. 6. Igor Klimovič. Self-styled Resistance**

Born in 1960, Klimovič is the youngest of the six narrators. His story begins in Prague and there is considerably less drama involved. Both parents had a college education, even though the mother had not finished it because of giving birth to Igor. Even though we do not learn much about the parents from the narrator himself, it can be assumed from this fact that they had no serious conflicts with the regime. And a young mother with unfinished education was a pretty common phenomenon at that time. In fact, the childhood story goes rather short here with the exception of recollections of certain felt injustices. *"I could swim well, so they picked me for that school for swimmers in 6th year. But I didn't stay long, there were pupils who couldn't swim but had active enough parents, so after six months, even though I was one of the best in that class, I was gone. [...] I got into football, so I decided to sign up for a football team. I even made it to a Prague team selected from all the local clubs. But they were sick of my long hair, so eventually, the coach asked me to get a haircut or get out. So well, I got out."*

The hair story is omnipresent in Klimovič's narration which is kind of interesting because it must have been a personal choice made at a very early age and seemingly in spite of his parents' opinion. Hair clearly stood for a symbol of freedom for him which he explicitly admits at one point. But where did the revolt come from? What influenced him most during childhood? *"When I was seven, the comrades came with tanks. I remember the event fairly accurately for I broke my arm then. And we couldn't go to a hospital because the tanks came and you could in fact hear them driving around. So my dad and I got there [to hospital] kind of the next day. And I was only treated in a basement, there were pipes running everywhere, and that's where they gave me an X-ray and put my arm in a cast. The following years after that weren't exactly cheerful at school."*

*The character of people would break, times would break, the initial enthusiasm was gone and gradually people were changing. So some of the teachers were really absolutely horrible, some of them actually quite good. I formed myself because I tried not to be there too much if I could help it. And as they didn't admit me to high school, I went for an apprenticeship.*

What we see here is an individual without much external pressure who just hated that “*in fact back then, everyone was going to be like monochromatic, everybody was going to be dressed the same*”. Klimovič saw it as a flaw of the system and refused to take part in it on his own accord.

#### **4. 7. Patterns of Singularity**

The most apparent common trait of the six narrations seems to be the fact that there is hardly anything common to all of them. Each life story starts with a different setting. Such observation seems to be consistent with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's research on creative people.<sup>31</sup> To become an *agent of change*, a person surely must show a considerable amount of creativity. “Creative individuals are remarkable for their ability to adapt to almost any situation and to make do with whatever is at hand to reach their goals. If nothing else, this distinguishes them from the rest of us. But there does not seem to be a particular set of traits that a person must have in order to come up with a valuable novelty,” Csikszentmihalyi notes.<sup>32</sup> The psychologist did his research mostly with artists, scientists, and some extremely successful businesspeople, but there can be hardly any doubt that the same applies for the *agents of change*.

In search of what contributes to shaping a creative person, Csikszentmihalyi says: “All creative adults were once children, thus it makes sense to ask what creative individuals were like when they were children, or what sorts of events shaped the early lives of those persons who later accomplished something creative. But when we look at what is known about the childhoods of eminent creative persons, it is difficult to find any consistent pattern.”<sup>33</sup>

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31 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, b. 1934, a Hungarian-American psychologist who recognized and named the psychological concept of flow, a highly focused mental state conducive to productivity.

32 CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. E-book. HarperCollins, 2007, p. 54.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 152

Despite this idiosyncrasy, characteristic of both the period in question and a child's growth in general, the present survey of the narrators' childhood helped to establish and argue for their individual motivations in a significant way, although they are not indeed linked together.

## 5. Crisis. Where the Ways of Life Diverge

*"You do not become a 'dissident' just because you decide one day to take up this most unusual career."*

-- Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (1978)

Although it has not been addressed specifically, not all of the narrators would fit under the label *dissident* before 1989. At least not in the sense in which the term is most commonly understood. By definition, a dissident is a person who strongly disagrees with and publicly criticizes a government for the official rulings of a group or organization.<sup>34</sup> In fact, only two would fit such definition: Jan Urban, the son of prominent true believers in Communism, and Vavřinec Korčič, a cheerful village kid with a passion for books. Not that the others would be happy with the ruling establishment of the time, only they would not make their disagreement public and were far from making themselves dissidents in a deliberate manner.

Despite their dissident family background, Michael Kocáb had become a rocker and composer of music for films and theatre, while Lubomír Schmidtmajer found his place as manager of a cultural center and a music promoter. Both of them had to fight their fights to be able to do the work they liked but they did not oppose the regime directly and actually did their best to stay at least partly within, too, because that was what allowed them to pursue their interests.

Igor Klimovič was proud of his long hair which distinguished him from the *monochromatic crowd* but apart from that, he basically went on with his private life and was winning his daily bread to feed his family as a manual worker without any higher ambition until he decided to emigrate shortly before the revolution, and returned shortly after it.

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<sup>34</sup> See entry *dissident* in *Cambridge Dictionary* [online]. <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dissident>>. [June 5, 2021].

The somewhat nebulous existence of *dissidents* at the time, both as a group and as a technical term, is addressed by Petr Miller, who even says: “*We knew back then that there was some group of the so-called dissidents but we’d never seen one in our lives. We didn’t know what they looked like and honestly, we didn’t even care that much.*” (The “*We*” standing for him and his workmates in the ČKD factory). Not that the former blacksmith would meet no adversities of the regime after he had refused to recant his attitudes to the 1968 invasion in 1968. However, he downplays them at one point, claiming quite significantly that “*They [Communists] wouldn’t let me study, but they let me make money.*”

The range of the narrators’ attitudes to the regime thus forms a scale defined by two opposing representatives: Jan Urban as dissident par excellence on one side, facing Petr Miller on the opposite side, a successful worker who in a way could not be less bothered. In a way, each of them mirrors one of the two patterns distinguished in Chapter 2 above. While Jan Urban represents the “life in truth” as described by Havel, Petr Miller presents a good example of an individual living one’s private life in which the constative and performative languages (as outlined by Yurchak) are routinely employed on a daily basis.

These two opposing attitudes are analyzed in subchapters 5.1. and 5.2., respectively. In approaching the lives of the narrators as well as their subjective recollections of those lives, the researcher should look for some turning point that triggered the individual on the path to achieving something neither expected nor necessarily corresponding to their pre-turning life. In other words, the word *crisis* in its modern, socioeconomic sense of a *revolution* or *upheaval* or *depression* may as well be interpreted in its original Greek sense, which is much closer to *decision* or *discrimination* or *choice* and which can be referred to a specific point in the individual timeline of a narrator.<sup>35</sup>

It is with both these meanings on our minds that we want to approach the lives of our narrators. We are looking for the turning point, for the trigger that led them on the path which took them to their remarkable feats. And we want to see to what extent those turning points were a matter of choice, and to what extent they came from outside.

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35 See the entry *κρίνω* in LIDDELL, G. – SCOTT, R. *A Greek-English 000Lexicon* [online]. <<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dkri%2Fnw>>. [cit. 3 June 2021],

## 5. 1. Jan Urban. A Frog in a Pot

Nothing in the childhood of Jan Urban suggests a future dissident, let alone an *agent of Change*. Until the early 1960s, the family seemed to be firmly anchored within the ruling establishment. However, things were changing, albeit quite slowly. *“Sometime around 1960, my father was sent to the Italian Communist Party Congress and had come back as a different man.”* He turned down the doubling of his salary that president Novotný started to pay to the party apparatus, which raised a conflict between him and the Party. Consequently, as mentioned above, Urban’s father was sent to the Czechoslovak embassy in Finland.

Yet, worse times were to come. After the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the ambassador to Finland was one of the five Czechoslovak ambassadors around the world the Soviets demanded to be immediately fired. The family returned to Prague and the Party offered Urban senior yet another chance in the higher levels of the nomenklatura in return for his compliance, which he strictly refused.

*“And then he didn’t get a job for a year. My mom got fired too, and so we had become a kind of an outlaw family. People in our house stopped knowing us. The landlord didn’t say hello anymore, and all of a sudden, eyes turned glassy whenever someone should pass by us. So we moved.”* From then on, things started to build up. A small crisis of sorts came with each particular event in the chain but for a very long time, none of them as yet forced Jan Urban to cross the line beyond the point of return.

The eighteen-year-old was admitted to the study of philosophy at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in 1969. Just in time, unlike his younger sister who never made it to college anymore. At the beginning of the 1970s, the regime grew tougher every year.

*“I had still made it for the best professors at the faculty but they were gradually kicking them out.”* For the students, the first three years of school were relatively quiet because the purging process started with the teachers at first. Gradually, fellow students of Urban got persuaded into compliance in exchange for future jobs. At that time, hundreds of employees were being sacked from all kinds of institutions which also meant many vacant posts in radio, TV, and the media in general. *“There were people, quite a lot of them, who went for it. But as for me, I had the stuff sorted out by then and they couldn’t catch me like that.”* Yet, Urban did not consider dropping the studies on his own accord and eventually managed to graduate.

In the meantime, things got really bleak in his family. Father would only be allowed to do various odd jobs and suffered four heart attacks along the way. At one point, the state secret police had forged his medical history and confiscated his hunting and driving license, his weapons, and in effect declared him mentally incompetent. It took him a year to prove that he was not deranged at all, and managed to do so only with a help of a friend who was a psychiatrist. *“When you live in this, it’s awfully simple. You’re just surviving, and you try to be nice to people who are also in trouble,”* Jan Urban sums up. However, even this pragmatic approach still does not make a person a dissident.

After graduation, Urban was drafted for a year as was the usual practice of the time. And an interesting thing happened there, or at least in this part of the narration. As we have mentioned above, the narration of Jan Urban is one most closely following Havel’s pattern of ‘living in truth’. Hints like ‘true believers in Communism’, followed by a similarly genuine rejection to play along with the regime after the initial belief was suspended, argue for this and some even stronger evidence is to come later in this text. So far, during the narration about the mandatory military service, it is not only the storyline that changes but also the voice and the style of recollecting it. Jan Urban has evidently left the realm of solemn sincerity and has become less serious and much more playful and anecdotal.

*“Since I just missed the blue book [i.e. the medical certificate that exempted conscripts from military duty], me and a friend of mine manipulated the whole situation in such a way that after a week in the army, we became indispensable. We founded a Poetry Theatre and compiled a performance from five or six books of poetry found in the regimental library, to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Liberation after WWII. We made a tour around the military quarters and joined the Army Artistic Creativity Competition.<sup>36</sup> And as the competition was indeed very low there and because we presented it in a very ideologically committed fashion, we ended up winning. This was quite a mess because we gained the highest decoration of the Socialist Youth Union<sup>37</sup> which neither of us was a member of.”*

All of a sudden, Jan Urban takes up on the performative quality of language without hesitation and uses it towards his own ends without a shade of doubt. Apparently, it is fun for him even nowadays.

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36 A competition in which members of the Czechoslovak Army presented their artistic performances.

37 The Czechoslovak Socialist Youth Union was a mass organization which served as the youth wing of the Communist Party in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from 1970 to 1990.

During the military service, Urban got married, and after finishing it the couple moved to Prachatice, a district town in South Bohemia, where the young man started teaching history at the local gymnasium.

In January 1977, Charter 77 was published and the regime responded by organizing public rejection of it. A document was issued, later nicknamed the Anticharter, for people in all kinds of organizations to sign despite the fact that hardly anyone had access to the original Charter 77 text. Inevitably, the Anticharter had arrived at the narrator's local school. *"The headmaster entered the room where there were all sixteen of us teachers sitting around the table. Here's the thing to sign, so sign it, he says. And now everybody just stares at the table, puts their signature on it, passes it on, and sits ashamed. And I couldn't."* Nothing happened at first until one week passed. *"I just suddenly felt like the air had changed. It was a small school, right. I was twenty-six, a naive fellow but with long ears. And there were best friends of mine among the teachers. Suddenly they started avoiding me. Their eyes stopped working. And you have neither the guts nor the heart to say 'hey, what's wrong, what's wrong?' You still rely on them, to be honest. They are friends. But they said nothing. And then I felt the Day had come, and I had a history class when I decided to explain the political processes in the 1930s in the Soviet Union to the great detail. In the middle of the class, the door opened and there was a crying colleague telling me that I should go with her to the headmaster's office. We were escorted out of the school building by the police, and then it was easy."*

Easy? Apparently so, because there seemed to be less and less difficult decisions to make. Not being an explicit dissident yet, the life and career of one started for Jan Urban in the exactly circumstantial and all-of-a-sudden fashion as described by Václav Havel (see the quote in Chapter 2).

*"The first interrogation [by the police] was a big lesson. It took eleven hours. I argued with them. I made them rewrite every word, and then they let me go. And only then I suddenly realized that I did all they wanted me to. That I told them who I knew, who my parents knew, what fantastic people they all were."* The identification of the network of people was obviously just as important for the secret police as the truthfulness of his words was for the narrator. Of course, adamant living in truth while being interrogated by the secret police may not be exactly the desired thing to do.

Despite being rejected by the regime (or maybe right because of it), Jan Urban spent some good years working on a horse farm but got fired eventually again on the request of the police and found a less desirable job in a local factory. Still, he was trying

to keep as much off the radar as possible. In the meantime, two daughters were born in the space of two years. But the secret police did not let him slip away just that easily, also because of Urban's hobbies which included skydiving or gliding rather close to the western border of Czechoslovakia. Harassed more and more by the secret police, the family moved to Prague where the narrator found a job with a construction company and spent six quite happy years renovating houses in Malá Strana.

*“You come to find that being completely broke is liberating. Plus, for me, it was a school of life. When I came out of college, I was a dumb young intellectual who could brag about what to read and what to do, but I didn't know anything about normal people.”*

But what about the dissent career? Illegal literature came to Urban's family rather naturally, though he would distribute it around only on an individual basis to those people close to him who were really interested. Eventually, the activity developed into regular courier work but still was hidden from most people. Urban neither wanted to go to prison nor put his family in danger. So, for a very long time, he kept a low profile. One of the biggest feats of his at that time, Urban recollects proudly, came with his working career. After two years of renovating houses, his colleague, *“a bricklaying genius of the name Franta Filípek”*, challenged him to get the official apprenticeship and started teaching him. And so Urban became a trained bricklayer at the age of thirty-six.

Parallel to that, Urban's role in the dissent was also taking in both volume and importance. But why did he bother in the first place when there were obviously other things he valued higher? *“It had much to do with humiliation.”* One day, still at the horse farm, his boss told him that he had been contacted by the secret police and asked to report on him. Being a decent fellow, the boss felt helpless about the situation and asked Urban to help him with that. And so it happened, that at a certain point, Urban found himself writing reports on himself for the secret police. With a bit of black humor, we can easily perceive another instance of performative language being used in a very sophisticated way. But this time, Urban felt like revenging himself for being forced to do that. Hence his secret dissent activities.

The point of no return was eventually to come. In the meantime, Urban had learned a lot as to how to handle interrogations. He refused to testify at all. He opted neither for true language nor for performative language. He chose no language at all. When they locked him in the custody, he did not eat. And then finally the Crisis had come. *“One of the worst things I have ever done was that I had to make it absolutely*

*clear to the secret police that they couldn't get to me through my family, through children. They then tried it through my father and they knew his diagnosis perfectly. They took him in for questioning, and he collapsed and died the third day. From that moment on, I was driven by pure hatred. I wanted to do as much damage as I could until they got me. I never thought I would see an end to it. To the last day, I just wanted to harm them."*

How Urban he made it clear to the police remains to be undisclosed as the narrator opted for silence in this matter even in his narrator's role.

## **5. 2. Through a maze**

At the very beginning, there was a presumption: No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Urban's life story only seems to prove this premise wrong. Following the chain of decisions that brought Jan Urban to become one of the *agents of change*, we can clearly see a pattern described by Václav Havel. It was the regime that narrowed the paths for the narrator and, as a result, made the decision-making process actually very simple. As if the oppression actually led the individual through the maze of life by the hand, offering quite simple, binary choices at a few important points. Accompanied by personal decisions of a certain type, ideal training for an *agent of Change* looms before our eyes along with strong motivation. It might be difficult to find many better ways to shape a competent enemy than let him grow in considerable comfort, then deprive him of it and precipitate the death of his father, his role model at the same time.

*"My father was fantastic in one respect: he didn't lie to himself. And he woke up from that dream [of building a better society] at some point. That was the environment I grew up in. Dad had put it straight: 'It was a killing machine, and I was part of it, and I don't have an excuse.' He was a man who, as far as I could remember as a kid, was screaming in his sleep. When I asked him about the war, he never told me anything even though we were very close in the final days. He would only say: 'It was too horrible.' And when you have someone like that as a role model, the admission of being part of a killing machine is a very important message. And he said to me: 'Never repeat my mistake. Never trust a party to know what's good, what's bad. That's what your conscience is good for.' And maybe this was really important to me in the Civic Forum after all."*

Further down the thesis, Jan Urban's story will be used as a model example and template. It will represent one extreme way of becoming an *agent of Change* for us. The following chapter will focus on the opposite extreme.

## 6. The Chance

*“The collapse of cohesion is one of the features that characterize chance. By sheer accident, or so it seems, something breaks the typical regularity of the natural world, like a comet disrupting the solar system. At a human scale, we find examples like unexpectedly bumping into an old friend, or losing a loved one in an accident. Such (seemingly) random phenomena appear arbitrary; they disrupt our lives and frustrate our human need for logic and meaning.”*

-- Klaas Landsman (2016)<sup>38</sup>

*“Everything in my life was a sheer coincidence.”*

-- Petr Miller, interview with the researcher

One of the ever-recurring themes of all the narrations was a coincidence, luck, chance, and in a remarkably positive context. While Jan Urban's life story may seem to have been driven by necessities imposed upon him by the regime, Petr Miller summed up his life story with the above-mentioned laconic claim.

Of course, the notion of chance brings about important questions. The very concept of science is based on the principle of cause and effect. But if the whole universe is governed by causality, do human beings possess free will? Consequently, is there a space for chance? Is history inevitable?

In fact, causality is the basis of predictability which in turn is the basic ground of knowledge. To understand something means to be able to discern repetitive patterns which allow us to foresee the future. But there is a catch. As Steve Weinberg famously

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38 LANDSMAN, K. – WOLDE, E. *The Challenge of Chance*. E-book. Springer, 2016.  
<<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-26300-7>> [cit. 29 May 2021], p.15.

puts it: “The more the universe appears comprehensible, the more it also appears pointless.”<sup>39</sup>

It is not necessary to provide any final answer to the question above at this point. After all, should it really be the case that merciless causality governs every single particle in the universe every single moment, the present author cannot do otherwise but write exactly these words and the eventual reader cannot do otherwise than to read them and think about it whatever he or she is currently thinking? However, if determinism and historical inevitability leave us some space for free will, we can choose what to do and be responsible for it.

What we chose to do in the previous two paragraphs was a very rough summary of a problem addressed nicely by Isaiah Berlin in an essay called *Historical Inevitability*.<sup>40</sup> Berlin does not attempt to refute the notion of causality as such. He rather shows what it takes to accept it and points out that should individuals be wholly determined by unalterable forces, it makes no sense to hold them responsible for their actions, to praise them or blame them. Berlin examines determinism from many angles, and among others, he also sums up a Marxist point of view: “Classes are never proclaimed to be literally independent entities, they are constituted by individuals in their (mainly economic) interaction. Yet to seek to explain, or put a moral or political value on the actions of individuals by examining such individuals one by one, even to the limited extent to which such an examination is possible, is considered by Marxists to be not merely impracticable and time-wasting, but absurd in a more fundamental sense – because the ‘true’ causes of human behavior lie not in the specific circumstances of an individual life or the individual’s thoughts or volitions, but in a pervasive interrelationship between a vast variety of such lives with their natural and man-made environment. Men do as they do, and think as they think, largely as a ‘function of’ the inevitable evolution of the ‘class’ as a whole. [...] It is the ‘structure’ and the ‘evolution’ of the class alone that causally matters in the end.”<sup>41</sup> Such were the grounds on which the Communist regime was built.

It did not allow for any chance or a sheer coincidence. It ‘scientifically’ proved a certain type of historical inevitability. Yet people grew and lived in it, who considered their lives to be a chain of sheer coincidences. Or at least one who, interestingly enough, at a certain point, significantly contributed to dismantling the regime.

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39 *The First Three Minutes*, Steven Weinberg, Basic Books, New York, 1993, p. 154

40 *Historical Inevitability*, Isaiah Berlin, in *Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 93

41 *Historical Inevitability*, Isaiah Berlin, in *Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 99

## 6.1. Petr Miller. An Orphan of Fortune

At the age of fifteen, Petr Miller found himself choosing his vocation. Or rather did so for him, or it was perhaps a row of subsequent coincidences as described above; i.e. parents wanting him to leave the apartment led in the end to his unexpected career of a blacksmith. So far, there had not been much choice involved on Miller's part, yet it proved to be an extremely lucky move. *"When I started my apprenticeship as a blacksmith, I must have been suddenly enlightened by the holy spirit, as I passed all three years with honors, and enjoyed the craft very much. I still think of the blacksmith's work as the best part of my life."*

No one actually gave much thought to where the kid's talents or prospects laid, the decision was made on very practical grounds based on someone else's needs. *"It helped me to many things. To film studios, among others. [...] I also later became the foreman in the ČKD big forge. We had some great reputation there and would finish quite complex orders for all other big factories. Consequently, I knew everybody and it was easy to organize the revolution."*

However, it was not such a straightforward path as it may sound. As Miller had to take care of himself since the age of fifteen, he needed to make money with great urgency. While still an apprentice, he found a part-time job in a brewery, where he also stayed after finishing his training. Happy about the work, less so about the salary. At that time though, it was not easy to quit a job and start somewhere else. There were all sorts of rules which made it difficult for people to move. One of the rare options to quit a job instantly was to get one recruited to either steelworks or mines. *"Well, I was a blacksmith and I kind of knew the work in steelworks, so I tried the mines. And there was also a big recruitment contribution of 3000 crowns. I joined the Nosek mine in Kamenné Žehrovice."*

Miller did not stay long there. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1960, there was a mining accident with 20 casualties. He was one of the rescued crew of the miners and even in his eighties, he remembers the exact date and the chain of events up to his loss of consciousness to minute details. He narrates the story with enthusiasm and even with bits of humor, emphasizing the good luck and a generous guardian angel who was his life-long companion.

*"I got married in the army. Not that I had to get married. I had my first child at the age of fifty-two. But I got married because I didn't have a place to stay and that*

*mommy of my wife was nice enough to let me stay with them. In a miniature apartment, which was stupid, of course, but as soon as I got my job I started to make some good money. I also joined a housing association and started with a studio, then a two-bedroom, then a bigger one, then a 3+1, then an even bigger 3+1 apartment.”*

It was rather difficult to acquire an apartment then. People had to meet certain requirements to make it on a list of applicants first, and then keep waiting. Yet there is this cheerful story by Miller of how he helped himself from the miniature space in his mother-in-law's small apartment to a decent living space of his own. And it is again a story of money and doing what needs to be done: joining the housing association in this case.

However simple such a move may seem to those unfamiliar with the practice under the Communist regime, at those times any act of the sort was accompanied by some kind of a political offering, Havel's greengrocer's shop window being one such example. So what is also important at this stage of Miller's narration is what is not mentioned at all. This is not to suggest any kind of 'collaboration' with the Communist power. But as we learned from Havel, if one wanted the luxury of living in truth, they were to give up such offerings and, in turn, to give up a chance of getting a decent apartment. Yet Miller is not talking about the obstacles not because he would be ashamed of living in a lie, as will become obvious soon, but because he simply does not consider those trifles worth mentioning at all. Neither then, nor now. He simply must have used certain means to make certain ends meet, and if it happened to involve using Yurchak's performative language and various pragmatic rituals, he surely did not hesitate to do so. There are other examples of his attitude worth relating, such as his building of a houseboat with his own hands.

*“My brother was kind of a deputy director of a chicken factory in Slaný and he had a house there with an orchard in front of it. So I got electricity from my brother, metal sheets, and all my tools from the ČKD. You know, I'd been a senior employee there and they all needed a blacksmith like me. At that time, everybody was stealing and everybody had a way. We weren't allowed to travel, so everybody had their summer houses. [...] Well, everybody needed something, and it wasn't to be given away, but it still was in the factory. And it would have been stupid to leave it there when it was needed somewhere else, so things got moved and nothing got lost. It was always there.”*

It may sound odd nowadays, but Miller's straightforwardness and humor reminiscent and typical of those times are captivating. How did he obtain permission to operate his houseboat in the Slapy resort?

*“To have a houseboat there, you had to be organized. You had to join the Svazarm<sup>42</sup>, so we had to go shooting, throwing grenades, and so on. But never mind, we were there, we had water and all sorts of things. And I had become the vice-chairman for the technology of that organization. I was always good in technology.”*

Soon another 'sheer coincidence' took place. A crew of filmmakers was passing by one day and shortlisted Miller's boat for some scenes. They made a deal and Miller even started a moonlighting job for the film studios, which brought him even more money.

*“Once the BBC made an interview with me and they kept asking about how I got to walk to my factory with a piece of bread for lunch. And I told them: ‘Gentlemen, no, I would drive there. And not just with one car, I also sometimes used another car, as I had three of them.’”*

To put things straight, however, Miller was not interested just in money. *“At the age of twenty-seven, I thought: hey, you've been stupid for a long time enough, start being smart now. And I applied for a school to get my GED. And my angel was somewhere there because I graduated with honors and became the best student at school. I was twenty-nine years old at that time. [...] They took me for a heroic defender of socialism, and, as the best student of the school, chose me to meet some visiting representatives of the state.”*

After that, Miller applied for the University of Economics, namely for the Foreign Trade department which was the most prestigious and also somehow difficult to get to at that time. He was admitted even though he had to clear some misunderstandings regarding his admittance with the dean first. *“Only reading foreign trade as a blacksmith from a factory, it was kind of weird.”*

It did not stay that way for long, though. When in 1968 the invasion took place, Miller got involved in a movement in the ČKD that strongly opposed the new development of the regime, and was even elected to the factory Union Committee. When political purges started sometime later, it turned out that it was impossible to sack a blacksmith,

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42 The Svazarm (or Union for Cooperation with the Army) was the largest 'paramilitary' organisation of sorts. Established in 1951, the Svazarm was an almost exact copy of the Soviet Union's DOSAAF, however, with massively scaled-down maritime activities. However, canoeing was still a popular activity. In 1985, Svazarm had about one million members, 60 per cent of whom were under 35 years of age. See <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svazarm>> [cit. 7 June 2021].

particularly an extremely skillful one. So a delegation of communists and workers had to march up to the University of Economics to ask to expel the politically dubious blacksmith from the studies.

*“So I just dropped out of the University of Economics, and in a year or so, or six months, I applied to Charles University for Law Faculty. ‘Comrade Miller,’ they told me, ‘you haven’t improved at all, you’re the same. The working class can’t pay people like you.’ So I was like, heck, I’m working class, too. And from then on I thought there was no way for me to get involved in politics anymore. I got out of the Union immediately, which was a rarity in the ČKD as I was the only employee out of many thousands who was not a member. But I didn’t miss anything because they usually only got those chocolates and towels and stuff like that. My condition allowed me to buy a towel on my own.”* A down-to-earth, matter-of-fact orphan who had always been used to take care of himself and knew how to do it. You wouldn’t hear much of a complaint of anything from him.

*“One thing I’ve got to hand to them: they didn’t let me study, but they let me make money. I was a working-class with a bit of college and didn’t need a boss anymore because what he could be telling me?. So I had my relative freedom.”*

Miller sounds like a person who does not exhaust himself by holding grudges: *“My father allegedly died of carbon monoxide poisoning. [...] The interesting thing was that there were more people in that room, the only one who died was him. And then in 1953, five years after his death, some gentlemen contacted my stepmother, showing her some pictures and asked whether it was my dad. [...] Nobody saw him in a grave so there was some kind of mystery. When I became a minister, I surely had the opportunity to look into it through Langoš, but I didn’t want to. I just didn’t need to know.”*

In 1985, the foreman of the big ČKD forge died and the factory had no better replacement than Miller. But there was a requirement Miller didn’t meet – he was not a member of the Trade Union. So Petr Miller was asked to join the organization and offered the job. *“And I said O.K. Well, the affair with the college, was the kind of a period that actually does leave a mark. And you might say, well, what’s the big deal, you asshole, you could have shut up and they’d let you finish your degree. But it ain’t in me.”*

If we were, to sum up, the narrator’s attitude in one quote, this might be it. We get his straightforwardness in excepting both, the condition and the job. We can see the lack of regret for anything in the past. We can also feel how indispensable he made himself for the establishment. And last but not least, we can perceive his attitude to it. There

is no opposition out of principle, an almost palpable personal independence that accepts external limits as they are set, but at the same time, is always capable of building its inner world within without compromising with one's own consciousness.

As luck would have it, Miller's wife had a workmate who had a husband who – of course coincidentally - was a son of the chair of the Czech department of Radio Free Europe in Munich. His name was Pavel Pecháček and the two made friends. After 1968, Pecháček helped Miller to secure an official invitation to West Germany so that Miller could help him move to Munich where the former was about to join his parents. Miller packed up one of his cars full of Pecháček's possessions and off they went. *"I stayed there in the Free Europe apartment for almost five days. They [the Communists] must have known, it just couldn't be hushed up. I also brought back some copies of the Svědectví magazine and various other prints, I didn't hide it anywhere, I just put it under the rear windshield. It was sitting there for anybody to see. I also used to hang out with these people, who later left for Free Europe like Ondřej Neff or [Karel] Jezdinský. Sometimes, I'd take part in their debates and I didn't understand much because it all sounded really crazy to me. [...] Yet, it may have affected me a little bit, because I came to think about life a little differently."*

## **6.2 Inevitability and Free Will**

In the previous chapter, we have followed one extreme way of becoming an agent of change, Miller's story represents another one to us. It is not the establishment itself which pushed the narrator into any kind of opposition, even though it actually harmed him, too. What we meet here is an individual, an orphan put into his position by a coincidental interplay between external forces and his inner will, where the external forces include not only the Communist establishment but also other existential conditions like early death of parents or the nature of his stepparents.

We have used Miller's example to address the question of free will and decision-making under difficult circumstances and also to illustrate Yurchak's position in describing the nature of the Communist system in general (see Chapter 2). There is one more point to it, although a little more subtle.

*"I was the one who organized the strike because nobody else wanted to. And as I didn't have kids, they would always say 'hey, you go.' So I went."* It just so happened

that Miller did not have children until after the revolution. Whether it was sheer coincidence or a subconscious defensive mechanism that prevented him to provide the regime with a hostage to his good behavior, remains undisclosed.

## 7. The Network. All Tomorrow's Parties

*“So we knew one another. Well, similar people find one another, don't they?”*

-- Vavřinec Korčič, interview with the researcher

In the previous chapter, two extreme positions according to Havel's and Yurchak's respective models were described. However, the life story of Vavřinec Korčič offers yet another dimension to the overall picture. Unlike Urban, who was somewhat pushed into the dissident role by the regime itself, Korčič found his way to its own role of his own accord, much in Miller's way. It even looks as if he had gotten himself spontaneously into his element. Perhaps the most striking feature of his account is the complete lack of any notion of grievance. The narration itself consists of a rather haphazard collection of various funny stories without much clear boundary between the life before and after joining the dissent, with both books and women playing important roles most of the time.

Korčič had some issues with publishing a secondary school magazine as well but in his case, the problems at hand were not strictly political. *“Once we published an issue and filled the blank pages with quotes copied from a book of selected quotations that had come out recently. I picked up: ‘Even the most beautiful legs end somewhere,’ Tuwim. That kind of thing. And so I was called to the headmaster's office and Mr. Kárník told me: ‘Some of my female colleagues complained about your choice of quotes in the school magazine. I'm reprimanding you. That's it. You can go.’ [...] I used the expression later when I worked at the Ministry of Interior when I was about to sort out some of my subordinate's misconduct.”*

However trivial the anecdote might sound and regardless of the fact that it has nothing to do with politics, it still contains much of Korčič's further life story, as well as his apparent approach to life in general, in the way a seed contains the whole plant. Typ-

ically enough, we find some female element, some trespassing, literature, an almost tangible benevolence, and bohemian attitude along with a sort of consistency squeezed in just a few sentences.

Korčič loved books but has always had more talent for mathematics than languages. *“I never wrote a letter to a woman, so that I have avoided the disgrace of making too many mistakes.”* Therefore he applied for the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at the Charles University and was admitted. But: *“Some lectures started at eight in the morning. I don’t know why this early, but I never attended those.”* Korčič passed the first year but a professor started to see potential in him and decided to develop it in full. Korčič, rather unamused by the latter’s efforts, quit his studies and applied for philosophy instead, where he joined a circle of young revolutionaries but quit those studies in another two years. *“My philosophy ended when I was arrested for the subversion of the republic.”* The story gets a bit confused at this part because of some lapses of memory which is an interesting fact in itself as it might be interpreted (in addition to more obvious reasons) to show a considerable lack of emotion on the part of the narrator regarding his being expelled from the school. What is attested is that young Korčič got the impression that the socialist establishment was losing its power, stopped evolving, and deserved something of a push. Tracking a notice on the school bulletin board at the Faculty of Arts, he met some like-minded people in the Movement of Revolutionary Youth<sup>43</sup> such as Petr Uhl,<sup>44</sup> Ivan Dejmal,<sup>45</sup> Jan Frolík,<sup>46</sup> or Petruška Šustrová.<sup>47</sup> The latter was to become his wife, and it was because of her that Korčič turned himself into the authorities and was imprisoned for the first time. In 1969 the group was found dangerous by the establishment and according to measures were taken against its members.

*“I went underground and was hiding in the girls’ student dormitory in Větrník. And I was lucky because I would always only accidentally just leave before they raided*

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43 The Movement of Revolutionary Youth was founded on 2 December 1968, a few months after the occupation of Czechoslovakia. It emerged not only in reaction to the political events in Czechoslovakia, but it was also influenced by the students’ leftist activism in Western Europe. See <<http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n59522>>, [cit. 10 June 2021].

44 Petr Uhl (b. 1941), Czech left-wing journalist and politician, former dissident and signatory of the Charter 77, from 1990 to June 1992 a member (for the Civic Forum) of the House of Nations of the Federal Assembly.

45 Ivan Dejmal (1946–2008), former dissident, later politician and environmental expert, 1991–1992 the Minister for Environment.

46 Jan Frolík (1947–2016), historian, archivist and left-wing intellectual, helped organizing student strikes after the 1968 occupation. He did not complete his university studies until after 1989. Then he was the head of the Department of Archives and Files of the Ministry of Interior for a long period.

47 Petruška Šustrová, (b. 1947), writer, translator from English and Polish and former dissident.

*the place in search of me. Then she [Šustrová] sent me a note from prison that they would set her free if I turn in. I had a temp job back then. I distributed milk and would deliver it even to the Ruzyně Prison. One day I knocked on the door and said that I heard that captain Horák wanted to talk to me. [...] So he put me in the office, turned on the tape recorder, and asked me to start testifying. And I told him that I was not going to. I stayed for fifteen months.”* Of course, his future wife was not set free, but: *“I knew they wouldn’t let her go, but I did it to give her some peace of mind. It smelled like they told her on purpose that I was hiding underground in a girls’ dorm.”*

Since then, Korčíš lived a dissident’s life. After his release from prison, he found a job as a manual worker in Metrostav which, according to him, was a firm famous for admitting the ‘discarded people’. However, the construction work often required staying overnight and Petruška started nagging about him not being at home much. To calm down his wife, Korčíš found another job in a printing house and found a few interesting people who had been fired from various positions, too. On top of it, he had now time and means for his ongoing ‘hobby’, i.e. binding books for the samizdat edition Petlice.<sup>48</sup>

Two years later, Šustrová complained again, this time about the shortage of money, and Korčíš returned to Metrostav where he made *“more than the secret agents who had interrogated him”*. Eventually, he got a job as a stoker with some other distinguished personalities like for instance Jiří Dienstbier.<sup>49</sup>

*“It was great there because there were three of us and we changed shifts, so I would stay ten whole consecutive days at work, and then had twenty days off. So for ten days, I was here at the mill, ten days at work, and ten days I was busy binding books and doing the opposition stuff.”* The other opposition activity, apart from binding books, involved distributing books smuggled into the country and from 1984 also photocopying documents on the two Minolta copy machines clandestinely operating at his home. Korčíš simply never gave up his passion for books despite a constant threat it might have represented.

But he claims he was never afraid of the police. *“That was my upbringing. My dad was a choleric man, he did competitive boxing, so I had a right to defend myself in*

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48 Petlice was a samizdat book edition founded in 1972 by Ludvík Vaculík to disseminate literary works by Czech and Slovak authors whose work could not be officially published in Czechoslovakia. By 1990, nearly 400 titles had been published.

49 Jiří Dienstbier (1937–2011) was a Czech politician and journalist, one of Czechoslovakia’s most respected foreign correspondents before being fired after the Prague Spring. After 1989, he became the country’s first non-Communist foreign minister in four decades, a post he held until 1992.

*a beating. I kind of put up with it mentally. I wasn't scared of a punch and I guess they sensed it, so we actually never got that far. [...] And what was also interesting, if you spend six months with someone [an interrogator], then without wanting to, you might actually make friends because otherwise, we couldn't have withstood it, either of us. He would ask me a question. We would keep quiet and then talked about what was in the newspapers. And then he would ask a question again. 'What should I put down?' 'Write that I'm silent.' [...] The only time I got a bit eloquent was when one XY denounced me. The interrogator told me what she said about me and I said that I was an asshole and I should have fucked her back then. So the cop got interested and I told him like I was in her dorm room, and it was coming up, she got undressed, I found out she had no tits, and so turned around and lost interest. I shouldn't have done that, I said. But my statement never made it into the record. And they never used it on me either."*

Anecdotes of similar kinds poured out of Korčíš without any trace of bitterness. His account is full of people of all sorts, we are given the names of pubs where they gathered, we meet always someone new. *"I don't know where I got these people. When I came to Prague, I fit in with the artists. I drank with them in their studios, and I was actually friends with them a lot."* We learn that there was a typical Czech mixed pub 'U Rakviček'<sup>50</sup> where artists would gather frequently, as well as homicide detectives and even some intelligence people. *"And when the revolution happened and I actually got into the presidential office and then the Interior, the old cops went like: 'no wonder you made a career. You are fine. You had always been like that.' [...] And I thought they hadn't even noticed me in the first place, but they did."*

In the meantime, Korčíš had two children with his wife Petruška, another child with another woman, and also got divorced *"because sometimes I would forget myself and didn't come home for days..."* The account is as open-hearted as the world which pours on the listener with no grudge against anyone. It all culminates with organizing the regular New Year's Eve parties in the empty flat *"after the girls had left" [...]* *"I would always have a big pot of goulash ready and a big pot of borscht. Vaculík once came disguised as Hercules, he had a big ego, that one."<sup>51</sup> Well, then I had the copy machines,*

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50 A guesthouse on the corner of Old Town Square and Dlouhá street, the official name was 'The Quick-Potter'. The nickname came from a neighbouring funeral service. The restaurant of the same name is still there today, but it no longer resembles the establishment of the time.

51 Ludvík Vaculík (1926 – 2015), a Czech writer and journalist, prominent samizdat writer, the author of the *Two Thousand Words* manifesto of June 1968.

*too. I would always move them here to the mill<sup>52</sup> when I threw a party. And once someone brought Olga Havlová in.”*

Put into modern terms, Korčíš was a nod in a network with a very high degree of connectedness. He was a person through which it must have been easy to reach almost anyone in the world of dissent. At the same time, he apparently never felt any ambition to become important in any other way. He obviously likes people and books, and never wanted to write anything “*because he would make too many grammatical mistakes.*”

## 7.1 The Territory

While the three narrators’ accounts from the previous two chapters represent external pressure, individual enterprise, and networking, respectively, as captioned by the three terms *the Crisis*, *the Chance*, and *the Network*, this chapter, focused on **Michael Kocáb**, **Lubomír Schmidtmajer**, and **Igor Klimovič** will address their individual stories more concisely in several aspects, such as in depicting their childhood and pre-revolution years. Suffice it to say that between their childhoods and the revolution, we find them all within the outlined territory – each one of them keeping more or less within the limits set by the establishment, while at the same time consistently pursuing their own interests, every now and then crossing a line slightly, and slowly building a network of like-minded people.

Thus, **Michael Kocáb** devotes himself to music and seems to be lucky enough to be able to make his living with it. In order to do that, he also has to perform certain rituals (including using Yurchak’s performative language) and yet pursues his interest genuinely enough (as a tribute to living in truth) for his rock band to be banished for several years.

**Lubomír Schmidtmajer** is officially employed as the manager of a cultural center which is a sensitive issue considering how much emphasis Communists put on “raising socialist people”. Yet he shows enough resourcefulness to be able to juggle his personal likings and interests with official performative offerings, and slowly but steadily builds an iconic small scene with a great reputation within the alternative scene of the time.

**Igor Klimovič** cannot be bothered by the establishment much, being in part a family man and in part, an underground man and without much ambition in either sphere

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52 The interview took place at a mill near Lovosice which Korčíš inherited from his grandparents.

and thus needs for open resistance. As soon as he is fed up with the state of affairs, he takes his family and leaves the country. The life of all three people, so far merely slightly touching the dilemma between living in truth and outside it, however, turns upside down when the revolution strikes and challenges their creativity and skills in troubleshooting sudden problems.

## 8. Creativity

*“It seems that the men and women we studied were not shaped, once and for all, either by their genes or by the events of early life. Rather, as they moved along in time, being bombarded by external events, encountering good people and bad, good breaks and bad, they had to make do with whatever came to hand. Instead of being shaped by events, they shaped events to suit their purposes.”*

-- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity* (2007)<sup>53</sup>

In researching human creativity, Csikszentmihalyi distinguishes between two kinds of problems: problems *presented* and problems *discovered*.<sup>54</sup> The former is the case when everybody knows that there is something to be done, but the solution is missing. *Will you sign Charter 77? Will you put a slogan into a shop window? Will you smuggle books over the border? Will you join an organization to secure your children’s education?* Most of the daily dilemmas fall into this category and are formulated (presented) by parents, spouses, children, bosses, employees, circumstances, establishments. On the other hand, there are situations in which nobody has asked the question yet and nobody even knows that there *is* a problem. *How does putting some words on paper and sending them to someone else actually helps the overall situation?*

### 8. 1. Michael Kocáb. Discovering Problems

Michael Kocáb reached his turning point in life in June 1989 at the music festival Děčínská kotva, an annual event organized by the Socialist Youth Union and broadcasted

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53 CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. E-book. HarperCollins, 2007, p. 179.

54 Ibid., p. 96

live by the Czechoslovak television. Anyone considered a risk to the current regime would not have been admitted. When receiving some of the festival awards, Kocáb said that every country had the government it deserved. Innocent as it may seem nowadays, the statement was meant as a revolt and also received as such by both the audience and the establishment. Encouraged by crossing the threshold out of sheer frustration, he and his friend Michal Horáček<sup>55</sup> (who coincidentally also received some awards at the festival) thought about what else could be done to oppose the regime. Neither of them was involved in the dissident network, Horáček being a journalist at *Mladý svět*, a popular official weekly. They came up with their own initiative and called it MOST ('Bridge' in Czech).<sup>56</sup> The objective was to facilitate contact between the dissident hardliners around Havel with people from the Communist nomenclature. Helped by several coincidences, Most managed to find a way towards the federal PM Ladislav Adamec. So due to the initiative, when the real revolution began in November 1989, there was already a communication channel established and running between Civic Forum and the government.

In fact, Michael Kocáb is the best example out of the six narrators who would attempt to discover problems before addressing them. There was no apparent necessity to start anything like the MOST initiative. On the contrary, the very idea of a rocker and a journalist addressing someone from the top ranks of the regime must have felt downright phantasmagoric at the time. But as Kocáb reflects: *"It seemed to be the time. Something was already happening in East Germany, Poland, a little bit in Hungary. It felt like the twilight of Communism. The Communists didn't think so, but our claim was that we needed to open the dialogue immediately along Polish lines and talk about what would happen next to prevent actual bloodshed. [...] We just presented it as if we were threatening with an open confrontation. It was absurd, but they accepted it. Because Moscow signaled something similar."*

The key person in establishing contact with Adamec was Oskar Krejčí, his advisor. *"He was also an associate of the secret police, but at the same time, he influenced it because he had the law-enforcement forces under him as the adviser to the prime minister, the army, the National Security Corps [the police], all of the organs. And he cut the secret police off our initiative. [...] But we didn't even know he was an associate. It would*

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55 Michal Horáček (b. 1950), Czech entrepreneur, lyricist, poet, writer, journalist and music producer. From 2007 until 2010, he was the chairman of the Czech Academy of Popular Music.

56 For more personal reflections on the initiative see the memoirs KOCÁB, M. *Vabank*. Universum, 2019, and HORÁČEK, M. *Jak pukaly ledy*, 1990 (see Bibliography).

*have been a different thing had we known. I would have probably backed away from it. The stakes were too high. Fortunately, we didn't know. The Lord was watching over us and no one told us. No one came, saying: Beware."*

Because of MOST, Kocáb got access to the very center of Civic Forum but also to high-ranking officials, which allowed him to come up with more subsequent initiatives of his own and discovering more new problems on the way, such as his own move to get into contact with generals Zachariáš and Vacek on his own accord<sup>57</sup>, which put him later in his well-known role of the supervisor of the withdrawal of the Soviet military forces from Czechoslovakia.

The question of how a civilian rock musician gains enough rapport with generals of the Czechoslovak army obtains a two-fold answer. On the one hand, it came somewhat naturally because *"They knew the real power [others from the Civic Forum, particularly those from the Obroda movement]<sup>58</sup> the danger and strength of it. [And so none was too eager to take the job.] I wasn't even in the army, so I didn't feel the subordination of the military [...] and a general didn't scare me. He was just a man to me."* On the other hand, as Kocáb himself admits, there was more to it other than his personal charms:

*"We realized one thing. Everything we did looked fantastic. You looked like you're the master manipulator pulling the strings, but you weren't. It was the citizens in the streets who were pulling the strings. In fact, if the hundreds of thousands of people weren't there, Adamec would have put us all to jail after two brief talks. [...] He wasn't a friend of ours but we had the power of the people behind us. They were the fuel of that revolution. Without them, the car couldn't go. And the students were like an engine. They were heckling other people into the streets. They disseminated information. We couldn't do anything without them, we were just sitting at the wheel. [...] So we never felt like superheroes [...] but the people gave us strength."*

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57 See KOCÁB, Michael. *Vabank*. Universum: Praha, 2019, pp. 190–202. Mojmir Zachariáš was the commander of the West military zone. Miroslav Vacek (b. 1935), a former Czechoslovak officer and army general, chief of the general staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army in 1989.

58 The Club for the Socialist Rebuilding known as Obroda (or *Revival*) was an opposition initiative in during 1989 to 1990, consisting mostly of former members of the Communist Party, excluded after the defeat of the Prague Spring. The club subscribed to the legacy of the Prague Spring and to Gorbachev's perestroika. After November 1989, the leaders of the Obroda tried to make a major impact in the Civic Forum and many left for Social Democrats later.

When Kocáb talks about his initiatives, he often uses the term ‘hole in the market’. It is great to be able to spot a hole in the market. However, for that to happen, there must be a market first. And then, of course, it is one thing to spot the hole, yet another thing to be able to make use of it. Once the hole is spotted, it presents a problem. And not just anyone can solve certain types of problems presented.

## **8. 2. Miller, Korčíš, Urban and Schmidtmajer. Answering Challenges**

Closest to Michael Kocáb’s own somewhat mediating position stands Petr Miller who appeared in the center of disgruntled workers in the ČKD and became a natural leader who channeled their voices in the proper direction after the events of the 17 November. As Miller recounts: *“Originally, people in the ČKD thought that students just made a mess, getting their asses kicked, and good for them. It wasn’t until the evening when people came home and saw these pompous, stupid faces on the TV commenting on it, that pissed them off. [...] So on Tuesday morning, people talked and called me and asked what I thought about it. I suggested we should get together because I had the big forge separated from the rest of the factory with its own lockable door. So after the morning break at about 11 o’clock, all of a sudden, my forge was full of people. That’s where we agreed to do something.”* Workers had put together a proclamation and sent Miller to deliver it to Havel. Miller accepted the notion that after all those years this might be the actual moment when acting could make a difference. Apart from the proclamation, he suggested that workers should organize a May Day Parade because everybody knew what a May Day Parade looked like and what to do. And with that, he set off to address Havel even though not sure where to actually find him as he was something of a mystical entity for casual workers.

Miller found Havel with the help of the aunt of Pavel Pecháček, the friend he helped to move to West Germany years ago. Coming from Radio Free Europe, Pecháček naturally had access to the opposition center, and so did his aunt. She spotted Miller looking for a way and helped him to get in where he met Pecháček who consequently put him through a chain of other friends who brought him to Havel eventually. The chain of lucky coincidences culminated by Miller speaking at one of the biggest rallies in Letná saying whatever occurred to him at the very moment and unafraid to make things up entirely. The following day, Miller received an offer to become the Minister of Labour

and Social Affairs. He accepted, half thinking that was a silly joke to the very last moment until he realized it was not.

Unlike Miller, who was wandering the streets wondering about where the city center was and how to get there, Vavřinec Korčič found his way right to the spot from the very beginning. *“When the revolution had come, I went to Havel’s house on my day off and answered phones and cooked and did all the things a home secretary or maid does. [...] It all happened in a kind of a broader group. So I automatically moved in with them [Havel and his wife Olga] when it started, and I worked there. I slept in Václav’s study. And then on 31<sup>st</sup> December, I quit my job to join the presidential office on the next day. But I stayed at their home and would only come to the Castle for meetings.”*

For Korčič, the revolution did not change much. He kept his lifestyle surfing naturally the waves caused by his previous life decisions. *“I remember going up the stairs at the Castle when I stumbled upon Václav and Sacher.<sup>59</sup> Václav said ‘Richard, that’s the man we agreed on’. And I said: ‘What did you arrange?’ and Václav said ‘You are going to the Ministry of Interior.’ I objected that I didn’t want to go to the Interior. But it was all set. [...] Even though Sacher must have found out something about me. We didn’t really hit it off, because he was a vegetarian, didn’t drink, and believed in ghosts. He didn’t rush with my appointment. So it didn’t happen until Langoš made it to the ministry, whom I knew from Slovakia, from the mountains, where they had cottages.”*

Similarly spontaneous was the way of Jan Urban. The angry man who wanted to hurt the enemy as much as possible had finally found his revenge. But it did not make him happy. He narrates: *“I was in it from the start. I even co-authored the title Civic Forum. [...] From the beginning, I was immediately angry because it was all chaos, where everybody wanted to do politics and be with Havel and nobody wanted to see it as having to do something. It needed some logistics. It needed to get out of Prague. So I together with the girls from the Laterna Magika production<sup>60</sup> took two offices near the entrance of the theatre and started doing the production work. We had put the capital letters ‘HPV’ on the door and it immediately became a part of the environment. People would say: throw it to HPV or let HPV handle it. After about ten days, Ivan Havel [Václav*

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59 Richard Sacher (1942–2014), Czech politician and civil servant. He was the first post-Communist federal Interior Minister, serving to 1990. He was also a member of the Federal Assembly for two years.

60 The Laterna Magika is largely considered the world’s first multimedia theatre. In its building at the Adria Palace, all of its premises were used by the Civic Forum.

Havel's brother] *started making flowcharts as for who's in charge of what, and he came up to us as asking what we are doing. We said we were the HPV, that is Holka Pro Všechno [the girl for all seasons in Czech]. And that was exactly what we were doing, from cleaning shirts to dealing with the Soviet Embassy.*"

Despite the quick success of the opposition movement, Urban was not at all happy about how the situation developed and the changes he perceived in people he had respected. He was asked to lead the movement up to the first free elections and he eventually agreed on the condition that he would quit right after it.

Another case of the very same pattern, this time in a different field of interest, is represented by the story of Lubomír Schmidtmajer. The manager of a scene as alternative as was legally possible, he had naturally become part of the network of contacts corresponding to each other. Interestingly enough, the idea to organize a concert of the Rolling Stones occurred to him already in the mid-1980s. As he recalls: *"Back then, it was more like a joke because it was obvious that it wasn't going to happen. But it felt pretty good to tease them, comrades, a bit. So I actually put together a proposal on how to organize a Rolling Stones concert [...] and sent it to Pragokoncert.<sup>61</sup> Like, 'comrades, that's what I'd like to do with you, let's get it done'. Of course, no one ever responded. But the idea was somehow there."*

It sounds reasonable to suppose that there were not many people in the 1980s Czechoslovakia who would have been able to come up with something of the kind. Most likely, Schmidtmajer was the only one. And for some reason or another, when Mick Jagger, out of respect to Václav Havel, a dissident freshly turned president, proposed a charity performance in Czechoslovakia (at least it seemed as such from his perspective), the task to organize it eventually came all the way down to Schmidtmajer. As he recollects: *"Vašek [Havel] didn't want to do it at all. He'd had some sort of a few months of experience. He already knew what it meant to face forays of people proposing him wonderful things. [...] He was like: I know all these people who promise it's charitable and then it turns into a bummer and we're gonna be dealing with some financial shit around here."*

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61 A monopoly state agency of the time, the only body through which any kind of performing art could be both exported or imported to Czechoslovakia.

*He really didn't want to do it. So Vlád'a Hanzel<sup>62</sup> called me if I'm into it, and I said: 'Well, sure. No big deal!' "*

### **8. 3. Igor Klimovič. As Chance Would Have It**

*"That brings us to somewhere between February-March 1990. By then, I had three children and I have come back from Austria, Havel is the president, we still have Czechoslovakia, we have a federal government, we have a Czech government, we have Jarda Kořán<sup>63</sup> in the Municipality, and I confess I did not know what a Municipality actually was; there was the mayor, yes, and otherwise I knew nothing at all," says Klimovič, a trained bricklayer, who was soon to join Kořán at the City Council and who was for some time also the Chairman of the Republican Union.<sup>64</sup> After returning from a brief exile in Austria, Klimovič started a construction business. "And one day I'm kind of walking cheerfully to some construction site down the Široká street and there's a long-haired man named Marcel Pok looking out of a window on the ground floor, and a sign reads 'Republican Union'. It was a kind of a fateful moment for me. [...] I marched into that place and was immediately accepted because I had a construction company and had come from Austria. That immediately got me a way to the leadership of the party. But most importantly, there was a phone, so I would come [...] every morning and made my calls. And as the then chairman Zdeněk Záhorský was always away and there were visits from all over the republic, it was me in my overall who would deal with the daily agenda and so I was cementing my position."*

These two short paragraphs summarize the gist of both Klimovič's attitudes and the spirit of the times. When all kinds of opportunities open at the very same time, almost anything is possible. Yet, for an opportunity to flourish, it still needs to be seized. When everything is upside down, the only qualification for seizing an opportunity seems to be courage and personal integrity. The former to put things in motion, the latter not to lose track when the motion gets wild. All the rest somehow follows.

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62 Vladimír Hanzel (b. 1951), a Czech music critic. From the summer of 1989 to 2003, a personal secretary to Václav Havel and director of his secretariat, then chief director of the cabinet of the Minister of Education, director of the educational and cultural centre of the Jewish Museum in Prague and internet editor at Czech Television.

63 Jaroslav Kořán (1940–2017), a Czech translator, writer, screenwriter, and politician. A dissident and signatory of Charter 77, one of the co-founders of the Civic Forum, in 1990–1991 Prague's first non-Communist Mayor since 1948.

64 A tiny right-wing conservative party in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic from 1990 to 2008.

With severely restricted resources, Klimovič's party did not do much to advertise or campaign before the elections. Up to nowadays, the narrator insists that they gained some seats in the City Assembly only because many inexperienced voters (most of them taking part in a free election for the first time) mistook their party with another of a similar name (the Republican Party) and with much better funding, even though with a very different program.

As has been demonstrated by the individual examples above, the ways to become an *agent of change* were manifold. But what was it that allowed the narrators to perform their new roles with success?

## 9. Personal Prerequisites

*Generally, creative people are thought to be rebellious and independent. Yet it is impossible to be creative without having first internalized a domain of culture. And a person must believe in the importance of such a domain in order to learn its rules; hence, he or she must be to a certain extent a traditionalist. So it is difficult to see how a person can be creative without being both traditional and conservative and at the same time rebellious and iconoclastic. Being only traditional leaves the domain unchanged; constantly taking chances without regard to what has been valued in the past rarely leads to novelty that is accepted as an improvement.*

-- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity* (2007)<sup>65</sup>

### 9. 1. Solving Puzzles

Csikszentmihalyi's observation concerns mainly artists and scientists and may sound strange in the context of managing the transformation of one regime of governing a country into another. On the one hand, the notion surely resonates with the artistic approaches of Michael Kocáb who fondly remembers his music school teacher and the classic drill she made him go through. On the other hand, the way it applies for a member of the Parliament responsible for the Soviet Army withdrawal, or other narrators, may not be clearly perceivable at the first glance. Yet, it does apply in interesting ways.

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65 CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. E-book. HarperCollins, 2007, p. 73

All the time, we are talking about a transformation of systems, not of complete destruction of one and construction of a different one. Hardly anyone wanted to bring the state to ground zero in 1989, and certainly none of our narrators. The basic structures were sure to be preserved, only used in a different manner. In such a case, however, it is apparently necessary to understand the mechanics of the old system if you want to transform it without breaking it to pieces. In general, as well as in each particular incidence.

Organizing a concert of Rolling Stones, the world's biggest body in the music industry of the era, meant a quantum leap for Schmidtmajer, yet he had already understood and internalized the essentials of music performances and promotion. At the same time, he had also proved an entrepreneurial (creative) spirit by founding a production co-operative at the first opportunity. It had to be co-operative, as the then Czechoslovak legislation did not recognize private firms yet. He promised to the president that he would not screw the event up but, as he reflects in hindsight: *"Today, when you make a deal, you just send the money, and it's more or less settled because there's just a clear list of professions that are doing something. Unfortunately, there was nothing like that at the time. So, theoretically, almost anything could get screwed up, because we had to sort of make it all up under some kind of supervision of the Rolling Stones' managers, but of course, they didn't know the Czech reality. They knew what the final product should look like, but the fact that many things simply didn't exist here at all presented a problem for them."*

What Schmidtmajer and his co-operative did was to follow a certain pattern given from outside and improvising makeshift solutions for anything missing on the spot. Among other things, the co-operative had to solve financial problems which under most circumstances and for most people would have remained essentially insoluble. Schmidtmajer and his friends overcame those only due to the unique situation of the time when the general rule of six steps of separation<sup>66</sup> as if shrank to three or four, old structures and rules were officially recognized as insufficient, new ones had not been born yet, and many unimaginable things could be solved through the right network. Even though the Rolling Stones agreed to perform as a kind of charity and therefore almost for no money at all, this still meant a considerable number of lump sums to be paid as deposits in advance. And the question was not only where to get the money, but also how

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66 *Six degrees of separation* is a hypothesis that everyone is, on average, at maximum six social connections away from any other person.

to convert it and send to the USA. *“It was settled through Hanzel, who asked Dlouhý<sup>67</sup> who asked Tošovský<sup>68</sup> who had some fund at his disposal...”* In other words, *“the music promoters asked the personal secretary of the president who asked some powerful guys”*.

This example demonstrates the significance and power of unofficial networks and contacts in a sphere devoid of working official hierarchy and daily routines. In this respect, the role of personal assistants and secretaries could not be overestimated during times of social or institutional upheaval.

## 9. 2. Secretaries

Internalizing the old structures in order to build new ones takes various shapes but it is perceptible in each of the narrations in some form or another. One of the most notable forms presents the value of ‘secretaries’ mentioned by all three narrators, who were made to enter an established official body and had to find their ways around.

*“Fortunately, there’s always a secretary around to tell you what to do and what’s needed,”* Vavřinec Korčíš says. *“I learned that at the Castle. There was the secretary of Husák’s, one Žákovičová, a Slovak and such a pleasant woman. [...] When I needed to know something, I always went to see her. [...] And she always told me, so I was the smartest of all.”*

*“Do I have a secretary here?”* Petr Miller asked the first day in the Ministry of Labour. *“So please, if you would be a good girl, make me some hot tea [...] and since you are here would you tell me about the ministry as well?”* And a bit further: *“So I was friends with everybody right away. [...] I am seeing these people until today.”* Also, Klimovič explicitly mentions a secretary when listing things that helped him the most in the first days at the City Council.

With Kocáb and Urban, the principle is represented in different ways which somehow follow from the nature of their respective positions. As the most advanced (in his creative approach) of all the six narrators, Kocáb truly dives into unexplored areas. Still, if we are to summarize the nature of his activities briefly, his primary objective is

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67 Vladimír Dlouhý (b. 1953), a Czech economist and politician, a former deputy chairman of the ODA political party and Minister of Industry and Trade between 1992 and 1997.

68 Josef Tošovský (b. 1950), a Czech economist and former governor of the Czech National Bank (from 1993 to 2000).

to contact the enemy and negotiate, not to destroy them. And it is the skill to make the contact and make it work that can be seen as the effort to internalize the old in order to transform it into something new.

On the other hand, Urban offers us a kind of a reverse perspective. He is angry that everybody is overexcited with politics and no one sees the need to keep some discipline. He also fiercely condemns the fact that the Obroda, the association of old reformist Communists, is put aside. In other words, he longs for some method, some resemblance of order and continuity in the process of transformation, and when he cannot see it, he leaves the whole process at the first possible moment.

### **9. 3. Ignorance and Integrity**

As Kocáb puts it explicitly, there was a certain moment when “*had we known all the circumstances, we might not have done it*”. It perhaps does not apply for all our narrators but still, this statement implies a certain type of a trait which we have found to be common to all narrators in some form. When you do not know where you are going and what is happening beyond your horizon, you need some strong inner compass that shows you the direction. Consistency. Integrity. Firm points in life. Kocáb surely has his music but at the same time a strong belief that anything is possible if you try hard enough. He has been able to demonstrate it through several stories from his childhood and formative years which sadly cannot make it into this work in order to keep it concise.

Miller was never afraid because he knew he could “*always get back to his forger*” and the houseboat he had built. The craftsmanship and the residential ship have represented firm points in his life come what may. “*Look, who knows what’s going to happen,*” he said to his co-workers in the factory when leaving for the ministry. “*I am keeping my locker here and God forbid, don’t you dare touch my hammer.*” And even though he may not work with the hammer anymore in his eighties, he still keeps the houseboat at the Slapy resort.

Interestingly enough, integrity takes a very symbolic shape with Klimovič who would keep mentioning his long hair as a symbol of independence. Even in moments such as when he describes his first days in the office at the City Council, he does not forget to mention that he had cut his hair for that occasion. Another firm point in his life apparently consists of his family, which, on the other hand, would get mentioned only

marginally in the narration, yet with considerable emphasis. What is explicitly mentioned though is the fact that he met his wife at the age of seventeen, they have been married for forty years, and the wife has always stayed home with their three children and has never had to work. The way Klimovič avoids giving away the particulars about his family suggests that his private affairs are precious enough to be guarded closely. Although not elaborated on in this thesis, the interviews of most of the narrators were often interrupted by family issues which revealed the respective person's care given to the matter.

As for Korčiš, two things seem to stand out. On the one hand, it is his omnipresent ability to make friends with just anyone. He is the party thrower and the pub crawler. At a certain point, he refuses to accept Havel's offer to become the manager of the presidential seat in Lány *"because it is too far from the pub."* He may never leak any testimony when interrogated, but he would freely chat with his interrogator in between. He never looks down on someone even if it happens to be his enemy at the actual moment, which more than pays off when he happens to appear at the other side – the Interior Ministry, and quickly gains respect there. He has a simple recipe: *"Actually, I've always been able to ask someone and get advice."* But he has also always loved books and learned to read very fast in childhood. He printed and bound samizdat books all through the 1970s and 1980s. And who would have thought how handy such affection might come even in the intelligence service: *"We blew up Kavan's security clearance. [...] I read about forty thousand pages of documents on him. Luckily I can read so fast. I could look at a page and instantly see what was there. So I found out that..."*

For Jan Urban, the most conspicuous integral trait lies in his personal dignity and ability to look people in the eye. Truly, people's eyes are his most outstanding recurrent theme. He never fails to mention them when describing the crucial moments. *"The landlord didn't say hello anymore, and all of a sudden, eyes turned glassy whenever someone should pass by us. So we moved. [...] Suddenly they're avoiding you. The eyes stop working. They don't look into your eyes. [...] And then in the morning, eyes in the corner, and I didn't know that a colleague had already taken the place. [...] People I had the utmost respect for. And all of a sudden their eyes lit up and this one wants to be a chancellor, that one wants to be a minister, another one wants to be a... I said stop fooling around."*

In a period when Václav Havel was no longer the President of Czechoslovakia but had not yet become the President of the Czech Republic, Lubomír Schmidtmajer worked for him as a personal manager of sorts for specific matters on a contractual ad

hoc basis. Later, when offered to become a full-time employee of the presidential office, Schmidtmajer refused. He preferred to maintain his independence and pursue his own interests instead.

#### **9. 4. Self-Education**

Last but not least, eagerness to learn and the ability to learn quickly (regardless of one's formal education) appear to be another common feature mentioned in one form or another by all the narrators. On one hand, Miller is proud of being able to devour enormous amounts of information once having entered the Ministry, spending days and nights with reading and listening to people over dozens of coffees. On the other hand, despite his university degree, Urban is equally proud of completing his bricklayer's training at the age of thirty-five. And while Korčiš is a lifetime reader, Klimovič does not forget to mention that regardless of his failure to complete formal education, his reads amount to thousands. "You learn as you go," he assures.

## **10. Conclusion**

*After all, what most distinguishes Western man from those who live in 'primitive' societies is precisely the dynamic, progressive nature of his cultural patterns. What makes a society 'primitive' is its inability to let its cultural patterns evolve, its unwillingness to interpret and exploit the original assumptions of its culture, which thus persist as empty formulas, rites, taboos. We have very few reasons to consider the cultural pattern of the West as universally superior, but one of these reasons is its plasticity, its flexibility, its capacity to respond to circumstantial challenges by constantly interpreting new experiences and elaborating new ways to adjust to them.*

-- Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*<sup>69</sup>

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69 ECO, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge (MS), 1989, p. 79.

## 10. 1. Peripheries

In an attempt to answer the initial question, six distinct and different narrative streams were followed to see them finally converge in the topics of the previous chapter. We followed six individual life stories to a very specific turning point typical for a certain time. We have seen each of them helped by whole sets of co-incidences without which none of their feats would have been possible. We have seen them coming from different environments following different guidelines. Much information has been gathered, but how much meaning can be made out of it? Should we conclude that despite all personal efforts, the *agents of change* are merely temporary phenomena born out of random sets of coincidences?

While Havel and Yurchak saw events of the time through different perspectives based on their interests, this contradiction proved compatible for a broader research: Havel's life in truth, and Yurchak's performative language. While Havel describes how the network of power is created when the line between the controlled and the controllers runs in the head of each individual, Yurchak reminds us that the Communist regimes should be viewed as modern projects that originate in theoretical ideals of the Enlightenment, and that they therefore share the same kind of paradox inherent to a certain way of ruling and enforcing ideas- to something common both political West and East.<sup>70</sup>

Interestingly enough, a similar paradox has been examined in Umberto Eco's seminal book *Opera Aperta*. And even though Eco's work concerns mainly the arts, it offers some useful insights applicable for any system. To put it simply, the central idea revolves around the problem to what extent a work or a system may remain closed (complete), and to what extent it needs to stay open (incomplete) to be able to live. Eco shows that closed systems die out because they cannot interact, while too open systems tend to turn into chaos. Therefore, for any living body or a work of art or a system to thrive, a certain balance between openness and closure is required. Closure provides structure, shape, meaning, openness provides communication, development, information.

As Yurchak points out, the Communist ideology asks people to totally surrender to the 'objective Truth'. From Eco's perspective, it means building a rigid system with little ability to communicate, grow and evolve. Once the objective Truth is known, there

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70 YURCHAK, A. *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, p. 23.

is no need to work on anything else but to further cement its structure. The process usually starts its operations bursts from a periphery to the center when the working class seizes power, and once it reaches the center, it turns around and presses back from the center to peripheries to secure and fortify the entire territory – to get rid of all subversive creativity. Such a process is in a way natural to all systems.

We have seen our narrators coming from different kinds of peripheries. They are either born and raised in border regions like Kocáb, Schmidtmajer, or Korčiš, or pushed to the margins of society like Miller and Urban, or even to a self-induced exile like Klimovič. The periphery is supposed to be the land where common social ambitions are difficult to fulfill. It is as far from the center as possible. On the other hand, when a system tends to be too radical and expels all potentially opening elements as far as possible from the center, it is also a territory where various interesting people concentrate as in Kocáb's Chodov, Korčiš's and Urban's odd jobs, Klimovič's pubs, Schmidtmajer's club, or Miller's forgery. For the disturbing elements, it is hardly possible to complete a higher formal education, which is considered a pathway to the center. Truly, the notion that no system gives man the education to overthrow it stayed at the beginning of our research. Nevertheless, it is almost unavoidable to gather a lot of precious life experience and informal education in peripheries where the disposed-of elements concentrate. Inconspicuously but inevitably, networks of creative people develop as the concentration of them is higher than average and continually raises. The longer a system is building up its structure, the more rigid it gets. At the same time, creative noise raises in all its peripheries and margins.

“Noise destroys and horrifies,” writes Michel Serres in *The Parasite*, a book in which the French philosopher examines the same phenomenon from a different perspective. “But order and flat repetition are in the vicinity of death. Noise nourishes a new order. Organization, life, and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony. If there were only order, if we only heard perfect harmonies, our stupidity would soon fall toward a dreamless sleep; if we were always surrounded by the shivaree, we would lose our breath and our consistency, we would spread out among all the dancing atoms of the universe. We are; we live; we think on the fringe, in the probable fed by the unexpected, in the legal nourished with information.”<sup>71</sup>

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71 SERRES, Michel. *The Parasite*. John Hopkins University Press, 1982, p. 127.

However distant and helpless the periphery areas may appear, there is always something growing and the system cannot in fact dispose of it unless it destroys itself. This is also something we perceive in all the narratives. As Jiřina Švorcová put it in her address at the last meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in November 1989: “I don’t think we followed that part of the *Lessons Taken from the Crisis Development*, that no one will be judged based on attitudes from those heated days after 21<sup>st</sup> August, but with their work, they will write his own appraisal. In the cultural field, however, the anathema lasted for too many years, and for many, it still applies today. And I think it is from these ranks that our opponents or outright enemies are recruited.”<sup>72</sup>

## 10. 2. Coincidences. When the Time Comes

Petr Miller found his way to Havel’s presence thanks to an aunt of a friend whom he selflessly helped years ago. Had luck not brought the good aunt to the specific place at the specific time, Czechoslovakia could have had a different Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

Had Kocáb known that Oskar Krejčí was, among others, a member of the secret police, there would allegedly be no MOST initiative at all. Had Adamec not had hints from Moscow that bloodshed might have been possible, he might not have accepted to answer the initiative at all. Chains of events would have taken a completely different course.

Had Urban’s father decided not to stick to his consciousness even if it meant getting into conflict with the Communist Party, Jan Urban might have stayed in a safe place at the center, and Civic Forum might have had another leader or maybe no leader at all.

Had not someone decided to push too hard in Czechoslovakia in November 1989, people might not have come to the streets in great numbers, and the space for the *agents of change* might not have opened.

Had Klimovič not had such an urge to walk into an office of a marginal political party somehow advertised by the presence of a long-haired man, the legislation governing the Municipal Police and homeless people might have taken a different shape, and

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72 KOCÁB, M. *Vabank*, p. 144.

no one can tell what it would have brought about. Of course, Klimovič's personal need for using the office telephone also played an important role.

Each individual decision creates an incidence. A certain number of coincidences creates an environment. That applies to both centers and peripheries. A sufficient number of co-incidences can develop and strengthen a structure. This is exactly why it was so important for the Communist regime to make its greengrocers put slogans in their shop windows. On the other hand, a sufficient number of coincidences of a different nature can also open up a closed system. One incidence is never enough to change much in a complex environment but it can gain importance relative to its position in a network and over time. When Havel and his friends put together the *Charter 77*, it might have seemed to be hopeless, if not vain, gesture. Yet some perseverance had eventually turned it into a firm point, an incidence that brought about possibilities of many coincidences. When the number of coincidences had reached a critical mass on all scales in Czechoslovakia, as well as internationally, the noise of peripheries made the system burst open. The time had come for the *agents of change* to emerge on the scene. They might have been helped by many coincidences, but neither of those was completely arbitrary.

### 10. 3. Victors? Losers?

In Chapter 2, Havel was quoted that the Civic Forum fulfilled its mission only a week into the revolution. "Now is the time for professionals," he said. "It seems to be almost won; in any case, we're not up to it all." Within our current context, we can paraphrase that as we have disrupted the system enough, triggered a change, and so in order not to let it fall into pieces completely, let us give space to someone who would develop the new structure. In Chapter 2 we have asked where were those professionals to come from. They may not have been exactly expected but they had really come. As Kocáb puts it: "*Had we known what we know today [...] we shouldn't have allowed anyone from the Forecasting Institute<sup>73</sup> anywhere near the Civic Forum. [...] That was a hole cut into the*

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73 The Forecasting Institute (Prognostický ústav) was established in April 1984 as the Forecast Cabinet of Czechoslovak Academy of Science. Its members were selected experts (members of the Party) who were supposed to formulate mathematically-based estimates of the future development of society and, above all, economy. Its members have held and keep holding influential positions in political parties across the spectrum. This apparent political success of the forecasters can be explained by close collaboration with the group around Václav Havel and later the Civic Forum, where economics experts were absent during the Velvet Revolution.

*hull of the ship, and that's where the waters of the economic academism were just pouring in and the ship started to tilt. [...] We also should have banned the Communist Party straight away. But back then we just didn't want to be like them and we wanted to make a difference. We didn't want to be the revolutionaries that would destroy, execute, or totally demolish."*

There are various kinds of margins and some can be found even in the middle of the center, carefully grown and hidden from curious glances patiently waiting for their time to come. In other words, some professionals had indeed come from the Forecasting Institute, a niche in the structure of the old system. Others had developed from the revolutionaries themselves as Urban had predicted commenting on the glare in their eyes.

Perhaps we should not be surprised that similar patterns to those described above can be observed in the opposite camp, i.e. among those whose positions were stirred by the revolution, as well. In an interview published in *Vítězové? Poražení?* by Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Urbášek, a prominent person in the Communist nomenclature, Miroslav Štěpán,<sup>74</sup> claims: "I want to say that my personal foundation is related to the village [where he grew up], where organizational prowess or competence was just given. Back then, I wouldn't have called it organizational prowess, but rather a personal initiative, autonomy. The village basically leads you to it that you always have the urge to achieve something. [...] You should notice that in Prague, whenever a responsible job is concerned, it can't be assigned to people from Prague. For something to be done here, those who have ambition, motivation must come from somewhere else. [...] I think the village led me to be just a little bit better than everyone else. If we look at a number of footballers today, well, with a few exceptions, they're from small places where they have a goal in front of them."<sup>75</sup>

The basic layout is the same – energy only comes from the periphery to the center, but the perspective is reversed. It is necessary to be responsible for achieving goals, keeping order. This is no *agent of Change* talking, but an ambitious conformist, one of those who had helped to cement the structure for years. But we should keep in mind, that those people had also come from the peripheries of society once. This leads us to the question, what happened to our *agents of Change* after they had fulfilled their objectives.

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74 Miroslav Štěpán (1945–2014), Czechoslovak politician and party chairman of the Communist Party in Prague

75 *Vítězové? Poražení?*, Miroslav Vaněk, Pavel Urbášek, Prostor, 2005, vol. II, p. 621

One of the first things Petr Miller did after leaving the ministerial office was getting divorced. *“I broke up with her [his actual wife] very quickly, that lasted maybe five minutes. I came home and said, look, I’m done being a minister and I’m going back to the forge. And she answered, excuse me, I’m not going to live with a blacksmith. So that had settled it, and it went very quickly.”* However, Miller had never made it back to the forge. *“I started Petmill Consulting, originally the Masaryk Institute for Employment and Social Policy [...] then I was the HR director of Chemapol Group [...]. Then I was the HR director of ČEZ, [...] Then I had a wine shop for four years, then I was the HR director at the Ministry of Culture, the IT Director at the Ministry of Culture, the Director of the Office of the Minister of Culture, and then I was also offered the chair of the Philharmonic Orchestra and I thanked nicely and said I’m not that crazy, that was really too much.”* In his eighties, he still radiates energy, keeps his houseboat, and supervises a reconstruction of several houses.

When the tanks had rolled away and Michael Kocáb was done in the Federal Assembly, he *“I didn’t know what was going to happen any further. I was upset though. You didn’t want to just sit around anymore. And then there was this voucher privatization, and my friends talked me into starting the Trend Investment Fund. [...] They just needed my name.”* It did not end up working very well. His colleagues blamed him for confusing business with the church, Kocáb lost control over the business and came out pretty unhappy about the results. At that time he decided not to poke his nose into the business anymore. But he has always had his music and eventually got back to politics for a time *“When I make music I miss politics and vice versa.”* At the moment of the interview, Kocáb is pondering to run for president by campaigning using a row of concerts.

As was had mentioned above, Urban had accepted the leading position in the Civic Forum only under the condition that he would leave right after the election in June 1990. But he notes: *“I blame myself for not walking away in December. I have the utmost respect for one of the most courageous people in the dissent who is totally unknown, David Schmoranz, with whom we have tried to jam the sound of the Czechoslovak TV and push in our own broadcast, just with walkie-talkies smuggled from Poland. He was hiding Havel from the police, an incredibly serious friend. He never got into it at all. He has always worked as a carpenter. Yet he’s Schmoranz – from the family of the first director of the National Theatre, the Czech revivalists, all that. An incredibly educated man. He’s a carpenter with capital C. Had I been wiser then, I would have left in time.”*

Later, Urban worked as a journalist anchor during the former Yugoslavia conflicts and has practically stayed in dissent till nowadays. Only that under the transformed circumstances, this state of affairs does not prevent him from publishing and lecturing.

Klimovič left politics soon after his first term in the City Council had expired. *“I was never rich, but that was never worth it. The idea that I would be in politics to create some source somewhere was never for me. [...] They [people filling the political scene in the early 1990s] were like prominent children of communist parents again, who if the revolution hadn't come would have been Party members, because they were just as likely to be part of the ruling establishment anyway. And suddenly I didn't want to be there.”*

He worked as an advisor, later a producer, working on various projects never employed. *“Of course, I'm thinking about what the future holds, I'm going to be sixty-one and now we have no idea. Luckily we have a place to live, we're putting something together, and I should better produce something this year.”*

Lubomír Schmidtmajer has been included in the original selection of narrators to provide some parallel comparison as a person from outside of the political sphere. Yet interestingly enough, even he was offered a job in the presidential office at a certain juncture of time. Nevertheless, he did not accept it because it would have required him to become an employee of the Castle, while he preferred to pursue his own interests and stay independent. He has been into cultural production work ever since, producing events small and big.

Vavřinec Korčíš originally did not show much enthusiasm in joining the Minister of Interior, yet he stayed with the intelligence service up to his retirement. His work involved much networking as even more reading, which is something he had always excelled at most, and almost no politics. His name is unknown to search engines even though it is possible to lookup there his father, his son, as well as his former wives.

The present thesis' sample of narrators is not representative enough to allow for many general statements, but a certain pattern may be spotted. It takes different people to strengthen the structure of a system from those who may help to evolve it. Both kinds are always present somewhere in society, and there is an ongoing motion from the center to peripheries and back again. There is always a line within each individual human being between stability and development, need for safety, and need for adventure, maintenance,

and discovery. The balance between openness and closure can never be fixed. It is always in motion, one turns into another like yin and yang in Daoist philosophy.

#### **10. 4. Final Reflection. The Innovator's Dictionary. Your Network Is Your Net Worth**

Above, we have preferred to talk about systems in general rather than specifically about the Communist regime in which our narrators had grown. Along with Eco and Serres, we claimed that the described characteristics apply to just any system. Which implies a question: Can history repeat?

If we, with Yurchak, stop thinking in terms of East versus West, Communism versus Democracy, accept that both have come from the same breed, and then we take up Eco's perspective on the present times, we may spot interesting things.

In the introduction to a recently published Innovator's Dictionary, an impressive large-format publication of 1152 pages and 3,6 kilos weight which lists "555 methods and instruments for more creativity and innovation in your company", we read: "Until a few years ago, creativity was certainly not competence that was focused on in professional development. Times have changed, however. More and more frequently we find ourselves in everyday situations where routines are no longer sufficient and we need new solutions. [...] People often react with the following behavior: they think hard and fail to come up with a solution; they don't think the problem can be solved and they concentrate on other things; they delegate the problem to colleagues and evade their responsibility to find solutions themselves; the problem bothers them and they get sick."<sup>76</sup>

Welcome to the world of corporations. In chase of ever-growing prosperity and overall security, the system closes again. It is looking for safe solutions. It offers 555 games for human resources managers to trigger creativity, among which we can find items like A Kick In The Seat Of The Pants or Whack On The Side Of The Head.

At the same time, innumerable guides tell people how to form their own networks, with which to finally achieve the status they desire. As the title of one of them suggests: Your Network Is Your Net Worth. The lists of well-meant advice point out:

A key to unlocking the hidden power of connections is helping others when you don't expect anything in return.<sup>77</sup>

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76 The Innovator's Dictionary, edited by Christian Buchholz and Benno van Aerssen, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2020, p. 9

77 Your Network Is Your Net Worth, Porter Gale, Atria Books, New York, 2013, p. 68

Shaking up routine and exploring new opportunities can change your life. Sometimes change is by choice and sometimes it is due to external circumstances. Regardless of where it comes from, it always has the potential to bring positive growth and learning.<sup>78</sup>

Reaching critical mass can be accelerated by connecting with core influencers, exploring partnerships, and unleashing the power groups.<sup>79</sup>

Get your foot in the door, secure a meeting, or simply get advice; the Ask is a skill people hone over time.<sup>80</sup>

As if all those things that had come so naturally in our narrator's lives disappeared and needed to be reinvented. But can that really happen within ever-growing Institutions? Maybe the time is coming to look where our peripheries are and who is living there.

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78 Ibid, p. 87

79 Ibid, p. 206

80 Ibid, p. 235

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## **Methodology and Oral History**

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# Appendix

## *Interview Protocols of Narrations Carried Out for the Purpose of the Thesis*

I.

Interview Protocol

Project: The Agents of Change

Narrator: **Lubomír Schmidtmajer**

Interviewer: Yveta Lizatović

Date: 8th June 2020 and 26th March 2021

Place: Restaurant in Akropolis Palace in Žižkov, my own office at Smíchov, Prague

Form: Life story

Length: 1:40:43 and 2:06:58

Brief characteristics:

Schmidtmajer is an old friend of mine, we even used to work together, so it was fairly easy to reach him and gain his consent. Before the interview started, we chatted about the old times for some time which helped us to tune into the actual work. He was my first interviewee, and the first meeting with him helped me a lot to realize all things I did wrong in asking questions. Due to the Covid-19 situation and the lockdowns going on, it took some time for us to meet for the second time, and for me to arrange other interviews as well. The otherwise unfortunate situation gave me enough time to reflect and collect my own thoughts about all the mistakes I made. The first meeting took place in Akropolis Palace restaurant, which may be considered Schmidtmajer's home turf. The restaurant was completely empty, and except for the occasional query from the serving staff as to whether we needed anything, the conversation proceeded undisturbed. The second interview took place one in the meeting room in my own office in the Park Anděl Centre where we were several times interrupted by the noise made by office colleagues, so we ended the recording and moved into a closed small conference room where we finally found some peace. Both times it felt more like seeing an old friend after a long time. Among other things, we were talking about events I took part in myself,

which I originally considered an advantage but the experience proved me wrong as it prevented me from asking the right questions. However, I took my lesson and the second meeting of ours fulfilled all my research needs.

II.

Interview Protocol

Project: The Agents of Change

Narrator: **Igor Klimovič**

Interviewer: Yveta Lizatović

Date: 18th February 2021 and 17th March 2021

Place: Narrator's office at the Prague's Embankment

Form: Life story

Length: 0:49:29 and 1:15:04

Brief characteristics:

Igor Klimovič also belongs to my circle of friends, so again there were no obstacles in reaching him and getting the consent. We essentially followed the same pattern, i.e. tuning in with a chat first, working later. We met in his home turf, an office above the Embankment at Palacký Square with beautiful view over the river to the Castle, a very positive place. There is also a room to sleep in case he gets stuck in Prague. But it also gave the impression of a really busy place with people coming and going in a very friendly atmosphere. Somebody needed this and someone else that, while someone just stopped by to say hello and have a little chat. However, the narrator managed to concentrate fully on the interview referring everyone for later, except for occasional calls of his wife which he always answered with an apology. He made time for me twice, and they were very nice encounters both times. The narration jumped a lot from here to there, but Klimovič didn't have any problems to explain anything or get back to something when needed. He was the second narrator I met, and I was still learning the job myself.

III.

Interview Protocol

Project: The Agents of Change

Narrator: **Petr Miller**

Interviewer: Yveta Lizatović

Date: 26th March 2021

Place: Narrator's friend's unfinished house in Dřevčice

Form: Life story

Length: 2:31:50

Brief characteristics:

The idea of contacting Petr Miller came from a sentence in Michal Horáček's book *Jak pukaly ledy*. Originally, I had no idea where to look for him. It took a good deal of both detective and production work to gain a possible address. I visited the place several times but no one would answer the door. I left a letter in the mailbox and tried to contact the firm whose name was stated there along with Miller. A young voice answered the phone saying Miller. I was sure it must have been a son. However, it was the narrator in person. He gave me an email address and asked me to send him something about myself first. Only then he accepted to meet me. Before we met, he made a meticulous search about me on the internet. I was greeted by an incredibly vital and positive person at home of a friend of his youth who has become his new girlfriend couple of years ago. The garden was currently under renovation as was the house. The narrator showed me what he was about to be changed in the next few days and I believe it's done by today. We were sitting on the terrace in front of the house, P.M. in shorts and a short-sleeved T-shirt even though the evening was coming and I had to put on my jacket. Miller's girlfriend made us a drink, joined us for the interview, and later eventually managed to put a jacket over the narrator which the latter commented saying: She takes good care of me so I can carry on.

Again, we chatted a bit before the recorder was switched on. I realized that there would always be an imbalance in situations like that, an asymmetry in the relationship: the interviewer knows a lot about the interviewee, while the interviewee knows nothing about the former. To make up for that asymmetry and fill in a gap, I learned the chat

before the actual interview to introduce myself more, so that the interviewee feels more comfortable. It worked well with this, as well as all of my following interviews.

Miller proved to be an enthusiastic narrator and there was not much I had to do once he started.

IV.

Interview Protocol

Project: The Agents of Change

Narrator: **Jan Urban**

Interviewer: Yveta Lizatović

Date: 31th March 2021

Place: Narrator's office in Bělohorská 85, Prague

Form: Life story

Length: 1:37:21

Brief characteristics:

The idea of contacting Urban had come partly as a snowball from Kocáb in one of many calls in which I tried to persuade the latter for an interview, partly from an article by Urban on the server Hlídací Pes. Having no contact to him, I send an email to editor of the server with a request to pass a message to Jan Urban. The narrator contacted me back promptly but expressed many doubts as for he was really he right person for a research like that. After I had explained the concept in detail, and assuring him that the aim is not to glorify the revolution and its outcomes, he agreed to meet. We had met in an office which narrator's agency NO-BAN shares with the law firm of Jan Kalvoda's, a former chairman of ODA. That helped me to introduce myself, as I used to work for Kalvoda briefly in the past and he came to say hello. Once there were a mutual friend on the scene, things ran much more smoothly. The interview took place in a completely neutral conference room. Overall, it was a very pleasant encounter. As a writer, Urban has got his thoughts well sorted out so that he can put across in an hour for what someone else might need at least 3 interviews to communicate. To clearly explain my intentions was all what was needed, the narrator managed to do the rest very fluently. His narration didn't jump from one subject to another, it had got a beginning and an end, it covered all what was asked for, and yet it was natural. Interestingly enough, he even did not bring his cellphone in!

V.

Interview Protocol

Project: The Agents of Change

Narrator: **Michael Kocáb**

Interviewer: Yveta Lizatović

Date: 3th May 2021

Place: Narrator's house, Troja

Form: Life story

Length: 1:56:53

Brief characteristics:

As Michael Kocáb used to be one of the most conspicuous characters of the Velvet Revolution, the choice seemed to be pretty natural, yet somewhat ambitious. It took me a several days of an intense production work to gain the contact. Then it took several weeks of occasional phone calls and text messages to break through. I had almost given up hope when the narrator finally agreed to meet the very night of my supposedly last attempt. We met in a villa with a stunning view of Prague located in Trója above the Zoo. The entire environment strongly suggested a bachelor's dwelling. The room where we sat looked like an informal meeting room. There were lots of reminders of Kocáb's relation to music and also to Havel. On the way there, we passed through another room which apparently served as an occasional studio for music sessions.

We drank water and smoked cigarettes, which created an informal atmosphere. After two hours, it was evident that the narrator got tired and had a tendency to steer the conversation towards the end saying that he needed to make some preparations for the next day.

I think I was lucky for the total lockdown, because I'm not sure the narrator would have met me at home, which was probably pretty important in his case.

VI.

Interview Protocol

Project: The Agents of Change

Narrator: **Vavřinec Korčíš**

Interviewer: Yveta Lizatović

Date: 7th May 2021

Place: Narrator's summerhouse, a former mill near Lovosice

Form: Life story

Length: 2:29:29

Brief characteristics:

The idea of contacting the Vavřinec Korčíš came from a friend of mine, a grandson of a former dissident, naturally familiar with the environment of former Czechoslovak dissent. It was also him who had put me through and consequently the narrator contacted me himself. Otherwise, I would have most likely never heard about the narrator myself. Korčíš welcomed me on the porch of a mill in Opárenské Valley near Lovosice leaning on crutches. Through the kitchen, we went into the living room/bedroom/dining room, which was filled with books, pictures, cat cups and all sorts of things. The furnishings of the house corresponded to Mr. Korčíš's youth. If you wanted to put something on the table, you had to move something else. Most items were a reminder of someone or something. Despite his apparent health issues, the narrator seemed very composed, calm and pleasant. He stays in the house on his own with just few cats. Through the windows in the upper part of the house, bunks could be seen, as a sign of potential numerous visitors.

The narration consisted of a cascade of funny stories without much effort to explain details which apparently should have been obvious. We met in the afternoon, it was a very nice, sunny day, and I had a feeling that if I needed to talk any longer, he would.