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**Paper Agora:**

**The Samizdat Periodical *Vokno*  
and the Provincial Czech Underground  
in Historical and Social Perspective**

PhD Dissertation

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## Statement of Honour

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Prague, 7 May 2021

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## Introduction

### The Oak Tree and the Wildflower – Historical and Theoretical Approaches to *Vokno* and the Provincial Underground

*The project of building a sophisticated framework of thought atop those instincts is rather like trying to graft an oak tree upon a wildflower. How to sustain the oak tree? More important, how to avoid crushing the wildflower? And yet such is the project that confronts those of us who are concerned with radical social change.*

- Theodore Roszak<sup>1</sup>

The present work takes as its central subject a Czech samizdat publication, the magazine *Vokno*, primarily during its years of illegal operation, i.e. from 1979 until 1990, with a three-year hiatus caused by the imprisonment of several key participants during the early 1980s. It is not a full bibliographic treatment of the magazine or an exhaustive analysis of its essayistic and literary contents, a registration of disputes and polemics, or even an aesthetic explication of its visual and poetic stylistics. As will be discussed, previous scholarly efforts have been performed in precisely these areas in the previous academic work by Jana Ružková<sup>2</sup> and Andrea Šulcová<sup>3</sup>. The intention at present is to examine *Vokno* not as a publication, or even as a samizdat periodical among others, but instead as a major social phenomenon in its own right, and a historical event of significant importance in the course of civil and cultural resistance to the oppressive social order of European state socialism. It describes *Vokno* as an instance of social action amid state forces inimical towards it, above all pre-1989 Czechoslovakia's political police (*Státní tajná bezpečnost* - StB), discussing the interplay and interaction of oppositional practice and the forces it opposes, both of state authority and (as I hope to demonstrate) more subtle ones of state cultural hegemony. As a social phenomenon,

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<sup>1</sup> Roszak, Theodore: *The Making of a Counterculture*. Revised edition, University of California Press: Berkeley 1995; first edition 1968, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ružková, Jana: *Vokno 1979–1989*. Bachelor's thesis, Department of Czech Literature, Charles University Faculty of Arts, Prague 2000. Available at: [http://vokno.cunas.cz/vokno1/o\\_voknu.html](http://vokno.cunas.cz/vokno1/o_voknu.html).

<sup>3</sup> Šulcová, Andrea: *Podoby české undergroundové scény*. Master's thesis, Department of General Pedagogy, Charles University Pedagogical Faculty, Prague 2014.

*Vokno* formed an attempt at a “counterculture” in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century sense of an impulsive critique of a regimented modernity, yet within its immediate conditions was necessitated to assume three specific forms: as an aesthetic sub/counterculture, as a social network with differing levels of involvement and connections (whether to established intellectual dissent or to other social strata), and finally as a conscious oppositional movement.

In one sense, *Vokno*, like samizdat in general,<sup>4</sup> can be treated as a form of resistance to one particularly concrete form of an undemocratic state order – the final decades of European state socialism – and as such inevitably reveals much about how this oppressive order functioned, what forms and strategies of resistance were possible or even how state controls retroactively generated “resistance” out of simple non-conformity or non-compliance. From this question, a further point of dispute immediately arises: the employment of the analytical category of “totalitarianism” with respect to the various oppressive social orders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, the focus widens from that of historiographic accuracy – Ranke’s command of ‘*wie es eigentlich war*’ – into examining and analysing the framework of public or collective memories, indeed of state memory-policies and institutions as one social realm, matched by its counterpart in the journalistic, civic, or cyberspace controversies over ‘how it really was’ within the societies where the European state-socialist order is (at least at the time of writing) still largely within living memory. It may be only a slight exaggeration to add that even as the actuality of 20<sup>th</sup>-century totalitarianism(s) retreats into an ever more distant past, new and unforeseen forms of social surveillance and control, combined with rising majoritarian/ethnonationalist populist political sentiments, make a nuanced and accurate understanding of this oft-evoked past all the more urgent.

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<sup>4</sup> Note esp. Gruntorád, Jiří: Samizdatová literatura v Československu sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let. In: Alan, Josef – Bitrich, Tomáš: *Alternativní kultura - Příběh české společnosti 1945–1989*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2001. For a bibliographical survey viz. Hanáková, Jitka: *Edice českého samizdatu 1972-91*. Praha: Národní knihovna České republiky 1997. Throughout the present work, I will use current Czech bibliographic practice and mark samizdat publications as -xx following the publication year.

At the same time, there is a no less significant argument that the Czech underground, looking to the cultural opposition of the Cold War West<sup>6</sup> not simply as a welcome source of inspiration but as offering a vitally needed model that closely matched this group's own experience not under late 20<sup>th</sup>-century capitalism but inside post-Stalinist state socialism. The "counterculture" evoked at the chapter's start through the quotation from Theodore Roszak should, I aim to argue, be regarded as a global phenomenon in reaction to, and shaped by, the shared experience of modernity and modernising forces;<sup>7</sup> it is this semi-articulated critique of modernity, as the subsequent chapters hope to reveal, that found eager recipients facing a different modernity than the one embodied in "open-society" capitalism. The tendency within historical sociology that addresses "multiple modernities"<sup>8</sup> clearly supports this line of argumentation<sup>9</sup>.

Furthermore, the very idea of a "counterculture" not only brings into the foreground what elements in the dominant culture are rejected (and what positive values are sought in their place), but additionally touches on wider questions of social theory in general. Even before the emergence of the counterculture described by Roszak and used, since this point, as the primary referent of the word, J. Milton Yinger in 1960 defined his neologism of "contraculture" in strongly structural-functionalist terms:

wherever the normative system of a group contains, as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society, where personality variables are directly involved in the development and maintenance of the

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term "Cold War West" with an awareness of the geographical Eurocentrism (or perhaps Atlantocentrism) of the West-East divide, but equally with an eye to the centrality of its historical use during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. Viz. e.g. Chakrabarty, Dipesh: *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of theoretical approaches in varying contexts note Šubrt, Jiří – Arnason, Johann Pall (eds.): *Kultura, civilizace, světový systém*. Praha: Karolinum 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Viz. in particular Eisenstadt, S. N.: "Multiple Modernities". In: *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 1, Multiple Modernities (Winter, 2000), pp. 1-29, or the other authors in the later volume by *ibid*: *Multiple Modernities*. London: Routledge 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Johann Pall Arnason, for instance, termed Communism a "distinctive but ultimately self-destructive version of modernity, rather than a sustained deviation from the modernizing mainstream". Viz. Arnason, Johann Pall: "Communism and Modernity". In: *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 1, "Multiple Modernities", winter 2000, pp. 61-90, here p. 61, reprinted in Eisenstadt 2002, *ibid*.

group's values, and wherever its norms can be understood only by reference to the relationships of the group to a surrounding dominant culture.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, as Yinger himself noted, it was Talcott Parsons who first made reference to the possibility of a “counter-ideology” or even “counter-culture”, though without much elaboration of what such a phenomenon might be.<sup>11</sup> These broad theoretical ramifications are significant not only in themselves, but equally should be kept in mind when considering the question of how to integrate the “Communist” or state-socialist experience into social theories of broader scope.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, the converse scholarly-investigative operation will be performed, working backwards from the external political order into the groups and networks of collective action assuming the form of resistance to the given power system. Essentially, *Vokno* is regarded as one of the central manifestations of resistance activity from the social category termed the “underground”. This word, used in its English form (with occasional phonetic re-transcriptions as “andrgrund”<sup>13</sup>) has something of a complicated history in the Czech cultural opposition, but its introduction is generally attributed to the primary theorist of the tendency, Ivan Martin Jirous, implying in his words “the new spiritual stance of the honest artist, reacting to the dehumanisation and the prostitution of values in the world of the consumer society”.<sup>14</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, the underground – or to be precise, more than one successive if overlapping undergrounds – was not confined to the traditional artistic forms but overwhelmingly sought (like Jirous himself) a

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<sup>10</sup> Yinger, J. Milton. “Contraculture and Subculture”. In: *American Sociological Review*, vol. 25, no. 5; October 1960, pp. 625-635; here p. 629.

<sup>11</sup> For the history of the term in American sociological writing, note particularly Roberts, Keith A. “Towards a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture”. In: *Sociological Focus*, vol. 11, no. 2; April 1978, pp. 111-125.

<sup>12</sup> Note e.g. Outhwaite, William – Ray, Larry: *Social Theory and Postcommunism*. Oxford: Blackwell 2005.

<sup>13</sup> As will be discussed later, there was a sharp difference between the use of English vs. phonetic Czech spellings: StB files preferred the latter, while underground publications – *Vokno* exclusively so – retained the English version.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase is from the seminal manifesto-essay “Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození”, originally published as a samizdat typescript, Praha: Edice Expedice 1976xx, cited here in Jirous, Ivan M.: *Magorův zápisník*. Praha: Torst 1997, p. 180.

genuine, unimpeded culture through unofficial, often directly illegal rock music. Precisely this interplay between a cultural-aesthetic sensibility, an affinity towards a specific cultural form, and the social formation of those who shared in it, often with considerable hindrances from police, educators, family et al., forms the wider backdrop to the immediate topic of *Vokno* as the medium for the artwork and its public, and highlights the other issues (not merely of culture but of cultural policies and hierarchies) that underlie the social basis of the samizdat “agora” of the periodical and its participants.

Music, or more precisely the unofficial-to-illegal rock scene of post-1970s Czechoslovakia, was regarded by immediate participants<sup>15</sup> and later observers as the central constituting element of the underground.<sup>16</sup> The very recent study by Trever Hagen<sup>17</sup>, published toward the end of the present research and covering many of the same events and personalities, itself focuses on music-making as the central and defining activity. Samizdat publications from the underground, including many later efforts on a local scale<sup>18</sup>, have tended to receive rather less attention. Hence the present research inevitably brings into the picture the social and personal milieu of the “Czech underground” and its other activities – of course not ignoring the production/performance of unofficial rock music but including as well many other forms of cultural and quotidian action apart from the standards of the era, from celebrations through amateur theatre and filmmaking up to attempts (often in the face of harsh police opposition) at communal living arrangements. In brief, the underground in post-1968 Czechoslovakia, which has itself become the subject of considerable historiographic attention

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<sup>15</sup> Jirous 1976xx, 1997, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> For a view of the Czech underground’s earliest presentation on the international stage, note the essays and articles of Paul Wilson, himself personally involved with both artistic and musical underground scenes in Prague during the late 1960s and early 1970s, specifically: Wilson, Paul: “What’s It Like Making Rock’n’Roll in a Police State?”. In: *Music Magazine*, 1983, republished in Machovec, Martin (ed.): *Views from the Inside. Czech Underground Literature and Culture (1948–1989). Manifestoes – Testimonies – Documents*. Praha: Karolineum 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Hagen, Trever: *Living in the Merry Ghetto: The Music and Politics of the Czech Underground*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Though more information will be discussed later, for now note the Moravian samizdat periodical *Mašurkovské podzemné*, launched in Přerov in 1984, viz: <http://www.guerilla.cz/masurky/archiv-news.htm>



both popular<sup>19</sup> and scholarly<sup>20</sup> during the time of writing, can be regarded as a wider secondary subject of the current project. Many publications<sup>21</sup> have discussed its particular form of cultural resistance, or perhaps more accurately “resistance as culture”, with reference either to the connections with late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Western countercultures (as well as their echoes in other regions of the Soviet Bloc at the time) or to the processes of forming a resistance movement out of an initially (relatively) apolitical youth subculture in the unique circumstances of Czechoslovak ‘normalisation’, as the bleakly ironic term was applied by the regime of the 1970s and 1980s to the state crackdown on all areas of autonomous public life. Understandably, the present work will also – hopefully without undue repetition – take these questions into its scope, yet its primary focus will remain on *Vokno* as the “paper agora”: the creation of a physical medium and a space of intellectual autonomy where ideas, emotions, critiques, polemics and jeremiads reached material expression, and where, I hope to argue, the experience of a kind of “proto-open society” could be achieved<sup>22</sup>.

It is one of the main aims, perhaps even the central thesis, of the current work to argue in favour of samizdat activity as an agora in the wider sense: essentially as a society in miniature in its reaching toward this ideal of civil society within a situation of the near-

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<sup>19</sup> Most crucial in shaping public awareness was the extensive documentary series from Czech Television, *Fenomén underground*, a cycle of 40 separate films mapping the underground, its key personalities, areas of activity, and even geographic spread across Czechoslovakia, broadcast from 2014 to 2015.

<sup>20</sup> In the research system of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the key institutions addressing cultural opposition in the 1948-1989 period have the Institute of Contemporary History, though usually within larger frameworks of dissident activity, and the Institute for Czech Literature, with its recent bibliographical-lexical mapping of Czech samizdat. Moreover, long-term research with a specific focus on the underground is underway at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů* - ÚSTR), which has also organised for several years an annual conference on the Czech(oslovak) underground at the Václav Havel Library in Prague. As noted later in the text, several of the current chapters are based on papers delivered at this conference. A series of public structured interviews with significant participants was held at the Charles University Faculty of Humanistic Studies from 2013 until 2015 under the direction of Nicolas Maslowski; note the FHS UK website <https://hiso.fhs.cuni.cz/HISOENG-47.html> with links to the interview videos via YouTube, also accessible through the video archive of the Václav Havel Library: <https://havelchannel.cz/cs/s?tag=underground>.

<sup>21</sup> Alan, Josef – Bitrich, Tomáš: *Alternativní kultura - Příběh české společnosti 1945–1989*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2001.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, viz. the extensive body of work by Martin Machovec, one-time participant in and subsequently theorist of samizdat; most recently note Machovec, Martin: *Writing Underground. Reflections on Samizdat Literature in Totalitarian Czechoslovakia*. Prague: Karolineum 2019.

complete state monopolisation of the public sphere. With this thesis in mind, it becomes necessary to discuss the many theoretical approaches taken to the ideas of “public sphere” and “civil society” within late-20<sup>th</sup>-century thought, including the inevitable historicization of these concepts and their specific Cold War and Eurocentric ramifications, yet equally recalling the dialogic path of their creation through precisely the networks of unofficial/illegal publications, smuggled typescripts and tamizdat, exiled/émigré thinkers and analysts or even larger enclaves.<sup>23</sup>

With these aspects at the centre of attention, it becomes clear that an examination of one instance of samizdat activity in both its historical and social dimensions touches upon several far larger questions in the sociology of the recent past, and moreover ones not simply restricted to European state socialist conditions. For one, the extensive body of theoretical and observational reflections on the idea of civil society,<sup>24</sup> which in strict chronology can be dated roughly to the two decades before and after 1989, can be anchored still more firmly in actual data from this case-study: the process and functioning of the (pre-cybernetic) virtual space of ideas, physical forms and personal relationships. If, as Andrew Arato famously asserted, the intellectual background for civil society has been a valuable contribution from Eastern Europe (and Latin America) to the West<sup>25</sup>, it is not only historiographic scholarship that needs more thorough, more deeply analytical treatments of the many often-overlooked instances of attempts at constructing such conditions of openness-practice in notably adverse conditions, but indeed many areas of current life, from political philosophy through journalism to our own individual and collective exercising(s) of citizenship in our present-day open societies.

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<sup>23</sup> Viz. Matischok, Jana: “From Samizdat to Tamizdat. Dissident Media Crossing Borders Before and After 1989”. In: *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, vol. 52, issue 1, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> For perspective on this concept over the decades, note Bernhard, Michael: “What Do We Know about Civil Society and Regime Change Thirty Years after 1989?” In: *East European Politics*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2020, pp. 341-362.; a critical voice is Ekiert, Grzegorz: “The Dark Side of Civil Society.” *Concilium Civitas*, 2019, at <http://www.conciliumcivitas.pl/en/almanac/item/97-the-dark-side-of-civil-society>.

<sup>25</sup> Arato, Andrew; Cohen, Jean: *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1992, p. 16.

Second on the agenda is the idea embodied in the word “network”. If civil society bears something of a flavour of pre-2001 optimistic promise, or even at times an almost nostalgic regret for a fading ideal, the ideas of social networks and network theories have in the succeeding two decades shifted abruptly to the forefront of interest.<sup>26</sup> The growth of cyberspace – one is tempted to say more accurately its monetarisation – has placed networks at the centre of interest across the social sciences, with social network analysis increasingly emerging as an autonomous discipline between traditional sociology, economics and applied mathematical fields. I should say at the outset that I have not attempted any statistical mapping, or even any particularly quantitative approach to my analysis of *Vokno* as a samizdat production and its overlaps with other activities in the circles of association generally subsumed under the term “Czech underground”. My analysis of the networked character of the underground is thoroughly qualitative, if making reference to more quantitatively established analytical paradigms, in part because my central focus lies elsewhere and in part because the networks are, admittedly, sufficiently small as to make high-powered quantitative analysis relatively uninformative. (Analysis of networks, or more aptly ‘networkedness’ between underground participants and non-participants could be a more statistically rewarding path of inquiry, yet again such a project would fall outside the central scope of the present work.) Even with this caveat, an examination of oppositional activity that attempts to draw wider conclusions than “who did what when” and examines who this “who” was as a collective entity is more than a worthwhile topic for investigation – once more, the application to a social milieu diverging in several ways from the ones in which social network analysis is usually performed is vitally important in avoiding the suspicion, to be discussed further on, of methodological nationalism in increasingly globalised sociology.

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<sup>26</sup> Viz. McLean, Paul: *Culture in Networks*. Cambridge: Polity 2017.

Third in this listing of major ideas that can be linked to the central case study is, paradoxically, one aspect that is not unique to European state-socialist societies but reached across dividing walls and seemingly implacable East-West schemata of diametrical oppositions. Moving now anachronistically, heading back even further into the past century, this common thread is the phenomenon termed the “counterculture” of the 1960s, though in the Czech case overlaid with many attitudinal as well as semiotic likenesses with a subculture widely regarded as its successor-antagonist, the punk movement of the later 1970s. In the standard markers of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century subcultures, fashion and music, the Czech underground, as I hope to demonstrate, occupied a very unusual liminal space between the hippie and the punk sensibilities while fully matching neither.<sup>27</sup> From this aspect alone, the contextual and contextualizing analysis of the underground, if understood as the wider (or more loosely connected) networks around *Vokno*, is indeed grist for the mill of an increasingly transnational approach to popular-culture studies,<sup>28</sup> beyond the rather simplistic assumptions of mere mechanical transplantation of Anglo-American forms into essentially subordinate local (provincial/ised) cultures. Equally, the passage of time and the resulting detachment from the immediate normative force of “1989 and all that” has led to a rising appreciation (both in post-Communist Europe and elsewhere) for independent cultural formations in the former Soviet bloc to be examined autonomously, i.e. as culture in their own right and not merely as superficial expressions of political opposition. Stressing similarities as much as differences in the counterculture, *Vokno* can be viewed as a participant in pre-1989 globalization, a mediator for analogous forms of opposition arising within the free world as well as a testing-ground for ideas and forms of activity that were genuinely regarded as valuable in the Cold War West.

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<sup>27</sup> Pixová, Michaela: “Alternative Culture in a Socialist City. Punks and Long-Haired People in Prague in the 1980s”. In: *Český lid*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2013, pp. 321-340.

<sup>28</sup> Huq, Rupa: *Beyond Subculture. Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World*. London: Routledge 2006.

Yet the invocation of a Sixties-based counterculture, in and of itself, brings up a further complex of ideas: the largely spontaneous (i.e. non-academic) emergence and self-generation of critical stances towards mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial modernity. As will be discussed in greater detail further on, the “counterculture”, for all its deliberate anti-intellectualism, was in fact based on an idea, lying in the programmatic rejection of the most immediately felt manifestation of modernity, the post-1945 ambitions toward hyperrational, planned technocracies, to cite Theodore Roszak’s terminology<sup>29</sup>. Opposed to the now-established traditions of analysis of subcultures, associated with Dick Hebdige’s classic 1979 study<sup>30</sup> or more widely the Birmingham School of cultural studies<sup>31</sup> (analyses that deliberately exclude the Sixties counterculture precisely for its deliberate articulation of critique), the counterculture can be described as a hybrid formation across class boundaries: a semi-planned allegiance of affinities between critical intellectuals and young dropouts. It is precisely the appearance of a similar *ad hoc* alliance in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, doubtless precipitated most immediately by the social crisis of the 1968 Soviet military intervention and its two-decade aftermath but in many ways visible even before, that sets the Czech underground apart from other forms of (sub)cultural revolt across the Warsaw Pact geopolitical sphere. On the one hand, it captured a largely spontaneous rejection of the promises of mid-century rationalism in its state-socialist form on the part of individual working-class youths; on the other, it attracted other individuals with remarkable professional qualifications and erudition who saw precisely this spontaneity as valuable. The standard image of *Vokno* as an enterprise carried out by a former mining apprentice and a qualified art

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<sup>29</sup> Roszak, op. cit., specifically chapter I, “Technocracy’s Children”.

<sup>30</sup> Hebdige, Dick: *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge 1979.

<sup>31</sup> Viz. Hall, Stuart – Jefferson, Tony: *Resistance through Rituals. Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain*. Second edition, London: Routledge 2006; also note McRobbie, Angela: *The Uses of Cultural Studies*. London: Sage 2005.

historian<sup>32</sup> fully confirms the understanding of the counterculture as a free-form application of “critical social theory” across boundaries of cultural hierarchy or even social class.

All these matters as outlined above are indisputably large questions of undeniable significance for the human sciences, bringing major theoretical issues into play. And as such, it may seem, at least from certain angles of vision, that there may even be a certain disproportion of scale inherent in this approach. Even, we might say, a kind of disjuncture between the relatively limited scale of one specific samizdat project within the vast geographic scope of state socialism – “from Magdeburg to Vladivostok” (alternately “Prague to Pyongyang”) in the then-favoured cliché – and the titanic implications of these major ideas. So to conclude the listing of the broad theoretical implications around *Vokno*, I should add precisely this disjuncture or disproportion as one vital aspect in the study, historiographic or otherwise, of the issues concerned with the controversial blanket term for repressive societies of the past century, which I have so far deliberately tried to avoid: “totalitarianism”. For this, I should thank one insight from a chance remark in a somewhat unrelated private conversation<sup>33</sup>. I cannot recall the exact wording or context, but the essential idea was that even relatively trivial items of personal gossip, or ones that now might seem relatively trivial, were granted under the conditions of pre-1989 ‘totalitarianism’ a kind of titanic global significance precisely because of the extent to which the state power of the regime reached into areas of everyday life in a way that it no longer does. Contrasted with even the most

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<sup>32</sup> Respectively František ‘Čuňas’ Stárek and Ivan Martin ‘Magor’ Jirous. As will be discussed later, this characterisation is not entirely accurate, and moreover obscures the crucial role at the outset of an even more established critical intellectual, psychologist-philosopher Jiří Němec, yet in the reduced form of broader Czech collective memory it holds considerable force.

<sup>33</sup> The person in question was a Charles University colleague in another discipline altogether, philologist Evžen (Jenő) Gal. To be altogether fair, I should also add that the current work would never have been able to assume its wider theoretical scope without countless additional impulses, insights, aperçus etc. delivered in free-flowing conversation (i.e. not in formal interview situations) with interlocutors from many walks of Czech society, inside the academy or in the most quotidian situations, close friends or random encounters. Indeed, an entire theoretical question to itself might be the role of everyday interaction as a form of participant-observation fieldwork that the present author can draw upon intellectually but was largely conducted unwittingly, without any particular regard to its future use (hopefully not exploitation) in professional scholarship. More on this topic will be discussed in the methodological section in the treatment of scholarly positionality.

subtle (not to say most paranoid) analysis of hegemony-systems inside capitalist societies, where the differences in scale underscore power's influence, the relentless micro-management of state socialism is remarkable for its politicization – and after 1989 historicization – of almost any conceivable aspect of the *Alltagsleben*. The implications of the study of aesthetic-semiotic revolt and the official reaction to it can be followed in two different directions, each making a specific contribution to the respective scholarly publics. On one side, greater awareness in English-language scholarship of the more subtle power-technologies in state socialism can undeniably prove enriching for a range of theoretical questions in sociology – power, agency, collective identity among others – along with the historical comparisons of the two variants of late-20th century modernity.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, an informed and appropriately non-normative *critique de la vie quotidienne* of state socialism that takes into account both direct power and indirect hegemony can bring a much-needed shift of perspective to the discussions within post-Communist scholarship, most notably and germanely in Czech debates both popular and scholarly during the course of research.

Regarding the term “totalitarian”, many compelling critiques of the totalitarian thesis find it intellectually vague, historically unfounded, or polemically over-normative,<sup>35</sup> not to mention the inconsistencies in its application as an analytical category.<sup>36</sup> And the classic definitions of totalitarianism that stress direct state violence combined with mass public mobilisation seems particularly ill-fitted to the situation of post-1968 Czechoslovakia. The

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<sup>34</sup> For the special connection between modernity and the Czech/Czechoslovak national historical condition, note esp. Arnason, Johann P.: “Alternating Modernities. The Case of Czechoslovakia”. In: *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2005, pp. 435–451.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Isaac, Jeffrey C.: “Critics of Totalitarianism”. In: Ball, Terrence - Bellamy, Richard (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003; also note Geyer, Michael – Fitzpatrick, Sheila: *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2009.

<sup>36</sup> The general neglect by researchers and institutions in post-Communist Europe of Western Europe's colonialism, even though discussed extensively as Hannah Arendt's third major category of totalitarian practice, is a significant topic, though of course for another time. The link between Nazi and colonial atrocities, of course, is a different matter: viz. Gerwarth, Robert – Malinowski, Stephan: “Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz”. In: *Central European History*, no. 42, 2009, pp. 279–300.

two predominant Western understandings – Hannah Arendt on a theoretical level<sup>37</sup> and Carl Friedrich with Zbigniew Brezinski on a policy-shaping one<sup>38</sup> - assumed that the ending of open terror within societies of the Soviet type after the early 1960s implied a shift toward a different form of repression. Within Czech dissent, there was Václav Havel's reference to the situation of Czechoslovak normalisation as explicitly “post-totalitarian” in his essay “The Power of the Powerless”<sup>39</sup>. Recent Czech historical writing, focused discussions of the totalitarian characterisation tend to regard the system as “post-Stalinism”<sup>40</sup> or even to focus on the negotiations and compromises made between the political authorities and the wider (non-dissident) public.<sup>41</sup> And of course, the popular deployment of the diminutive “*totáč*” in casual usage in Czech adds another sociological-historical dimension.<sup>42</sup>

For my own decision not to avoid invoking totalitarianism as a defining term and indeed to consider it one of the shaping forces for the (counter)cultural revolt of the Czech underground, there are two possible justifications. From a theoretical standpoint, there is the argumentation of Raymond Aron<sup>43</sup> and later Claude Lefort<sup>44</sup>: the post-Stalinist situation represented a continuation of the project of domination and hyper-organisation, the “image of a society which is homogeneous in principle, capable of being subsumed to the overview of knowledge and power”<sup>45</sup>. Second, there remains the question of such relentless

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<sup>37</sup> Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. London: Penguin 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich, Carl – Brezinski, Zbigniew: *Totalitarianism, Dictatorship and Autocracy*. New York: Harper 1956.

<sup>39</sup> Havel, Václav, *Moc bezmocných*, Edice Expedice (samizdat) 1978xx. *Moc bezmocných*. Praha: Lidové noviny 1990; tr. Wilson, Paul: “The Power of the Powerless”. In: *Open Letters. Selected Writings 1965-1990*. New York: Alfred E. Knopf 1991.

<sup>40</sup> Kolář, Pavel: *Der Poststalinismus: Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche*, Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Most notably, the somewhat controversial study by Pullmann, Michal: *Konec experimentu: Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu*. Praha: Scriptorium 2011. For an overview of the debates viz. Hrubý, Karel: *Rozpaky nad výkladem komunistické diktatury. Kritické poznámky k projektu „Socialismus jako myšlenkový svět“*. In: *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. XXI, no. 3, 2014, pp. 382-404.

<sup>42</sup> Viz. Pauer, Jan: “Totalitarismus jako teorie a jako český ‘totáč’”. In: *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. XVI no. 4, 2009, pp. 699-708.

<sup>43</sup> Aron, Raymond: *Democracy and Totalitarianism*. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson 1968.

<sup>44</sup> Lefort, Claude: *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press 1986.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.



micromanagement in so many areas of life even beyond the political sphere, the nervous supervision of the aesthetics of creative work or the semiotics of quotidian existence, no less than the radical confluences – of private and public, of macro- and micro-scales. The forms assumed by cultural dissent, embodied not merely by *Vokno* as a single samizdat project but by the wider activities of the Czech underground, provide a compelling argument for the persistence of totalitarian (or at least totalitarian-like, totalitarian-adjacent) qualities to the post-1968 Czechoslovak political order.

Following this rather abstract and theoretical discussion of the major ideas, in part to demonstrate how state-socialist societies remain notably resistant to grand sociological theories<sup>50</sup>, yet more importantly to serve as the broader justification for the question “Why *Vokno*?”, I should now turn to the explication of how, precisely, my analysis will proceed.

First, in Chapter 1, “Window to a Desolate Landscape: Origins of the Provincial Underground”, I undertake the most basic operation for our understanding of the relevant case study of *Vokno*: establishing a definition of the immediate personal network associated with the publication, generally regarded as the Czech “underground” though forming a subset of a wider collective of cultural resistance in Czechoslovakia towards the end of the 1970s. It will also bring into consideration the overlap of underground activities outside of samizdat, whether cultural (specifically unofficial rock music) or social (e.g. the communal living experiments known as the ‘baráky’) and the geographic as well as class context of the central participants, specifically the Czech industrial regions of west and north Bohemia, with a special importance often assigned to the geographical specificity of the formerly German Sudetenland, and to the predominant working-class background of the people involved.

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<sup>50</sup> Note e.g. Arnason 2000, *ibid.*, for a discussion of the relationship between state socialism and wider modernisation processes.

Chapter 2, “‘Produced in Indecent Haste’: The Commune, the Duplicator and the Start of *Vokno*” aims to provide a full description of the origins of the periodical *Vokno*, specifically the conjunction of oppositional circles between Prague and the provincial underground during the 1970s. First and foremost, it attempts to map the historical chronology not merely of the launching of *Vokno* and its immediate origins, but moreover that of the ‘collective entity’ within the wider North Bohemian underground that brought the publication into reality, primarily the history of the communal living arrangements (the ‘*baráky*’) in the region and the commune in Nová Víska near Chomutov – the publication site of *Vokno*’s first issues – in particular. A second aim is to establish the constellation of actors, in both their personal and intellectual frameworks, that led to *Vokno*’s emergence as a nationally significant yet notably non-metropolitan samizdat enterprise: the central figures of the Nová Víska circle and of Prague-based intellectual dissent, and the implications of this connection for our understanding not only of the political situation of Czechoslovak post-1968 ‘normalisation’ but moreover of social relations within one state-socialist system. In essence, the chapter aims to understand, historically and sociologically, the connection between two sectors of the dissident opposition – the ‘political’ metropolitan intellectuals and the ‘countercultural’ provincial youth – and to demonstrate that such clear-cut oppositions are in reality less distinct than might appear.

Chapter 3, “*Vokno* after ‘Clearance’: The *Vokno* Trial, Prison and the Eighties”, continues the historiographic thread, in this case describing the publication and its immediate circumstances following the forced dissolution and state seizure of the Nová Víska farmhouse and the dispersal of several key underground personalities (along with many other Czechoslovak dissidents) into emigration under the ‘Clearance’ (Asanace) action of the political police, and the even more damaging effects of the trial and subsequent prison sentences of four central *Vokno* participants in 1981. In addition to an analysis of the

periodical and its relation to both political and cultural opposition, the chapter brings into the discussion the increasing impact on *Vokno* of police spying and the international dimension through Czech exiles in the Cold War West, discussing several of the leading controversies across the Iron Curtain in the final years of illegality.

Chapter 4, “Transitions in Space and on Paper: 1989 and *Vokno*’s Final (Legal) Years” concludes the predominantly historical section of the present work, describing the course of *Vokno* between the end of state press censorship in the final days of 1989 and the establishment of former samizdat as significant, even highly prestigious components of the new “media ecology” of the transitional decade of the 1990s, up until the publication’s dissolution in 1995. Not only does it contrast the legally published periodical in the unusual conditions of “transitionality”, between the fall of Communism and the rise of cyberspace, but more significantly draws attention to the process of the integration of pre-1989 dissent into the newly forming social order through the example of *Vokno*’s final period of publication. In juxtaposing the institutionalisation of dissident publication activity with the rise of the characteristic 1990s format of the hand-printed, individually circulated zine, this final historical section tries to illuminate the integrative-absorptive forces in the conditions of an open society, as opposed to the repressive-exclusive methods of state power shortly before, and to examine how the proto-civil society of cultural dissent dealt (or failed to deal) with the new conditions of this now-historical “transitional” social order.<sup>51</sup>

Chapter 5, “Heineken Cans and Typescript: Socialist Counterculture and/or Materiality”, is intended as a further, indeed more theoretical treatment of several of the previously discussed issues, aiming towards an intellectual synthesis of possible innovative approaches to late-Communist societies. Moving beyond the semiotics of material culture to

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<sup>51</sup> Viz. Maslowski, Nicolas: "The Symbols of the Dissent in Central European Politics since 1989". In: Hałas, Elżbieta - Maslowski Nicolas (eds.), *Politics of Symbolization Across Central and Eastern Europe*, Berlin: Peter Lang 2021, pp. 205-220.

the economics and day-to-day pragmatics of material life in command economies, it first addresses the unfortunately neglected thesis of the planned economy treated as a “dictatorship over needs” – in the phrase of Hungarian ex-Marxist dissident researchers Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér and György Márkus<sup>52</sup> - in which shortages of goods are seen not simply as a side effect of state planning but essentially decisions of moral value, in fact a tool of social control in their own right. Samizdat and other autonomous cultural activities, as anti-systemic action, thus can be viewed as negotiations within the moralized (as well as semioticized) dimensions of state-socialist materialities and economics. Not only social movements and political police forces are viewed as agents, but inanimate objects, from records and manuscripts through typing paper and duplicating machines up to abandoned Sudetenland farmhouses, are themselves given a degree of agency. As such, in the interests of proposing a broader theoretical scope, allowing for greater subtleties in discerning activities and actions without the current moralistic flavour (whether as a condemnation of the old regime or a revision of post-1989 conventional wisdoms), I make reference to a limited (“weak”) application of Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) as possibly providing a valuable analytical tool for both the historical and social aspects of the state-socialist past.

Chapter 6, “Six Degrees of Agency: *Vokno*, Its Networks and State Power”, is a consideration of recent work in social-network paradigms both quantitative and qualitative, with specific attention directed towards the “small world” and “strength of weak ties” theories, and their use within conditions of late-20<sup>th</sup>-century European state socialism. As in the previous chapter, it is primarily involved with the applicability of theoretical approaches generated by scholarship within “open” societies to social orders with much greater overt displays and means of social control – not necessarily as special pleading for uniqueness of

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<sup>52</sup> Fehér, Ferenc; Heller, Agnes; Márkus, György: *Dictatorship over Needs. An Analysis of Soviet Societies*. Blackwell: Oxford, 1983.

totalitarian experience, but rather as a corrective for possible methodological nationalism. First among the aims of this chapter is attempting a retrospective mapping of the personal networks surrounding *Vokno*, its production and its circulation, their overlap with affiliated areas of a wider provincial underground and/or Prague-based dissident circles, and their inevitable forced network-integration with the forces of state repression, whether secret-police agents or participant-informers within the underground itself. An additional dimension of this analysis also tries to cast light on the more peripheral zones of the underground-as-movement: those who slipped away into more conventional life forms, or conversely fell into forms of more obviously negative deviation, e.g. the various scenes of drug abuse in pre-1989 Czechoslovakia (opiates, amphetamines, solvents<sup>53</sup>). Second is the confrontation of the historiographic findings and interpretations regarding these networks with the methodologies of network analysis and their own historicization; respectively the “small-world” theory with the tumult of 20<sup>th</sup>-century migration and exile and the weak-ties analysis with broader patterns of industrial modernisation. Finally, the chapter will discuss the self-understanding of the network-collective in the conceptual basis of its sociability-as-resistance, and to what extent this resisting practice created a form of autonomous identity for individual and group creativities.

Chapter 7, “Jeans and Typewriters: Counterculture, Subculture or Movement?” addresses the underground at the intersection between traditional subcultural analysis and social movement theory<sup>54</sup>. Though lying chronologically outside the immediate scope of *Vokno* samizdat activity, this section in the personal (pre)history of its participants, along with their immediate generational influencers, provides the underlying historical background, and

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<sup>53</sup> Note e.g. Kolář, Jan: *O problému, který měl nebýt. Drogy v socialistickém Československu*. Brno: Nakladatelství Doplněk – společensko-ekologická edice 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Viz. specifically Maslowski, Nicolas: “Underground jako (nové) sociální hnutí?”. In: Onuferová, Edita; Pokorná, Terezie (eds.): *Magorova konference (K dílu I. M. Jirouse)*. Prague: Revolver Revue 2014.

an attempted elucidation of the qualitative processes shifting a predominantly anomic stance of refusal into conscious political antagonisms. During the mid-1960s, socialist Czechoslovakia witnessed the unorganised growth of spontaneous anti-systemic stances and sentiments, expressed by disparate, often geographically separated subcultures of alienated youth in the first post-Stalinist years (e.g. the Prague subculture of the ‘trafouši’ hanging out on the steps of the National Museum at the head of Wenceslas Square,<sup>55</sup> but mirrored in similar formations outside the metropolis). At still earlier periods, usually in connection with Stalinist industrialization projects and their unforeseen social consequences (massive population dislocation, abrupt rural-to-urban migration, yet also rapidly increased disposable income for proletarian youth), various forms of “Hebdegian” semiotically-based youth subcultures were registered throughout Sovietized Europe as well as the USSR itself. Whether on the vast scale of Cold War geopolitics or the micro-level of immediate fashion and music preferences, these socialist-bloc subcultures were (respectively) praised or reviled as manifestations of resistance, yet without much concrete analysis of – let alone input from – the participants themselves. And from a historical standpoint, there is even less discussion of how or indeed if these collective forms of refusal<sup>56</sup> were ever shifted into a conscious pattern or continual practice of opposition to the ruling Party-State. In this chapter, using the case of Czechoslovakia in the pervasive social crisis of post-1970 normalisation, I attempt to outline the concrete process through which the rejectionist subculture of the Czech proto-hippies (*vlasatci*) became transformed into a significantly more affirmative anti-systemic movement, through the aspects of central organising personalities, exchanges of ideas and spontaneous social analysis, and dialogue across lines of class and education. In doing so, I also intend to

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<sup>55</sup> “Trafouš” was the slang name for Wenceslas Square (Václavské nám.) – from London’s Trafalgar Square adapted as a demotic Czech abbreviation. Viz. esp. Jaboud [Boudný, Jaroslav]: *Trafouš, páskové, Vyšehradští jezdci a jiné vzpomínky: Dětství a mládí v Praze padesátých let*. Praha: Nakladatelství Zdeněk Bauer 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Viz. Pospíšil, Filip, *Kampaň proti vlasatcům v komunistickém Československu*. PhD dissertation, Faculty of Humanistic Studies, Charles University in Prague 2009. Also note Blažek, Petr, Pospíšil, Filip: *Vraťte nám vlasy! První máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu*. Prague: Academia 2010.

examine, as it were in reverse, the applicability of standard paradigms of the sociology of social movements to the historical case of this instance of a closed society – and equally to draw conclusions on how social movements can and cannot function within multiply “policed” social orders.

Chapter 8, “In the Wolf’s Belly: Islands of Deviation, Underground Sociabilities and Proto-Civil Societies” offers an analysis of the *Vokno* underground through the late-20<sup>th</sup>-century theories of civil society against authoritarian (totalitarian) dictatorial state orders. If the underground collective consisted of a kind of “performing” of non-coerced sociability in adverse circumstances, how can their activity be extrapolated to larger social scales or matched to theoretical concepts, whether international (e.g. Cohen-Arato) or domestic (dissident-Charter 77 approaches: Václav Havel, Václav Benda, Jan Tesař et al.)? Within the historical period of Czechoslovak normalisation, how does the VOKNO-focused underground match up against other forms of collective identification: familial networks, education or employment-based linkages, or even the increasing presence of semi-autonomous associations, in the contemporary phrase “islands of positive deviation”<sup>57</sup>, in the final decades of the Communist system? Central to the aim of this section is an elucidation of the role of intermediary spheres between the entirely private world of family and familialism and, as the purported opposite, the state-managed and police-monitored non-familial public spheres in late-Communist Czechoslovakia. As a form of, let us say, “sociological archaeology” into a no longer extant set of circumstances (not necessarily the vanished world of popular clichés, as one unquestionably manifesting still-real consequences even at the time of writing), this section aims to use both the radical counterculture of the underground and the appearance of less-radical autonomous communities to provide a less polemical, less normatively

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<sup>57</sup> Bútorá, Martin - Krivý, Vladimír - Szomolanyiiová, Soňa. “Positive Deviation: The Career of a Concept and the Epidemiology of a Phenomena in Czecho-Slovakia in the Late Eighties“. Bratislava: mimeographed manuscript 1989xx.

judgmental image of the actual functioning of public, private and intermediary levels in the given place and time.

Finally, the concluding chapter also attempts to sketch a systematic analysis of the importance of samizdat, aesthetic revolt and free circulation of ideas in the imperfect yet far more open social conditions of post-1989 Europe and more generally the global sphere arising from the social transformations of the subsequent decade of the 1990s. As a sociology of the print media just before its final 21<sup>st</sup>-century crisis, this conclusion examines the methods for distributing a society's self-analysis and self-conception, idea-circulation and idea-legitimation in the "open-society" decades, and reflections on what echoes these previous legacies might have on the far more chaotic cyberspace-dominant world we now face.

To bring this introduction to a close, I should make a few remarks about the circumstances of its creation and authorship. Scholarship, as the social sciences are increasingly willing to recognise, is invariably positional. What is studied, the intellectual apparatus and methodologies used in its analysis, the individual personal standing of the researcher, the institutional frameworks for professional university research and the relations between research outcomes and the external structures of societies on both global and nation-state levels – none of these are ever anodyne, innocent givens, let alone detached entities allowing for perfect objectivity. The past years of research have been marked by academic and extra-academic debates, controversies and often bitter disputes over the matter of 20<sup>th</sup>-century totalitarianism(s), its/their character and legacy (respectively applicability) for the concerns of the present. Omitting or obscuring the areas in which my research into a still-recent past has clear and present "real-world" implications would be irresponsible, not only from any ethical questions, but even for a full scholarly understanding of a matter in the human sciences. What this implies for the present work is the likelihood, perhaps even the near certainty, of deviating from the path of scholarly detachment into moments, let us say, of



excessive normativity. Secondly, the passage of time has itself been a factor<sup>58</sup>: a near-decade of research cannot but be marked with an awareness of how assumptions, evaluations, even broader intellectual frameworks have shifted even since 2012, let alone since the period under discussion or – more personally – the start of my own, initially unwitting, “participant observation” in the Czech Republic during the almost unimaginably different era of the 1990s. The ways in which this body of knowledge has proven simultaneously advantageous and burdensome are too difficult to set forth here; suffice it to note that the task of understanding and explaining cultural and social phenomena across a period of rapid change has drawn upon this body of personal memory – not necessarily as self-indulgent “mesearch” but through my own direct experience at trying to make sense of my immediate surroundings. It is nonetheless my hope that the present work manages to meet the goals that it should: to contribute to understanding, to rescue from historical obscurity important aspects of what happened, and to integrate them into our understanding towards the future.

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<sup>58</sup> For questions of time and memory note: Olick, Jeffrey – Robbins, Joyce: “Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices”. In: *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, 1998, pp. 105-140.

## Chapter 1

### Window to a Desolate Landscape: The Historical and Geographical Background of *Vokno*

Northerners: Many slender threads and cables connected us with our cohorts born in the north of Bohemia, in nooks and crannies whose shapes on the map remind the more susceptible of nothing so much as a demon's head. The North was full of evil spirits, in the air, on the ground, and especially underneath it. [...] In the days when we were being thrown out of schools and kulchur, the northern longhairs were killing off their hangovers in the nastiest toxic factories, where the only way to get thrown out was over the cemetery wall. It's a cursed land those wretched hicks live in, Bohler assessed their situation [...] That's what they get for their granddads' gold digging, he went on cruelly. They kicked out the Germans, battered 'em in concentration camps, an' now they got what they asked for.

The fact that the Northerners were more stifled than us wasn't the only difference. There were also insurmountable cultural chasms. While we favored leather boots, the orthodox Northerner never took off his sneakers. He didn't share our fondness for jackets and sportcoats, being too much in love with his shabby olive-drab field jacket. And even on the steamiest summer day, he never took off that abominable sweater, often frayed at the elbows. [...] The memory of German bones haunted them in their genes. Where one of us had a glass of wine, the Northerner drank a bottle; where the smug Prager slowly sipped his beer and discussed global issues cagily, to avoid getting right to the heart of the matter, the Northerner guzzled rum and hollered. [...] It was a fiendish circle. Broke the weak, steeled the strong, like life itself, only much faster.<sup>59</sup>

- Jáchym Topol

To understand *Vokno* as a publication, it is first necessary to understand the milieu in which it appeared: the loose countercultural collective-network of the provincial Czech underground of the 1970s, and beyond that, the external world – the reality of provincial Czech life after the crackdown following the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 - that shaped it. However, defining both the group and the social backdrop are more difficult tasks than might initially seem. Generally, this collective, or indeed movement, is given the term “Northern underground”, in association with the industrial regions of North Bohemia, though – as we shall see – associating the group specifically with the North is something of an oversimplification. The external world, in turn, is often conflated with the historical geography of the Czech regions associated with the pre-1945 Sudetenland, and the highly unusual social environment that emerged (and in many senses persists) in the wake of the

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<sup>59</sup> Topol, Jáchym: *Sestra*. Brno: Atlantis 1994, English: *Sister City Silver*, tr. Alex Zucker, North Haven: Catbird Press, 2000, p. 151-153.

post-World War II expulsion of the German majority population and both spontaneous and state-managed waves of resettlement. Along with the official policies of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in cultural life, command economics and politicized law enforcement, the legacies of the Sudeten experience as well as the participants' industrial working-class identity can definitely be seen as strong determining factors for the quest towards independent, autonomous culture among youth outside the metropolitan centres. At the same time, precisely this aesthetic orientation has implied in practical terms greater skill and artistry in the presentation of this group, even in the generation of retrospective mythologies, both from outside and from within. Hence a responsible scholarly approach will need, even in all acknowledged sympathy on the researcher's part, to proceed carefully. Not only to tread the difficult path between facts and stylisations, but – and here the sociologizing aspect comes to the fore – to examine the means and processes of collective self-definition, and in doing so to integrate the self-stylisations (and of course the other-stylisations) into the framework of the empirically accurate characterisation.

The reason behind the inclusion of the long description of the 'Northern' underground quoted above is this quote's status as itself both historical record and social artefact. For one, it is quite obviously far more of a literary stylisation than a sober historiographic assessment, taken from Jáchym Topol's novel *Sestra*, itself hardly a conventionally realistic work. Secondly, as the following pages confirm, in certain ways the characterisation it presents can be found inaccurate, oversimplified, or even misguided. And yet few other brief encapsulations can match Topol's combination of myth and reality into a compelling, and thus highly memorable, characterisation of this often-obscured group. As regularly discussed in the extensive literature on history versus memory<sup>60</sup>, i.e. the body of work that itself has

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<sup>60</sup> Šubrt, Jiří – Maslowski, Nicolas – Lehmann, Štěpánka: Soudobé teorie sociální paměti. In Maslowski, Nicolas- Šubrt, Jiří et al. *Kolektivní paměť. K teoretickým otázkám*. 1st ed. Prague: Karolinum 2014, pp. 31-45.

haunted the present research task from the outset, aesthetically powerful iconography has a far more prominent role in shaping mediated (collective) memory than the more modulated “imagery” often given by strict factographic analysis. Furthermore, the very processes through which historical iconography is created and distributed reveal much about hierarchies and relations of power and authority – who creates the images and how they are transmitted into a collective awareness. In this sense, Topol’s sketch is highly accurate in how closely it matches a widespread impression, a vague sense of this particular social group within the minds of those who knew it only through association - including, I should admit, the present author. (Deliberately, I leave aside the question of a specifically Czech collective memory, more numerous yet more nationally confined, where the mental associations and responses – not to mention the sympathies and antipathies - could be far wider.) In another sense, its position within the social mechanisms of memory-production grants it strong influence: the author’s standing in the literary world as a purported generational voice, the historical moment of the 1990s, the post-Cold War cultural networks and (again speaking from personal experience) genuine enthusiasms for overcoming the previous “East-West” divide. Even the image of the wild, rum-swilling dropout in a filthy sweater smacks no less of its own self-promoting stylisation, creating impressions of raw anti-systemic authenticity outstripping and showing up the pretensions of the metropolitan elites – moreover revealing their status as elites even in the face of political persecution and economic proletarianization.

Last of all: Topol himself was a significant participant in the Czech cultural opposition, specifically the Prague underground referenced in the excerpt, and an occasional contributor to *Vokno* under the pseudonym Jindra Tma. As not only a paradigmatic case of “participant-observer” but in fact a socially and culturally prominent figure of the post-1989 era, Topol’s position in shaping the image of Czech cultural dissent on the national and international stage should not be underestimated. His personal trajectory sheds considerable

light on crucial aspects of memory-generation and memorializing as they affect not only our knowledge of the (various) Czech underground(s) prior to “November” but the sociological question of the integration of this previously excluded group into the subsequent social order – not only as the “voice of his generation” in the 1990s<sup>61</sup> but equally as journalist and cultural organiser, currently director of the Václav Havel Library<sup>62</sup>. The process through which former dissidents assumed a social position with the authority to shape both the collective memory of the past and even the directions of its scholarly research (or, in other cases, did not)<sup>63</sup> is more complex than might appear at first sight, and provides one of the central investigative areas of the present work.

However, since the question of the post-1989 integration of previously countercultural or underground tendencies forms the central topic of Chapter 4, this aspect can be set aside for now. More vital for the considerations of historiography is a second aspect: the question of aestheticization versus actuality in conducting historical research involving the pre-1989 past. The productive and the wider social circles around *Vokno* belonged to what I have called “aesthetic dissent”, a term that could span a very wide range of specific historic manifestations from artistic movements of the standard 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernist type all the way to youth subcultures in Dick Hebdige’s now-classic categorisation. In both clearly documentable personal affiliations and the rather less empirical question of similar aesthetic stances, the *Vokno* circle is remarkable for its span and overlap – on one hand bringing together provincial and metropolitan dissent during its period of activity, on the other occupying historically and chronologically an interstitial space between various lineages and cultural hierarchies. One line of analysis, taken by another participant-observer, Martin

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<sup>61</sup> Viz. e.g. Howell, Yvonne: “Where’s the Velvet?” Jáchym Topol’s *Sestra* and the Reception of Alex Zucker’s *Translation City, Sister, Silver*”, *Translation Review* 63:1, 2002, p. 45-50.

<sup>62</sup> By way of full disclosure, the Václav Havel Library is where the papers on which chapters 4, 5 and 6 are based were originally presented within the annual seminar on the Czech underground organised by the library and the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR).

<sup>63</sup> Viz. Maslowski 2021, *ibid.*

Machovec, places the *Vokno* circle in a cultural-historical lineage as the ‘second underground’<sup>64</sup> emerging between the earliest literary samizdat circles in Stalinist Prague (Egon Bondy, the Czech Surrealists) and the later, though similarly Prague-based artistic dissidents associated with another samizdat publication, the cultural journal *Revolver Revue*. Another approach – which forms the basis of a subsequent chapter of the present work – could be the situation of the underground as sub/counterculture between political activism and Hebdige’s “revolt through style”; a slightly different phrasing of the terms could also place it in an equally ambiguous space within status hierarchies. between popular and avant-garde culture as well as the social hierarchising of “worker” and “intelligentsia”.

As an object of memory, discourse, and – most crucially for the present purposes – study, the underground touches upon a surprisingly varied array of issues, questions and often-overlooked areas of Czechoslovak state-socialist society. For the immediate topic of its samizdat production, in which *Vokno* formed the first significant project (and indeed inspiration for many later efforts, directly or indirectly linked to its personal networks, particularly<sup>65</sup> toward the end of the 1980s), one final question should be outlined, starting from the problems of myth-making and self-aestheticization that perhaps may not prove insurmountable but do cast into a certain doubt any positivistic attempts at description or evaluation. This question is, put succinctly, one of epistemic trust: how accurate are the depictions of *Vokno* and its operations four decades on, even with a significant majority of active participants (though not, as we shall see, the two major intellectual authorities) still alive during the research period? And similarly, what counts as a reliable source given the

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<sup>64</sup> The historical overview is given primarily in Machovec, Martin, “Od avantgardy přes podzemí do undergroundu. Skupina edice Půlnoc 1949-1955 a undergroundový okruh Plastic People 1969-1989”. In: *Pohledy zevnitř. Česká undergroundová kultura ve svědectvích, dokumentech a interpretacích*. Praha: Pistorius & Olšanská 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Bearing in mind the conditions facing independent scholarship during the normalisation period, the most accurate explications of its social structure are generally assumed to date from the 1960s. Viz. e.g. Petrušek, Miloslav: Sociální stratifikace československé společnosti (Shrnutí výsledků empirického šetření). In: *Sociologický časopis* vol. 6, no. 1, 1969, pp. 569-590.

conditions of 20<sup>th</sup>-century state socialism as (both relatively and absolutely) a society with low degrees of self-reflection and high degrees of mutual opacity between individual elements – often separating into far smaller categories than the common frameworks of state and dissent? Producing *Vokno* was an illegal undertaking, with no small risk for the participants. Beyond the published physical copies, our knowledge of the social circle behind it is based on the post-1989 testimony of participants, and to a significantly lesser degree the surveillance records kept by the state political police (largely because many case files, particularly those still active at the end of the 1980s, were partially or entirely destroyed in the last weeks of the old regime at the end of 1989).

Individual testimony, shaped by various factors including the psychological and indeed the neurological, is of course highly fallible and regularly contradictory. Secret-police files, when available, can provide an incredibly vivid and detailed picture of the events themselves, very often even with telling historical references or glimpses into the material culture of the age<sup>66</sup> - viz. the following description (in this case, the surveillance on 20 October 1981 of Ivan Martin Jirous):

...bareheaded, clothed in a brown suede jacket, blue trousers, brown shoes, with dioptric glasses over his eyes... He successively ordered a soda, two hot dogs, 2 dcl of white wine and one vodka. After dining, he paid, at 15:50 hours left the restaurant carrying in his hand his bag and washbasin.<sup>67</sup>

Yet for analysing motivations and actions, the StB files often fall far short. Surveillance reports combine the trivial with the superficial, even beyond the deadpan earnestness of the reports that researchers have often termed ‘pataphysical’.<sup>68</sup> Interviews with StB informers within oppositional groups, by contrast, present the specific interpretation of the individual informer, which may not invariably have been privy to all matters, as will be examined in

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<sup>66</sup> I would like to thank in particular Libora Oates-Indruchová for her highly insightful personal remarks on this matter.

<sup>67</sup> In: Blažek, Petr: ‘Akce Ivan-2: Sledování Ivana Martina Jirouse příslušníky Správy sledování Státní bezpečnosti’. In: *Paměť a dějiny* 2012/01, pp. 103-113, here p. 105.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

somewhat greater detail in the present work through the case of the main informant in the regime's legal process against *Vokno*, the singer 'Jim Čert'<sup>69</sup> – even leaving aside the ethical questions of the use of such information. Another matter, of course, is who presents the testimony (levels of involvement, remaining in Czechoslovakia vs. leaving for exile), and where (whose versions are cited the most, which former participants are interviewed most frequently or even invited to participate in historical symposia or research). In other cases, the only extant testimony might be a written text of only quasi-autobiographical or even explicitly literary character, such as the testimony of a deceased participant (e.g. rocker and author Josef Vondruška<sup>70</sup>) or a novelistic description of a social milieu that otherwise could only be reconstructed at best through contemporary police reports. *Vokno* was not, as I discuss later, necessarily a conspiracy in the full sense of the term but had to adopt conspiratorial methods out of necessity. It did not seek secrecy but autonomy; indeed, the very looseness of the underground networks had its own significance in generating an open, autonomous space<sup>71</sup>. Yet even with the exceptional willingness of the participants to communicate their own experiences<sup>72</sup>, as a historical investigation the present work should be aware of its approximate and reconstructive, if not partially speculative, nature. And similarly, the more strictly sociological attempt to perform a retroactive investigation into the social structures and formations of Czechoslovakia before 1989 will, in turn, be marked with its own incomplete points, obscurities and lacunae.

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<sup>69</sup> Note: Drda, Adam: 'Signální svazek Byt, případ Michala Hýbka a František Jim Akord Homér Čert Horáček'. *Revolver Revue* no. 41, September 1999, pp. 292-303, containing many extracts from the actual police files; for more extended discussion viz. Makovička, Jan: '„Já si pořád myslím, že jsem nikomu neublížil“: František Horáček alias Jim Čert jako tajný spolupracovník Státní bezpečnosti v letech 1979–1989'. In: *Sborník ABS*, no. 14/2016, p. 353–407.

<sup>70</sup> Vondruška, Josef: *Chlasej a modli se*. Torst: Praha 2005.

<sup>71</sup> This assumption is taken from the findings of participant interviews, in which a frequently occurring motif was the combination of independence and accessibility. To cite a printed expression of this sentiment, note the contribution Stárek, František Čuñas: "Magor a Vokno", in: Onuferová, Edita-Pokorná, Terezie (eds.): *Magorova konference: k dílu I.M. Jirouse*. *Revolver Revue*, Praha 2014, specifically p. 71-72.

<sup>72</sup> For which I should thank them once more: viz. the list of interviews for the specific individuals.



All historiographic, theoretical or epistemological questions aside, we can establish three main shaping factors for the two circles of involvement, the provincial underground and the immediate *Vokno* creative team. First is the physical and social backdrop to milieu of the “*severní androš*”, the region of the Czech industrial peripheries well outside of the capitol Prague. Describing this area as North Bohemia is, however, something of a misnomer, though the term is commonly invoked: it is not the entire area of the North, and in the southern regions actually lies in the traditional political boundaries of West Bohemia; similarly, the metropolis of the latter region, Plzeň, had its own countercultural-underground circles that often mixed with those of the North. The area is the heavily industrialised urban strip along the western-to-northern border where Czech territory abuts the German state of Saxony, running along the edge of the Ore Mountains (Krušné Hory/Erzgebirge) up to the ‘Porta Bohemica’, the gap between mountain ranges where the river Labe/Elbe leaves the Czech Republic for Germany. A series of sizeable industrial towns are located along this route, linked by a major rail line running from Cheb at the southwest northeastward to the largest city, Ústí nad Labem – Sokolov, Klášterec nad Ohře, Chomutov, Most, Teplice<sup>73</sup>. Thanks to a rich seam of lignite, or brown coal, the region industrialised rapidly under Habsburg rule – common estimates granting it more than half of all industrial production in the Dual Monarchy<sup>74</sup> - and throughout the twentieth century remained a crucial economic force for Czechoslovakia.<sup>75</sup> Yet unlike the ‘steel heart of the republic’ to the east, Ostrava, the North Bohemia industrial region never depended on a single monolithic mining-and-metallurgy

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<sup>73</sup> The most thorough scientific treatment of the social geography of the Czech Republic is the monograph: Hampl, Martin: *Geografická organizace společnosti v České republice: Transformační procesy a jejich obecný kontext*. Charles University Faculty of Natural Sciences, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development: Prague 2005.

<sup>74</sup> For the history, note Mikšiček, Petr. (ed.): *Proměny sudetské krajiny*. Praha: Antikomplex 2006.

<sup>75</sup> Arburg, Adrian von - Staněk, Tomáš (eds.). *Vysídlení Němců a proměny českého pohraničí 1945–1951: dokumenty z českých archivů*. Středokluky: Zdeněk Susa 2010.

base, in large part because its productive facilities and basic infrastructure pre-dated Communist industrialisation<sup>76</sup>.

Further east, past the Labe, the borderlands to the northeast had, by the 1970s, already assumed more of the form of a recreational landscape, with e.g. the mass development of skiing and other winter sports in the Giant Mountains, or the extensive use of former mountain farmsteads as city-dwellers' second homes, a phenomenon that expanded dramatically precisely during the two decades of 'normalisation'<sup>77</sup>. (The cottage-mania of the era extended as well to several metropolitan dissidents – most notably, Václav Havel and his own former farmhouse in Hrádeček near Trutnov<sup>78</sup>). South of Cheb, by contrast, the border zone abutting West Germany remained highly militarised (until 1989) and severely depopulated (up to the present), as the second most crucial Cold War border after the German-German one where the Warsaw Pact and NATO directly met. Noting this geographical circumstance is less of a digression than it might seem, since it draws attention to the level of militarization within the society of Communist Czechoslovakia. To be sure, it was never as strong as in the USSR or even the GDR, hence relatively overlooked in current historiography – yet universal male conscription was a reality and, for young men of an oppositional turn of mind, an ever-present threat to be avoided through any possible subterfuge.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> In this regard, see Hampl, *ibid.*, chapter 2.3, 'Specifikace a deformace poválečného vývoje', pp. 35-40.

<sup>77</sup> Petra Schindler-Wisten, whose study of Czech 'cottages' also discusses in detail the connection between the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and second-home use, notes that the number of recreational properties practically doubled between 1970 and 1991. Schindler-Wisten, Petra: *O chalupách a lidech: Chalupářství v českých zemích v období tzv. normalizace a transformace*. Praha: Karolinum 2017.

<sup>78</sup> The eastern Sudetenland, specifically the recreational zone of the Giant Mountains (Krkonoše-Karkonosze-Riesengebirge) was also the site of the famous 1978 cross-border meeting between Czechoslovak (Charter 77) and Polish (Komitet obrany robotników-KOR) dissidents, with Václav Havel, Adam Michnik and others enjoying a picnic along the 'Trail of Czechoslovak-Polish Friendship'. In the following decade, the same trail – accessible from both the Polish and Czechoslovak sides even without a passport – was used by young Prague underground members (Alexandr Vondra and occasionally Jáchym Topol as well) for exchanges of manuscript, samizdat and tamizdat publications. For a complete picture, see the website of the organisation Post Bellum: [www.mistapametinaroda.cz](http://www.mistapametinaroda.cz).

<sup>79</sup> The social history of the Czechoslovak People's Army, as an institution experienced by a vast majority of the male population in the 1948-1989 period, is still relatively little mapped. The most extensive discussion has been

Both the northwest and southwest border zones – indeed, nearly all the ‘borders’ of the current Czech Republic, apart from the Czech-Slovak one – are also connected in another sense. Citing Topol’s metaphor, it is the “memory of German bones”; in more sober language, the region’s tumultuous twentieth-century history, which in the past decades has increasingly become the subject of an impressive body of scholarship both domestic and international<sup>80</sup>. Until 1945, the border zones formed part of the German-majority Sudetenland (*Sudety*); from the Nazi defeat in May of this year up until the end of Communist rule it was known officially under the seemingly neutral designation of the “borderlands” (*pohraničí*)<sup>81</sup>, while since 1989 both scholarly and popular awareness of the vanished German past have led to an increasing deployment of the earlier term. and which indeed comprised the vast majority of the Czech border regions (along with several isolated German-speaking ‘islands’ further inside, e.g. Jihlava/Iglau and Svitavy/Zwittau). After 1945, with the series of population transfers ranging from the ‘wild expulsions’ immediately after 8 May up to the final organised transports of ethnic Germans across the border into Allied-occupied Germany, the largely emptied border regions became the object of massive resettlement (with the signal exception of the southwest border facing the American zone), with some involvement of ethnic Czech populations resettled from Romania or the USSR, but predominantly from within the Czechoslovak state: new arrivals from the central regions of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as poorer regions of

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Drož, Petr: *Základní vojenská služba v ČSLA v letech 1970–1980*. MA thesis, Department of Oral History, Faculty of Human Sciences, Charles University in Prague, 2020. Compulsory military service is discussed by many respondents in Vaněk, Miroslav (ed.): *Obyčejní lidé? Pohled do života tzv. mlčící většiny*, vols. i-iii, Praha: Academia 2009. For deliberate refusal of military service in communist Czechoslovakia, predominantly on religious grounds, note Blažek, Petr: *A nepozdvihne meč....: Odpírání vojenské služby v Československu 1948–1989*. Praha: Academia 2008.

<sup>80</sup> The major social histories of the Czech Sudetenland, with a focus on ‘North’ Bohemia as the most populous region, have been Wiedmann, Andreas: *"Komm mit uns das Grenzland aufbauen!" Ansiedlung und neue Strukturen in den ehemaligen Sudetengebieten 1945-1952*, Essen: Klartext, 2007; Spurný, Matěj: *Nejsou jako my. Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945–1960)* Praha: Antikomplex, 2011; *ibid: Most do budoucnosti. Laboratoř socialistické modernity na severu Čech*, Praha: Karolinum, 2016; Glassheim, Eagle: *Cleansing the Czechoslovak Borderlands: Migration, Environment, and Health in the Former Sudetenland*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

<sup>81</sup> In particular, note chapter 1.5.2 in Spurný 2011 for a discussion of the terminological issues around the use of ‘Sudety’ and ‘pohraničí’.

Slovakia, including significant numbers of Slovak Roma. Celebrated with all the pomp, fervour and wooden diction that the regime could muster, the ‘building of the borderlands’ emerged as a central feature of Czechoslovak Stalinism.<sup>82</sup>

No human social setting, apart perhaps from Antarctica or another planet, is entirely a social tabula rasa. Even in immediate post-Nazi Europe, the Czech Sudetenland was less severely marked by genocide, bombardment and violent population transfers than the German-Polish-Soviet border shifts to the north (ex-German Silesia and Pomerania in Poland, Ukrainian Galicia, etc.). The physical infrastructure, with a few exceptions, was overwhelmingly intact at war’s end; meanwhile, the population transfers, though dramatic, left small numbers of Germans as well as previous Czech settlers (*starousedlíci*) residing within the region. As Glassheim notes, the industrial cities at the edge of the Ore Mountains were never purely German but attracted Czech-speaking workers from the regions inland: as of the 1930 census, Ústí as the regional capital was 77 percent German<sup>83</sup>, while Most, for instance, had only a German majority of 64 percent<sup>84</sup>. Moreover, despite the varied points of origin of the new arrivals, only the Slovak-Hungarians (who had largely returned to southern Slovakia by the mid-1960s) and the inevitably excluded Roma, the Czech (Czechoslovak) population formed part of the purported national collective, bringing the entire range of national and (if not always) ideological social imaginaries from the central regions out to the new periphery. Social homogeneity, as Spurný discusses at length, lay at the centre of Stalinist social policies and indeed Stalinist ideology, in which social assimilation of disparate groups did not appear as a Procrustian adaptation to the majority but in fact as corrective justice for past wrongs, a “liberation from the results of previous oppression”<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Spurný 2011, esp. p.68 and following.

<sup>83</sup> Glassheim, p. 54.

<sup>84</sup> Glassheim, p. 128.

<sup>85</sup> Spurný 2011, p.145.

A sociologist in West Germany, Elisabeth Pfeil, as early as 1948 offered the term *Entwurzelungskrankheiten* – diseases of uprooting – for the poor psychological and psychosomatic state of many Germans expelled from the East<sup>87</sup>. On the opposite side of the Ore Mountains, a similar sense of malaise began to be acknowledged in Czech media as well as official governmental bodies already in the post-Stalinist 1960s, eventually growing to such dimensions that even the authorities found the image of “gaping coal pits, uniform housing blocks, choking smog, and social dysfunction”<sup>88</sup> impossible to ignore. The massive burning of high-sulphur brown coal, mined in gigantic open-cast pits, drove local industry and powered the limited yet real increases in living standards that formed the normalization regime’s bargain with the population – yet at a devastating environmental cost, not to mention their impacts on public health. Yet precisely such a space of bitter alienation from modernity’s promises<sup>89</sup>, might well in retrospect seem a likely kindergarten for a disaffected counterculture.<sup>90</sup>

The physical effects of heedless industrialisation were “public” knowledge at least to the region’s residents and a matter of unambiguous record. The social aspects, by contrast, tend to receive less discussion from empirical historiography. Spurný’s investigative scope ends in 1960<sup>91</sup> and Glasheim concentrates far more on the environmental aspects – which were reliably and quantitatively measured by the relevant authorities<sup>92</sup> – over the “social dysfunction”, where the main source is a post-1989 study<sup>93</sup>. And while the latter work amply

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<sup>87</sup> Glasheim, p. 81.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 128., 92.

<sup>89</sup> Jedermann, František (Příhoda, Petr with Kriseová, Eda): *Ztracené dějiny*. Praha: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku 1990 (originally samizdat 1985xx).

<sup>90</sup> Particularly one in the model of the “Birmingham School” of cultural studies – viz. specifically McRobbie, Angela: *The Uses of Cultural Studies*. London: Sage 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Spurný, *ibid.*, esp. p. 12-17 and 21.

<sup>92</sup> Glasheim, *ibid.*, p. 230, footnotes 88, 89, 90. The main source is the minutes from meetings of the District Commission for Environmental Creation and Protection of the District National Commission in Ústí nad Labem.

<sup>93</sup> Specifically: Kostecký, Tomáš: *Regionální diference sociálních problémů v České republice*. Praha: Sociologický ústav, Pracovní texty, 1994.

discusses both Petr Příhoda's long essay '*Ztracené dějiny*'<sup>94</sup> and the discussions among dissident historians associated with Charter 77 over the malign aspects of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and the subsequent policies of official social engineering, little mention is made of the response from the region's inhabitants themselves. While dissident and post-Communist descriptions of the situation often reached near-apocalyptic tones<sup>95</sup>, the actual textures of the social reality remain hidden behind statistics.

By contrast, the descriptions provided from the respondents hardly match the dark visions of outside – metropolitan or international – observers. Several underground participants spontaneously compared the Ore Mountains industrial belt to the similar rail-linked Liverpool-Manchester conurbation in northern England as a “place where the music started,”<sup>96</sup> an evident reference to the Beatles. Others recall the easy fellowship among the alternative-minded youth, where social atomisation meant if not liberation at least a simulation of the traditional urban “polite indifference” usually assigned to metropolitan centres. In the wider area of the socio-geographic mapping of the Czech industrial periphery, stretching to the Žatec-Louny conurbation and the annual festivities to mark the hop-picking, or the ‘Dočesná’ festival in Plzeň, there were a few occasional opportunities for the non-conformist young to meet with relatively little interference. In brief, the purported weakness of the social fabric of the industrial Sudetenland, in spite of all its reputation for negative anomie, might well have proven beneficial for the growth of (at least) one variant of positive deviation – in the absence of more coherent social structures rather than in any lessening of state control.

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<sup>94</sup> Jedermann, František (Příhoda, Petr with Kriseová, Eda): *Ztracené dějiny*. Praha: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku 1990 (originally samizdat 1985xx).

<sup>95</sup> E.g. Vaněk, Miroslav: *Nedalo se tady dýchat. Ekologie v českých zemích v letech 1968–1989*.

<sup>96</sup> First registered in interview as of 4.3.2014 with František Čuňas Stárek, repeated in other conversations (specifically the festival ‘Lábusovky’ in Žatec, 29.3.2014).

After the physical and social space of Czechoslovakia's western periphery, the second factor in the formation of the provincial underground was social class – or to return to Topol's less scientific if more lively formulation, “the nastiest toxic factories, where the only way to get thrown out was over the cemetery wall”<sup>97</sup>. The initial participants, under the generic term *androši*<sup>98</sup> were almost uniformly working-class in the usual sense of the word: humble family backgrounds, restricted educational opportunities, usually taking the form of tracking into vocational training, and an assumed future of labour in industrial production. *Vokno*'s chief organiser, František ‘Čuñas’ Stárek, attended a trade school for apprentice coal miners<sup>99</sup>; his closest associates in organising, printing and distributing the publication, Miroslav ‘Skalák’ Skalický and Karel ‘Kocour’ Havelka, were respectively a former apprentice at the Škoda works in Plzeň and a road-construction supervisor<sup>100</sup>. Other participants in the wider *Vokno* network had similar backgrounds, as will be discussed later. And if we take into consideration the broadest definition of a general underground milieu,<sup>101</sup> those who favoured unofficial culture without much personal involvement in its production (primarily the audience for illegal concerts of unapproved rock bands, occasionally as well readers and distributors of *Vokno* or other samizdat) differed from the more closely involved not in education or family, but in the matter of current employment. In other words, the semi-involved participants, it would seem, tended more often to accept steady employment over the far more difficult path of irregularity; i.e., the porous boundary between the underground and greater external conformity lay not in traditional class markers but the higher degree of “dropping out” from the expected life-trajectory of state socialism.

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<sup>97</sup> Topol 2002, p. 152

<sup>98</sup> Derived from the English word underground – or in Czech phonetic rendering, *andrground*.

<sup>99</sup> Střední průmyslová škola hornická, viz: <http://www.sostp.cz>. Information from personal statements by Stárek.

<sup>100</sup> Denčevová et al., p. 81.

<sup>101</sup> Note Maslowski's definition in: Maslowski 2014, *ibid*.

For now, though, the crucial matter is the question of how to define class identity, and above all “working-class” identity, in the reality of European state socialism. From the outset of the present research, I have used the term ‘working-class’ as a characterization without any specific discussion or elaboration of what ‘working-class’ practically implied for the persons or the society around them. This division follows the accepted differentiation between the spheres of dissent – i.e. the pre-1968 political and intellectual elites more or less forced into opposition by normalization – and an ‘underground’ whose primary characteristic was its lack of any social standing within the two major elite-formations in the hierarchies of European state socialism: Communist Party affiliation or educational achievement.

In the words of František Stárek, published in the first issue of the ancillary information bulletin *Voknoviny*, underground samizdat was ‘the forum for those who feel themselves to be young, who are arriving from ‘below’, from ‘outside’ and ‘for the first time’.<sup>102</sup> Participants in the underground tended to emerge from the culturally disaffected and ‘unorganised’ youth (i.e. not involved with any of the official young people’s organisations of socialist Czechoslovakia) who also lived at a notable geographic remove from Prague, above all in the belt of industrial towns of northwest Bohemia, from Sokolov to Děčín and eastward towards Liberec. Here, in a region based largely on the extraction of brown coal and the manufacturing powered by its highly environmentally destructive use, in other words an urbanized area without any real cultural elite or even many university graduates, it hardly comes as a surprise that more than a few young people would feel themselves – once again in Stárek’s words - ‘denied the right to information and cultural experience’.<sup>103</sup>

Two factors can be identified here as shaping the category of “working-class” youth likely to find alternative culture – and subsequently political resistance – attractive. One is, as

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<sup>102</sup> VOKNOVINY, p. 1, issue 2, no date (1987xx).

<sup>103</sup> Stárek, paraphrased in Růžková (2000), p. 12.



noted above, the question of “organisation”. The standard term used by the KSČ hierarchy as well as the political police translated into English essentially as “free youth” (*volná mládež*), for whom the reluctance to join state organisations was the cause of considerable worry, indeed fears of “ideological diversion”, yet the term could also partially cover the less negative characterisation of “unorganised youth” (*neorganizovaná mládež*), not irretrievably harmed but merely endangered by “right-wing opportunists and anti-socialist hostile elements”.<sup>104</sup> Contrastingly, police organs used a different phrase, which could be translated as “defective” or “harmful” youth (*závadná mládež*), to indicate young people – inferred as working-class in occupational standing – posing an evident threat to the positive development of those merely “unorganised”. Or, to cite the StB jargon itself:

people unadaptable to their environments, threatening the functioning of society as a whole, drunkards, addicts, displaying a distaste for work, mocking the progressive traditions of the socialist system, devotees of the West, rejecters of the leading role of the Communist Party...<sup>105</sup>

It is hard to state with certainty in which section of the police forces the “defective” term originated,<sup>106</sup> but its primary use – as discussed subsequently – was explicitly political rather than criminal, indicating not merely a tendency towards antisocial behaviour (crime, drunkenness etc.) but a fascination with the “ideological diversions” of the capitalist world.<sup>107</sup> While the situation of criminology within the state-socialist order is notably more complex than the standard Cold War-era assumption that political infringements were invariably the predominant focus of policing,<sup>108</sup> the evidence currently available would seem to indicate that

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<sup>104</sup> Kudrná-Stárek 2017, esp. pp. 100-103.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in Vaněk, Miroslav. *Byl to jenom rock-n-roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956-1989*. Praha: Academia 2010, p. 404.

<sup>106</sup> Note the discussion in Vaněk 2010, *ibid.*, p. 404-chapter VII, Represe a perzekuce rocku, esp. pp. 404-455, and Kudrná-Stárek 2017 *ibid.*, chapter III, Hudba podle generálských not, esp. pp. 94-106.

<sup>107</sup> A sustained characterisation of music and youth subcultures as ‘ideodiverze’ can be dated to 1974, clearly in response to the police attack on the Plastic People concert in Rudolfov, in both the Czechoslovak Communist Party and within the police forces: for specific detail note Kudrná-Stárek 2017, p. 84-93.

<sup>108</sup> See particularly Pinerová, Klára: “Profesionalizace a modernizace vězeňství v období tzv. normalizace a úskalí jejich uplatňování v praxi”. In: *Securitas imperii*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2018, p. 10-28.

the official treatment of youth did, in fact, grant priority to the direct politicisation of unofficial musical and cultural activity.<sup>109</sup>

The second is the matter of social status within Communist Czechoslovakia. Can the ‘working class’ in a ‘workers’ state’ be regarded as an entity comparable to the ‘working classes’ of market capitalist society?<sup>110</sup> Obviously, the question of class status within one of the pre-1989 socialist countries, i.e. in a purported “workers’ and peasants’ state”<sup>111</sup>, is a tricky matter. Very few observers, then or now, would actually have taken the belief in a realized classless society at its literal word, even beyond the clear division between party and populace. Even if one comes across various invocations of a thoroughly leveled, socially *gleichgeschaltet* sphere of universal social levelling, such oversimplified formulae tend largely to find their place outside the sphere of serious scholarship. And the experience of the post-1968 dissidents, deprived of professional careers and forced to assume ‘menial’ occupations, reveals, precisely through the shock of what we might call ‘instant proletarianization’, just how strong the stratification barriers were under Communist rule. Many dissident texts from the normalization years directly accentuate the diverging perspectives between the unwillingly proletarianized and the actually proletarian; Havel’s Vaněk plays and Milan Šimečka’s essays are only the best-known examples. Conversely, the propaganda campaigns of the regime, particularly after Charter 77, use the ‘elitism’ of the signatories in their arsenal of abuse, even though it tends to have a secondary character as opposed to the more frequent rhetoric of ‘foreign lackeys’ and ‘failures’<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup> Kudrna-Stárek 2017, *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> See: Kalinová, Lenka, Dělníci v normalizaci. Dělnictvo a sociální stát. In: Tůma, Oldřich-Vilímek, Tomáš (eds.): *Česká společnost v 70. a 80. letech. Sociální a ekonomické aspekty*, Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny 2012.

<sup>111</sup> The phrase “*dělnicko-rolnická vláda*” in socialist Czechoslovakia actually applied only to the proposed provisional government assumed by the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) immediately after the Soviet invasion in 1968.

<sup>112</sup> In the wording of the infamous *Rudé právo* headline: *ztroskotanci a samozvanci*.

At the same time, the body of work that attempts to map class stratification and distinctions under state socialism remains significantly limited. Within the Czech situation, in particular, the immediate historical circumstances of the 1968 invasion and the subsequent ‘normalisation’ processes vitiated independent social research. More notably, post-1989 investigations – quite logically – focused predominantly on current events and undergoing transformations, rather than looking back to the previous state of affairs. As a consequence, we have essentially a ‘black box’ of two decades between Pavel Machonin’s masterful *Československá společnost* of 1969 and the unconstrained research starting from the early 1990s.

General or popularizing historiography, and perhaps to a still greater extent the framework of post-1989 collective-memory cultivation, often give the impression that socialist Czechoslovakia was most strongly marked by disruptions, discontinuities and officially imposed injustices. The Stalinist 1950s are associated with the expropriation of businesses and smallholdings (‘dekulakisation’ and agricultural collectivization perhaps forming the most widespread encounter between the wider public and state power), restricted educational opportunities on grounds of ‘class origin’, show-trials and political imprisonment, or conversely the unjustified promotion of reliable working-class cadres into positions of leadership or responsibility. Such a situation resembles less a society of fixed stratification than one of fluidity – or, if we wish to use a less positively tinged word, perhaps Zygmunt Bauman’s ominous ‘liquidity’. International and national scholarship on the Communist period in the past decade, by contrast, focuses much less on the thrilling or depressing individual stories than on broader situations, where structural necessities of advanced industrial production, path-dependent historical trajectories or geographic provincialism present a wider impression of stability or even stasis. It is precisely between these two tendencies that we need to look for the actual situation of the class structuring of one specific

state-socialist society, along with all its historic determinants, if we are to have any sense of what the designation “working-class” means before applying it to the Czech underground of the 1970s.

Post-1989, Machonin offered the characterization of the CSSR as a “totalitarian and egalitarian social system”<sup>113</sup>, yet never fully achieving either aim. For the Stalinist 1950s, he admits the positive and negative effects of the bi-directional social mobility upwards and downwards, noting that its primary outcome was less one of levelling than of “social status inconsistency.”<sup>114</sup> Normalisation, or in his phrase the “return to abnormality” – which caused the author himself considerable difficulties (working for most of the period as a statistician for a poultry plant) – only revived the status inconsistency of the early years, though with social advancement for youth of specifically working-class origin less pronounced and the offspring of the more complicit middle class “granted automatic access”<sup>115</sup>. And indeed, the post-1945 meritocratic gains were admittedly based not only on egalitarian-minded state policies or the needs of economic growth and modernizing complexity, but also on much of the dark legacy outlined previously, not least in the setting of the Sudetenland but visible throughout Czechoslovakia after the war: the elimination of “competitors” or entrenched elites through the Nazi genocide and the German expulsion, along with the wave of anti-Communist emigration after the ‘Victorious February’ coup of February 1948.

Beyond social mobility and educational-employment ranking, in matters outside Machonin’s strictly data-driven scope, the defining traits of social class were moreover obscured by pressures of a different sort. Income levelling placed large sections of the purported middle class at a disadvantage and workers at a comparative advantage. As will be

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<sup>113</sup> Machonin, Sergej, “The Installation of a Totalitarian and Egalitarian Social System”, in Krejčí, Jaroslav - Machonin, Sergej: *Czechoslovakia, 1918-92. A Laboratory for Social Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p. 159-167.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>115</sup> Machonin, p. 194.

discussed later, the increased financial capabilities of working-class youth may have been only an exaggerated version of the similar stimulus in the capitalist side of post-war Europe that subcultural theorists like Hebdige and the wider Birmingham School saw as crucial for the formation of early youth subcultures (e.g. Mods and Teddy Boys in Britain), though the subcultural-countercultural analogy is more difficult to make<sup>116</sup>. More significantly, state policy as exerted through every level of economically planned life acted with simultaneously levelling and uplifting effects – and this latter category could even be termed a ‘socialist mission civilitrice’ for the formulation of a rationalized functional plan as well as a universal aesthetics of everyday life. In particular, the process of de-Stalinization that marked the 1960s, significantly the era for the late childhood and early teenage years of *Vokno*’s primary participants, functioned – as American historian Cathleen Giustino notes<sup>117</sup> - economically with the rise of the consumer sector over heavy industry and aesthetically with a shift from Socialist Realist canons towards international post-war Modernism, a parallel operation that Czech scholarship has only rarely examined in cross-disciplinary terms. This unified socialist-modernist living model, itself the focus of a subsequent chapter, can for now be assumed to have shaped class identity through weakening and flattening (if not necessarily eliminating) the complex cultural hierarchies and hierarchizations of the capitalist West – Pierre Bourdieu would have had to work particularly hard to discern his taste distinctions in a normalization-era housing estate. Yet its secondary consequences are, if anything, still more noteworthy: not only would even relatively slight semiotic-aesthetic deviation cause greater disturbance than within a more complex social-significatory range, but the restrictions of available cultural

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<sup>116</sup> This question is the central topic of a subsequent chapter.

<sup>117</sup> Giustino, Cathleen M.: “Industrial Design and the Czechoslovak Pavilion at EXPO '58: Artistic Autonomy, Party Control and Cold War Common Ground”. In: *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 47, no. 1, Special Issue: Sites of Convergence — The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home, January 2012, pp. 185-212.

goods within the prescribed scheme fully match the “hunger for a different culture” regularly cited among *Vokno*’s participants and the wider underground.

An additional factor in working-class experience that set state-socialist systems apart not merely from previous eras but indeed appears hard to imagine in today’s world of precarity and the gig economy is what we might term “policed Fordism”, or more prosaically, mandatory employment. State-socialist economies may not have entirely succeeded in matching the longstanding dream of “work for all”, and moreover hidden unemployment (not to mention underemployment of qualified professionals for political reasons, as a salient feature of normalization Czechoslovakia) was likely widespread within the overmanned state enterprises, heavy industry or collective farms.<sup>118</sup> Yet the achievement of (largely) full employment, as much as it could well have functioned as a legitimization force among older persons with direct memory of the Great Depression of the 1930s, was grounded not only in the provision of work through coercive means (e.g. politicised underemployment as mentioned above, but also through work assignments, and from 1952<sup>119</sup> to 1959<sup>120</sup> even mandatory assignments for university graduates – the notorious ‘*umístěnka*’) or other institutions tightening the labour supply (most notably mandatory military service), but in actual criminal law. Paragraph 203 of the 1961 Czechoslovak Criminal Code specified up until 1990 the crime of ‘*příživnictví*’, i.e. parasitism, punished with up to two – and later three – years in prison.<sup>121</sup> The historical circumstances of the use of ‘parasitism’ as one of the regime’s tools of social control have been discussed in far greater detail elsewhere<sup>122</sup>, yet two

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<sup>118</sup> A discussion of unemployment in command economies can be found in Porkert, J. L.: *Unemployment in Capitalist, Communist and Post-Communist Economies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995.

<sup>119</sup> § 2 vládního nařízení č. 20/1952 Sb.

<sup>120</sup> § 4 vládního nařízení č. 24/1959 Sb.

<sup>121</sup> Updated in 1965, the wording of Article 203, paragraph 2 is the following: “Kdo se soustavně vyhýbá poctivé práci a dává se někým vydržovat nebo si prostředky k obživě opatřuje jiným nekalým způsobem, bude potrestán odnětím svobody až na tři léta“ [Whoever continually avoids honest work and allows himself to be supported by another or acquires the means to live through another dishonest method will be punished with denial of liberty of up to three years.]

<sup>122</sup> E.g. the somewhat more popularising publication Kudrna, Ladislav – Stárek, František Čučas: *Příživnictví jako zbraň normalizačního režimu (nejen) proti mládeži*. Fakta & Svědectví, 2016, no. 12, or more specifically

aspects are worth mentioning in its relation not specifically to the underground but more to the wider question of working-class experience. One, it should be noted, is the relative lack of immediate political application of paragraph 203 to dissent (even cultural or subcultural / semiotic), particularly in comparison to the USSR – e.g. the prosecution of future Nobel Prize-winning poet Josef Brodsky for ‘*тушеядство*’ in 1964<sup>123</sup>; most of the current findings indicate that the immediate targets tended to be the socially marginal, usually prostitutes or the quasi-homeless (*‘somráci/bufetáci’* in contemporary slang)<sup>124</sup>. Conversely, the continual threat of persecution for an “economic” crime may well have led the activist core of the underground (the organisers of events, concerts and eventually samizdat) to take still further care in ensuring immunity from prosecution in this one area, thus leading to a greater separation from the genuinely marginal, quasi-criminal subcultures of industrial towns.

The final determining dimension of the *Vokno*-underground group is the question of its generational position. By this, I mean not only the remarkably narrow chronological window of year of birth, essentially restricted to the years between 1950 and 1958 for the most active participants, but additionally their age, specifically their relative youth, at the moment when they commenced their oppositional or anti-systemic activity. (Excepting, as we will see later, the few metropolitan intellectuals who deliberately sought a connection to the younger generation.) On one side, this approach requires an identification of specific historical events as forces that shaped a generational awareness, from population demographics and childhood circumstances (family and schooling, Czechoslovak Stalinism and gradual de-Stalinisation), through the public national trauma of 1968, up to the widespread impression of utter social stasis in the early 1970s. On the other, there emerges a need for classification of “youth” as a

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Mejzr, Martin: *"Kdo nepracuje, ať nejl": Fenomén „příživnictví“ v socialistickém Československu*. MA thesis, Department of Economic and Social History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2019.

<sup>123</sup> It should be noted that Brodsky’s 1987 Nobel Prize was commemorated in *Vokno* by Jirous: Magor [=Jirous, Ivan M.]: *Upřeli mu i jméno*; *Vokno*, no. 13 (winter 1987/88), p. [54-56], along with translations of an essay and poem by Brodsky himself.

<sup>124</sup> Mejzr, *ibid.*, esp. p. 119-134.

crucial category – or more accurately, a description of the processes of its generation and reification - within the CSSR and European state socialist systems more broadly. Such an interpretation would manage to integrate simultaneously two radically different aspects of life in the period more or less on either side of the crucial year 1968: both the layer of all-pervasive rhetoric reflecting the Soviet-Leninist cult of youth and the emergence of the social class of “youth” across both sides of the Iron Curtain within post-WWII industrialised societies. Nor should we necessarily ignore, on one side, the efforts of Czech and Slovak sociology during the 1960s to match both international theoretical approaches and actual empirical data regarding the much-debated ‘youth question’ of the later mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, or on the other the no less empirical, often highly impressive data-collection of the StB in its reports on “*závadná mládež*”, even if the subsequent analytical frameworks may not meet contemporary standards of true scientific objectivity. This latter question presents far more challenges than the present study can attempt without danger of serious digression; nonetheless, references to both the “systematic-rhetorical” and the “empirical-analytical” understandings will be regularly made throughout. For the present, though, we can take as a working hypothesis the existence of specific generational experience in shaping and directing the provincial underground across the various levels of involvement without necessarily extrapolating a unified “generational identity” across the other variables of geography and social status, i.e. through the range of responses to state power from active collaboration to quiescent discontent.

In Karl Mannheim’s classic definition of generation as a sociological category,<sup>125</sup> the similarity of immediate personal experiences shared among participants born in

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<sup>125</sup> Mannheim: “The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide, does not in itself involve similarity of location; what does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data, etc., and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly ‘stratified’ consciousness.” Mannheim, Karl: “The Problem of Generations“. In: Kecskemeti, Paul (ed.) *Karl Mannheim: Essays*. London: Routledge, 1952.



Czechoslovakia in the 1950s would form a central factor, no less so considering the extreme measures towards conformity during the Stalinist years.<sup>127</sup> Available demographic data suggests the appearance of a kind of belated “baby-boom” in the wake of the war years if not a particularly striking statistical bulge, in any case more diffused than the highly pronounced and condensed post-1968 “mini-boom” often popularly termed “Husak’s Children”. More than raw demographics, then, we can assume the decisive influence to have been the generation’s perception and awareness of public events: the increasing political thaw in the 1960s, culminating in the spring and summer of 1968, followed by the Soviet invasion in August of that year and the subsequent events of the “normalisation” process starting essentially from 1970. The importance of the self-imposed repression of Czechoslovak public life should be evident precisely from its occurrence within the participants’ life cycles, catching most of the underground right at the most formative point of early youth and the threshold of legal maturity, their later teenage years. (Or, in some cases, younger participants had older siblings who for various reasons were less active but acted as transmitters of experience.) The trauma of 1968, as not only academic historiography but equally broader national collective memory has begun to accept, was in fact a dual trauma: the Kremlin-imposed invasion of the late summer and the self-administered trauma of the overwhelming public apathy in response, followed by the actions of the Husák régime and a no less massive scale of assent or indifference.

Key individuals within the *Vokno* underground often mention 1968, but more frequently cite as motivating factors the experience afterward – as will be discussed later, the predominant findings from personal testimony, whether gathered directly for the purposes of

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<sup>127</sup> Viz. Knapík, Jiří-Franc, Martin: *Mladá generace v náručí strany, vlády a propagandy*. In: Knapík-Franc 2018, *ibid.*, pp. 49-101.

the present study or expressed in publications<sup>128</sup> or the broadcast media<sup>129</sup> indicate that the general atmosphere of the early 1970s took precedence over echoes of the Prague Spring or the actual invasion itself. Still, even the admittedly dismal public sphere of the early 1970s could not have proven the sole shared influence. Childhood socialising institutions and public schooling, as similar unifying experiences, cannot be immediately dismissed as potential shaping forces,<sup>130</sup> nor can wider systems of Czech national (nationalist) collective self-understanding be dismissed as marginal.<sup>131</sup> Conversely, the same generation was more than well-positioned to receive the slightly belated arrival of elements from the Western counterculture of the late 1960s, not only as chronologically fresh impulses but as standing out strikingly against the unified culture of socialist modernity in a sense hard to imagine today<sup>132</sup>. (And, with the combination of the time delay and the unity of the modern vision, finding in Roszak's counterculture, or to cite his words this "invasion of centaurs", not merely amusement but an essential critique of modernity *per se* – though this assertion is for later discussion).

The historical contingencies of generational experience, though, should also be understood as one factor overlapping among many. Citing Mannheim's notably fluid category of the generation-units,<sup>133</sup> we find the *Vokno* underground to form a collective influenced by

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<sup>128</sup> E.g. Stárek-Kostúr 2010.

<sup>129</sup> Most notably, Denčevová, Ivana – Stárek, František Čuňas – Stehlík, Michal: *Tváře undergroundu*. Praha: Radioservis 2012, or specific interviews in the Czech Radio series 'Příběhy 20. století' via the 'Paměť národa' project (note as well the interview database online at [www.pametnaroda.cz](http://www.pametnaroda.cz)).

<sup>130</sup> For recent social history of Czechoslovak childhood in this period note Knapík, Jiří – Franc, Martin et al.: *Mezi pionýrským šátkem a mopedem. Děti, mládež a socialismus v českých zemích 1948-1970*. Praha: Academia 2018.

<sup>131</sup> Here note e.g. Bolton 2012, esp. chapter 6, "The Public of the Powerless" (p. 201 and following).

<sup>132</sup> Several respondents – e.g. Sylva Chnapková or Stanislav Pitaš – strongly emphasised their own experience of technological change, indeed transformation, with the rise of the internet and the smartphone. Personal communications, Osvračín 2018, Broumov 2018.

<sup>133</sup> "Within this community of people with a common destiny there can then arise particular generation-units. These are characterized by the fact that they do not merely involve a loose participation by a number of individuals in a pattern of events shared by all alike though interpreted by the different individuals differently, but an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences." Ibid, p. 306.

many stronger forces than the affinities for similar aesthetic-semiotic preferences, for the music and fashion choices of the counterculture of the Cold War West. Even as affinities are shaped and (at least partially) conditioned by external circumstances, the responses – or in different terminology, the social action – remain a freely chosen alternative, collectively and individually, even within the confines of a system most accurately described as post-totalitarian yet limiting both collective and individual action in ways now largely unthinkable almost anywhere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. True, a genuinely totalitarian state would never have witnessed the emergence of samizdat, unofficial rock groups, communal living attempts or even divergent fashion choices, or would have been much more effective (and brutal) in eliminating them, yet the constraints present within socialist Czechoslovakia – and it should be stressed, not only those imposed from above but invoked willingly and autonomously by the more conformist members – were real enough to ensure that open rejection of the entire package of socialist modernity remained strictly limited. And strictly canalised, such that for at least its early years, *Vokno* genuinely offered the only alternative for so many of its contributors, typists and, above all, readers.

## Chapter 2

### “Produced in Indecent Haste”: The Commune, the Duplicator and the Start of Vokno

...typing errors and grammatical mistakes, misspellings and jumbled pagination were left uncorrected in the final proof. Those corrections and crossings out that were made before publication were left to be deciphered by the reader. The overwhelming impression was one of urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line.

- Dick Hebdige, *Subcultures*

At present, the entire print run of *Vokno* is immediately available online, including the opportunity to download each of the illegal issues in PDF format, on the website [www.vons.cz](http://www.vons.cz). This website, operated through the civil organisation ‘Centrum pro dokumentaci totalitních režimů’,<sup>134</sup> commemorates the ‘Committee for Defence of the <sup>135</sup>Unjustly Prosecuted’ (*Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných*), founded in 1978 by Charter 77 signatories with the aim of providing legal aid, material assistance and international publicity to Czechoslovak dissidents, and was intended primarily to put in accessible on-line form the samizdat documentation published by VONS, primarily in the samizdat periodical *Informace o Chartě* (often abbreviated as ‘Infoch’,<sup>136</sup>), other informational bulletins including the Polish *Biuletyn Informacyjny Solidarności Polsko–Czechosłowackiej*,<sup>137</sup> as well as complete electronic versions of several unofficial publications – the short-lived tamizdat project from the Uppsala-based exile Jaroslav Suk entitled *Krtek* [mole]<sup>138</sup>, the three issues of the magazine *Koruna* [crown]<sup>139</sup> of the 1988-89 oppositional organisation ‘České děti’, the nine issues of the samizdat philosophy journal *Paraf* (Paralelní akta filozofie)<sup>140</sup>. Original printings are of course available at state archives and the National

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<sup>134</sup> <https://www.edtr.cz/>.

<sup>135</sup> A total of 174 issues were published in samizdat from 1979 until 1989; accessible at: <https://www.vons.cz/informace-o-charte-77>

<sup>136</sup> Various authors: *Infoch: Informace o Chartě 77*. Praha: Mluvčí Charty 77 1992.

<sup>137</sup> Two issues – July and October 1988; accessible at: <https://www.vons.cz/buletin>

<sup>138</sup> Two issues – February and August 1984, accessible at: <https://www.vons.cz/krtek>

<sup>139</sup> Three issues, 1989 (otherwise undated), accessible at: <https://www.vons.cz/koruna>

<sup>140</sup> Published from 1985 to 1989, issues 1-9; accessible at: <https://www.vons.cz/paraf>

Library, and above all the Prague samizdat archive Libri Prohibiti, but for an understanding of the massive changes around printed information over the past four decades from the start of *Vokno* to the time of writing, few starting points are more suggestive than the quickness, indeed the ‘insane ease’ of cyberspace in acquiring a copy through a few clicks of a mouse.

All Cold War triumphalism aside – after all, there are far more observing entities in cyberspace watching us access *Vokno* online than Branch X of the StB, though with less punitive force – these circumstances both highlight and obscure the place of *Vokno* within its own historical era. Explaining the historical realities of the information blockade deplored by Jirous (and many others!) requires great consideration of the receiver of the said information, whether a university undergraduate in 2020 or a sympathetic Western observer in 1980, encountering samizdat from radically different technological situations even against generally similar political contexts of a shared “open society”. More precisely, we cannot avoid the seismic impact of information-technological change from typed mimeograph matrices to the enormous servers of Google or the US Defense Department. Today, both the reader of *Vokno* and, say, a tamizdat, exile, or free-expression-oriented publication of the same era, e.g. the pre-1989 *Index on Censorship*, appear, through the compression of historical distance, to have more in common with each other than with the media of today even in spite of post-World War II geopolitics: equally confined to limited-circulation paper formats, equally excluded from our all-embracing ‘consensual hallucination’ of continually accessible cyberspace. The homogenising force of our backward glance, rendering the past century’s seemingly incompatible opposites as mere reverse homologates,

## A) The Beginnings: *Vokno* and the Social Milieu of Its Creators

As with the genre of samizdat in general, the origins of *Vokno* lie in the nexus between intellectual and physical work and their forced overlap. More concretely, the origins can be divided into inspiration and realisation (i.e. preparation for actual print production): how the idea was first voiced, and who was there at the right moment to help bring it to earth.

Secondly, it is a “genealogy” not necessarily in the elevated Foucaultian usage of the word, but more immediately and conventionally in establishing a lineage of task-delegations within a relatively limited pseudo-family: the group of individuals within the shared anti-systemic milieu between metropolitan dissent and provincial counterculture who had the ideas and the opportunities to realise them. Somewhat facetiously, we might term them the “men and their nicknames”, since in post-1989 recollections it is the nicknames through which they have usually been identified. More informatively, we could divide the central participants into specific categories of activity and levels of involvement. Obviously, any strict categorisation is going to have a high degree of arbitrariness, and the conditions of improvisation required much overlapping of capabilities and actions. Yet it is nonetheless striking that even in the forcibly “de-professionalized” setting of samizdat, where the hierarchy between (intellectual) author and (physically labouring) producer is often said to have been obscured, that certain distinguishable hierarchies arose and persisted throughout *Vokno*’s illegal years.

*Organisers.* The organisers of *Vokno* formed, at the outset, the smallest group: essentially the triumvirate of Čuñas, Skalák (Miroslav Skalický) and Kocour (Karel Havelka). Organisation, in the first place, implied all the activities necessary for creating the physical copies: the reproduction technology, the duplicator fluid, the typing membranes, the paper, and other immediate material requirements.<sup>141</sup> Gathering the publication ingredients in

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<sup>141</sup> For the question of the material basis for samizdat, viz. Dányi, Endre: “Samizdat Lessons: Three Dimensions of the Politics of Self-Publishing”. In: *Journal of Electronic Publishing* vol. 19, no. 2, October 2016, or Komaromi, Ann: “The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat”. In: *Slavic Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, autumn 2004.

conditions of regular shortages was no small feat itself; a further difficulty was in buying even immediately available goods (paper, typewriter ribbon, ink) in quantities sufficient for a production run without provoking suspicion on the part of the authorities. A second level of organisational support lay in the transportation of copies through the personally based distribution network, particularly for verifying reliability and trustworthiness within the network during the first few issues. While Stárek personally oversaw the initial distribution procedure, the first of the “newsboy runs”, as the participants termed it, from western Bohemia all the way to Košice in eastern Slovakia, required the participation – and the car – of Jaroslav Chnapko along with his then fiancée Sylva Luppertová.<sup>142</sup>

*Producers.* If Vokno was a largely unplanned, ad hoc undertaking, it may not have followed strict division-of-labour rules or professional boundaries, but at the same time it had less time to spend on instituting strictly non-hierarchical practices, or arguing over status-based injustices in the production collective, in the way that US or Western European self-declared “underground” publications of the 1960s so frequently did. Apart from the central core of organisers, the production of a periodical required the labour of additional participants. Crucially, this work meant cutting the membranes on a manual typewriter, i.e. the typed reproduction of the manuscripts but with greater physical effort than required for conventional paper typescripts. One of the primary typists for the first issues of Vokno was a respondent in my interviews, Sylvestra ‘Silva’ Chnapková; Růžková’s survey states the other typists as Lenka Laurenčíková and Jaroslava Vosminková<sup>143</sup>, both of whom were residents of the Nová Víska commune<sup>144</sup>. Acquiring paper or duplicator fluid, usually by pilfering from a workplace, could also be classed as a “production” activity; Marcela ‘Mašina’ Stárková, then

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<sup>142</sup> Personal communication, Silva Chnapková, Osvračín, April 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Růžková, p. 8-9. Lenka Laurenčíková emigrated with her husband Vendelín to the USA in the early 1980s, viz. Stárek-Kostúr 2010, p. 375. I have been unable to trace Jaroslava Vosminková, and regret that neither could be interviewed for the present work.

<sup>144</sup> Again, note the chapter in Stárek-Kostúr 2010, ‘Nová Víska’, p. 252-301.

the wife of Stárek, was one such source for materials, as well as assisting with the typing of later issues after Nová Víska's forced dissolution<sup>145</sup>. This latter aspect of production work likewise involved outside assistance, or occasionally initially more peripheral individuals whose participation deepened at a later stage, such as Mirek Vodrážka, later central to Vokno as author and editor towards the end of the 1980s<sup>146</sup>, who from the start, by his own admission, supplied "ten-litre canisters of chemical solution for the duplicator membranes, which I stole from the copy room of the State Publishing House for Technical Literature"<sup>147</sup>. Obviously, a clear gendered division is visible in this brief characterisation, which will be discussed at a later point.

*Inspirers.* Neither strictly contributors nor editors, these participants provided original texts, translations, or advice for individual issues, as well as – perhaps more significantly – serving as intellectual or cultural authority-figures for the somewhat inchoate yearnings of their younger associates<sup>148</sup>. Largely, the 'inspirers' had far stronger connections to the dissident metropole, as signers of Charter 77 and (predominantly) holders of university degrees, yet nonetheless viewing working-class rock fans as a group deserving of attention.<sup>149</sup> Here, of course, two names stand out above the rest: Ivan Martin Jirous, former art critic<sup>150</sup>, and Jiří Němec (1932-2001), by training a clinical psychologist but by avocation a philosopher of Christian bent<sup>151</sup>. As will be discussed later, Jirous and Němec formed a particularly curious dyad in their private lives until Němec went into exile in Vienna in 1983,

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<sup>145</sup> interview 4.3.2014 with František Čuňas Stárek.

<sup>146</sup> See the subsequent chapter for further and more detailed discussion of Vodrážka's role.

<sup>147</sup> Vodrážka, Mirek: "Mytická vize o příchodu Velkého Hospodáře. Zrození roku 1989 z chaosu a jeho tajemství zvrtnosti". *Paměť a dějiny*, 2015/1, p. 52.

<sup>148</sup> One samizdat essay that discussed the relationship between Prague intellectuals and disaffected working-class youth – from the standpoint of one of the central figures discussed below – is Jirous, Ivan Martin: "*Nebyla nikdy v troskách*", in: Jirous, Ivan Martin: *Magorova summa*, pp. 402-418.

<sup>149</sup> Viz. Stárek 2014, p. 69, also note many writings of Jirous himself, e.g. in: Jirous 1997 *ibid.*, pp.

<sup>150</sup> As noted below, the primary work on Jirous's life and significance is the massive biography compiled by journalist Marek Švehla, Marek: *Magor a jeho doba*. Praha: Torst 2017.

<sup>151</sup> As discussed later in the present chapter, the printed information on Němec is surprisingly limited; perhaps the most extensive publication has been the block of articles and reminiscences in the quarterly *Souvislosti*: Petruželka, Antonín (ed.): Jiří Němec – fenomenolog a fenomén. In: *Souvislosti* 2001, no. 3–4.



though similar patterns of successive marital bonding were not entirely alien to the broader underground. An expanded list of inspirers should also include Egon Bondy (after issue 8), poet Andrej Stankovič (1940-2001), journalist Petruška Šustrová, or literary critic Jan Lopatka (1940-1993).

*Contributors.* Understandably, this category is the widest, ranging from international figures like Timothy Leary (twice) or Jack Kerouac through domestic documentation (e.g. the reprinting of the evaluation of Vokno produced for the trial by the chief literary policeman of the era, Dr Vítězslav Ržounek), all the way to obscure authors like the jailed poet Lenka Marečková. In the paper agora, publication can be regarded as a virtual network, and moreover one where a certain eclecticism (e.g. Ržounek's denunciation of the publication itself) could be allowed without the dangers of conflict in physical space. The 'contributor' label could also be extended to musical or artistic figures who are the subject of interviews or articles translated from (usually Anglophone) sources, which began to increase towards the decade's end, the translators themselves (among them the current samizdat authority Martin Machovec) and a special importance for the *Vokno* 'foreign correspondent', Jan Pelc, whose own move from one-time proletarian dropout to editor at the highly prestigious Parisian exile journal *Svědectví* is a tale all to itself<sup>152</sup>.

To start, however, it is necessary to turn away from the transnational or even metropolitan sphere, back to the illegal rock concerts in deserted buildings in Teplice or Chomutov and to the performers and audience. Stárek has personally stated that he made his entry into samizdat production at the start of the 1970s by typing carbon copies of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* in Jan Zábřana's Czech translation and distributing them to friends in

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<sup>152</sup> Pelc's story is, of course, provided in fictionalised form in his novel ... *a bude hůř*, to be discussed in subsequent chapters. For more on his biography in exile, see Tigrid, Pavel: 'Czech novel about drop-outs causes rumpus', in *Index on Censorship*, vol. 15, issue 6, June 1986, p. 27.

various hippie-friendly pubs between Teplice and Mariánské Lázně,<sup>153</sup> though as far as he knows none of the copies has survived. By 1975, he had already decided to create an informational bulletin for unofficial culture in northwest Bohemia, with the title *UM – Underground Magazine*; according to Růžková, with the collaboration of one Jiří Uhrín<sup>154</sup>, whose name is otherwise absent from later records, though Machovec lists him among the members of the underground who signed Charter 77 in its first two years<sup>155</sup>. Roughly in chronological parallel, Jirous – whose interests had already moved beyond the visual arts to rock music several years previously<sup>156</sup> - had begun to consider a similar project on the national scale, under the (English) title “Plastic People in the Sky”. Meeting at the pub ‘U Lojzy’<sup>157</sup>, its planned editors included not only Jirous and Němec, but also Stankovič and Jan Patočka junior, son of the renowned philosopher and chief inspiration for Charter 77<sup>158</sup> - and eventually Stárek as well.<sup>159</sup>

Mirek Vodrážka, at present a colleague of Stárek’s at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, has asserted that “the Prague editors co-opted Stárek already in the preparatory phase” and thus to speak of *Vokno* as a product of the “North Bohemian underground” is misleading<sup>160</sup>. Strictly speaking, there is a case to be made for this argument, even though *Vokno*, at least in the first part of its illegal career, was physically typed and printed in North Bohemia, initially near Chomutov (the Nová Víska commune) and then in Stárek’s Teplice flat. One point on which all observers agree, though, is the crucial reason why both projects remained unrealised: the police crackdown on underground culture starting

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<sup>153</sup> Stárek, personal comment.

<sup>154</sup> Růžková, p. 5

<sup>155</sup> Machovec 2019, p. 52.

<sup>156</sup> Jirous, Ivan M.: “Mesaliance, či zasnuby mezi beatovou hudbou a výtvarným uměním?” In: *Výtvarná práce* no. 3, 1968.

<sup>157</sup> Officially ‘U Šolců’ on Tylovo náměstí, Prague 2, a brief walk from the Němec family flat in Ječná ulice.

<sup>158</sup> Švehla, p. 419.

<sup>159</sup> Růžková, p. 6.

<sup>160</sup> Vodrážka, Mirek: “Antisystémová queer politika undergroundu a prosystémová politika Charty 77“. *Paměť a dějiny*, no. 1, 2012, p. 125.

with the launching of the campaign ‘Akce Kapela’ in November 1975. ‘Kapela’ [band] has been the focus of another impressive survey in recent years, compiled with the direct participation of Stárek, which bears the subtitle ‘The Background of the Action that Created Charter 77’,<sup>161</sup> drawing attention to the efforts of Division X of the State Security, i.e. the section entrusted with the ‘struggle against the internal enemy’. Keeping the clear chronological succession in mind, from the wave of arrests in March 1976 through the events described (somewhat inaccurately) as the ‘Plastic People trial’ – in fact two trials in July and September of the same year – one could easily conclude that ‘Kapela’ was the most spectacular failure of the StB, perhaps even the system signing its own death warrant. On the other hand, the temptations of hindsight in such a claim are all too blatant, even leaving aside the increasing historians’ dispute over the importance of organised dissent in the collapse of the Communist Party-State in 1989. For the present, let us restrict our scope to the impact that the ‘underground trials’ had on the formation of *Vokno*, since even in this area the facts and their further ramifications provide more than ample material for analysis.

The actual process of ‘Akce Kapela’ on the part of the StB, while enormously significant for the underground in general (and the subject of greater discussion in a subsequent chapter), is for the present purposes less significant than the response fielded by the Czech opposition. These two court cases were extensively documented at the time in a samizdat project essentially occupying the space between the early formulations and the eventual launching of *Vokno*, the ‘Brown Book’ (‘*Hnědá kniha“ o procesech s českým undergroundem*’). The original collection was compiled by Václav Vendelín Komenda, a historian, and Jaroslav Kořán, a translator of Anglo-American literature;<sup>162</sup> the latter, it is worth noting, had an earlier acquaintance with Jirous including their shared arrest in 1973 on

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<sup>161</sup> Kudrna, Ladislav - Stárek, František Čuñas: *Kapela. Pozadí akce, která stvořila Chartu 77*. Academia / ÚSTR: Praha 2017.

<sup>162</sup> Later to serve briefly as Prague’s first post-1989 mayor.

charges of ‘disorderly conduct’ for singing anti-Russian songs in a Prague pub (and in Jirous’s case, devouring a page of the Communist Party daily *Rudé právo*)<sup>163</sup>. Upon the volume’s publication in conventional book form in 2012, under the auspices of ÚSTR<sup>164</sup>, co-editor Stárek noted in the foreword that he had been entrusted with ensuring the binding of the ten copies of typescript for local distribution or smuggling abroad, and that the one trustworthy bookbinder he knew could only supply red or brown canvas, leading him to choose the latter<sup>165</sup>. The ‘Brown Book’ is, by sheer necessity, a highly eclectic compilation, documentation that ‘speaks a sufficiently eloquent language itself’<sup>166</sup> with only brief commentary. It starts with a re-‘printing’ of Jirous’s essay-manifesto ‘Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival’, followed by the lyrics of the offending songs: texts by Egon Bondy (performed by the Plastic People), Pavel Zajiček (performed by his group DG 307), and by singer-songwriters Karel ‘Charlie’ Soukup and Svatopluk Karásek. Essays by leading literary critics (Přemysl Blažíček, Miroslav Červenka, Jan Lopatka), statements by still more publicly prominent individuals - poet Jaroslav Seifert and philosopher Jan Patočka – along with a sermon by Karásek (an active Protestant minister as well as musician) are then succeeded by the main bulk of texts: the records of the trials themselves. Here, the documents consist of the court rulings issued to the defendants themselves (accusations and verdicts) faithfully reproducing the official legalese of the wording, as well as reports from the court hearings: for the first case (Havelka-Skalický-Stárek, i.e. Přeštice) personally transcribed by Dana Němcová<sup>167</sup> and for the second – in this case largely from memory – by Jiří Němec, Věra Jirousová and Václav Havel<sup>168</sup>. Completing the original volume is a series of open letters by

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<sup>163</sup> Komenda and Kořán also participated in the first meeting of the founders of Charter 77 in December 1976.

<sup>164</sup> Machovec, Martin, Navrátil, Pavel, Stárek, František Čuñas: *Hnědá kniha o procesech s českým undergroundem*. ÚSTR, Praha 2012.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 13. Tellingly, Stárek admits that he could not remember the names of the (assumed female) typists who produced the copies.

<sup>166</sup> In the wording of the original introduction by Komenda and Kořán, *ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 462

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 470.

Czech oppositionists to state institutions and – perhaps most strangely – reproductions (retypings) of the attacks on the defendants issued in the official state media, specifically the daily press (*Svoboda, Mladá fronta, Mladý svět*).

The ÚSTR edition from 2012 adds around 200 further pages of material: international press reports and commentary on the trial(s), historical and textual explications, footnotes and most significantly, contemporary texts that would not have been available in 1976 – reproductions of the internal StB documents behind the anti-underground campaign. Valuable as this information certainly is (and it will form a crucial part of our later analysis), the second block inevitably reshapes the original ‘Brown Book’ and slightly obscures its historic form. In a further sense, the physical formatting of an offset-printed book, rather than a bound typescript, also changes our impression, along with the typographical ‘segregation’ setting off the court documents and the internal StB reports through the use of the Courier font. (The contrast with the immediate impression of the actual material substance given by samizdat digitally scanned and uploaded into cyberspace – notably, *Vokno* has never been re-issued, post-1989, in print form – is itself striking.) Yet these transformations, possibly comparable to the idea of ‘layerings’ to use another term from post-modernist theory and scholarship for other areas of material culture (from art restoration through urban planning), should not distract us from examining the 1976 samizdat production – not merely how it appeared, but more significantly (and more sociologically) how it operated in, and shaped and formulated, the informational sphere at the time.

The ‘Brown Book’ was not a periodical in the literal sense, since no subsequent issues were ever planned. Its combination of political reports, cultural reviews and literary works, though, mirrors quite closely the typical content-mix of a serious weekly publication. Even despite its central focus on a single instance, i.e. the court proceedings and criminalization campaign against the musical underground, it brings together the same eclectic simultaneity

that Anderson, as discussed previously, assigned to the newspaper as a crucial element of a modern collectivity – in his case the nation-state. In the present case, this collective was assembled from a trans-national community of Czech dissidents, Czech exiles, human-rights organisations (Amnesty International), Western European cultural celebrities (Heinrich Böll), Western news media and, more generally, a post-countercultural Western public more receptive to “alternative” music than to the traditional Cold War rhetoric associated with the political right. Transposing this network scope into a smaller scale, yet with a greater lateral reach (i.e. across class rather than geographic distance) was, in fact, what the next samizdat project would entail.

A clearer view of Vokno’s similarity to the ‘Brown Book’ is even provided by a comparison with the first two unrealised projects, *Underground Magazine* and *Plastic People in the Sky*. In the first instance, since Jiří Uhrín left no written record and proved unreachable through the contacts of the current underground-network, we have to rely on Stárek’s personal testimony, as recorded in numerous interviews (including with the present author) and Růžková’s thesis, that *UM* was intended as an informational sheet for rock enthusiasts in North and West Bohemia: announcing concerts and parties, offering Czech translations of song lyrics “from the circle of performers appearing at Woodstock”<sup>169</sup>, and providing space for the publications of local creators, e.g. the ‘Independents’ (a group of amateur artists in Mariánské Lázně) and the Teplice poet Věra Rudíková<sup>170</sup>. As such, *UM* would probably have occupied a position somewhere between the status of a purely informational bulletin, as later embodied by *Voknoviny*, and a prefiguration of the subcultural, music or sports fanzines of the final years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before the rise of cyber-media. Conversely, Jirous’s planned

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<sup>169</sup> Růžková, p. 5

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. Rudíková is another individual who has so far proven untraceable, though she is mentioned in the context of an amateur theatre ensemble in the same city, KIX, active from 1968 until an unknown point probably in the early 1970s. Viz: Lážňovská, Lenka, Vítězslava Šrámková, František Zborník (eds.): *Divadla svítící do tmy. Nesoustavné nahlédnutí do historie malých neprofesionálních scén 70. let 20. století*. Praha: NIPOS 2006, p. 161.

*Plastic People in the Sky*, despite its title's strong fanzine-like connotations, resembled from all accounts more of a cultural revue with a somewhat adventurous turn, where the future contributors ranged from experimental author and art critic Věra Linhartová (by then already in Parisian exile) to rocker Pavel Zajíček<sup>171</sup>.

An impression of the ambitions of Prague's shadow elite in a realised samizdat form, similarly involving Jirous, Němec and others, can be gained from a third periodical worth placing in comparison to *Vokno*, the short-lived annual (3 issues between 1977 and 1979) entitled *Spektrum*. In the words of the pseudonymous reviewer 'Sharon' in *Kritický sborník*, a later Prague samizdat periodical with clear personal and thematic ties to its forerunner, *Spektrum* ranked "among the first samizdat periodicals that began to appear, among other reasons, from the natural need to provide space in the samizdat field for other texts than prose and poetry, i.e. equally genres of journalism, philosophical reflections, sociology, art history etc"<sup>172</sup>. Tomáš Vrba has recently drawn attention to *Spektrum*'s exceptional design, credited to Jaroslav Krejčí, who "decided to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by a typewriter and to turn its shortcomings into something positive,"<sup>173</sup> along with the publication's highly sophisticated distribution system and intricately coded table of subscribers<sup>174</sup>. *Spektrum* was additionally reprinted on conventional presses for tamizdat redistribution through the agency of the British periodical *Index on Censorship*, thanks to the efforts of its contributor and editor George (Jiří) Theiner<sup>175</sup>. Viewed today, *Spektrum* could be regarded as a well-curated assemblage of the Czech intellectual elite of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>171</sup> Růžková, *ibid.*, Švehla, *ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Sharon: *Spektrum po deseti letech*. *Kritický sborník* 8, 1988xx, no. 4, p. 48–53.

<sup>173</sup> Vrba, Tomáš: "Independent Literature and Freedom of Thought 1970-1989". In: Glanc, Tomáš (ed.): *Samizdat Past and Present*, tr. Melvyn Clarke, Prague: Karolinum 2019, p. 98.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>175</sup> Theiner (1926-1988) is worth mentioning as a somewhat overlooked figure of exile life: escaping the Nazi occupation for Britain in 1938, he returned to liberated Czechoslovakia in 1945 but fled once more in 1968. His legacy is, nonetheless, commemorated by the Theiner Prize for promotion of Czech literature abroad awarded since 2011 by the Prague Book Fair.

in generational terms caught at the trough of a kind of (state-enforced) middle age between their youth in the 1960s and their return as figurative elder statesmen in the 1990s: philosophers (Ladislav Hejdíánek, Zdeněk Neubauer, Zdeněk Vašíček), poets (Petr Kabeš, Andrej Stankovič, Karel Šiktanc), political commentators (Jiří Dienstbier, Bohumil Doležal, Petr Pithart), artists (Olbram Zoubek)<sup>176</sup>. Nonetheless, *Spektrum* remained unusually open to the broader underground, at least insofar as ‘underground’ can be applied to the sphere of unofficial rock music. Pavel Zajíček had an extensive block of his lyrics printed in the first issue<sup>177</sup>, though allegedly he was far from pleased with the editing process<sup>178</sup>. Perhaps of greatest interest to the current discussion is the record of a conversation between Jirous and conceptual artist Eugen Brikcius,<sup>179</sup> in many ways foregrounding wider issues of the particular intersection, or more accurately overlapping quadrant between intellectuals and counterculturalists, conceptual art and underground rock, that lay mostly unarticulated below the surface of the normalisation-era ‘second culture’ in both metropolitan and provincial manifestations.<sup>180</sup>



Olbram Zoubek’s figures from the cover of *Spektrum II*

<sup>176</sup> Photographs of Zoubek’s sculptures were used prominently in issue 2, with the cover image depicting one of the disintegrating human figures later used in his ‘Monument to the Victims of Communism’ in Prague.

<sup>177</sup> Zajíček, Pavel: ‘vyslov sám sebe i svůj svět’. *Spektrum 1*, 1978xx, p. 47-54.

<sup>178</sup> According to Stárek: “I think the first one to send them his work was Pavel Zajíček, he put his poems into the first issue and was really horrified at how they were edited.” Stárek, František: *Magor a Vokno*, in: Onuferová, Edita, Pokorná, Terezie (eds.) *Magorova konference: K dílu I. M. Jirouse*. Proceedings from the November 2013 conference of the same name, p. 70.

<sup>179</sup> *Spektrum 2*, 1979xx, p. 82-102. Symptomatically, the conversation took place in the previously mentioned Prague pub ‘U Lojzy’.

<sup>180</sup> This question will be treated in detail in the chapter ‘Centaur and Conceptualists’.



Bearing in mind the crucial role that both Jirous and Němec played in mediating between the semi-permeable yet real barriers of metropolis and periphery / intellectual and countercultural, and that neither were alive at the time of the start of my research, we are largely required in this instance to rely on Stárek's testimony as the major source for information on the link between *Spektrum* and *Vokno*. As Jirous had been arrested in October 1977 and eventually sentenced to eighteen months in prison ostensibly on the grounds of "insulting" remarks made during his address at the opening of a semi-official exhibition of paintings by Jiří Lacina, and remained behind bars until April 1979,<sup>181</sup> it was Němec who served as the crucial intermediary between Prague and North Bohemia, and after Stárek had the greatest share in formulating the future form of *Vokno*. Moreover, it is certainly no exaggeration to note that both Czech and international historiography of the normalisation years have tended, somewhat unjustly, to overlook Němec's importance during the 1970s, at least until quite recently. It might, therefore, be worth briefly discussing 'Starej', to cite his dissent/underground nickname, both as an individual case of a cultural intermediary, even 'idea-broker', and as a representative of a wider Czech 20<sup>th</sup>-century tradition of the typology of the organic intellectual mediating across status and stratification lines. And no less, for his historical role as the crucial behind-the-scenes figure for the launching and first issues of *Vokno*.

The rather mournful course of Němec's later years – exile to Vienna in 1983, increasing depression and alcoholism during his period with the *Institut von Wissenschaften von Menschen*<sup>182</sup>, and his severe illness in the final decade of life upon his return to Prague – somewhat obscure the vital force that he evidently held among those who knew him

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<sup>181</sup> Jirous's prison career is discussed in considerable detail in Švehla's biography; a more concise presentation is provided by John, Roman: "Magorova vězeňská léta. Pět životních zkoušek Ivana Martina Jirouse". In: *Paměť a dějiny*, no. 4, 2016, p. 37-48.

<sup>182</sup> In his StB file, this institute received the almost comically inaccurate translation as 'Výzkumný ústav člověka' – suggesting medicine or physical anthropology over the traditional humanities. Note Švehla, *ibid.*

personally in the 1960s and 1970s. Beyond a short tribute after his death in the ex-samizdat Catholic-affiliated cultural journal *Souvislosti*<sup>183</sup>, he appears in the secondary literature as a fleeting presence only rarely brought into closer view. Even more than Jirous, Němec counts as a pure ‘inspirer’ recalled for his erudite conversation and imposing personal charisma; yet unlike Jirous, who even in his final years was scribbling poetry and fragments on wastepaper, beer mats or whatever else was at hand<sup>184</sup> and witnessed the great bulk of his writings published during his lifetime, Němec has had comparatively little of his work available<sup>185</sup>. Though at the time of writing the publishing house Triáda has started a massive ten-volume series of his written output<sup>186</sup>, the prevailing sense of Němec has remained, in the words of critic Michal Špirit’s review of the Triáda project, that “most of those who were touched somehow by Němec’s influence are convinced that despite the author’s stature or intensity he lacks a personal oeuvre... that this oeuvre is in fact ‘only’ his actions and it’s a terrible pity that he didn’t write more.”<sup>187</sup> However, it is the role of Němec as charismatic mediator (and indeed the legend of his personality over his work) that concerns us at present. It might not be too great an exaggeration to note that his own combination of interests, alongside his actual training in clinical psychiatry and phoniatrics, had a decisive role on anti-systemic Czech intellectual life in the 1970-1989 period and the 1990s-early millennium intellectual semi-establishment: phenomenological philosophy, Christian theological and social thought, an aesthetic preference for work expressing dark existential angst and raw experience.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Along with a fragment of an essay on phenomenology, the block consists mostly of reminiscences of his life and work: “Jiří Němec – fenomenolog a fenomén”. *Souvislosti*, no. 3-4 (49-50) / 2001. A brief essay commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Němec’s birth is: Špirit, Michal: ‘Chytrý chlapec’, in: *Revolver Revue*, no. 88/2012.

<sup>184</sup> Švehla, *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> One exception has been his prison letters from the period of his pre-trial detention in 1979: Němec, Jiří: *Dopisy z Ruzyně a nové šance svobody*. Praha: Pulchra 2011.

<sup>186</sup> According to the publisher’s website [www.i-triada.net](http://www.i-triada.net), three volumes of essays, three of personal diaries, one of interviews and three independent volumes.

<sup>187</sup> Špirit, Michal: “Spisy Jiřího Němce, řada A”. Accessed at: <http://i-kanon.cz/2019/02/28/spisy-jiriho-nemce-rada-a/>.

<sup>188</sup> Viz. Putna, Martin C.: Mnoho zemí v podzemí. In: *Souvislosti* no. 1, 1993.

On the individual level, Jiří Němec seems to have been a controversial personage. In the words of a present-day Czech Christian-humanist ex-dissident, Tomáš Halík,

[Němec] destroyed my own ideal image... I was disappointed that he left Dana. Disappointed that he devastated his brilliant intellect with booze. Disappointed that even though I never ceased to like him, I was never able to collect enough arguments against those who condemned him; with self-irony: I was angry that he made it hard to win arguments about Jiří Němec.<sup>189</sup>

Moreover, there is also the question of the difficult interpersonal relations and romantic conflicts within a small human collective, as was Czech dissent in general and its more counterculturally-minded wing in particular. Once again, the question of social scale emerges with unexpected force as the historical-analytical intentions of scholarship come into intersection with somewhat prurient gossip. Or conversely, the

As briefly noted above, Jirous and Němec were tied together not merely by common intellectual interests, cultural activism or personal friendship alone, but indeed lived together during the crucial period of the formulation of the underground at the start of normalisation. Jirous's first wife, art historian and poet Věra Jirousová (née Vařilová), essentially left him for Němec, while Jirous in response began his own relationship with Dana Němcová; throughout the early 1970s, the two switched couples lived together in the Němec family apartment at Ječná 7 along with the children – the seven children with Dana and the son (author and DJ Tobiáš Jirous) he had with Věra. Švehla's biography of Jirous has been one of the very few Czech publications to discuss the romantic entanglements of Ječná 7 in detail,<sup>190</sup> claiming that even by 1970, Jirousová found her husband's love of long pub discussions with both intellectuals and workers increasingly tiresome, preferring the "orderly Catholic family man" Němec instead<sup>191</sup>. And yet for all the soap-opera qualities of this story, Jirous provided us with the most apt encapsulation of the qualities of Němec that rendered him such a crucial

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<sup>189</sup> Interview with Bohuslav Blažek, in *Souvislosti*, no. 3-4 (49-50) / 2001.

<sup>190</sup> Švehla, p. 143-4.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* In confidence, several people personally connected with underground-dissident networks have informed me of their displeasure at Švehla's openness in this matter.

figure for cultural mediation. This “priest without a collar”, in Jirous’s essay bearing this title,<sup>192</sup>

...conducted thousands of conversations and dialogues equally with university professors and workers from the underground. Sometime in the mid-Seventies he told me, after speaking with a waitress who asked him about some philosophical problem ‘I believe that the greatest thing that we did in our lives is the creation of such a group where no one cares about the origins, profession or IQ of another person. This position is what I hope to hold on to most firmly’<sup>193</sup>.



The inhabitants of Ječná 7. Jiří Němec is seated at the centre (in the white turtle-neck), Ivan Jirous at lower right.

We have, though, skipped ahead chronologically: Jirous, released from prison on 25 April 1979, was writing in support of Němec following his own arrest on 29 May of the same year<sup>194</sup>, and the first issue of *Vokno* was already prepared for circulation. The moment of *Vokno*’s founding occurred, if we are to take Stárek’s testimony at face value, during a long conversation between himself and Němec following the New Years’ Eve party at the underground commune in Nová Víska near Chomutov, with the given date of 5 January 1979<sup>195</sup>. Again, since one of the interlocutors is no longer able to provide contradictory evidence (and even other individuals present in the house in January were only ancillary participants to the conversation), the inevitable lack of a counterbalance should make us treat

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<sup>192</sup> Jirous, Ivan Martin: “Jiří Němec – kněz bez kolárku”. In: *Magorův zápisník*. Praha: Torst 1997, p. 398-401. Regarding the essay’s samizdat history, it first appeared in *Informace o Chartě*, September 1979, and was reprinted in issue no. 2 of *Vokno*, per the bibliographic information in *ibid.*, p. 719.

<sup>193</sup><sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398. Švehla paraphrases Jirous’s words in his description of Němec on p. 201.

<sup>194</sup> Švehla, *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Stárek, personal communication.

the record cautiously. At the least, Stárek's repeated narrations of the events, whether in print<sup>196</sup>, in his interview with Růžková<sup>197</sup>, his interview with the present author, or various statements in historical symposiums on the Czech underground<sup>198</sup>, all bear a relatively coherent shape, allowing responsible historiography at least a degree of certainty.

More germane to the argument is the connection that emerged between the “androší” of the industrial periphery and the intellectuals of the metropolis, primarily through the deliberate efforts of certain acknowledged Prague dissidents. At the end of 1978, it seems, Němec was intent on bringing his underground contacts – primarily through Stárek and the commune – more closely into the personal sphere of Prague's samizdat producers, concretely *Spektrum*. For the underground outside Prague, though, the limited-issue production of *Spektrum* would have meant an extremely small number of copies for circulation; moreover, in Stárek's words “those kinds of phenomenological babblings didn't interest them much”<sup>199</sup>. Němec arrived in Nová Víska for the New Year's celebration, planned as a three-day festival of unofficial music; from the report published as the first article in *Vokno*'s first issue<sup>200</sup>, we know that nearly 200 spectator-participants were present, as well as the listing of individual groups (e.g. the ‘Neo Surrealistic Psycho Dada Band’, ‘The Water Closet Band’) or solo performers. As it happened, an unusually warm 31 December was followed by a sudden plunge in temperature and a heavy snowfall, leaving the celebrators cut off from the outside world, with relatively limited food but ample quantities of fruit brandy. Inside the old farmhouse, Němec argued long hours with the commune's members, who (again quoting from Stárek's published contribution) “all agreed that we needed our own magazine, which

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<sup>196</sup> Stárek, “Magor a Vokno”, in *ibid.*, p. 70-71.

<sup>197</sup> Růžková, p. 4, footnote 3.

<sup>198</sup> Most notably, the recurring conferences on the Czech underground organised by the Václav Havel Library and ÚSTR.

<sup>199</sup> Stárek, *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Vokno*, no. 1, 1979xx, p. 2-15. Written by Karel ‘Kocour’ Havelka and signed with his initials and nickname, the article extensively discusses the increasingly narrow range of opportunities for unofficial music performance from 1974 onwards, and the necessity for restriction to a more private setting.

would be not only digestible for the average underground member but also available to everyone”<sup>201</sup>. Around 3 a.m., with the last of the spirits consumed, Němec allegedly told Stárek, Skalický and Havelka “You’ve convinced me” and fell soundly asleep on a sofa.

Through Stárek, the Nová Víska commune had as well an enormous technical advantage within the Northern underground: its own duplicator. Several years previously,<sup>202</sup> he had arranged with a friend employed in the Teplice branch of the state enterprise ‘Office Machinery’<sup>203</sup> as a repairman for spirit duplicators. Piece by piece, he stole enough components during his shifts (though apparently the metal roller, too large to fit into a tool bag, had to be carried out of the workshop on the pretence of visiting a client<sup>204</sup>). The repairman reassembled the duplicator in the cellar at Stárek’s residence in Teplice, though for reasons of safety he kept it buried in another friend’s garden in the outlying village of Střelná. In Stárek’s words, owning such a device was equivalent to a “heavy machine gun” in terms of its perceived danger by the authorities. The duplicator, a German-made Ormig (Organisations-Mittel GmbH) likely of pre-war vintage, lacked a paper feed but was capable of printing up to 120 pages from a single membrane. Installed in the Nová Víska house, evidently by early spring in 1979, the Ormig was soon operating to full capacity<sup>205</sup>.

All the first five issues of the journal – which did not receive its name until the second issue – were printed on this duplicator. The covers and photographs, though, were silkscreened in another location: according to one recent study, by Stárek’s connections to the underground circles in Plzeň:

In Plzeň, this is how, perhaps for the first time in samizdat they printed a small text for the musical underground samizdat magazine VOKNO. It was a printing of the poems and writings of Jáchym Topol, who also wrote lyrics for the band Psí vojáci. These were printed by Miloš Kraus and Ladislav Vyskočil by night on a home-

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Stárek estimates the year as 1975, viz. *ibid.*, p. 71; also note Švehla, p. 419.

<sup>203</sup> *Národní podnik Kancelářské stroje*

<sup>204</sup> Švehla, *ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Stárek 2013, p.71, personal communication

made silkscreen in the kitchen of Miloš Kraus's flat in Rooseveltova ulice. For František Stárek (Čučas), they also printed the title pages of VOKNO.<sup>206</sup>

At this point, it might be worth taking a brief detour to discuss 'the house' (*Barák*), i.e. the communal living arrangement in the Nová Víska farmhouse at the southeast edge of the Ore Mountains<sup>207</sup>. It was the location where *Vokno* was founded and its first two issues printed, up until the dissolution of the community in January 1981 and the sale of the house itself<sup>208</sup> – followed not long after with the 'Vokno trial' and the publication's forced halting until 1985. Though its residents spoke of it in the singular form (with capital letter at the start), it was hardly the only communal living attempt in 1970s Czechoslovakia by far<sup>209</sup>. An admittedly incomplete survey was compiled in 2010 by Stárek and another one-time *Vokno* contributor, Jiří Kostúr, citing 32 'baráky' as the underground's 'archipelago of freedom', though not all the houses were necessarily full-time communes<sup>210</sup>. Indeed, a slight majority of the properties were used communally only for special gatherings, most frequently of a musical nature; more significantly, the geographic distribution was far wider than the Ore Mountains industrial belt, even though most were located somewhere in the former Sudetenland (often in the less industrial northeastern borderlands). In one case, the farmhouse of 'Zlatý Kopec' (in the early 1970s the home simultaneously of two major underground musicians – Vratislav Brabenec from the Plastic People and singer-songwriter Karel 'Charlie' Soukup) stood just outside the Prague city limits<sup>211</sup>. More confusingly, the moniker 'barák' has even been applied to non-residential spaces such as the essentially uninhabitable structure near the unusual (anthropogenic) alum-bearing lake Kamencové jezero, near Chomutov. A kind of prefiguration of Nová Víska, briefly the property of Milan 'Skalák' Skalický (1976-1978) before its expropriation and demolition during the building of a lakeshore recreation

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<sup>206</sup> Petrová, *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>207</sup> Stárek, František, Kostúr, Jiří: *Baráky. Souostroví svobody*. Praha: Pulchra 2010.

<sup>208</sup> Viz. Stárek-Kostúr 2010, *ibid*

<sup>209</sup> Viz. Stárek-Kostúr 2010, *ibid*

<sup>210</sup>. Viz. Stárek-Kostúr 2010, *ibid*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30-72.

area, it bore the English name ‘Barrel House’ for its improvised roof of metal barrels, but served almost exclusively for concerts and other events linked to Skalák’s group, ‘The Hever and Vazelina Band’<sup>212</sup>.

It could, in fact, be argued that the network of underground focal points is crucial to understanding not only Vokno and its ambitions – as a project created and (initially) executed within one such locality. If samizdat formed a virtual space of activity outside state control, the physical spaces where the underground could experience (or in more strictly sociological language, ‘practice’) autonomous sociability were themselves no less important than the infrastructure of typewriters, paper and duplicators. Stárek and Kostúr note in their introduction the importance – specifically to them as former participants – of specific points of physical congregation: pubs, open-air spaces (public squares, parks etc.), ‘open flats’ like Ječná 7 or even the occasional workers’ dormitory<sup>213</sup>. Spatiality and sociability, or perhaps conversely the spatiality (spatialization) of sociability formed a significant ‘shaping’ component of the Czech underground, as would have understandably been the case for any form of cultural resistance. More particularly, there is the question of the degree of privacy and accessibility spanning the range of alternatives from informal hangouts to fully owned real estate, which reveals the complexity of a social collectivity positioned between disaffected youth subcultures and (historically potential, after 1989 realised) cultural elites. Various spaces also match differing points in chronology, both historically (before and after 1968) and within the participants’ life cycles (e.g. from teenage hangouts in public squares through specific underground-friendly pubs up to independent dwellings).<sup>214</sup> And an additional dimension in this spatialising of subcultural-underground involvement is – as in

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 9-10.

<sup>214</sup> Masłowski, Nicolas: Underground jako ruch społeczny. In A.Karpowicz, W.Parfianowicz, X.Stanczyk, ed. *Awangarda Underground, idee, historie. Praktyki w Kulturze Polskiej i Czeskiej*. Cracow: WUJ 2018, pp. 121-131.



many other aspects of 20<sup>th</sup>-century totalitarian rule – the exceptional role of chance and individual response in shaping the situationist map of key localities (or, in today’s language, genuine ‘safe spaces’). Here, the paradigm is offered by the existence of clearly recognised underground or dissident pubs despite their economic unification in the single state catering and hospitality corporation, where the degree of acceptance relied overwhelmingly on the pro- or anti-systemic attitude of the specific manager or barman – for instance, ‘Lojza’, the proprietor of Němec’s and Jirous’s favoured Prague local, had (according to one story<sup>215</sup>) narrowly escaped a death sentence for trumped-up espionage charges in the 1950s.

The formation of a closed communal space away from immediate official surveillance (leaving aside, for the moment, the penetration of social networks by StB agents) can be understood as a qualitatively different level from the semi-public gathering. Or in other words, it represents taking an increased level of social action in defining (physically bordering) a central core of primary participants, fully involved in an autonomous life situation, and the more peripheral/marginal participants at the boundary between opposition and conformity. And, of course, the economic investment in the purchase of the properties also formed its own specific form of involvement and commitment, particularly on the limited salaries for the various lines of work that allowed for non-conformity. Yet there is another dimension to the realised common houses that matches the situational logic of samizdat: the conflation of agora (this time of bricks and mortar) and object (the aesthetics and the human interactions of the given building). A common physical-architectonic space, or to use the language of the cyber-era a shared ‘meatspace’, mirrors the ‘spatiality’ in virtual dimensions of a periodical. The qualities of direct juxtapositions, of encounters (personal and textual), even of incongruities are underscored by precisely this spatial proximity. Though more

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<sup>215</sup> This information was provided by Stárek during the discussion between himself and the *Revolver Revue* editors in April 1992; viz. its transcript at: <http://vokno.cunas.cz/vokno1/rozhovor1.html>.

attention will be paid to this question in the subsequent discussion of material culture and materiality, the parallel between the institutionalisation of action in house and periodical is definitely noteworthy.

Of the ‘baráky’ actually situated within the ‘North Bohemia’ of popular imagination, Nová Víska and the house owned by Květa and Jan Princ in Rychnov u Děčína both displayed unusual levels of political as well as cultural activity, and served as focal points for notably extensive underground publics. While as Stárek has observed, Rychnov had a more educated group of residents than Nová Víska, with its working-class predominance<sup>216</sup>, and had already been dispersed by the time that the latter was created, the two ‘house-societies’, if we can call them that, bear salient points for comparison. And even if the overlap of personal connections between the immediate residents was limited, their situation within the wider opposition-network put them at a much closer position. Specifically, Květa Princová, as a student of chemical engineering in Prague in the early 1970s, had made contact with Dana and Jiří Němec, regularly spending time at Ječná 7. The latter (accompanied by Věra Jirousová) spent the New Year’s Eve of 1976-77 in Rychnov, exactly two years before the arguments preceding the founding of Vokno in Nová Víska. The Princ family in fact successively organised three communal residences from 1976 to 1986, each of which was brought to an end through police and governmental pressure: the official seizure of the Rychnov house (on the evidently false excuse of building a never-realised bus stop) and its demolition by the police and the paramilitary ‘People’s Militia’; eviction from the subsequent community in the half-ruined former parish house in Robeč, seizure of the last house in Mastířovice ostensibly for use as civil-defence storage.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 275

<sup>217</sup> Viz. the chapters “Rychnov”, “Robeč”, “Mastířovice” in *ibid.*, p. 140-207. For Květa Princová’s personal testimony viz. <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/princova-kvetoslava-1950>

The story of the undoubted heroism of the family in the face of unceasing official persecution is impressive, to be sure. And it is worth noting, additionally, the use of the semi-private space of each successive house for a wider range of events than concerts and parties – lectures by Prague dissidents, theatre productions (e.g. a staging of Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*)<sup>218</sup> and somewhat unusually, religious events (both husband and wife belonged to the more Christian tendency within oppositional circles, which touched the Vokno/rock music networks to a far lesser extent<sup>219</sup>). However, the close involvement with the metropolis and, once again, the persistent division of educational qualifications among participants, even noting the Prince family’s openness to curious local youth, were factors implying a certain qualitative difference between the communities. Similarly, the higher level of integration with extant dissident networks and circles in the Prince ‘*baráky*’ added one further, and highly germane, circumstance: not producing its own samizdat project.



The house at Nová Víska near Chomutov. Photo by Jan ‘Íč’ Hric

In its history and personal lineage, Nová Víska emerged from Chomutov’s ‘Barrel House’ but drew its inspiration from Rychnov. The building itself stood in an isolated settlement of former farmsteads at the foot of the Ore Mountains, just past the town of Prunéřov (Brunnersdorf), which gradually vanished for a vast open-cast coalmine and the

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<sup>219</sup> Viz. the personal testimony in the chapter ‘Robeč’, in: Stárek-Kostúr 2010, p. 160-188.

largest electric plant of the region between 1966 and 1982<sup>220</sup>. From what we know of the region, it can be assumed to have been a German property before 1945<sup>221</sup>, and moreover – judging from the size of the house – a notably prosperous farmstead for the region. None of the participants (whether in published testimony or in personal interviews) ever spontaneously noted these historical circumstances, and indeed the choice of the building for purchase, after Barrel House had proven insufficient and Rychnov forcibly dispersed, was highly pragmatic: sufficient space for concerts and for housing the community<sup>222</sup>. Yet the link between the house and the doubled historical traumas of the German expulsion and the expropriation of Czech smallholders during the early 1950s (‘dekulakization’) is not necessarily a trivial matter<sup>223</sup>.

Another crucial aspect of the property was its distance from built-up areas, essential for establishing an autonomous space. The closest pub or restaurant was ‘Motorest Ušák’ beside the main road,<sup>224</sup> and the small number of additional residents ensured relative peace from interventions. For a certain historicist-minded framework of analysis, Nová Víska could be seen as a kind of microcosm (or, in the terminology of traditional rhetoric, a *synecdoche*) for the immediate chronological intersection in the 1970s between the tragic drama of Sudetenland history, the state-socialist version of industrialised anomie and the ensuing sub/countercultural search for community. Such a depiction, of course, aptly highlights the forces that, on the larger scale, shaped the non-metropolitan underground from outside. In another sense, though, Nová Víska provides a more interesting subject viewed less as an

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<sup>220</sup> A description of Prunéřov-Brunnersdorf and its destruction is available on the (partially) bilingual volunteer-sourced database *Zaniklé obce – Verschundene Orte*, viz: <http://www.zanikleobce.cz/index.php?obec=77>. For any study of the Czech Sudetenland, as well as a fascinating insight into Czech collective memory within cyberspace, this site is an invaluable resource.

<sup>221</sup> I was not able to find any information about the previous owners through the district cadastral office.

<sup>222</sup> Viz. Stárek-Kostúr 2010, *ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Recall that Stárek came from a family of expropriated, i.e. ‘proletarized’ smallholders, though he was from all accounts the only participant with such a background.

<sup>224</sup> Still in operation at the time of writing.

object and more as a process: the deliberate enactment of an autonomous living formation in the space between the familial and the state, indeed the creation of a micro-society as achievable utopia. As I intend to argue later<sup>225</sup>, the connection between the Czech communal-living attempts (i.e. *'baráky'*) and the longer tradition of utopian settlements, particularly in North America, cannot merely be reduced to mere emulation / imitation of various media-representations of US hippie communes, but instead reflected a similar endeavour towards the creation of a differing social order than the prevalent one, an attempt towards a positive ideal even in particularly adverse circumstances. How successful the idea was in practice, or counterfactually might have been without state intervention is a different question; of greater importance is the path of this idea of a micro-society both in its initial implementation within normalisation-era Czechoslovakia and its possible later ramifications for the much-discussed revival of 'civil society' in the system's aftermath.

At least on a more concrete level, regarding its own domestic economy, Nová Víska went further than the majority of other communal centres in its striving towards material self-sufficiency. Its members were whenever necessary in paid employment, since 'parasitism' was, as noted previously, a criminal act; most frequently, as surveyors' assistants<sup>226</sup>; at times when the building itself required such extensive work as to form a full-time commitment (e.g. the installation of a water-heating system), several of the men from the commune only wore dirty overalls if leaving for a nearby town to avoid police questioning. For provisions, Nová Víska relied on its capacious vegetable garden, its chickens, an occasional pig slaughtered by the father of one member, Eva 'Bulharka' Terzijská<sup>227</sup> or rabbits from the hutch. "Only shoes and diesel" would be items necessary for purchase from outside, or so Stárek has often

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<sup>225</sup> Specifically, Chapter 8: "In the Wolf's Belly: Islands of Deviation, Underground Sociabilities and Proto-Civil Societies".

<sup>226</sup> Geodézie, národní podnik (Geodesy, National Enterprise), served as a safe place of employment for nonconformist youth through the 1970s and 1980s, or at least for the all-important employer's stamp in the identity pass.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

stated<sup>228</sup>; nonetheless, this aim was never achieved. No attempt, for instance, is recorded of Nová Víska achieving self-sufficiency through brewing its own beer, or even distilling its own spirits: drinks had to be purchased from ordinary retail outlets, usually the main shopping centre in Kadaň. For concerts or weekend visits, it was expected that visitors bring their own drinks, or for larger events pay a nominal fee plus transportation costs. Supplies were generally purchased in bulk, often to the displeasure of store management; in part, this practice allowed the community to keep local authorities in the dark regarding future events<sup>229</sup>. From the recollections, the most time-sensitive commodity was fresh bread: regularly, large purchases of bread signalled to the (unknown) informers that a major action was planned, often leading Stárek (in charge of such matters) to drive as far as Most to throw them off the scent<sup>230</sup>.



Photo of the Nová Víska commune's residents by Jan 'Āc' Hric for the house chronicle

Two questions should be posed in response to Stárek's stated aim of maximum autarchy. For one, it would appear that despite the retrospective pride in the declaration, it is not certain whether, at the time of the commune's founding, the aim towards economic independence from the state-socialist order was indeed as programmatic as the ambition

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<sup>228</sup> In print in *Báraky*, p. 272; personally on several other occasions.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

appears in hindsight. Secondly, the historical circumstances of real-socialist *Alltagsleben* strongly indicate that the level of household self-sufficiency even among the wider, and thus arguably more conformist, majority of the Czech population would have been little different.<sup>231</sup> (A circumstance, incidentally, that underscores the difference between the Czech ‘*baráky*’ and the North American countercultural communities, where refusal of consumer abundance had much more explicitly political implications.) Examining how the self-sufficiency of Nová Víska worked in practice reveals much about its standing (in differences and similarities) with respect to a purported ‘regular’ household in the Ore Mountains region. Following the wording of Stárek’s formulation, shoes were understandably beyond the technical possibilities of self-production, yet clothing most definitely was not: Marcela Stárková earned her nickname ‘Mašina’ through her sewing skills (often preserving precious imported bluejeans beyond their natural lifespan<sup>232</sup>), while Lenka Laurenčíková knitted sweaters from the wool of the community’s one sheep. Diesel fuel, in turn, formed a crucial supply as the house’s main heating source. While coal then served as the primary fuel in rural areas<sup>233</sup>, and would have logically seemed the likely choice in the North Bohemian coal basin (particularly with the enormous Prunéřov pit close by), it was cheaper to buy (not quite legally) the excess diesel used by the road crews for melting frozen sand in wintertime and burn it in diesel stoves.<sup>234</sup>

Other rural communities may have been less programmatic in their self-sufficiency aspirations, but often attempted at least to avoid full co-optation into the sphere of socialist work and socialist consumption in a few main areas. The community around the Princ family

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<sup>232</sup> Viz. the recollection by Stárek commemorating the tenth anniversary of Stárková’s death: “All those tattered jeans of our hippie friends were something that she should fix, patch up, etc. And she did it on an old Singer machine, where she spent lots of time pedalling away, and so she got the nickname ‘Mašina’”. Stárek, František Čuñas: V depu je prázdné místo. In: *Babylon*, no 2 / XXI, 8 October 2012, p. III. The same issue of the magazine printed several of Stárková’s own poems.

<sup>233</sup> And, indeed, still does.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

in Robeč<sup>235</sup>, following the destruction of the society (and house) in Rychnov<sup>236</sup>, maintained a flock of sheep, a sizeable amount of domestic poultry (hens, ducks, geese), rabbits and briefly a cow; per Květa Princová, the cow purchase came entirely at Věra Jirousová's urging and the elderly heifer ran away from her when she tried to take it to pasture<sup>237</sup>. A question worth asking, if only for historical context, is nonetheless how radically the self-sufficiency aims of these communities differed from the life of mainstream households in 1970s Czechoslovakia: gardening and individual animal husbandry remained mainstays of rural larders well into the 1990s<sup>238</sup>, while the enormous prevalence of homemade clothing (if striving towards quite opposite fashion-semiotic effects) formed a chapter demanding its own social history<sup>239</sup>.

One other matter of self-sufficiency, specifically the intellectual self-production of samizdat, is nonetheless markedly different from the majority of living arrangements in normalisation-era Czechoslovakia. The Ormig duplicator, when not in use, was bricked up under the stairs to avoid its detection if the police decided to make a house search; this task was assigned to a younger resident with training as a mason, Jiří 'Kečup' Slovák<sup>240</sup>. Allegedly, Slovák rigged a vacuum-cleaner motor to run in reverse to spray dust over the new brickwork to disguise it further from prying police eyes<sup>241</sup>.

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<sup>235</sup> Viz. the chapter 'Robeč' in Stárek-Kostúr, pp. 158-191.

<sup>236</sup> Viz. the chapter 'Rychnov' in Stárek-Kostúr, pp. 140-157.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>238</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. the study Hlaváčková, Konstantina: *Móda za železnou oponou - Československo 1948-1989*. Praha: Grada 2016.

<sup>240</sup> 'Kečup' is one of the more tragically fated figures of the North Bohemian underground, allegedly run over by a train after the dispersal of Nová Víska – viz. Černega, Jiří, in Stárek-Kostúr 2010, p. 263. Another reference to him is in Sylva Chnápková's interview with Post Bellum, where she mentions that he was severely affected by his experience of imprisonment in the 1980s: <https://www.pametnaroda.cz/en/chnapkova-silvestra-1954>.

<sup>241</sup> Stárek, repeated personal communications.





*Vokno*, cover of the first issue, 1979

A similar conspiratorial necessity is linked to the very title of the periodical, which has occasionally led to various speculations verging on the over-interpretive. The authoritative explanation (again, stated and established by Stárek)<sup>242</sup>, though, is that originally the publication had no title: based on legal advice, it was decided that to avoid the possibility of breaking (at the very least) the law on unregistered periodicals, it would have no title on the cover and no periodical numbering. Instead, the front page would display six squares that would gradually be filled with photographs – and at the start, only six issues were even planned – depending on the primary theme of the issue. (E.g. the first cover, visible above, shows five empty squares and a photograph of guitars to match the primary focus on music.)

Barring one near-fatal mishap when the entire print run fell off the roof rack of Skalický's Russian GAZ jeep –

“...so, when we started up, around 300 m<sup>2</sup> of the main square in Chomutov was filled in with secret *Voknos* and some old grandmothers and an entire nursery school along with Comrade Teacher helped us pick them up”<sup>243</sup>

- the first issue of *Vokno* went into distribution in the spring of 1979. “Went into distribution”, though, hardly captures the reality of the situation, bearing in mind the

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<sup>242</sup> Stárek has mentioned this origin repeatedly in person; a published version is available online at: <http://vokno.cunas.cz/vokno1/rozhovor1.html>

<sup>243</sup> Skalický, Miroslav Skalák, interview with Drápal, Vladimír Lábus, April 1999, viz: [guerilla.cz](http://guerilla.cz), also note Švehla, p. 419.

contradictory needs for conspiratorial secrecy (from the police) and widespread accessibility (for the wider, often only semi-involved underground public). Stárek chose as the basis for the distribution network an address book that he had maintained prior to his move to Nová Víska, of visitors to his Teplice flat who shared their own addresses for returning the favour. For the physical diffusion of the printed copies, Stárek and Jaroslav Chnápko made good use of their surveying employment (and of the week-long breaks between work-related trips) to undertake distribution runs to each of the addresses, accompanied by the latter's girlfriend, Sylva Luppertová.

The longest such trip led to eastern Slovakia<sup>244</sup>, where a similar network of underground sympathisers already existed in the eastern metropole of Košice. Marcel Strýko<sup>245</sup>, an amateur artist employed as a technician at the Košice broadcasting studio of Czechoslovak Television, had already started to circulate a samizdat anthology, *Trinásta komnata* [The Thirteenth Chamber]<sup>246</sup>, as well as organising a highly informal improvisatory musical ensemble in which anyone present could participate, with or without an instrument<sup>247</sup>.

Oddly enough, the StB file concerning Strýko was assigned the operational name 'Komúna' despite the Košice underground not actually attempting a communal living arrangement – though Strýko and two friends jointly purchased a weekend house in the nearby village of Slanská Huta for music-making and philosophical-religious discussions<sup>248</sup>.

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<sup>244</sup> E.g. the descriptions by Chnápková, viz. interview with the present author, Osvračín, 2018, or Denčevová et al. 2012, p. 123.

<sup>245</sup> Several texts commemorating this prematurely deceased activist and intellectual were published around the thirtieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution; e.g. Ičo, Pavol: 'Košický filozof Marcel Strýko', *Listy*, 2/2019; Kacejová, Monika: Marcel Strýko – filozof, ktorý bojoval za pravdu, <https://kosicednes.sk/tema-dna/marcel-stryko-filozof-ktory-bojoval-za-pravdu/>. Also noteworthy is his profile in Masaryk University's online dictionary of Czech and Slovak philosophers: <https://www.phil.muni.cz/fil/scf/komplet/stryko.html>.

<sup>246</sup> Vodrážka, Mirek: "Marcel Strýko. Příběh radžajógového kněze košické Komuny". In: *Paměť a dějiny*, no. 3, 2015, p. 82-90.

<sup>247</sup> The group bore the name 'The Nace' – a macaronic anglicisation of 'Pusť tam nás!' [Let us in]; viz. *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87; also note the Czech Television documentary in *Fenomén underground*, 'Divoký východ' for more on Strýko and his connection to *Vokno*.

As will be mentioned later, Slovakia's situation – even within federal Czechoslovakia – diverged considerably from the Czech one in terms not only of its dissent practices (notably weak representation of Charta 77 but a far stronger and more popularly routed Catholic opposition, a wider and less heavily policed 'grey zone' inside official structures, a dispersed and secretive but nonetheless real "anti-democratic" nationalist opposition) but even within the more internationally shaped countercultural sphere, where common cultural signifiers, generally Anglo-American (rock music, beat poetry etc.), formed a point of agreement and similarity. One main instance, once again, of historic path-dependencies and physical-spatial conditions shaping the manifestations of cultural opposition lies in the rarity of the American-influenced alternative commune in Slovakia, for many reasons: low industrialisation until after 1970, more strongly traditional demographic-familial relationships<sup>249</sup>, and above all the lack of the Czech Sudetenland's empty formerly German farmsteads<sup>250</sup>.

In this instance, it is possible to discern how not only social macrostructures, but even physical spaces shaped the forms of (oppositional) social action. Usually, the physical loci for oppositional sociability east of the Carpathians were the wooden mountain huts [*salaš*] originally used as summer pasturing settlements before agricultural collectivisation, located in high mountain regions outside of the era's tourism industry (i.e. usually not the High Tatras but instead Kysuce or the Lesser Fatras) separated from the outside world by long stretches of genuinely rugged wilderness<sup>251</sup>. As such, they formed impractical sites for year-round

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<sup>249</sup> The primary source for information on the differences between the western and eastern regions of Czechoslovakia (not only Slovakia but also including sections of eastern Moravia) is the wide-ranging sociographic work of the reformist 1960s discussed in detail below: Machonin, Pavel (ed.): *Československá společnost*. Bratislava: EPOCHA 1969.

<sup>250</sup> This is not to say that Slovakia was spared ethnic displacement after 1945: to the contrary, a sizeable fraction of its ethnic Hungarian population and most of its (relatively small) ethnic German population were subjected to resettlement (Hungarians in the Czech Sudetenland) or expulsion (Germans); nonetheless, no massive depopulation of wide areas of traditional settlement occurred on anything like the Czech scale. Viz. Štefanica, Ján. Odsuny a výmeny skupín obyvateľstva európskych štátov v prvej polovici 20. storočia. In: *Historia et Theoria Iuris*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2010, p. 78-93.

<sup>251</sup> The difference between even the 'recreational landscape' of the eastern Sudeten regions in the Czech lands and the far wilder landscapes in Slovakia is, again, traceable to the historical legacy of the German expulsions: while Slovakia's mountainous regions are largely untouched wilderness, the Czech mountains were previously

residence, let alone communal living experiments like the Czech ‘*baráky*’ – instead serving more as weekend retreats for urban dwellers. Hence it should come as no surprise that Slovakia’s small mountain settlements or shepherds’ refuges became gathering points for independent-minded circles associated more with the “grey zone” (small-format theatres<sup>252</sup>, environmental and historic preservation groups<sup>253</sup>) than with active dissent. Only one Slovak mountain retreat - Brízgalky in the Kysuce region<sup>254</sup>, which will be discussed in greater detail below - could be genuinely regarded as openly dissident (i.e. with an explicit connection to Charter 77 or a similar organisation). Here, the closer analogy is that of the culture of the weekend cottage<sup>255</sup> as a temporary refuge from the forced engagement with the extant system, rather than the aim of the *barák* as a fully autonomous space for counter-systemic sociability, creativity or direct action.

As significant as the ‘communes’ were in musical production, and in the case of Nová Víska for samizdat, the community formed and shaped by periodical publications needed to include those with a greater personal stake in the above-ground world. For all the discussion of the ‘*barák*’ communities as physical concentrators or nodes of activity, the thinner yet far wider ‘tissue’ of underground youth who formed Vokno’s intended public lacked any such stable brick-and-mortar refuge. Again, the centre of sociability in many localities – particularly where uninhabited houses were rarer – tended to be the pubs with more tolerant

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far more intensively settled and farmed. Viz. in particular *Zmizelé Sudety – Das verschwundene Sudetenland* (ibid.) for the aerial photographs pre- and post-1945.

<sup>252</sup> Viz.: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/746780/mikulas-huba-je-fantasticke-ze-sme-znovu-ziskali-slobodu-ale-pred-slobodou-drancovania-chcem-varovat/>

<sup>253</sup> In particular, it is worth mentioning the role of environmentalist Mikuláš Huba, as an instance of what I will later discuss as ‘grey-zone’ or para-dissident action: as a qualified scientist employed in an official institution who nonetheless was active in the unofficial sphere, in this case the preservation of Slovakia’s vernacular architecture. Viz. Huba, Mikuláš: *Ideál, skutočnosť, mýtus: Príbeh bratislavského ochranárstva*. Bratislava: PRO 2008.

<sup>254</sup> For a recent description and images of Brízgalky viz: <https://www.kysuce.sk/cl/299/zachranme-brizgalky-cholvarky-zivy-pamatnik-nasho-regionu.html>.

<sup>255</sup> Viz. Schindler-Wisten 2017, ibid., or Bren, Pauline: “Weekend Getaways. The Chata, the Tramp and the Politics of Private Life in Post-1968 Czechoslovakia”. In: Crowley, David - Reid, Susan E.: *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post- War Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Berg 2002.

management. Or, in Stárek's wording, "it was enough to talk about it in the right pub". Leaving aside Prague, where the network of sympathetic 'locals' was thicker than elsewhere, as described in repeated oral accounts and enumerated e.g. by Machovec,<sup>256</sup> and eventually Brno, it was usual for a regional city or district town to have at least one such gathering point even within the confines of the state hospitality enterprise (RaJ).<sup>257</sup> Particularly noteworthy for North Bohemia was "Vyšehrad" in Teplice<sup>258</sup>, repeatedly cited by underground participants; the list in the introduction of *Baráky*<sup>259</sup> additionally mentions "Na Slovanech" in Plzeň<sup>260</sup>, "Na Hradě" in Hradec Králové<sup>261</sup> and Olomouc's longstanding "U Muzea", popularly "Ponorka" [submarine]<sup>262</sup>.

A thorough mapping of the locations where Vokno reached its public would undoubtedly be fascinating for the historically minded observer today. Such knowledge would have been welcomed even more by the StB in 1980, of course, and consequently secrecy – i.e. storage of the knowledge in memory rather than written media – was essential at the time. Here, historical investigation comes up once more against the limitations both of participant memory, whether personal or collective, and the limits to the 'memorialising' documentation of the StB. On the participant side, it can only be assumed that the locations remembered and cited in a participant-work like *Baráky*, significantly situated in regional cities, formed central points that remain in the minds of Vokno's organisers, in contrast to smaller towns where fewer examples have been recorded, and changes of management, or after 1989 privatisation,

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<sup>256</sup> Machovec, p. 144, footnote 20.

<sup>257</sup> All dining facilities in socialist Czechoslovakia, including pubs, were unified into the national enterprise *Restaurace a jídelny (RaJ)*, administered on the district level. Viz. e.g.: Vaněk, Miroslav - Krátká, Lenka. *Příběhy (ne)obyčejných profesí: česká společnost v období tzv. normalizace a transformace*. Praha: Karolinum, 2014.

<sup>258</sup> Still in operation, address: Tržní náměstí 1580/11.

<sup>259</sup> Stárek-Kostúr, p. 9-10.

<sup>260</sup> Address not verified at time of writing.

<sup>261</sup> Still in operation, address: Špitálská 175/5.

<sup>262</sup> Tř. 1. máje 8. For full disclosure, the conference at which a section of the present work was presented, 'Popular Music in Communist and Post-Communist Europe', held in Olomouc in March 2017, paid a visit to 'Ponorka'.

could well have obscured any standing as extant ‘lieux de memoire’ – and in tandem, making historical reconstruction even more difficult. (One exception might be ‘Kotva’ [Anchor] in the district town of Trutnov,<sup>263</sup> mentioned by a central underground organiser and interview respondent in East Bohemia, Stanislav ‘Guma’ Pitaš.<sup>264</sup> In this case, one preserving factor for this knowledge could be the connection with Václav Havel and the longstanding summer rock festival known as the ‘Czech Woodstock’ – itself an underground project disrupted by the StB in 1987 but held legally from 1990 until 2016<sup>265</sup>.) As for keeping private addresses in memory across nearly four decades, it would be more surprising if any specific locations were recalled, let alone the more (geographically and socially) peripheral ones that historiography would prefer to know.<sup>266</sup>

Conversely, the StB records concerning Nová Víska and the start of *Vokno* are relatively sparse, even despite several house-searches and regular surveillance. In the Czech Television series *Fénomen underground*, the one former police officer willing to speak publicly noted the distance that the forces of state power – at least for a time – had from the group under observation:

“We were so angry at you! Not because you were Chartists or enemies of socialism, but because in your farmyard you were playing Patti Smith at full volume, drinking draught beer and the girls walking around in swimsuits, while we lay in the ditch with beetles crawling all over us”<sup>267</sup>.

As we shall see later, this distance was not to last long, particularly with the StB’s ability to identify and informers within oppositional groups. The byzantine structuring of the StB on the federal, regional (Ústí nad Labem) and local (Chomutov, Kadaň) levels nonetheless hindered the organisation’s ability to draw connections between Prague and the outlying areas.

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<sup>263</sup> Horská 14/72, still in operation.

<sup>264</sup> Note his published interview: ‘Dělám kulturu jako za komančů’ in: *Babylon* no. 2 / XXI, 8 October 2012, p. i-ii, vi.

<sup>265</sup> See issues 1 and 2 of *Voknoviny* – ‘Na otázky Vokna si odpovídá Čuňas’ respectively p. 7-8 and p. 7.

<sup>266</sup> Viz. Maslowski 2021, *ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Fénomen underground*, *ibid.*

During the period of *Vokno*'s emergence and production in Nová Víska, Jirous was still serving his prison sentence of 'disorderly conduct' from October 1977; strangely enough, after October 1978 in a prison in the Sudetenland – Ostrov nad Ohří, itself created from the infamous Vykmanov labour camp, the destination of many political prisoners in the 1950s as part of the Jáchymov uranium mines.<sup>268</sup> He was released from Ostrov on 25 April 1979, with *Vokno* already largely completed, and evidently made his first visit to Nová Víska only in October of that year. Still, Jirous's role in compiling issue 2 of *Vokno* was crucial, since it aimed, in the words of the editorial introduction, to expand the scope of inquiry beyond the music of the Czech and international underground(s):

among other things, a brief view into the area of the fine arts. It is about expanding the space of our awareness in a different direction than our previous musical interest. Simply, we'd like to offer the possibility of comparison with other areas of artistic activity that are moving towards the same goal.<sup>269</sup>

Not that the second issue of *Vokno* had altogether turned away from music: the first 17 pages after the introduction discuss in succession Pavel Zajíček and DG 307 (Jirous's essay dated May 1979 with Zajíček's lyrics) and Josef Vondruška's band DOM, following its appearance at the Nová Víska "Punk-rockový festival" of 30 June<sup>270</sup>. However, Jirous presented the underground readership with an extensive description of the Prague artistic-conceptualist group 'The Crusaders' School of Pure Humour without Jokes' (*Křížovnická škola čistého humoru bez vtípu*)<sup>271</sup> and a brief note on the work of painter Jan Šafránek, with two pages of

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<sup>268</sup> John, p. 43.

<sup>269</sup> Unsigned, *Vokno* no. 2, 1979xx, p. 2.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>271</sup> The 'Crusaders' School', named after the now long-vanished pub 'U Křížovníků' in Prague's Old Town, was an informal association of artists (its best-known member being sculptor Karel Nepraš) and conceptualists (e.g. Evžen Brikius, viz. supra) active mostly in the early 1970s. So far, the one published study, published on the occasion of the first legal group exhibition, has been Jirousová, Věra (ed.): *K.Š. –Křížovnická škola čistého humoru bez vtípu*. Hradec Králové: Galerie moderního umění, 1991. The only subsequent exhibition, held in Roudnice nad Labem in autumn 2015, had no published monograph or catalogue. Citing the words of its curator, Duňa Slavíková, "... the programmatic outsider stance, the praise of absurdity and the living truthfulness of the artists [...] had no place in Czech normalisation society. And after 1989, the art historians writing the new history continued to stigmatise the artists of the KŠ ....". Viz: 'Tato víra je i pozadím roudnické výstavy (rozhovor s Duňou Slavíkovou)' in: *Revolver Revue* no. 102, 2016; also note from the same issue Tuckerová, Veronika: 'Křížovnická škola čistého humoru bez vtípu a její dějiny', ibid, p. and Wilson, Paul, A description in the online database of the Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague is: <https://www.artlist.cz/en/groups/krizovnicka-skola-100231/>

reproductions of his sarcastic-realistic canvases of the banalities of everyday life. Jiří Němec's essay on underground activity, 'New Chances of Freedom' (*Nové šance svobody*) was the longest contribution, followed by two slightly polemical essays on Němec himself (by Jirous<sup>272</sup> and poet Zbyněk Hejda<sup>273</sup>, though only signed with the latter's initials). Jirous's personal involvement with *Vokno*, it is safe to say, only strengthened the publication's stance as an intermediary ground between university-trained Prague intellectuals (Němec, the 'Crusaders') and the vocational-school graduates, amateur rockers, or simply enthusiasts for a different range of cultural offerings than the state-approved assortment<sup>274</sup>. Or perhaps more accurately, the editors, producers and typists of *Vokno* made it increasingly clear that any socially imposed differences of background or (more sociologically) prior cultural capital were irrelevant to their aims, against our retrospective imposition of socialist class differences as an interpretive grid. As will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections, the social and cultural distinctions of European state socialism were indeed real, yet far more ambiguous, perhaps even fluid, than has been the case in the post-1989 period.

And the link with the working-class commune above the coalpit was not to remain for long. *Vokno*'s second issue was, as it happened, the last one produced in *Nová Víska*. As with its predecessor, it was typed and printed only by the core residents: to cite an interview with Sylva Luppertová-Chnápková:

"It was printed in secret, only the select few could turn the [duplicator] crank, definitely not everyone. I turned it myself, sometimes we'd alternate throughout the night. There could be a hundred people at *Víska* and no one had any sense that *Vokno* was being manufactured here."<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Magor (Jirous, Ivan Martin): 'Jiří Němec, kněz bez kolárku'. In: *Vokno*, no. 2, 1979xx, pp. 20-21, reprinted in Jirous, Ivan Martin: *Magorův zápisník*, Praha: Torst 1997, pp.398-401.

<sup>273</sup> Z. H. (Hejda, Zbyněk): 'O Jiřím Němcovi znovu'. In: *Vokno*, no. 2, 1979xx, pp. 22-24, also reprinted in Jirous 1997, pp. 633-637.

<sup>274</sup> Hejda, it should be said, was strongly critical of Jirous's essay precisely on this point: "If M[agor] wished to prove that this conversation [...] is an expression of Jiří Němec's current anchoring in the underground, where somehow all class differences vanish, then he is in error. In reality, it is the coherent activity of a person for whom dialogue has forever been a basic life-stance." *Ibid.*, p. 634.

<sup>275</sup> Interview in *Tváře undergroundu*, *ibid.*, p. 123.



Interrogations of community residents and successive house searches increased markedly through 1980. Towards the end of June, a raid was undertaken, to cite from Jiří Kostůr's somewhat Kerouac-flavoured description, by

'uniformed and non-uniformed members of our people's police, just then in the kitchen I was carving up a fresh-skinned rabbit, with blood-dripping hands I grabbed out of the sideboard the large volume of our chronicle and with other materials ran up to the attic and hid everything under a pile of mattresses in Chmelák's unfinished room [...] On the warrant for the search they actually had written suspicion of marijuana possession, but why they ransacked all the bookshelves and stole an entire shelf of Šimako's cassettes, only God knows, one minesweeper even crawled through the garden with a metal detector....'<sup>276</sup>

In other instances, the authorities confiscated the registration documents of the community's cars, which for an isolated farmstead would have been fatal. And the final item in the regime's arsenal was expropriation of the property. From the start, the local authorities (the MNV in the adjoining village of Místo) had tried to invalidate the purchase contract, though the court case was rejected on a technicality<sup>277</sup>. During the next year and a half, the local criminal police conducted a concerted harassment of Nová Víska, blocking road access during concerts and events, threatening visitors, occasionally surrounding the house with armed patrols and police dogs. From August 1978 until January 1979, the electricity was cut off, even though the wiring was in good order, forcing Lenka Laurenčíková, then in the final months of pregnancy, to leave for Prague<sup>278</sup>. And at the end of October 1979, the district authorities in Chomutov (ONV) found their most effective weapon: forced sale of the entire property "for reasons of defence of the state", followed by an order for outright seizure as of 20 December. Almost immediately afterward, Miroslav Skalický was issued an injunction from the city's public health department, forbidding any visits to the property on hygienic grounds without even a pretence of a physical inspection<sup>279</sup>.

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<sup>276</sup> Kostůr, Jiří, *Satori v Praze*. Praha: Pragma 1993; cited in *Baráky*, p. 281.

<sup>277</sup> INFOCH, no. 3, 1980, p. 10

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

Ending the complete listing of the humiliating searches, interrogations, and inspections in the jointly signed letter to Charter 77 was the following bleak statement:

On 30 December in the afternoon, the building was surrounded by around 20 uniformed and plain-clothes police. The police patrols remained guarding the object continually until the final hours of the year 1979. At that time, there remained inside the house only two adults, one dog, two cats, ten hens and an uncertain number of fish. The police visits continued in the new year of 1980, when we had only a few weeks left of our shared life in the house.<sup>280</sup>

Before we turn to the situation after the destruction of *Nová Víska*, one final consideration from *Vokno*'s early years is the matter – regularly stressed by Stárek in his interviews and written recollections – of the magazine's international contacts. The standard description, followed as well by Růžková, is that *Vokno* had links to three other samizdat (or at least oppositional) magazines elsewhere in the Warsaw Pact. The caveat of 'oppositional' is worth noting, because one of the listed periodicals, the Hungarian youth magazine *Mozgó Világ*, was officially allowed for publication from 1971 to 1983<sup>281</sup>. *Vokno*'s connection to *Mozgó Világ* is ascribed to the Bratislava underground personality Gabriel Levický, born into a Hungarian-speaking family<sup>282</sup>. Here, the personal connection was evidently through Levický's introduction to Jiří Němec in 1977 in a location of Czech-Slovak dissent mentioned above: Brízgalky, a settlement of wooden cabins high up in the Kysuce mountains in western Slovakia close to the Polish border, once the summertime residence of shepherds but then used as a meeting place for Slovak and Czech dissidents (Andrej Stankovič, Olga and Václav Havel) as well as musicians primarily from the folk scene (e.g. Vladimír Merta, who

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>281</sup> For more on the history – and the highly ambiguous political status – of *Mozgó világ*, as well as its place within the Hungarian media landscape between official and samizdat publication see Bozóki, András: "The Hungarian Democratic Opposition: Self-reflection, Identity, and Political Discourse". Unpublished draft paper accessible at [politicalscience.ceu.hu/files/attachment/basicpage/50/07-bozoki101.pdf](http://politicalscience.ceu.hu/files/attachment/basicpage/50/07-bozoki101.pdf), esp. p. 34-35, or Nóvé, Béla: "Talking about Censorship and the Lost World of Samizdat". In: *Kultūros barai*, no. 9, 2010; English version accessible at: <https://www.eurozine.com/talking-about-censorship-and-the-lost-world-of-samizdat/>. For its bibliography, note: <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n93661>.

<sup>282</sup> Levický's parents were both Jewish and concentration-camp survivors; according to one interview, his father, a Communist Party member, acted as director of the cultural centre in Humenné. See: <https://ncsml.omeka.net/items/show/4050>.

dedicated a song to the place)<sup>283</sup>. Nonetheless, since Levický emigrated in the spring of 1979, hitchhiking through Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia to Italy and eventually the USA, and *Vokno*'s further connections with the Bratislava underground remained sporadic, the Hungarian component to *Vokno* can be regarded as relatively minimal.

Poland, though, was a different matter: not only for the significantly reduced language barrier but even more so for the density of dissident ties between Charta 77 and their northerly counterparts. In this connection, one significant individual actor deserves at least brief mention for his cross-border efforts: Tomáš Petřivý, a Bratislava-born student expelled from the Prague Film Academy (FAMU), who holds perhaps the greatest credit but died tragically young in 1986, possibly by his own hand, though rumours of official involvement are occasionally voiced<sup>284</sup>. In 1980, Stárek used the “exit validation”<sup>285</sup> he had received, as part of the ‘Asanace’ efforts to force dissidents and other problematic individuals into exile, not to leave for the West, but instead to travel to Poland. Compared to Czechoslovakia, where mimeograph copying represented the greatest technical advance over the circulation of carbon-copy typescripts, the unofficial press in Poland was an entirely different matter in all aspects.<sup>286</sup> Not only did Polish samizdat surpass its southerly counterpart in range and extent, technology, intellectual diversity: it indeed is better described by the Polish term ‘*drugi obieg*’, literally ‘second circulation’ as an industrial-scaled – and monetarised – undertaking.

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<sup>283</sup> The source for this information is an interview with Andrej Stankovič from 1990: <http://lege.cz/kytlice/nikolaj.htm>.

<sup>284</sup> Viz. Blažek, Petr: *Dějiny Polsko–československé solidarity. Vztahy československé a polské opozice v letech 1976–1989*. PhD dissertation, Praha: Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 2008, p. 59 and 66.

<sup>285</sup> The validation - *výjezdní doložka* – consisted of an extra stamp in the passport, allowing the bearer to exit Czechoslovakia. Even with a valid passport, exiting the CSSR was impossible without the secondary validation. Though regarded as a “Communist” legal measure, it was first imposed in the Second Czechoslovak Republic after the Nazi seizure of the Sudetenland as Government Directive 208/1938. Ostensibly, it was designed to prevent young men of military age from evading possible service through emigration, yet its main effect was to leave many Jewish would-be refugees without hope of escape.

<sup>286</sup> Among the most recent works on the topic of Polish samizdat, note Doucette, Siobhan: *Books Are Weapons. The Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

In the words of American historian Siobhan Doucette, it was the presence of mimeograph machines in Poland that significantly altered the dynamics of samizdat production:

two groups of young people, unrelated to each other and to the founders of KOR, who in 1976 smuggled mimeograph machines into Poland. In so doing, these individuals implicitly rejected the samizdat printing mechanisms employed in neighboring countries, which required that each recipient of a text retype it and pass it on. [...] Polish publishers could produce longer texts with higher print runs and thus reach people across geographic and social divides; already in 1977 Polish independent publications were made specifically for workers and farmers. [...] The use of printing machines is why in Poland, the publishing movement is referred to as a “second circulation” (*drugi obieg*) or “independent press” rather than “samizdat.”<sup>287</sup>

Another separating factor, of course, for unofficial circulation of printed matter within state-socialist Poland was the similarly far deeper reservoir of Polish-language tamizdat to draw upon from the worldwide Polish diaspora<sup>288</sup>. Yet the implementation of an industrial format over the typewritten ‘craft’ of the best-known instances of Czech samizdat – a feature, it should be noted, paralleling the efforts of *Vokno* itself – is of particular significance even beyond the sheer volume, regarding the social ramifications of samizdat as a mass phenomenon. The nationwide, mass-movement scale of Solidarity and the deliberate aim among its leaders to overcome the worker-intellectual divide that had been exploited by the regime at the decade’s start<sup>289</sup> had another effect: ensuring access to still more effective machinery (printing presses etc.) through pro-Solidarity printing workers. Even, as we shall see, *Vokno* and other Czech samizdat periodicals eventually made similar personal contacts to use official printing equipment, it was hardly common practice<sup>290</sup>.

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 5-6.

<sup>288</sup> For more on Polish tamizdat or cross-border publication, note Arndt, Agnes: ‘Renaissance or Reconstruction? Intellectual Transfer of Civil Society Discourses between Western and Eastern Europe’. In: Kind-Kovács, Frederike - Labov, Jessie (eds.): *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013, specifically p. 166-168.

<sup>289</sup> I am relying in this characterisation primarily on the interpretation of Timothy Garton Ash: while the campaigns by civic-minded intellectuals in 1968 against official anti-Semitism and Polish participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia were largely ignored by the general public, the industrial strikes and their violent police response in 1970 received the same treatment from the intelligentsia. Solidarity, as a movement involving both working-class trade unionists and critical intellectuals, consciously strove to overcome the division towards the common end. Viz.: Ash, Timothy Garton: *Solidarity. The Polish Revolution*. Yale University Press: New Haven 2002 (third edition, originally 1983), specifically chapter 2, ‘A New Social Contract?’, as well as the postscript, specifically pp. 364-366.

<sup>290</sup> Catholic samizdat in Slovakia is a different story, much closer to the Polish case. Note e.g.: Šimulčík, Ján: *Svetlo z podzemia*. Prešov: VMV, 1997.



Display of linocut matrices and tamizdat smuggling cans, Muzeum Solidarności, Gdańsk. Photo by author.

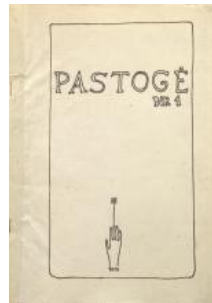
Secondly, even permitted Polish cultural production had considerably greater scope for aesthetic or semiotic divergence, even a sense of echoing Western countercultural attitudes, without this difference automatically leading to politicised dissent. Generalising widely, Polish state-managed culture had by 1980 experienced a decade of relative liberalisation parallel to the 1960s in Czechoslovakia, yet with radically different Western influences being integrated (harmonised, indeed rendered harmless)<sup>291</sup>. Unauthorised rock performances and active ‘hippie’ lifestyles could certainly invite persecution, yet rock music and hippie fashion as aesthetic touches devoid (or perhaps ‘emptied’) of oppositional semiotics far more easily found a place in the mainstream of the entertainment and garment industries respectively. As such, what truly constituted an “underground” in Solidarity-era Poland was itself a far different matter, let alone its samizdat production and circulation.

Nonetheless, Stárek established contact with two unofficial publications in Warsaw: the Polish periodical *Puls* and a short-lived Lithuanian project, *Pastogė* (Shelter). By way of concluding our discussion of the first stage of samizdat Vokno, it might be worthwhile to look at these two publications for comparison. *Pastogė* has been described as “close to the

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<sup>291</sup> For more on the ‘system-stabilising’ character of Poland’s relative openness to Western aesthetic forms in the post-Stalinist period, see Pelka, Anna: ‘Youth Fashion in Poland in the 1950s and 1960s: Ideology, Resistance, and Manipulation’. In: Fahlenbrach, Kathrin- Klimke, Martin – Scharloth, Joachim – Wong, Laura (eds.): *The Establishment Responds. Power, Politics, and Protest since 1945*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, pp. 197-210.

underground in its orientation toward alternative culture”<sup>292</sup>, yet this interpretation, like Stárek’s “classical underground, like the Czech one”<sup>293</sup>, may not be entirely accurate. Possibly his Polish informants may have not known much about the publication itself, and Stárek was never able to obtain a visa to the USSR to meet its publishers in person.



Cover of first issue of *Pastogė*. Source: Urbanavičiutė 2015.

Judging from the description by the Lithuanian scholar Asta Urbanavičiutė<sup>294</sup>, *Pastogė* most closely resembled *Vokno* in its credo of print-liberty and utter independence from official culture:

It should be mentioned that this magazine, although representing humanitarian intellectual publications, did not seek high level of literary texts. *Pastogė*'s (...) publishers declare that they have nothing to counter the official culture, “save for a moral position”; and that is why they completely distance themselves from it, i.e. “have nothing to do” with it. In this publication they gave priority to “texts standing out not only in terms of their artistic maturity or ideological maturity” but also those which have the most important feature – they must be independent and of unconstrained thought.<sup>295</sup>

From her description, though, the periodical assumed a far more openly nationalistic stance than could even be imagined in the Czech underground, in its defence of the Lithuanian language and the history of Lithuania’s brief period of national independence, including a section commemorating anti-Soviet partisan Mindaugas Tominas<sup>296</sup>. Translated material was

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<sup>292</sup> Růžková, *ibid.*, p. 45. According to her findings, the periodical was already known to Stárek and others through reports from the US broadcasters Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, having been mentioned by the Russian-language dissident bulletin *Khronika tekushchich sobytii* as the main source of information on dissident activity in the USSR. Viz. the online site for *Khronika*: <http://old.memo.ru/history/diss/chr/index.htm>.

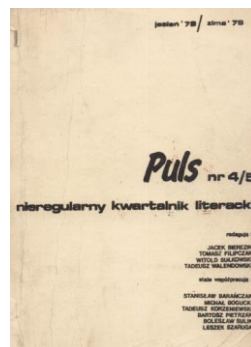
<sup>293</sup> E.g., the discussion between the editors of *Vokno* and *Revolver Revue* – viz. Geisler, *ibid.*, p. 34, or “Beseda s Voknem a Revolver Revue, Strahov, 7. 4. 1992”, transcribed and accessible at [vokno.cunas.cz](http://vokno.cunas.cz).

<sup>294</sup> Urbanavičiutė, Asta: “Self-Publishing of Lithuanian Cultural Periodicals in Soviet and Contemporary Times”. In: *Libellarium: journal for the research of writing, books, and cultural heritage institutions*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>295</sup> Urbanavičiutė, *ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> Urbanavičiutė, *ibid.*, p. 63

rare, beyond three texts by the Franco-Lithuanian author Oskar Miłosz<sup>297</sup>, without any echo of the pronounced Anglo-American orientation of *Vokno* – and even more strikingly, no discussion whatsoever of rock music. Perhaps the main point of connection was its declared stance of demotic openness to the unaffiliated young and indeed others, “open to all people who are young not only in terms of their age but also to all those who are concerned with our issues”.<sup>298</sup>



First issue of *Puls* Source: Orman-Lebioda 2017.

If the connection to *Pastogę* emerged largely through association via external similarities, the connection to *Puls*, in turn, reveals an interesting – and often overlooked – aspect of *Vokno*'s connection to Chartist dissent, as well as an instance of Czech-Polish dissident ties that has largely escaped notice even in the most serious discussions<sup>299</sup>. *Puls* was an unofficial literary journal launched by a group of aspiring authors associated with the University of Łódź, with the greater organisational roles assumed by Jacek Bierezin and Witold Sułkowski. These writers were also activists in the main organisation of intellectual dissent in Poland in the 1970s, not merely prefiguring but participating directly in the formation of Solidarity at the decade's end: the 'Workers' Defence Committee' (Komitet Obrony Robotników – KOR)<sup>300</sup>.

<sup>297</sup> A distant relative of the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>299</sup> The most exhaustive scholarly treatment of Charta-KOR relations to date, the dissertation work of Petr Blažek, makes no mention of Stárek's meeting with the editors of *Puls*. See Blažek 2008.

<sup>300</sup> For a historical overview of the group shortly after its founding, note Lipski, Jan Józef: *KOR : A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. Additionally note Garton Ash, *ibid.*

KOR and Charta 77 had been in contact – essentially through Petřivý – since the famous meeting between Havel and prominent Polish dissidents (Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Antoni Macierewicz)<sup>301</sup> in the summer of 1978 atop Sněžka, along the Czechoslovak-Polish Friendship Trail, as described previously. As for *Puls* itself, thanks to the much larger Polish diaspora-exile sphere and the somewhat more relaxed travel regime, it occupied a strange position between samizdat, tamizdat and exile publication: several ‘original’ copies with illustrations, around 500 mimeographed copies circulated within Poland – and approximately 10,000 offset-printed issues (in smaller format) reproduced in London and distributed piecemeal both back in Poland and internationally<sup>302</sup>. Twelve issues were produced in this manner up until the 1981 crackdown, including – with particular significance for *Vokno* and its own origins - the first Polish publication of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”, translated by Piotr Bikont<sup>303</sup>.

After this date, though, the greater part of the original collective dispersed into exile. And the diverging life-trajectories set in motion by the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century process, to cite Pavel Tigrid’s well-known characterisation, of ‘political emigration in the atomic age’<sup>304</sup> reveal much about the strength of social ties within oppositional subcultures and the devastating force their breakage could have, even in the apparently more favourable conditions of open societies. In certain cases, the experience of forced disassociation from an oppositional community could – as previously noted e.g. for Jiří Němec – have had a tragic effect: e.g. Jacek Bierezin’s exile years in Paris and eventual (presumed) suicide in 1993.<sup>305</sup> For an illustration of the opposing personal trajectory, there is the case of one significant contributor to *Puls* as essayist and poet, Stanisław Barańczak: granted a professorship at Harvard and for

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<sup>301</sup> Blažek 2008, *ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> Viz. Stárek 2008, p. 5.

<sup>303</sup> Viz. e.g. <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/miasto/niebezpieczne-zwiazki-literatury-z-lodzia/>

<sup>304</sup> Tigrid, Pavel: *Politická emigrace v atomovém věku*. Köln: Index 1974 / Praha: Prostor 1990.

<sup>305</sup> Viz. Orman-Lebioda, Kamila: *Jacek Bierezin - biografia łódzkiego opozycjonisty i poety (1947-1993)*. PhD dissertation, Faculty of Arts, University of Łódź, Łódź 2017.



the next two decades contributing essays and reviews on Central European topics to the prominent US political weekly *The New Republic*<sup>306</sup>.

As compelling an image as this dichotomy presents, though, it is not the only story for the significantly more mixed and ambivalent record of exile and dispersion in the Cold War years. Between tragedy and renown lay many different fates, many different personal responses and many different contingencies from good networking skills to blind luck: generalisation from specific instances is reductive, while a full explanation of the complex vicissitudes of political exile/emigration is a topic all to itself. Yet as a common motif for dissent in the Warsaw Pact at this moment, forced emigration forms the central focus of the following chapter and itself significantly altered both *Vokno* as a periodical and the wider provincial-underground social milieu that it represented and embodied.

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<sup>306</sup> For a sampling of his writings in this periodical and elsewhere, note Barańczak, Stanisław: *Breathing under Water and Other East European Essays*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1990.

## Chapter 3.

### *Vokno* after ‘Clearance’: The *Vokno* Trial, Prison and the Eighties

*Second Inspector*: Sometimes it’s necessary, people, to bite into a sour apple. And sometimes it’s even necessary, in the interest of human health, to take a scalpel and cut away a person’s ulcer. For a minute it hurts, but then the entire body feels relief...

[...]

*Albert*: I want out! All this makes me want to puke!

- Václav Havel, *Redevelopment, or Slum Clearance*

One regularly repeated motif in the memories of *Vokno*’s participants is the mention of ‘Asanace’. By this, they do not mean the standard use of the term in urban planning, i.e. blanket clearance of allegedly defective earlier construction, which entered the wider public awareness as far back as the demolition of the ancient Jewish Ghetto in Prague at the turn of the previous century. Nor do they mean the 1987 play by Václav Havel bearing this title, which treats the planned destruction of a medieval town centre and its replacement by prefabricated apartment blocks<sup>307</sup>. ‘Asanace’ was the plan created by the political police, the State Security (StB), at the urging of the then interior minister, Jaromír Obzina, at the end of 1977 to “achieve the complete dispersion and isolation of the main organisers of Charta 77 from the other signatories and for indicated organisers to achieve their emigration from the CSSR”<sup>308</sup>. The campaign involved repeated summoning for interrogations, termination of employment, anonymous letters and other forms of psychological pressure, and in several cases direct physical assaults (Zbyněk Benýšek<sup>309</sup>, Zina Freundová<sup>310</sup>). No less important than driving key Charta 77 organisers and activists into exile was the StB’s success in using this

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<sup>307</sup> Viz. Havel, Václav: *Redevelopment – or Slum Clearance*, tr. James Saunders and Marie Winn. London: Faber & Faber 1990.

<sup>308</sup> In the wording of Ministerial Directive no. 32/1977, cited in Koutek, Ondřej: ‘Akce Asanace’. In: *Securitas imperii*, no. 13, 2006, p. 173.

<sup>309</sup> Note e.g. Gregor, Pavel: “Vyšetřování akce Asanace“. In: *Securitas imperii*, no. 13, 2006.

<sup>310</sup> For this case, as well as many others, see Lefeuvre, Ivanka. *Migrace 1982. Deníkové záznamy signatářky Charty 77 vystěhované v rámci akce „Asanace“ z Československa*. Praha: Academia 2014.

order against the underground, finding that the emigration of key personalities led to the “gradual decomposition of the grouping of this section of the youth, the deepening of mutual disputes in this setting and a gradual loss of interest in the underground”<sup>311</sup>.

Expropriation of the Nová Víska house dispersed the community locally; ‘Asanace’ scattered it on a global scale, sending the greater part of its one-time members or associates into the world of Europe’s Cold War political diasporas<sup>312</sup>. Vokno’s first photographer, Jan ‘Íč’ Hryc, was apparently the first to leave Czechoslovakia, thanks to relatives in the USA, followed by ‘Skalák’ Skalický and ‘Kocour’ Havelka, both to Austria<sup>313</sup>. The exile milieus and enclaves of each Warsaw Pact nation formed a social phenomenon of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that, at our current chronological remove, appears increasingly strange and, perhaps more significantly, still largely unintegrated into national narratives and memories<sup>314</sup>. Without digressing too much from the immediate topic, i.e. samizdat and alternative culture as social action within state-socialist rule, it is nonetheless necessary to keep in mind the overlap between domestic opposition and the émigré/exile circles<sup>315</sup>. For the current purpose, though, the central factor of ‘Asanace’ related to *Vokno* in the short run was the result discussed in specific detail below: the loss of several leading personalities from its immediate countercultural base in North and West Bohemia, and the effect that the absence of leadership-figures (in part if not entirely) had on the dynamics of the periodical’s creation and realisation.

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<sup>311</sup> Koutek 2006, *ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> Scholarship on post-1968 Czech exile is notably infrequent, compared to its earlier period. Note e.g. Lukes, Igor: ‘Czechoslovak Political Exile in the Cold War: The Early Years’ in: *The Polish Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2002, pp. 332-343.

<sup>313</sup> Stárek-Kostúr 2010, p. 263.

<sup>314</sup> Zdeněk Nešpor has discussed the reception of returning exiles in the immediate post-1989 decades in: Nešpor, Zdeněk R. *Reemigranti a sociálně sdílené hodnoty*. Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR 2002, also note by the same author: Most, nebo propast? In: *Přítomnost*, no. 4, 2003, p. 10-11, or several of the subsequent essays in the same issue.

<sup>315</sup> As well as their common pressure from the political police. See e.g.: Schovánek, Radek: Aktivní opatření komunistické rozvědky proti exilu. In: Blažek, Petr (ed.): *Opozice a odpor proti komunistickému režimu v Československu 1968–1969*. Praha: Dokořán 2005.

Secondly, it appears that the wider readership network of *Vokno*, where greater anonymity or greater social anchoring within the broader social fabric meant less immediate visibility to the organs of power, remained far less damaged by ‘Asanace’ than the central productive core, whether in its intellectual or physical creation (manufacturing). As a targeted policing program, ‘Asanace’ focused on the most active underground personalities over more widespread harassment of the greater mass, even to the extent of including instructions for the StB to “take thorough care” to avoid provoking large-scale flight or brain drain<sup>316</sup>. And yet neither the clear inability of the police to “disintegrate” (in their terminology) the entire underground<sup>317</sup>, nor the hindsight of historical knowledge after 1989, with the awareness that the system had less than a decade ahead of it, should obscure the recollections of the pervasive mood in the underground (and indeed Czech dissent as a whole) at the start of the 1980s. Those members of the central *Vokno* collective who insisted on their decision not to emigrate, whether leading organisers like Jirous and Stárek or the no less vital production assistants like Stárková, Lupertová, or Chnápko, recall the start of the decade as a particularly depressing time, most frequently citing the loss of the wider friendship circle and a pervasive sense of isolation among the conformist mainstream<sup>318</sup>.

Issue 4 of *Vokno*, the first one produced outside of *Nová Víska*, was typed and printed in the house of a friend of Stárek’s in the village of Lom u Mostu, at the edge of the Most-Litvínov conurbation. Increasingly conspiratorial conditions, in short, meant that few questions were asked and few details remembered. Nonetheless, Stárek noted in the issue’s

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<sup>316</sup> Koutek 2006, *ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> The StB jargon repeatedly employed such terms and phrases as ‘*rozložit*’ [literally ‘cause to disintegrate’] or ‘*rozkladná opatření*’ [disintegrative measures]. Practically speaking, ‘disintegration’ of unfavoured youth collectives (most frequently, unapproved rock bands) implied threatening their members over school or employment, forcing some participants into collaboration, etc. *Viz.* specifically Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 107, footnote 238.

<sup>318</sup> *Viz.* the interview with Sylva Chnápková, Jaroslav Chnápko, Osvračín, 2017.

foreword, “Now *Vokno* issue four! We couldn’t have dreamed of this at the beginning” and addressed the community of readers directly:

Leaving aside pseudo-comments like ‘I can’t read the purple’ or ‘don’t wrap it in plastic, I can’t stand that’, we should try to react to the objections about the possibilities of submitting contributions to the editors. Again, we repeat, the way the magazine reached you is the way back to us (everyone of course knows someone who could pass it on)<sup>319</sup>.

Still, the contents of the issue reveal less input from the purported readership than the clear curatorial hand of Jirous: Czech independent popular music (an earlier text by Jirous himself about *Nová Víska* concerts, a long section on folksinger Karel ‘Charlie’ Soukup) alongside a section on conceptual and performance art with essays by Milan Knižák and Jindřich Chalupecký<sup>320</sup> or a piece by Egon Bondy on Islamic mysticism.

One further issue of *Vokno* was completed in 1981, still under equally conspiratorial conditions in a weekend cottage<sup>321</sup> in the recreational zone of Komáří Vízka in the mountains near Teplice. Again, it combined a focus on domestic rock (the Plastic People and DG 307 were still prominent) with attention to American experimental arts, in this case film: essays by Gene Youngblood and Ed Emswiler on the ‘New American Cinema’, specifically Stan Brakhage, Jack Smith and Andy Warhol. Many pages were also devoted to a commemoration of John Lennon to mark the first anniversary of his 1980 murder, along with translations of his song lyrics. Issue 5, perhaps more than the previous numbers, formed a strange cultural ‘centaur’ between the original aim of a samizdat ‘thick journal’ in the traditional sense (exemplified by *Spektrum*) and the new form – emerging precisely at this time within the punk scene – of the music fanzine. While the relationship between fanzines and samizdat will form a central trajectory of analysis in the subsequent chapter, for understanding the Czech

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<sup>319</sup> *Vokno*, no. 4, 1981xx, p. 2.

<sup>320</sup> The latter is republished (retyped) from the original publication in *Sešity* no. 33.

<sup>321</sup> Švehla refers to the location as a ‘tramping cottage’ (Švehla, *ibid.*, p. 422). The relationship between the provincial underground and the Czech ‘tramping’ subculture remained notably reserved, as will be discussed subsequently; I cannot say with certainty if the production of *Vokno* no. 5 implied cooperation between the two social formations.

oppositional sphere after Charta 77 this strange juxtaposition – or perhaps more accurately proximity – is if anything more revealing, and certainly more analytically rich. One possible comparison could be drawn to its contemporary parallel in political history, i.e. Charta 77 itself and the oft-remarked close cooperation between critical Marxists and Christian dissidents, even including Catholic conservatives, within the organisation<sup>322</sup>. Or in cultural history to the strong enthusiasm of a previous Czech creative generation, the modernists of the 1920s, for their own era’s American musical innovation, jazz<sup>323</sup>. And a third common factor is the clear attraction of specifically Anglo-American alternative culture as a strong centripetal force across the globe – not merely along the Cold War east-west divide – in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even aside from any immediately national specifics of the particularly noteworthy Czech receptivity towards it. Moreover, as will be discussed in greater detail subsequently, a similar eclectic yearning for “the West” as a whole assumed mass proportions within the same decade, as an aesthetic refusal of the immediate everyday without necessarily assuming concrete political action as conventionally understood.

To assume that proximity of disparate influences necessarily implied their forced grouping together under external pressure from the Party-State and its agents of legal repression is, with these questions in mind, something of an overstatement. Even less accurate would be to diminish the importance of Vokno’s efforts towards creating a paper-based public sphere where disparate standpoints, ideas, or tastes could encounter one another, regardless of the extent to which this aim was achieved. Vokno was never merely a catch-all container for “anything Western”, and to equate the often-eclectic mixtures of its written contents with the far more publicly widespread fetishization of any object from the other side of the Iron

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<sup>322</sup> A parallel is worth drawing here between the experience of Czech and Polish dissent during roughly the same period: viz. Michnik, Adam: *Kościół, lewica, dialog*. Paris: Institut Literacki 1977; tr. with introduction by Ost, David as *The Church and the Left*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993.

<sup>323</sup> Note in this respect e.g. the memoir of poet Jaroslav Seifert, *Všechy krásy světa*.

Curtain is not merely unjust, but worse - incorrect. Nonetheless, Vokno after the dissolution of Nová Víska found itself – paradoxically in the very moment of the physical-spatial scattering of its participants – increasingly consigned to a smaller and more compact circle, in proportion as the necessary degree of commitment increased under external pressure. Life outside of the shared refuge became either a life of isolation<sup>324</sup> or an increased motivation for closer ties to the oppositional centre in Prague (e.g. Stárek’s case particularly in the later years of the decade). An enforced proximity, in other words, found itself reinforced as normalisation entered its second decade, with the underground left not only smaller but also more isolated than had been the case in the previous decade.

The reasons for the underground’s increased ghettoization, the condition of the “merry ghetto” in Egon Bondy’s oft-cited phrase, were themselves notably complex. One key aspect often overlooked was the lifecycle stage of the participants already approaching the age of thirty. Another possibility is the likely success of the regime in exploiting semiotic or behaviour antipathies among older or more aesthetically unadventurous sections of the wider public, which we could term after the British sociologist Jock Young ‘folk-devil legitimization’<sup>325</sup>. However, measuring its width and depth retrospectively, between three and four decades later, matches less well with empirical and verifiable findings. Conversely, we have undeniable evidence, given the vast amount of archival documentation on this topic, that the state authorities, specifically the StB, worked deliberately to hinder underground activity, and equally regarded specifically the cultural formation of independent (unauthorized) rock music as the central source of “ideological diversion” among the young. As Kudrna and Stárek impressively document in their previously cited survey *Kapela. Pozadí akce, která stvořila Chartu 77*, the ‘Division for the Struggle with the Internal Enemy’ and the

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<sup>324</sup> Viz. interview with Sylva and Jaroslav Chnápko, *ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> Young, Jock: *The Role of Police as Amplifiers of Deviancy, Negotiators of Reality and Translators of Fantasy*. In: Cohen, Stanley (ed.) *Images of Deviance*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971, also note Cohen, Stanley: *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Invention of the Mods and Rockers*. London: MacGibbon and Kee 1972.

subordinate organs of the criminal police (SNB) both regarded the young as a vulnerable class for ‘ideological diversion’, and had focused on unorganised youth specifically since the early 1970s.

During the action ‘Hurricane’ (1976), the StB in cooperation with the regular police (VB) and social organisations intended to map tramping colonies and their populace, including making sure that there was no ‘negative’ influence on the young. In action ‘Lily’ (1976) the focus of attention was those who had earlier been active in the illegal Scouts. At the start of the 1980s, a nationwide action was launched against punk and New Wave music, with the significant title ‘Garbage’. [...] Action ‘Spider’ monitored Jewish citizens, while in actions ‘Prevention’ and ‘Isolation’, primarily (but not only) Charter 77 signers were persecuted.<sup>326</sup>

And of course, alongside ‘Akce Kapela’ itself, there were special surveillance projects for individuals – Stárek, for one, was the subject of one titled ‘Satan’, in addition to his individual secret-police surveillance file. Beyond the individual ‘actions’ and the personal files, however, lies the wider organised plan for the treatment of ‘free youth’ (*volná mládež*). Kudrna et al. date the state campaign against ‘ideological diversion’ among the young, particularly secondary-school pupils and apprentices, from the end of 1974, when the head of the recently founded Division X, Colonel Vladimír Stárek (no relation to ‘Čuňas’ Stárek), issued a series of guidelines “for preparing annual accompanying plans in the problem of the struggle against the internal enemy.”<sup>327</sup>

As the authors reveal (though without explicit elaboration of the point), the political rhetoric of diversion and “harmful” [*závadný*] ideology was, particularly by the 1970s, aligned less with the militarized discourse of Stalinism than with the jargon of modern criminology. And it was not only through the duration of ‘Akce Kapela’, or even post-1970s normalisation itself, that the internal documentation stressed “preventive-educational” [*preventivně-výchovné*] and “prophylactic-disintegrative” [*profylakticko-rozkladné*] methods to reduce the ideological harm of non-conformity.<sup>328</sup> As historian Prokop Tomek relates, it

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<sup>326</sup> Kudrna – Stárek, *ibid.*, p. 91, footnote 192.

<sup>327</sup> “*Pokyny pro zpracování ročních prováděcích plánů v problematice boje proti vnitřnímu nepříteli*”. Viz. Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 86-87.

<sup>328</sup> Viz. the plans and plan-evaluations of both local and regional StB administrations discussed in Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 96 and following.



reaches back to the immediate post-Stalinist period; within Czechoslovakia specifically to 1960.<sup>329</sup> In its language, the “preventive” approach to political criminology often seemed to echo the administrative state rather than what is usually associated with the totalitarian practices of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, e.g.:

Prophylactic and dispersive work is work with people. It is living, multifarious, diverse and variegated, its forms are changing. It cannot be forced into patterns and recipes that lead to dogmatism and could cause more harm than utility<sup>330</sup>.

Individual instances of physical brutality – a phenomenon not unknown among the police in democratic regimes as well – were matched by a notably more subtle psychological strategy of isolating leaders and cultivating informers from within. For all the calcified jargon of the reports, their strategic aims lay less in large-scale suppression than in using the “internal enemy’s” weaknesses and spreading division – in other words, dissolving a sense of shared sociability and solidarity through planned unevenness and inconsistency, though shrouded in a rhetoric of concern for the unfortunately influenced yet ‘morally healthy’ young assumed to form the numerical majority.

No less complex is the mapping of the various Tenth Division ‘actions’ implemented to de-organise the Czech opposition. We have mentioned ‘Asanace’ and ‘Kapela’, yet nearly every influential Charta 77 signer received a personal ‘action’ (in practical terms, campaign of surveillance and harassment), while each opposition collective, as defined by the StB, was assigned a separate action, often with several overlapping. For historians, the task is complicated still further by the extensive destruction of files at the end of 1989, including several actions that immediately impinged upon Vokno but are known largely from their titles in the section registry. First had been the 1976-1979 operation “Akce Podzemí” organised by the Plzeň branch of the StB against Stárek, Havelka and Skalický after their trial in the

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<sup>329</sup> Tomek, Prokop: “Prevence, profylaxe a výchova v pojetí Státní bezpečnosti”. In: *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek* no. 5, 2007, pp. 155-181.

<sup>330</sup> Cited from: “Metodická pomůcka k provádění profylaxe ve státobezpečnostní práci, č. j.: Sv-0017/02-1960” in Tomek, *ibid.*, p. 158.

Přeštice case<sup>331</sup>, where part of the documentation survived; it was followed by ‘Akce Sabat’, a project of the regional StB in Ústí nad Labem, focusing on splitting the North Bohemian underground from Charta 77<sup>332</sup> and on discrediting the regional underground through association with drug use<sup>333</sup>. Now, i.e. by the end of 1981, the StB brought even greater force to bear against the underground with the “nationwide preventive educational and security action Satan’, where the primary target was Stárek himself, as the most prominent North Bohemian underground figure, and other “issuers of printed material of the underground movement”<sup>334</sup>.

The arrests and the criminal trial of several Vokno participants, as an outcome of the criminalizing of cultural divergence into political dissent, had a significant impact not only on the history of its production as a periodical – involving the seizure and loss (likely destruction) of the manuscripts in preparation for issue no. 6, but no less for its role as a form of social action. ‘Akce Satan’, which in the words of its official evaluation planned “the paralysing of enemy activities of leading organisers from the ranks of hippies, underground and signers of CH-77 in the North Bohemia region and Czechoslovakia”<sup>335</sup> used the sinisterly neutral phrase “realisation of the object of the action” for the arrest of Stárek and four other associates: Ivan Jirous, photographer and filmmaker Michal Hýbek, worker and occasional poet Milan Frič and former Nová Víska member Jaroslav Chnápko on 10 November 1981.

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<sup>331</sup> The documentation from this partially preserved file was published in edited form in the 2012 printing of *Hnědá kniha o procesech s undergroundem*, op. cit. p. 299-327 – “though without explanation of the context and relieved of StB newspeak”; viz. equally Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 150-153.

<sup>332</sup> Viz. Kudrna, Ladislav: “Český underground 1976-1981”, presented at the conference “Underground a Československo v letech 1976-1981”, Václav Havel Library, Prague, 17 October 2019.

<sup>333</sup> Brožová, Markéta: Případ Marihuana – proces s tzv. volnou mládeží v Ústí nad Labem. Skupina Švestka a spol. In: *Ústecký sborník historický* 1 - 2, Ústí nad Labem 2013, p. 109 – 139.

<sup>334</sup> Kudrna-Stárek, p. 170.

<sup>335</sup> The wording of the report “Vyhodnocení prováděcího plánu na rok 1982 Státní bezpečnosti Ústí nad Labem z 1. listopadu 1982”, cited in Denčeva, Ivana: *Underground jako politický fenomén*. MA thesis, Department of Central European Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, 2013, p. 118.

Across North and East Bohemia, as well as in Prague, over 30 house-searches were conducted and 188 people were subjected to police cross-examination<sup>336</sup>.

Stárek, still employed with the state surveying company Geofyzika, was arrested in temporary quarters in the Central Bohemian village of Nové Slivno; allegedly, the local policeman who performed the address was an acquaintance who had occasionally borrowed tapes of underground rock bands<sup>337</sup>. Jirous, in turn, was in his farmhouse in Nová Říše in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, with his second wife Juliana and their two daughters. The other defendants, though, were at best marginal participants: Hýbek, then completing his studies in organic chemistry at Charles University, had contributed one article, several photographs and a collage commemorating John Lennon<sup>338</sup>, though his looser ties to the underground often meant that he was regarded as a safer caretaker for sensitive materials, manuscripts and the like<sup>339</sup>. Frič, in turn, had merely submitted several poems for publication and had almost nothing to do with either editorial or production work. (Chnápko was never brought to trial.) In addition to the main charge of “disrupting the peace” or “hooliganism” (*vytržnictví*) per the favoured paragraph for political dissent, no. 202 of the criminal code, the StB decided to add a further crime to ensure greater public opprobrium. One of the arresting officers, Václav Ducháč, often described in post-1989 scholarship as the police ‘specialist’ on the underground<sup>340</sup>, claimed to have found sacks of dried hemp, i.e. marijuana, in the residences of both Jirous (among various herbs being dried for tea) and Hýbek. From all accounts, this was an instance of deliberately planting evidence on suspects (and it was not the first time that StB agents did so – recall the famous incident with Jacques Derrida’s visit

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<sup>336</sup> Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 170.

<sup>337</sup> Denčeva, p. 119-120.

<sup>338</sup> Bernard, Jan: “Filmař disentu Michal Hýbek”, at: <https://www.dokrevue.cz/clanky/filmar-dizentu-michal-hybek>, excerpt from forthcoming publication from Nakladatelství AMU, 2020.

<sup>339</sup> Viz. his interview with Adam Drda: “Když člověk někoho udá, tak si to moc dobře pamatuje”, in *Revolver* 1999, no. 41, p. 300.

<sup>340</sup> Švehla, p. 431.

to Prague in December 1981), and clearly the StB had discreditation of the underground first on their agenda.

Strangely enough, the confiscated issue of *Vokno* contained an extensive series of articles on drug use. Various opiate and amphetamine derivatives from available prescription drugs had been prevalent particularly in urban areas and youthful milieus, such as the anti-asthma preparation sold under the trade name Yastyl (evidently preferred in prisons and among criminal subcultures); even more disturbingly, ever since the early 1970s the abuse of readily available industrial solvents (toluene, trichlorethylene – then sold as a cleaning fluid under the trade name Čikuli) had been increasing, particularly among young rock fans<sup>341</sup>. In part, this theme was chosen, per the testimony of the editors, in response to several solvent-sniffing deaths in North Bohemia, and indeed by the end of the 1980s, official statistics confirm over 20% of the criminal police registrations of drug abusers precisely in this region<sup>342</sup>.

Oddly, though, the actual trial of the *Vokno* editors was conducted in near-secret conditions, markedly contrasting to the blatant media campaign against the Plastic People only a few years previously. According to Stárek, the initial trial in Chomutov was deliberately held in a small courtroom, with the available public seating occupied by police in plain clothes and only two family members allowed per defendant, to prevent underground participants or sympathisers from possibly disrupting the proceedings<sup>343</sup> – or, perhaps more damagingly, taking notes to pass on to Prague dissidents and eventually the Western press, as Dana Němcová and others had done in the ‘Plastics Trial’. One other consequence, understandably, is that the historical record of the trial and the appeal is based on the

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<sup>341</sup> For drug use in socialist times, see specifically: Kolář, Jan: *Toxikomané v socialistickém Československu 1960 – 1990*. MA thesis, Department of Economic and Social History, Charles University, Prague 2009. Specific information on solvent abuse and youthful drug subcultures is found on p. 24-33.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>343</sup> *Viz.* his comment in Denčeva, p. 120.

recollections of the participants (predominantly Stárek), the wording of the verdict<sup>344</sup> and the StB report also cited above. Similar conditions also applied to the unsuccessful appeal at the regional court in Ústí nad Labem, citing the report in the samizdat bulletin Infoch:

*For the appeals hearing of defendants František Stárek and co., only the wife of Ivan Jirous, Juliana Jirousová, was allowed to enter since she had submitted the appeal against the verdict of first instance and was thus considered a participant. Neither the wife of František Stárek nor the mother of Michal Hýbek were allowed into the building, even for the reading of the verdict. We cannot think of any parallel to this incident in previous court practice.<sup>345</sup>*

Judging from the available evidence, the trial seems, as Denčeva notes, less a prosecution of the defendants than of the publication itself. The marijuana charges (with an additional firearms charge for Hýbek related to an inoperable air-rifle seized during his arrest) figured in the final verdict in brief mentions; the greater part of the court ruling consists of excerpts taken from the report of the prosecution's expert witness on the socially damaging nature of Vokno. This witness was Vitězslav Rzounek, originally a lecturer at the "Political University,"<sup>346</sup> but from 1972 until December 1989 the chair of the Department of Czech Language and Literature at the Charles University Faculty of Arts. Rzounek's service to the normalisation regime in the university setting has been amply documented in the compilation *Tato fakulta bude rudá!* [This Faculty Will Be Red!],<sup>347</sup> yet his testimony in the Vokno trial is equally revealing of his resolute and dogmatic adherence to the mental world of the Stalinist 1950s:

as a member of an organised group participated in the publishing of the illegal magazine VOKNO containing articles with anti-social and grossly offensive themes ...

In their work they expressed in various ways and to various degrees disagreement and refusal towards the cultural policy of our state, reviving the idealistic conception of the development of the world and society, propagating individualism and anarchistic tendencies. They propagate various decadent tendencies in culture, ironize progress, vulgarize social life and fight for a so-called culture "without beautification" and "officiality". The defendants, as supporters of this movement, are unwilling to follow common social norms. The sense of life

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<sup>344</sup> Court verdict: Verdict II 5T 176/82, District Court in Chomutov, 9 July 1982 (Rozsudek okresního soudu v Chomutově ze dne 9.7.1982, 5 T 176/82).

<sup>345</sup> Infoch, no. 9, 1982, p. 7, also note Denčeva, p. 122.

<sup>346</sup> *Vysoká škola politická ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa*, an institution operated by the Central Committee of the KSCĚ essentially to assign academic qualifications to high-ranking Party cadres; for its location on Prague's north-western edge known popularly as the "Sorbonne of Vokovice".

<sup>347</sup> Holý, Jiří - Volná, Katka: *Tato fakulta bude rudá! Katedra české literatury FFUK očima pamětníků a v dokumentech*. Praha: Akropolis 2010.

and freedom they find in various play connected to the use of alcohol, further including various psycho-games and refusal of social progress. They live isolated from the interests of socialist society and refuse to join in publicly beneficial activity.<sup>348</sup>

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The actual mission of this magazine was an attack against the socialist culture of the CSSR. In its contents are poems with vulgar expressions, as well as attacks with an anti-social theme, focusing primarily on the areas of culture and politics. The vast majority of the works printed in this magazine have no basic artistic value, revealing the immaturity of the authors as far as concerns the mastery of themes and formal questions. In more than one case, artistic ineptitude is masked by anti-social and directly anti-socialist attacks, provocations and insults. The dissemination of this magazine had a negative social influence particularly on the consciousness of the youth; the magazine propagated negative social tendencies, hopelessness and the cult of ugliness.

Nothing in Rzounek's entire pre-1989 career suggests that this denunciation was anything other than his sincere belief, nor did he ever respond to interview requests up until his death in 2001. Moreover, in his courtroom interchanges with Jirous, he often seemed out of his depth:

Rzounek's expert report was based on saying that we were all imitators. Jirous then launched into an art-historical dispute with this "expert" on literature and art, starting off with the question: "Who is Pavel Zajíček imitating?" And Rzounek looked over to the judge and asked: "Do I have to answer?"<sup>349</sup>

Yet all amusement aside, Rzounek was instrumental in providing the regime with its fig-leaf of 'de iure' justification for the issuing of unconditional prison sentences to the four defendants. Hýbek and Frič received 18 and 15 months respectively in minimum-security prisons, Stárek 2.5 years in a medium-security prison, and Jirous a full 3.5 years in maximum security – in this case, the former Carthusian monastery in Valdice near Jičín, known among criminals as 'Kartouzy' and widely feared for its cramped dank cells.



Valdice Prison, view of the prison workshop in the former monastery chapel. Photo: ÚSTR.

No less important for the preparation of the Vokno trial was the information that the StB had managed to collect from its informers. Here, the crucial personage was singer and

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<sup>348</sup> Court Verdict II 5T 176/82, *ibid.*

<sup>349</sup> In: "Žádná diktatura nepřezíje nástup IT technologie", interview with Michal Jareš, *Tvar*, no. 16, October 2008, p. 4.

accordionist František Horáček, or to use his artistic pseudonym, Jim Čert<sup>350</sup>. Since 1979, when he personally pledged his allegiance to the StB (the ‘binding act’ of the printed form along with a signed oath), he had used his undeniable talent, his wide popularity and indeed his “underground cultural capital”<sup>351</sup> to provide information from the wider circles of ‘harmful youth’ and the central focal points of the underground (and later even Charta 77 dissent): underground weddings in the mid-1970s, *Nová Víska*, and through the next years Chartist New Year’s Eve parties or several of Olga Havlová’s birthday celebrations in *Hrádeček*<sup>352</sup>. While the wider implications of such embedded informers within the underground (and specifically Horáček-Čert’s significance for *Vokno*) will be discussed later, for the present it should be emphasised strongly that Horáček-Čert’s information was crucial in preparing the *Vokno* trial, and in particular bringing both Hýbek (previously unsuspected by the StB) and Frič (only a minor contributor but believed by Horáček-Čert to be more involved) into the scope of observation. Without his testimony, ‘*Akce Satan*’ would not have reached the successful conclusion of halting *Vokno*’s production and sending still further oppositional personalities into “emigration to the capitalist states”.

*Vokno* remained in this enforced hiatus for just under three years. Stárek was released from the medium-security prison (previously a labour camp for political prisoners) of Bytíz in Central Bohemia in May 1984; Jirous left Valdice one year later, 10 May 1985. As the two primary defendants, each had also been issued a two-year period of continual police surveillance, known in the legal phraseology of the time as ‘protective observation’ (*ochranný*

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<sup>350</sup> The first major revelation of Horáček-Čert’s informing came in 1999, initially in the news media and in full with the publication of Adam Drda’s extracts from the de-classified StB files and interview with Hýbek in *Revolver Revue* (op.cit.). The most exhaustive scholarly study has been Makovička, Jan: *Nemravný talentovaný řemeslník: František Horáček alias Jim Čert jako tajný spolupracovník Státní bezpečnosti v prostředí českého undergroundu mezi lety 1979 až 1989*. MA thesis, Faculty of Arts, University of Pardubice, Pardubice 2015; note also the extract published as: “... Já si pořád myslím, že jsem nikomu neublížil. František Horáček alias Jim Čert jako tajný spolupracovník StB, 1979–1989” in: *Sborník archivu bezpečnostních složek*, no. 14, 2016.

<sup>351</sup> Makovička 2016, p. 365.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

*dohled*)<sup>353</sup>. In practice, ‘protective observation’ meant not only the physical presence of police near the targeted person’s residence, but also regular house searches, curfews and mandatory registration – in some cases daily – at the nearest police station. Alongside legalised police harassment, the remaining underground faced a remarkably changed landscape both of individuals and of samizdat media. ‘Asanace’ had done its work: nearly half of the Nová Víska community were now abroad, others (like Stárek’s one-time companions from the first Vokno distribution run, Sylva and Jiří Chnápko) had dispersed to their own rural hideouts, or wherever else they could establish relative independence. As well, Jiří Němec was now in exile in Vienna, supported by a fellowship at the *Institut von Wissenschaften von Menschen* and Vienna, in a sense, reassumed its old Habsburg status as a ‘Czech’ metropolis in the 1980s<sup>354</sup>. The underground, or perhaps more accurately cultural dissent in a broader sense, was able to create its own institutions in the Austrian capitol. One was the exile periodical *Paternoster*, largely the project of artist and author Zbyněk Benýšek, a Charter 77 signatory who had worked intensively with *Infoch* before his emigration in 1982, whose circle of contributors largely matched the counterculturally influenced Prague social-essayistic, literary and artistic work of Jirous’s original milieu (Tvář, the ‘Crusaders’ School’, conceptualism, critical views of Czech national self-conceptions and mythologies)<sup>355</sup>. Relatively little attention, though, was paid in *Paternoster* to independent music, except as a subject of political persecution. For this aspect, Vienna had the Czech-run music club ‘Nachtsyl’<sup>356</sup>, though it only opened in 1987. Its manager was Jiří ‘Chmelák’ Chmel, previously active near Most in distributing samizdat texts or (open-reel) tapes and a frequent visitor to Skalický’s

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<sup>353</sup> Zákon č. 44/1973 Sb., Zákon o ochranném dohledu, annulled as of 1 July 1990.

<sup>354</sup> Note e.g.: Stern, Silke. ‘Die tschechoslowakische Emigration: Österreich als Erstaufnahme- und Asylland’. in: *Prager Frühling : das internationale Krisenjahr 1968*. Sonderband 9/1, Beiträge. Köln : Böhlau Verlag, 2008, pp. 1025-1042

<sup>355</sup> A good summary of this journal, including its full bibliography, was published in *Revolver Revue* no. 48, 2001, along with correspondence between Benýšek and several contributors.

<sup>356</sup> Address: Stumpergasse 53-55, still in operation at the time of writing.



Barrel House; having inherited a small house in the village of Korozluky u Mostu, he had used the property for parties, samizdat and eventually gathering signatures for Charter 77 until his arrest in July 1978<sup>357</sup>.

The year 1985 meant two further, highly significant changes for *Vokno*. One was technological: the shift from a spirit duplicator, with poor resolution and easily smudged bluish-purple type, to a mimeograph machine, which used hard stencils and a continuous ink flow. As can be seen in the copies, whether on paper or online, the difference in legibility is striking, and even more so is the shift in the appearance of the typed page, closer to that of a printed sheet than to the more frequent connotation of a third-class restaurant menu. In part, this technical improvement was necessitated by the loss of the ancient Ormig, the fate of which is still unknown, yet more significantly it also ensued from the second, perhaps even more significant change in *Vokno*'s status. And this was the shift of both editorial and production activity out of the Sudeten periphery and into the metropolis. With *Nová Víska* dispersed and the 'North Bohemian' underground of the previous decade scattered, a certain personal and physical concentration of the cultural opposition would have been an understandable result. The capitol city offered not only greater anonymity, a thicker network of oppositional connections, but equally better access to the cultural information – and production technology – vital for *Vokno*'s self-declared mission. Specifically, the association of samizdat activity with the communal living and the self-sufficiency attempts of the *barák* communities ended with Stárek's release and the second chapter of *Vokno*, now to be regarded as a Prague publication with a broad provincial reach, had begun.

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<sup>357</sup> Chmel is the subject of an extensive interview from the Czech Radio project *Tváře undergroundu*: viz. Denčevová et al., *ibid.*, p. 136-156. The house in Korozluky, "had nothing in common with the shared houses... That people met there and visitors came from Prague, maybe also from Plzeň and of course from the North, that's something else. But it was a normal house. [...] No concept." (p. 139-140).

One aspect of the ‘metropolitan’ shift in *Vokno* could be the reproduction technology, or more accurately the place of the machine in the minds of those who used it. While the Ormig, if a carefully guarded secret of the *Nová Víska* core residents, had nonetheless assumed a key place in the household life, if not perhaps a quasi-personified status usually given only to motor vehicles, the mimeograph machine that produced the subsequent issues remains somewhat in the background of all personal accounts. There is, most notably, no story behind its acquisition as with the ‘one piece at a time’ Ormig; the mimeograph simply begins to be used. Understandably, the machine itself had to have passed through its own conspiratorial narrative even to reach any oppositional network (we know that at least one mimeograph in Prague had been removed from a storeroom for disused office machinery at the Hussite Theological Faculty<sup>358</sup>), yet the absence of any such tale from the recollections of *Vokno*’s editorship is striking compared to the intimate detail recalled from the brief two years of life at *Nová Víska*.

Viewed in terms of participant psychology, the lack of recollection can be explained for various reasons: the harsh experience of imprisonment, the loss of the milieu of underground sociability, the differing conditions of a closer working relation with middle-class university graduates or their offspring. From a more sociological analytical standpoint, in both its physical production and its written content, *Vokno* can be said to have moved closer towards professionalism with its shift from North Bohemia to Prague. Non-musical contributions (including poetry not set to music by underground bands) in the previous *Voknos* largely originated either from the wider underground community as contributions acquired on a personal basis (e.g. the poems of Robert Prášek) or from three primary sources – Němec, Jirous or pre-1970 copies of *Sešity*. Now, and for the next four years following,

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<sup>358</sup> Petrová, Jana: *Zapomenutá generace osmdesátých let 20. století. Nezávislé aktivity a samizdat na Plzeňsku*. Plzeň: Jana Petrová ve spolupráci se Sdružením občanů Exodus, 2009, p. 190

*Vokno* increased its span both nationally and internationally, though the ties abroad had themselves shifted geographically from Communist-bloc subcultures further east to Western Europe: not only the print organs of exile enclaves in the West, specifically *Paternoster* in Vienna and *Svědectví* in Paris, but increasingly to an international, often Anglophone, human-rights media (e.g. Britain's *Index on Censorship*).

Moreover, issue 7 of *Vokno* in many ways prefigured the further directions indicated by this shift in social terms upwards, whether in the quasi-professionalisation of production or the urbanisation of its contributors. One new element was the direct involvement of a controversial individual, a personality spanning several different focal points of Czech cultural rebellion yet – as recent archival research has increasingly confirmed – a longstanding police confidante. This was Egon Bondy, or to cite his official name Zbyněk Fišer (1930-2007), whose relatively limited involvement with the non-metropolitan underground circles has so far kept him outside of our field of consideration but whose influence on what might be termed, somewhat more amorphously, the ‘underground sensibility’ has been viewed as crucial. Machovec, for instance, regards Bondy as literally the founder of the first underground generation during Communist rule, starting with the ‘Jewish Names’ samizdat compilation of 1949 in which he assumed his lifelong pseudonym<sup>359</sup>. (Additionally, Machovec is the editor of Egon Bondy's collected poetry<sup>360</sup>, as well as a personal friend from Prague's dissident-underground circles in the 1980s.) Other prominent post-1989 cultural figures with a background in Prague's second (or in Machovec's characterisation, third) underground equally found Bondy a crucial inspiration of their youth, despite more recent revelations of his activities as an informer: e.g. author and editor of the monthly *Babylon* Petr Placák:

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<sup>359</sup> Machovec 2019, p. 11. By way of historical accuracy, it is worth noting that there was a real Egon Bondy, from a leading Czech-Jewish industrialist family in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Prague.

<sup>360</sup> Bondy, Egon: *Básnické spisy I.–III.*, ed. Martin Machovec, Praha, Argo 2014–2016.

Zbyněk Fišer was a monster who means nothing to me, but Egon Bondy remains a guru [...] These are the two extremes of how I see him. And between them was an entire range of personalities which he embodied or was made to embody.<sup>361</sup>

In turn, regarding the international picture of Czech oppositional currents and personalities, Bondy features no less prominently. The American historian Jonathan Bolton, in his *Worlds of Dissent*,<sup>362</sup> treats Bondy as an intellectual influence on the underground comparable only to Jirous (with Jiří Němec, however, consigned to a footnote)<sup>363</sup>. Contrastingly, one of *Vokno*'s main participants in this period, Mirek Vodrážka, has spared little in his criticism of Bondy precisely for his active service for the StB:

*Bondy truly relied for nearly three decades on his secret connection with power. From 1961 to 1968 he was an agent with the code-name Klima and provided 181 reports. From 1973 to 1977 he was an agent with the code-name Mao and by 1976 provided 110 reports. After a brief intermezzo, when he was himself under investigation, he was from 1985 to 1989 a confidential agent [důvěrník] with the code-name Oskar. [...] In the language of the StB, Bondy participated in the documentation of enemy activity from reactionary students who admired Western philosophy and resolute supporters of the Catholic Church.*<sup>364</sup>

Leaving aside, at least for now, all questions of moral judgment of Bondy's actions, it is worth considering how he fit into the underground milieu in both intellectual and social (personal) terms. For all Bondy's undoubtedly fascinating personal traits – his erudition, literary talent, evident charisma and reputation for absolute non-conformity – he nonetheless stands largely outside the scope of the provincial underground (and hence of the present work) even as a figure of reputation and legend. If anything, Bondy could be viewed as the quintessence of metropolitan cultural opposition throughout the post-war period, starting with the second Prague Surrealist group<sup>365</sup> through his association in the 1950s with author

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<sup>361</sup> Remarks in a Czech Radio interview, 2 September 2019, accessible at: <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/byl-egon-bondy-velky-filozof-a-basnik-nebo-pouhy-spolupracovnik-stb-8047701>.

<sup>362</sup> Bolton, Jonathan: *Worlds of Dissent. Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press 2012.

<sup>363</sup> Several Czech reviews have criticised this emphasis, e.g. Kudrna

<sup>364</sup> Vodrážka, Mirek: 'Filosofický sendvič. Jak chutná Bondyho díla?' In: *A2*, no. 10/2015, online only at: <https://www.advojka.cz/archiv/2015/10/filosoficky-sendvic>. For the polemical reactions of Machovec and Placák viz. resp. Machovec, Martin: Ad Miroslav Vodrážka: Pohromové myšlení současné české levice. In: *Bubínek Revolveru* 22. 12. 2015 (online newsletter of *Revolver Revue*); Placák, Petr: 'Jak feministka Vodrážka znásilnil básníka Bondyho'. In: *Paměť a dějiny*, no. 4, 2015, p. 110-113.

<sup>365</sup> Most of the other contributors to *Židovská jména* belonged to the second generation of Czech Surrealists, though Bondy's connection to the group seems to have ended almost immediately after the anthology's appearance.

Bohumil Hrabal and artist Vladimír Boudník up to his normalisation-era connection with Jirous, the Plastic People of the Universe and eventually the final decade of the Prague underground. Yet he never maintained or cultivated any immediate ties to the working-class youth subcultures that formed the basis of its non-metropolitan counterpart, unlike Jirous or (even more significantly) Němec.

Bondy's interest in non-European religion and his radical anti-systemic Marxism not only offer an unusual reflection of tendencies in Western countercultural thought, but distinctly set him aside from the Czech underground – both provincial and metropolitan – which looked towards Catholicism for its spirituality<sup>366</sup> and ignored Marxism as anything but an occasional target of mockery<sup>367</sup>. Conversely, in his style of self-presentation, combining intellectual refinement (e.g. a doctorate in religious studies and extensive philosophical writings) with a love for deliberately scabrous vulgarity, Bondy defined a cultural style with a potential for far greater resonance: the declassé intellectual, cast out and proletarianized by merciless history, evoking the disruptive experience of both 1948 and 1968. The creation of 'Egon Bondy', perhaps we could even say the 'conceptual artwork' of Egon Bondy or, in Goffman's terms the 'performance' of Egon Bondy<sup>368</sup>, as much as his own life circumstances (as the son of a First Republic military officer and former Czechoslovak Legionnaire in Russia

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<sup>366</sup> Marcel Strýko in Košice was an exception with his strong interest in yoga and Hindu spirituality. Viz. Vodrážka, *ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> Though something of a digression, it is worth noting that the self-declared 'hippie' subculture in late-1970s Poland and the early years of martial law seems to have taken a considerable interest in Hindu and Buddhist spiritual practices. Obviously, a significant factor here was Polish popular Catholicism and the relative autonomy of the Catholic Church from state control, making Christian belief less of a subversive or 'countercultural' stance. Not having much expertise in this area, I am basing this speculation on the reports and interviews of Roman Laube, a Czech participant/observer with Polish hippies in the later 1980s. Laube, Roman: 'Hippies na Východě'. In: *Revolver Revue* no. 64, 2006.

<sup>368</sup> For the best-known description of performances see: Goffman, Erving: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre 1956; of course, bearing in mind the somewhat duplicitous aspects of Bondy's life and character it is also worth noting his earlier article on confidence schemes: Goffman, Erving: "On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation to Failure". In: *Psychiatry. Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 1954, vol. 15, issue 4, pp. 451-463.

during World War I)<sup>369</sup>, evokes the motif – simultaneously realistic historic circumstance and oft-repeated cliché – of Communist-imposed downward mobility, the former intelligentsia forced into working-class status. At the very least, his version of an underground sensibility matches that of the provincial subcultures only with considerable incongruity.

Two other individuals associated with issue 7 should also be discussed as prefiguring Vokno's tendencies for the next period. First is Lenka Marečková, whose poetry and political persecution cover a sizeable block of text (8 pages in all), and in editorial hierarchization are placed third behind the section on the Plastic People's clandestine recording 'Hovězí porážka' (Beefslaughter) and Jirous's prison poetry, preceding the equally extensive section on Egon Bondy. Marečková, at the time of the issue's production, had been issued a 7-month prison sentence for 'defaming the republic and its representatives' and 'defaming the states of the world socialist order and their representatives' through reading her own poetry at an evening for young authors held by the public library in the small South Bohemian town of Písek<sup>370</sup>. Her case illustrates not only the arbitrary nature of police and state power (no less a personage than the serving justice minister overturned the district court's issuing of a suspended sentence, insisting that Marečková should instead be charged with sedition)<sup>371</sup>, but equally a change in methods of protest.<sup>372</sup> An officially sponsored gathering at a local library, understandably, differs considerably from an unauthorised or semi-clandestine rock concert on a wide range of sociological levels. Most notably, it implies a shift across the most crucial class barrier in state socialism – academic versus vocational secondary schooling, and more

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<sup>369</sup> Viz. the interview with Bondy's son from his first marriage (who had almost no contact with him during his childhood) in the daily *Dnes*, 11 June 2010: [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/archiv/rozhovor-se-synem-egona-bondyho-a-ponekud-sokujici-post-scriptum-tohoto-interview.A100610\\_212122\\_kavarna\\_chu](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/archiv/rozhovor-se-synem-egona-bondyho-a-ponekud-sokujici-post-scriptum-tohoto-interview.A100610_212122_kavarna_chu)

<sup>370</sup> Per the report of VONS, in: *Vokno*, no. 7, 1985xx, p. 41-42.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Maslowski, Nicolas: Vývoj českých protestů v letech 1988-2012. In: Pospíšil, Filip (ed.): *Umění protestu*. Praha: Rubato 2013, pp. 64-80.

significantly, a closer relation to the world of constituted social authority: under the supervision and control of the state apparatus, but with limited autonomy.

The immediate milieu of Marečková's literary debut – a small-town public library - is hardly that of the raucous amateur music-making in Chomutov's Barrel House<sup>373</sup>, or even the joyful hedonism of a concert at the communal farmhouses. If anything, it matches the somewhat complex category of "worthiness" in Charles Tilly's formulation of social movements' self-presentation – the "WUNC display"<sup>374</sup> of self-promotion in the public sphere. Or more accurately, a different degree of "worthiness" than that of the Plastic People of the Universe and their Charter 77 defence:<sup>375</sup> one more likely to seek public acceptance over the ethical stance of an absolute rejection of the immediate conditions.

Secondly, even the artistic character of Marečková's protest indicates a shift, if not necessarily in the aesthetic protest-method of *Vokno* itself, at least in cultural dissent more generally. The actual stance of her writings recalls less the despair and rejection of the often visible undertone of countercultural Romanticism in the earlier underground than an appeal to notably divergent ideas of civic courage and engagement. 'Long Live Society!' ran the title of the poem figuring most prominently in the indictment (and in her *Vokno* contribution); even if the unambiguously expressed yearning for community is as strong as the similar desires that brought disaffected youth to Nová Víska and other 'lived sociabilities'<sup>376</sup>, it uses very different aesthetic means. The publication of Marečková's literary work is one very noteworthy instance of *Vokno*'s ability to match its declared aim of serving as an open platform rather than as the reflection of one specific and strongly self-defined oppositional stance, let alone aesthetic. Secondly, on a broader level, one could make the argument that

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<sup>373</sup> Cf. the interview with Miroslav Skalák Skalický in Denčevová et al. 2012, p. 90-91.

<sup>374</sup> Tilly, Charles: *Social Movements 1768-2004*. Boulder: Paradigm Press 2004, p. 4.

<sup>375</sup> As argued by Bolton 2012, specifically Chapter 4, "Legends of the Underground".

<sup>376</sup> Various circumstances prevented a full-length interview with Marečková in the period of research; my basis is a brief conversation with her following a reading at the Václav Havel Library in Prague on 4 April 2019.

despite the harsh response of the authorities in Marečková's immediate case<sup>377</sup>, her public debut prefigured the slow emergence during the next decade of admittedly modest yet nonetheless hopeful 'cultural autonomous zones', or instances of "positive deviation" across socialist Czechoslovakia.<sup>378</sup> Two of the major areas were folk music, as discussed in the 2014 study by historian Přemysl Houda<sup>379</sup> or theatre in amateur or small-scale formats<sup>380</sup>, though the scope was understandably wider in practice, eventually including even rock bands that earlier would have met with far worse treatment.

This autonomous culture – which seems a more apt characterisation than terming it a 'grey zone', as indeed it only matches Jiřina Šiklová's definition very irregularly<sup>381</sup> – was inevitably dependent on the good will of individual authorities, and moreover far more integrated with not only the state-socialist middle class but even with the aesthetic-semiotic canons of respectability. It has long been under-appreciated even within scholarship on the normalisation period, yet it formed a crucial part of formulating a nascent or embryonic civil society not only for the actual creative outcomes but even more vitally for simply existing as self-organised activity not confined to the immediate domestic sphere<sup>382</sup>. As such, it operated not only in parallel to the countercultural-dissident underground but provided a form of competition with the underground for a type of sociability or organisation that could allow for

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<sup>377</sup> Viz: Lenka Marečková uvězněná. In: *Informace o Chartě 77 (INFOCH)*, no. 9, vol. 8, 1985xx, p. 6-7.

<sup>378</sup> Bůtora, Martin - Krivý, Vladimír - Szomolanyiová, Soňa. "Positive Deviation: The Career of a Concept and the Epidemiology of a Phenomena in Czecho-Slovakia in the Late Eighties". Bratislava: mimeographed manuscript 1989xx.

<sup>379</sup> Houda, Přemysl: *Intelektuální protest nebo masová zábava? Folk jako společenský fenomén v době tzv. normalizace*. Praha: Academia 2014.

<sup>380</sup> No cohesive scholarly treatment of autonomous theatre – professional or not – in the normalisation years has yet been published at the time of writing. Several individual studies, though, have been undertaken, e.g. Filová, Jana: *Amatérské vývojové tendence v období normalizace. Divadlo X v Brně a jeho autorská tvorba v letech 1969 -1987*. MA thesis, Masaryk University, Brno 2011.

<sup>381</sup> Šiklová, Jiřina: "The 'Gray Zone' and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia". In: *Social Research*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1990.

<sup>382</sup> A good analysis of public and private in Czechoslovak dissent is given by Linková, Marcela – Straková, Naďa: *Bytová revolta. Jak ženy dělaly dissent*. Praha: Academia-Sociologický ústav 2017. The focus on domesticity had, as well, its economic aspect: note e.g. Betts, Paul: "Private Property and Public Culture: a Forgotten Chapter of East European Communist Life". In: *Histoire@Politique* vol. 1, no. 7, 2009.

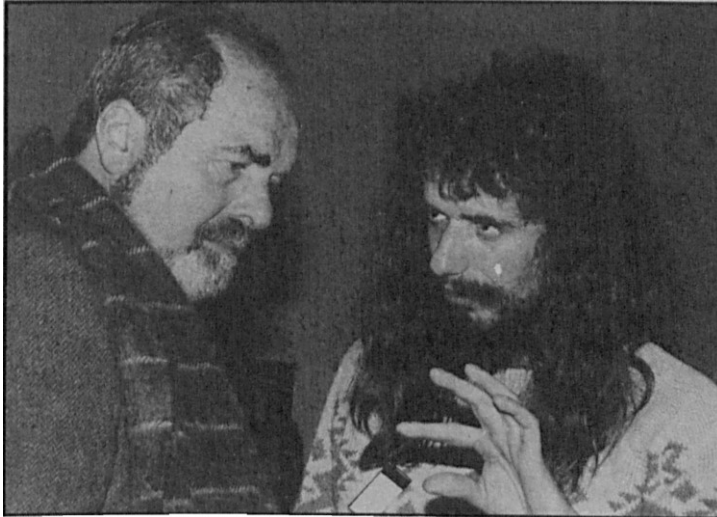


a more comfortable life within certain structures. University students in scientific or technical disciplines, where Marxist ideology usually was restricted to lectures taken seriously by no one and even the acceptance criteria of good political standing tended to be more flexible, might organise their own musical or dramatic events with considerably less potential for violent disruption – though nonetheless secret-police surveillance would always have been a possibility<sup>383</sup>. As such, the concentration of independently-minded individuals into the stark choice between dissent and conformity had begun to blur from the decade's midpoint: while the extant underground still faced the full hostility of the StB, the less confrontational circles of 'positive deviation' not only began to multiply but offered an alternative between the sharply agonistic polarities of only a few years earlier. And as the 'islets of freedom', following Miroslav Vaněk's terminology,<sup>384</sup> began to multiply and diversify, the generational experience of independently-minded individuals on the outset of social (artistic-creative) maturity similarly differed, largely in dependence on the accessibility or inaccessibility of such refuges.

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<sup>383</sup> Since the question of autonomous yet non-dissident social spheres in the 1980s is the scholarship challenge of the future, I cannot cite specific data on the level of secret-police penetration, while the destruction of a significant volume of the most recent StB files in the final weeks of 1989 equally implies that information would be scant from this side. I can only rely on various personal communications which I would prefer to keep anonymous; though I have no reason to doubt them, this question is for now only speculative.

<sup>384</sup> Vaněk, Miroslav. *Ostrůvky svobody: kulturní a občanské aktivity mladé generace v 80. letech v Československu*. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2002.



Pavel Tigrid and Jan Pelc. In: *Index on Censorship*, no. 5, 1986.

The second significant personage in *Vokno 7* is the subject and author of the final block, occupying over one-third of the entire issue (p. 60-100) even without his interview: Jan Pelc. He had fled Czechoslovakia via Yugoslavia for Paris four years previously and found work with the Czech exile journal *Svědectví*; allegedly, his literary ambitions only came to wider attention when editor Pavel Tigrid<sup>385</sup> entered the office as he was preparing copies for a fellow employee with actual literary training, Dana Hutková. Pelc was himself from North Bohemia, though slightly younger than the core group of *Vokno*, and during the period when the *Nová Víska* community was in existence, he worked in the maintenance staff of the Prunéřov power plant:

I knew what pub they were at, so I went there and sat by myself in a corner. And already they were doing their events at *Víska* – and I couldn't get in. They didn't trust me. A strange boy from nowhere, new arrival, no friends here ... But then I got angry – I knew there'd be something at *Víska* – and told myself I'd just show up. They could kick me out or let me stay. Defy them. [...] Somehow, I began to make friends with them. But as I say – I never was part of the underground, only a periphery of the underground.<sup>386</sup>

Pelc, if anything, represented a still tougher, harsher side of the Ore Mountains industrial belt even than blue-collar labour. His early experience with the world outside that of the 'orderly socialist citizen' involved the criminal underclass of the region, or in his own words:

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<sup>385</sup> Regarding Tigrid, the most recent work is Hanáková, Jitka (ed.): *Pavel Tigrid. Svědek dvacátého století*. Praha: Národní muzeum 2018.

<sup>386</sup> Interview with Czech Television, in: 'Fenomén underground', episode 34, 'Pekelná kotlina dětí ráje'.

There [North Bohemia] the concentration of people's probably the greatest in the republic, after Ostrava and Kladno. Prisoners get let out after five, six years, and they don't have anyplace to go, so they get sent to North Bohemia, because there's work there and they could get a dormitory. These people show up without any resources. In a city they don't know, basically all they have is work, which they usually don't show up for, or they have their own problems. So all they do is meet up in the pub. These pubs, they're really an underworld in the true sense of the word, something you probably don't see anymore in the West, like the underworld of the Thirties, where these people create their own castes. Whoever gets into it really is close to prison once again, because the same thing keeps happening: fighting, drinking, petty theft.<sup>387</sup>

From his own account, Pelc personally knew the world of 'negative deviation' well, though his primary description of it has been in quasi-fictionalised form, the start of which forms such a large section of the first post-release issue of *Vokno*. Published here under the title 'Děti ráje' [Children of Paradise], it has assumed cult status since its first legal publication in 1991 under the memorable title '*...a bude hůř*' [It'll Get Worse]<sup>388</sup>.

The excerpt had first appeared in *Svědectví* in 1984,<sup>389</sup> and as is widely known sparked a wave of angered denunciations and polemics throughout the Czech émigré or exile press. Reviewing the record of enraged reactions today is a revelatory experience for the extreme degree of shock that Pelc evidently caused among his exile readers, and could definitely be of interest for what it reveals about the conservatism of exile communities, with those of post-World War II Europe forming an extreme example. And all too many commentators quickly conflated Pelc's semi-criminal, anomic denizens of 'Klostrdlá'<sup>390</sup>, where occasional group-sex orgies alternated with long sessions in the pub U Boučků, with the underground in general. However, Pelc's importance for *Vokno* as a publication is significant in two senses: first for his mediating role between the later *Vokno* and the exile sphere via *Svědectví* and second for setting in motion the heated exchange of opinions between Jirous and the underground's dissident or exile detractors.

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<sup>387</sup> Pelc, Jan: in 'Rozhovor redaktora Hlasu Ameriky Pavla Skály s Janem Pelcem'. *Vokno*, no. 7, 1985xx, p. 61.

<sup>388</sup> A brief excerpt from the first chapter appeared in English translation as 'It's Gonna Get Worse' by George Theiner. In: *Index on Censorship*, no. 6, 1986, p. 28-30.

<sup>389</sup> *Svědectví*, no. 72, 1984, p. 673-724.

<sup>390</sup> A thinly disguised Klášterec nad Ohří.

As these exchanges were reprinted in *Vokno* itself, they are as germane to the publication as their key points are to our understanding of the underground as conceived and constructed from without. The greatest amount of space in the discussion is occupied by the polemic of Ivan Sviták (1925-1994), previously a prominent reform Marxist in exile in the USA after 1968; the two other critics of Pelc represent the conservative-Christian segment of Czech dissent – author and Catholic samizdat activist Iva Kotrlá and philosopher Rio Preisner (1925-2007), then also in American exile.<sup>391</sup> Sviták, whose position could be termed possibly ‘conservative-leftist’ (indeed, upon his return to Czechoslovakia in 1990 he provocatively joined the Communist Party once again), attacked what he called the ‘andrgraund’ and ‘hipíři’ (hippies) with comparison to the Hell’s Angels and the Charles Manson cult, culminating in the following summary:

If we could distil from the underground any ideology, then its components would be boundless egoism [...], extreme hedonism that hardly lifts its gaze above the bodily innards and the sensitivity of the digestive tract, foolish destructive anarchism [...], flirting with mysticism and occultism that raises any beer-soaked moron above the learned man, and finally an unprogrammed anticommunism so stupid that I cannot but see in it the natural twin of the anti-Americanism so often the lodestar of the New Left.<sup>392</sup>

This bilious invective provoked a no less hostile counterattack from Jirous in *Vokno* no. 12, ‘Down the Crapper, You Scum!’<sup>393</sup>, in which the main points of argument focused on Sviták’s dogmatic Marxism in the 1950s over any factual errors, mischaracterisations or oversimplifications. In response, Jirous’s article was answered in issue 13 by Kotrlá’s “Sit Down on the Toilet, Our New Zdeněk Nejedlý!”, defending Sviták (and by extension, the larger ex-Marxist contingent in Czech dissent who had consciously asked forgiveness for their Stalinist pasts) against Jirous’s own dogmatism<sup>394</sup>. And finally, immediately following Kotrlá’s contribution, came Jirous’s final word: ‘If Fish Were in My Ass, It Need Not Be a

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<sup>391</sup> It is worth mentioning, if only briefly, the academic situations of both Sviták and Preisner. The former, after a brief affiliation with Columbia University, spent most of his career at a notably less prestigious institution, California State University-Chico. Preisner taught at Pennsylvania State University, but primarily German language and literature.

<sup>392</sup> Sviták, Ivan: Šmejdi z andrgraundu. Originally in *Právo lidu* 4/1985, reprinted in *Magorův zápisník*, p. 649.

<sup>393</sup> Jirous, Ivan Martin: ‘Jdi do hajzlu, ty sajrajtu!’. In: *Vokno* 12, 1986xx, p. 103-110.

<sup>394</sup> Kotrlá, Iva: Usad’ si už na WC, náš novodobý Zdeňku Nejedlý!. In: *Vokno* 13, 1987xx, p. 127-130

Pond'<sup>395</sup>, by which point the discussion had turned exclusively to Sviták, entirely omitting both Pelc and his semi-underground and any wider ramifications of counterculture.

Preisner's attack on Pelc, originally published as a letter to *Svědectví* in 1985, was hardly more moderate, even making allowances for his often turgid and jargon-riddled prose:

I see basically no difference in the virulence of social danger between 'texts' a la [Pelc] and for instance the 'virtuous' text of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, or the murderous texts produced by Lenin. Their common denominator is an appeal and guideline to be followed. In them can be discerned the late degenerative product of homocentric humanism and idealistic subjectivism.<sup>396</sup>

Reprinted in *Vokno* no. 9, it too was accompanied by a rebuttal, in this case from Egon Bondy, arguing (convincingly) that Preisner had largely missed the point of Pelc's coldly disillusioned, largely documentary depiction of cynical despair. Moreover, Preisner as a philosopher was, it should be noted, a genuinely anti-modern reactionary, not merely a traditionalist deploring the ill-mannered youth of the counterculture. His own analysis of the roots of totalitarianism in Western thought is derived from a very different source than the far more frequently reproduced and cited Popperian critique of Platonism and its echoes in German Idealist philosophy: for him, the original sin of the European mind (and the theological invocation is crucial) lies in what he repeatedly terms "gnosticism" – essentially the (Biblically sinful) yearning to overturn and disrupt the divine order and principles of natural law for a "promise of freedom through self-enslavement".<sup>397</sup> Preisner's own stance not only toward the Czech underground (regardless of any misunderstandings on his part) but indeed toward the vast majority of dissident thought can be discerned through an earlier tamizdat-exile essay, 'On the So-Called Parallel Culture'<sup>398</sup>. Since every quasi-modern standpoint in Czech dissent, from reform Marxism to centrist Catholicism, he held to be essentially "post-Christian Occidental-Gnostic culture, descending lower into barbarian lack

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<sup>395</sup> Jirous, Ivan Martin: 'Kdyby byly v prdeli ryby, nemusely být rybníky'. In: *Vokno*, no. 13, 1987xx, p. 130-133.

<sup>396</sup> Preisner, Rio: letter to *Svědectví* no. 75, in: *Vokno*, no. 9, 1986xx, p. 47.

<sup>397</sup> Preisner, *ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> Preisner, Rio: 'O tzv. paralelní kultuře', in: *Rozmluvy*, no. 1, 1983, pp. 10-44.

of culture, or still worse – the ‘underground’ of an entirely different quality, to the abyss of rationally planned anti-culture as the accompanying phenomenon of the destruction of the Czech state and the Czech nation”, only militant Christianity is a true ‘counterculture’, exemplified for Preisner by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Czech Catholic authors and poets<sup>399</sup>. Of course, recalling not only the undercurrent of Christian belief and practice within the underground, whether immediately linked to *Vokno* (Jirous and Němec as Catholics<sup>400</sup>, or occasional contributor Eduard Vacek, an Adventist convert<sup>401</sup>) or more widely, it is no wonder that Preisner’s admonitions were largely ignored.

In terms of intellectual history both Sviták and Preisner were in their lifetimes idiosyncratic, indeed largely isolated thinkers in the frameworks of debate and opposition in the Cold War West, while today – oddly enough – their standpoints seem to prefigure mental dispositions known only from the past few years: conservative leftism in the former, Catholic neo-reaction in the latter. Since in a later section of the current work, I plan to discuss the question of how the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century counter/independent cultures became integrated into turn-of-the millennium reality, the questions of the conservative critique (indeed, from both right- and left-wing standpoints) raised at the time, however apparently marginal, are worth recalling. Yet there is a second question for these two thinkers: their own strange position as European exiles in the USA of the 1980s between marginality (within their place of exile) and centrality (as prominent contributors to Czech-language exile periodicals, hence significant actors in the tamizdat, and partially samizdat independent media ecology). For *Vokno*, it is significant that the post-imprisonment period witnessed not only a greater presence of exile writing within its pages. More significantly, it was that through Pelc himself, once too

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<sup>399</sup> Preisner 1983, p. 38.

<sup>400</sup> Alongside many interviews, note e.g.: Vaňková, Marie: *Religiózní motivy v tvorbě Ivana Martina Jirouse*. MA thesis, Masaryk University, Brno 2009.

<sup>401</sup> Vacek, Eduard: Česká patafyzičká republika. In: *Babylon* vol. XIX, no. 1, 30.3.2019, or his earlier interview with Viki Shock in *Babylon* vol. XV, no. 2, 30.10.2005.

‘marginal’ even to attend the concerts and parties at Nová Víska, *Vokno* had established its link to Paris and *Svědectví* as a vitally important node in the exile-sphere. Exile writing and exile media – even beyond their service as ‘tamizdat’ in the economy of illegal circulation within the national homeland – formed an ‘imagined community’ (in Anderson’s classic definition of print-nationalism) not merely extra-territorial but, we could even say, aterritorial. Exile periodicals published in the Cold War West in the languages of Soviet-affiliated Europe constituted a strange form of national collectivity that largely has remained unanalysed, or studied only in the most factographic-documentary way, ever since the end of the need for exile in 1989. The vast geographic spread of the exile communities (and, it should be acknowledged, the generous assistance from Western governmental and non-governmental bodies) created a series of ‘para-nations’ in the space of pre-cybernetic virtual existence (print, postage, research libraries, community centres). The Viennese underground enclave around the periodical *Paternoster* and the music club Nachtsyl may be one manifestation of European political exile in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>402</sup>, yet it should be placed into a context against the figure of the individual émigré in linguistic isolation, often (like Sviták and Preisner) in the physical-spatial isolation of a US university campus, often growing still more idiosyncratic – to put matters politely – through the pre-1989 decades. The polemic over Pelc’s writing brought the samizdat and the exile versions of anti-totalitarian social analysis together in a way that only the purposefully mixed form of the periodical allows; at the same time, the presence of these two radically divergent identities of dissident and exile/émigré (let alone their sense of seemingly talking past one another) makes all too clear how consciousness within the CSSR and abroad had grown increasingly incompatible<sup>403</sup>.

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<sup>402</sup> Note in particular the interview with Zbyněk Benýšek from 2001: Benýšek, Zbyněk, interview with Josef Kroul, *Revolver Revue* no. 48, 2001.

<sup>403</sup> As is, in fact, the case for Jan Pelc’s post-1989 writing, both essayistic and literary, where the central idea remains the need for the one-time émigré to reconcile two understandings that never merge.

Czech exile life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its highly incomplete integration into national collective understandings, whether in public discourse or historical memory<sup>404</sup>, is a topic richly deserving of attention in its own regard. Yet to return to the immediate controversy at hand, one final matter should be the relationship between the social milieus of the disaffected North Bohemian youth that respectively led on the one hand to positive deviation (political / politicized action) and its negative counterpart. Jirous's actual view of Pelc is perhaps best captured in an interview not long after his release from prison conducted by samizdat journalist<sup>405</sup> Petruška Šustrová, published in the samizdat periodical *Kritický sborník*:

...because I lived among the people he writes about. In Valdice. And they told me stories that [...] would seem even more unbelievable. [...] People mix it up with the underground. It's not the underground. The 'Children of Paradise' aren't underground. Underground is a conscious spiritual effort, once again I can cite my own formulation. This is a sub-subculture, something that lives on the edge of society here among us, I mean in the bigger cities, and we don't know anything about it. That one is in North Bohemia, but the guy I shared a bunk with was from Poruba, and those stories... Stories about flats where in the centre of a black-painted room was a tank of toluene. The one who told me about it lived only in cellars, hiding among the piping of prefab tower blocks. So I knew it was authentic.

As it happens, this 'sub-subculture' of the normalisation era, between negative disaffection and crime, remains largely known to us today through Pelc's depiction, which while largely documentary contains enough artistic licence as to serve only partially as a reliable information source. Charter 77 issued critical reports on prison conditions and drug abuse, both forming areas where standard sociographic research remained notably limited. Imprisoned dissidents occasionally touched upon the world of the socialist criminal underclass: Eva Kantůrková's prison memoir provides anecdotal observations of women prisoners<sup>406</sup>, while Jaroslav Suk's detention led to the compilation of a brief dictionary of prison slang – an unusual situation for linguistic fieldwork but put to good use<sup>407</sup>. Yet there has yet to appear an extensive summary of marginal life in normalisation Czechoslovakia,

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<sup>404</sup> Maslowski, Nicolas-Šubrt, Jiří: Úvodem. In Maslowski, Šubrt et al. *Kolektivní paměť. K teoretickým otázkám*. Praha: Karolinum 2014, pp. 7-12.

<sup>405</sup> Since 1990 a prominent newspaper columnist in the daily *Lidové noviny*.

<sup>406</sup> Kantůrková, Eva: *Přítelkyně z domu smutku*. Köln: Index 1984, Praha: Český spisovatel 1990, tr. anonymous. Woodstock: Overlook Press 1987.

<sup>407</sup> Suk, Jaroslav: *Několik slangových slovníků*. Inverze, Praha 1993.



treating the criminal-negative deviation subculture, let alone its broader historical trajectory from its origins within the state-socialist system up to its integration into a post-socialist underclass<sup>408</sup>. And post-socialist sociographic research, in which questions of social exclusion focused overwhelmingly on the specific Roma predicament, has not provided much further information in its own turn regarding the pre-1989 underclass and its own ‘anti-systemic’ standing – whether, in other words, there existed a form of declared ‘resistance’ through social self-exclusion or even physical self-destruction. This question, as well as the question of whether, and to what degree, there existed marginal sections or personal overlaps between the organised and/or ‘positive-deviationist’ underground and this still-nebulous ‘negative’ counterpart, should be the subject of an entire study of its own.<sup>409</sup> More significant for the present topic is asking why *Vokno*’s treatment of the underground’s negative-deviationist parallel – even assuming that the subculture depicted by Pelc was widespread enough to warrant a comparison – was confined, essentially, to the reproduction of a controversy within the exile press. Pelc’s transmission of the glum cynicism pervading the company at U Boučků was routed from Klášterec to Prague via rue Croix des Petit-Champs, which we can regard as one of the strange historical circumstances of Cold War European exile, yet conversely this convoluted pathway only highlights *Vokno*’s lack of direct reportage on the social situation of working-class youth of a generation only slightly younger than its own. All the more surprising, considering not only the increased attention that the more strictly politicised aspect of Czechoslovak dissent was paying to signs of social decay (not only Charter 77’s documentation but eventually other samizdat periodicals, notably *Revolver Revue* in this

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<sup>408</sup> A summary of normalisation-era criminological studies is offered in Kolbábek, Filip: *Vývoj kriminality na uzemí České republiky*. MA thesis, Palacký University, Olomouc 2007, p. 14.

<sup>409</sup> I outlined a possible framework for this problem, as well as its extension into post-1989 social policy, in a still-unpublished contribution, ‘Moc, paměť, toluen: ’, at the conference *Fenomén moci a sociálne nerovnosti*, November 13, Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, Comenius University, Bratislava.

period<sup>410</sup>), but moreover the attention to drug abuse, primarily of industrial solvents, in the confiscated and lost Issue 6.

The picture revealed through *Vokno* of the 1980s underground, in brief, is twofold. On one hand, the personal milieu itself appears more closely integrated into politicised dissent, which in the given circumstances implied Charter 77 as the single most unifying (integrating) organisational platform. On the other, *Vokno* as a publication appears more interested in cultural transmission of Western – predominantly Anglo-American – work to its readership network than of direct reportage from the regional base ‘upward’. The increasing volume of reporting on Anglophone music and direct translations can be linked mostly to the post-1985 editorial involvement of Lubomír Drožd’, later to become the legal publication’s editor after 1989. Drožd’ had sporadically contributed to *Vokno* previously under the pseudonym ‘Čaroděj Oz’ [Wizard of Oz], or occasionally ‘Řehoř Samsa’ [i.e. the Czech name of the protagonist of Kafka’s ‘Metamorphosis], all the while running his own samizdat circulars – first ‘Opium pro lid’ [Opium for the People], followed by ‘Jen pro blázný’ [Only for the Crazy] and ‘Sado-Maso’<sup>411</sup>. Additionally, he was an amateur filmmaker, bringing the moving image into the area of active underground creation and prefiguring the inclusion of videotape ‘samizdat’ (if to a far more limited extent than print) in the underground by the end of the 1980s. For the still-illegal *Vokno*, Drožd’ used additional pseudonyms, ‘Homeless & Hungry’ and ‘Blumfeld SM’, the latter used since this time for his post-1989 literary publications<sup>412</sup>. His direct involvement with *Vokno* was mediated by Egon Bondy, as related in the following vignette:

I remember how I came into his boudoir and [Bondy], dressed in his ‘shaman poncho’ from a checkered blanket started [...] raving about how *Revolver Revue* was done by the gilded youth around Topol, but we – that is, he and I and the rest – had to work on *Vokno* for the “boys with the shovels”. It was a harsh lecture because even though he maybe was right from the viewpoint of world revolution – remember the important role of the

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<sup>410</sup> Viz. e.g. the description of life in a state-run children’s home: [Anonymous]: “Vzpomínky na děcák”. In: *Revolver Revue* no. 10, 1988xx, pp. 169-178.

<sup>411</sup> Note Romanová, Gabriela: *Sado-Maso 1983–1986. Historie a článková bibliografie samizdatového časopisu*. MA thesis, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague 2012.

<sup>412</sup> For the discipline of sociology, it is worth noting that Drožd’ signed ‘Blumfeld SM’ to his Czech translation of Zygmunt Bauman’s *Liquid Modernity* in 2002.

revolutionary students who a few years later in November '89 travelled around the factories – I, an avowed "zero-worker", had little in common with the long-haired proletarians of North Bohemia. This was something that the "underground politruk" could learn during the next visit, when I brought him my supremely decadent magazine Sado-Maso. After this, we could finally talk on another, more cultivated level.<sup>413</sup>

And it is with this insight that we reach the final point of *Vokno*'s post-prison transformation: the appearance of competition, both in samizdat and in the sphere of legal (or at least tolerated) cultural offerings. We could even start with the very day of Jirous's release from Valdice, when Stárek and Jiří Gruntorád drove to the prison to greet him with a copy of issue 7 of *Vokno*. A prominent feature was a large block of the poems that Jirous had written in prison on scraps of candy-wrappers and cigarette packets, which Gruntorád then smuggled out during his own court hearing – allegedly in a plastic bag delivered via a kiss with Dana Němcová. These prison-poems were later to form the collection *Magorova labutí písně* [Magor's Swan Songs] – in ironic reference to the figure of St. Hugo with his attribute of a swan, remaining in the former castle chapel where the prisoners assembled electrical motors<sup>414</sup>. More to the point of the present discussion, they additionally brought the first issue of a new samizdat publication from Prague. Bearing the title *Jednou nohou* [One Leg In – i.e. in prison], it represented the efforts of a generational cohort roughly one decade younger, with its own generational formulation and specific ambitions<sup>415</sup>. As the new project described itself, it was an:

"independent" print organ. Contributions selected exclusively from circulating samizdat and reprinted without the awareness of the authors. [...] Issued extremely irregularly.<sup>416</sup>

The main figures of this publication were its chief editor and organiser Ivan Lamper, artist (and publication designer) Viktor Karlík, and a young Prague poet who had himself published previously in *Vokno* under the alias Jindra Tma – Jáchym Topol.

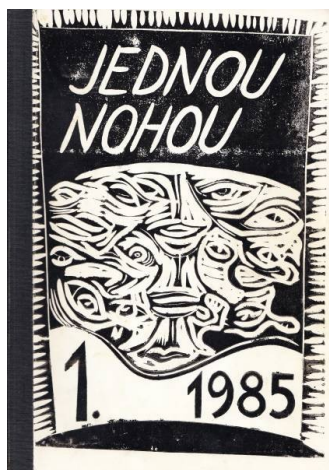
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<sup>413</sup> Interview in *Lidové noviny*, 16.12.2009.

<sup>414</sup> John, *ibid.*, p. 41. The specific poem, no. 36, is in *Vokno*

<sup>415</sup> *Jednou nohou* also reprinted Jirous's prison poems.

<sup>416</sup> Editors' note, *Jednou nohou*, no. 1, 1985xx, p. 2.



First issue of *Jednou nohou*, with linocut cover by Viktor Karlík. Source: revolverrevue.cz

In his own interviews with the *Revolver Revue* participants, Michal Geisler cites a description of the minor rivalry between the older and younger undergrounds from Topol himself:

Vokno was the work of the older androši, the way we saw it was that they'd get together somewhere, finish off a keg of beer, recite some of their poetry and think they were the Resistance, and we said to ourselves 'But we're the ones who have contacts with the Poles, with the East Germans, we're the ones making the revolution'.<sup>417</sup>

Though of course the relations were cordial, and with Stárek's third arrest in early 1989 the circles of the 'final' underground generation understandably rallied behind Vokno, a separation even beyond that of generational difference is still evident on nearly all levels, whether the publications, the orientation, or moreover the social background of the actors themselves. We may take with a large grain of salt the (likely humorous) note at the end of *Paternoster* in 1987:

From our Prague correspondent, we hear that the joint meeting of the honoured and comradely editorial boards of the revues *Vokno* and *Jednou nohou* in the Klamovka restaurant ended in a brawl, as if read from a gunfighter-thriller, and the editors of *Jednou nohou* had to seek out another location for their meeting. (With many greetings and no guarantee of truth.)<sup>418</sup>

What is, though, beyond dispute is the significance of the gap between Prague and the peripheral regions even at the end of the 1980s. Geisler is explicit in his attention to the

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<sup>417</sup> Geisler, Michal: *Časopis Revolver Revue jako společenský fenomén a jeho vývoj*. MA thesis, Department of Historical Sociology, Faculty of Humanistic Studies, Charles University, Prague, 2012, p. 34.

<sup>418</sup> *Paternoster*, no. 18, 1987, back cover.

emergence of the differentiation between the two undergrounds, citing Jirous's retrospective evaluation from 1990:

In this generation there came about that significant sociological shift that I spoke about at the start of these reflections. These were no longer alienated workers and rockers, but young intellectuals with a sharp orientation who assumed a thoroughly irreplaceable position in the cultural map, not only the Czech one but all of Europe.<sup>419</sup>

“This generation”, which Jirous specifically names (for literary personalities) as including Lamper, Topol, and Petr Placák, not only tended to have grown up in Prague, but often came from families where notable intellectual standing and dissident-Chartist activity were combined. The Topol brothers had in their family lineage not only their father Josef Topol, a noteworthy dramatist in the 1960s (and Charter 77 signer), but also their (posthumous) grandfather, Karel Schulz, a novelist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Placák's father Bedřich (1914-1993), also a Charter signatory, was a cardiac surgeon and decorated veteran of the anti-Nazi Slovak uprising of 1944. And even Martin Machovec, both participant and scholar in samizdat with strong personal ties to the *Revolver Revue* circles, likewise came from a Chartist family as the son of philosopher Milan Machovec (a regular attendee of the philosophical discussion groups organised by Vodrážka in the late 1980s and, ironically, one of the chief targets of Jim Čert's informing)<sup>420</sup>.

Not all of the second underground generation had similar familial circumstances, yet perhaps more important than the inherited cultural capital of dissent (understood as combining the 'ethical capital' of political opposition with the educational achievements and intellectual status of the pre-normalisation era) was the geographic advantage of presence in the national metropolis. For all the geographic isolation of the Iron Curtain, Prague nonetheless had international embassies, foreign correspondents, and other institutions eager and willing to take abuses of civil rights seriously, particularly if documented by *Infoch* or other samizdat

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<sup>419</sup> Jirous, Ivan M. “O české undergroundové kultuře 70. a 80. let” In: Machovec (2008), p. 79; viz. Geisler, *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>420</sup> Vodrážka

informational services. Invitations to apartment seminars could also be found through the right connections, or even more surprising advantages unthinkable in a provincial setting: Viktor Karlík, for example, found work as a depository assistant in the Czech National Gallery's collection of Asian art, thanks to the support of a sympathetic 'grey zone' intellectual, the museum's curator Dr. Lubor Hájek<sup>421</sup>.

Between Stárek's release from prison and the second *Vokno* trial in early 1989, the periodical can be said to have become considerably more integrated into the realm of intellectual metropolitan dissent both through personal ties and programmatic affinities. First and most importantly, it was through Drožd's undeniable abilities for curating and translating selections from the Anglo-American sphere, and his ability to discern the fusion in the 1980s between post-punk music and postmodern visual artwork – no longer as barbarous or primitive countercultural attacks on good taste but as a cohesive aesthetic sensibility that proved undeniably attractive for the second underground generation. Second was Vodrážka's passionate enthusiasm for philosophical discussion (along with his personal connections to unofficial philosophical seminars) and interest in non-European mystical thought. And then there was Jirous himself, who had returned from Valdice a significantly changed man – physically (far heavier and his long hair shaved to prison length<sup>422</sup>), psychologically, artistically. Even beyond his literary work from Valdice, which certainly holds its own place of honour in the tragic canon of 20<sup>th</sup>-century prison poetry, he had intellectually shifted towards the contemplative religious element that had always been present alongside the more visible stance of the countercultural rocker<sup>423</sup>. Now, however, with his Catholic-confessional poetry circulating through the various levels and standpoints of dissent via *Vokno*, his

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<sup>421</sup> Karlík, Viktor: "Vzpomínka na Lubora Hájka" in: *Revolver Revue* no. 52, 2003.

<sup>422</sup> The Irish translator and Bohemianist Gerald Turner, who knew Jirous in the early 1970s, once remarked to me in conversation that Jirous's notable change in physique was believed to be the result of the authorities putting saltpetre or even possibly tranquilisers in prison food during his sentence. Personal communication, May 2016.

<sup>423</sup> A clear explication of these two cultural forms is offered in one essay on Jirous from the 2014 symposium: Šlajchrt, Victor: "Tradice prokletých básníků a Jirous". In: *Magorova konference*, p. 17-21.

personal artistic and self-presentational persona managed to unite in a single prominent individual these two – otherwise seemingly irreconcilable – lines of opposition to the state-social order of the ČSSR, shaping (to a degree still largely underestimated) the tastes and attitudes of the youngest generation of the Czech intellectual elite in the decades both before and after 1989. In addition, it was Jirous who ensured another significant change in *Vokno*'s trajectory from open samizdat forum towards more of what could be classified as a “conventional periodical in unconventional circumstances”: an official editorial board, according to Stárek, from the very moment of his release.

The first thing that Magor told me was: “Well, they locked me up for something I really wasn't, so now I'm actually going to be an editor at *Vokno* so now they can really shit themselves. And he was right. We actually did form an editorial board roughly in the form it has in normal magazines. Of course, now we only met in people's flats.”<sup>424</sup>

In line with *Vokno*'s shift toward a kind of professionalisation (implying, significantly, the implementation of a policy of selection and exclusion far removed from the previous approach of typing and duplicating of almost any manuscript submitted through its reader network) was the creation of an ancillary publication, the informational newsletter *Voknoviny*. Intended as a “flyer [...] that will appear in irregular intervals and size, according to momentary need”, “for the further improvement and primarily speeding up the flow of information”, it stated in its first issue in 1987 its aims to follow

...the principle that has guided *Vokno* since its founding: it is the forum of those who feel themselves to be young, to be arriving “from below”, “from outside” and “for the first time”. [...] Just as a reminder, jeans have priority over evening dress [...].<sup>425</sup>

And in remarkable departure from earlier practice, it added “for easier communication” the full names and postal addresses of the editors: Stárek, Jirous and Bondy. During the next three years, with 19 samizdat issues followed by a full 25 legal issues in 1990 alone, *Voknoviny*

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<sup>424</sup> Stárek 2014, p. 72.

<sup>425</sup> *Voknoviny*, no. 1, 1987xx, p. 1.

appeared roughly in inverse proportion to its parent *Vokno*: three issues in 1985, two in 1986 and 1987, and only one each in the last two years of samizdat illegality.

*Vokno* in the final samizdat era not only could draw upon a much thicker “media ecology” of metropolitan source material, but increasingly on technological innovations of the era, namely the early personal computer and the videocassette recorder. The first nine pages of issue 11 (the second issue in 1986) formed the first use of a computer for “word processing” the page layout: the hardware for this was a Sinclair Spectrum personal computer in Stárek’s possession, linked to a dot-matrix printer for cutting the mimeograph sheet<sup>426</sup>. Issues 12 through 14 were still primarily typewritten, though with computer-set and printed sections of increasing length; the final samizdat issue, no. 15, was entirely computer-produced without any of the traditional hand-typed pages of the earlier numbers. An audio-visual supplement of its own right was the project “*Videomagazín Vokno*”, consisting of two VHS videocassettes, one completed in spring 1987 and the second around a year later, intended for circulation of primarily musical footage from international (e.g. the Polish rock festival in Jarocin) and domestic (including a section with Jim Čert in the second cassette) sources.<sup>427</sup> (One exception was the open exhibit for unofficial artists held on Prague’s Střelecký Ostrov.)

Already by 1989, *Vokno* had moved a long way from the pre-war Ormig, even if its production values remained slightly behind its more youthful counterpart *Revolver Revue*, which in the same period had already moved to offset printing, carried out secretly and conspiratorially on state-owned printing presses<sup>428</sup>. Yet for the thread of our historical narrative, the most telling item in the final 1989 issue is the wording of its dedication:

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<sup>426</sup> Růžková, p. 7.

<sup>427</sup> *Videomagazín Vokno* no. 2 can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbHWviHWR6g>.

<sup>428</sup> For the story of *Revolver Revue*’s samizdat production, see Geisler, and particularly the legal periodical’s special 15<sup>th</sup>-anniversary supplement: Hořejší, Tamara (ed.) *15 let Revolver Revue*, Edice *Revolver Revue* 9, 2001.



*It is the fault of all of us that here immoral monsters lay claim to the sole and last word, and that anyone who takes a stand against this injustice faces only persecution and punishment. This issue is dedicated to our imprisoned comrades – František Stárek and Ivan Jirous.*

The final samizdat issue, in other words, was produced and issued entirely in the absence of the two leading participants, who had been arrested this year among the very last political cases in socialist Czechoslovakia. Jirous was charged not for any connection to *Vokno* but instead for his involvement in the petition ‘Tak dost!’ [Enough Already], in response to the death in police custody of Charta 77 signatory Pavel Wonka, which in many ways formed his one most unambiguous act of traditional political activism in his long career of state persecution<sup>429</sup>. Stárek, however, had been arrested with his then partner Iva Vojtková in February precisely for ‘suspicion of infringement of the public order’ in Vojtková’s house in the provincial town of Česká Třebová, along with the confiscation of the following items:

an electric typewriter with memory Rank Xerox 630, personal computer Spectrum Delta, two cameras, mimeograph Rex Rotary 400, typewriter Zeta, tape player Sony stereo, micro-recorder, over one hundred cassette tapes, library of *Vokno*, mimeograph membranes clean and used, large quantity of paper, books, printed matter, archive of *Vokno*, address books etc.<sup>430</sup>

Stárek and Vojtková were convicted of ‘disturbing the peace’ through their production of *Vokno* at the district court in Ústí nad Orlicí in July; after a failed appeal to the regional court in August, Stárek received a sentence of two and a half years (with a suspended sentence for Vojtková) and entered prison at the end of the month.

The final samizdat issue of *Vokno* lists as its editors Egon Bondy and the poet Luděk Marks, yet the primary editorial circle – and the one to bring the journal into legality only a year later – had a somewhat different composition. In its final form, the *Vokno* editorship consisted of a strictly conspiratorial, in fact highly disciplined collective of seasoned Prague dissidents, judging from the description offered by Miroslav Vodrážka:

First, it was necessary to renew the editorial grouping to exclude any unreliable people. We agreed on cooperation with Blumfeld S. M. alias Čaroděj OZ, Martin Fendrych, computer experts Pavel ‘Anténa’ Lašák,

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<sup>429</sup> Viz. e.g. Švehla, p. 480. A personal recollection of Jirous’s trial is Placák, Petr: ‘30: Jirous + Tichý – Tak dost!’. In: *Babylon*, 2019.

<sup>430</sup> Per the report ‘Sdělení VONS č. 935/František Stárek ve vazbě’, accessible at: <http://www.cunas.cz/dokumenty/sdeleni-vons-c-935/>

Jirka Včelák and others. I had my hidden mimeograph machine with Honza Velát, whose house in Kerhartice had been set on fire by the StB after the Plastic People concert [...]. Working with him and Anténa in Velát's flat in Vyšehradská ulice we printed the 15<sup>th</sup> issue of *Vokno* in May 1989. We hoped to demonstrate that repression against the underground would not mean the destruction of this cult magazine. At the same time, we hoped to weaken the arguments of the court against illegal printed matter of an anti-socialist orientation.<sup>431</sup>

From this point on – the brief caesura between May and November, with the release of both Stárek and Jirous nine days after the police attack on the student demonstration – the samizdat era of *Vokno* ends; perhaps the most interesting finding is that Vodrážka and Velát brought the same mimeograph machine that printed *Vokno* to the Charles University Faculty of Arts building to assist the student strike in printing its leaflets<sup>432</sup>.

The *annus mirabilis* of 1989, to cite Timothy Garton Ash's Latin tag<sup>433</sup>, marked the final turning point for *Vokno*, if not its end: a turning point for the periodical and for the external forces shaping it. By way of concluding this discussion of anti-systemic social action in the final decades of European state socialism, it might be worthwhile to examine what had changed in the period between the removal of the duplicator from the seized house in Nová Víska and the Prague student strike eight years later – in short, the changes witnessed and shaped by *Vokno* through the 1980s. What, in fact, happened in this decade?

For a start, the previous pages should make clear that the political police were singularly ineffective in dividing, neutralising or dissolving the opposition, and in particular the culturally-based forms of it. In the words of the StB itself, evaluating the level of success of Akce Asanace and their various 'preventive' measures in the 1980s:

Harmful groups maintain their friendship practically from primary school and this continues practically until the start of mandatory military service. [...] The youth are strongly influenced on the part of IDC through so-called 'sociological propaganda', through which they are implanted with the subconscious impression of work-free prosperity in the capitalist world, absoluteness of freedom and the negation of the values of the socialist society. Individuals thus influenced then openly speak against the current policy of the KSČ and show hate for its members. Such invective is found not only at parties and discotheques but often directly in the learning process, particularly the misuse of freedom of expression during the teaching of civics. From this we infer that while in previous years the harmful activity of youth had a narrower circle of select individuals, it now has among

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<sup>431</sup> Vodrážka, Miroslav: 'Mytická vize o příchodu Velkého Hospodáře. Zrození roku 1989 z chaosu a jeho tajemství zvrátlosti'. In: *Paměť a dějiny*, no. 1, 2015, p. 52.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>433</sup> Garton Ash, Timothy: *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of 1989 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague*. New York: Random House 1990.

younger persons an uncontrolled spread. Primarily among trade- and secondary-school youth, there are appearing elements of anarchism with a desire to imitate absolute liberty in thought, independence, indifference and living life from day to day...<sup>434</sup>

We can leave aside for now the question of the historiographic status of secret-police documentation (though it would seem that the stronger argument is to trust it as accurate rather than viewing it as an optimistic distortion). Even with its wooden jargon and tortured syntax (actually worse in the original Czech), this document nonetheless captures from the police perspective, or indeed police-state perspective, a reality confirmed repeatedly from the other side, by members of the generation approximately one decade younger than the original underground. The generation born during the 1960s in Czechoslovakia, to be sure, occupied a distinct demographic trough between the post-war generation and the most prominent baby-boom of the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ‘Husák children’ born through most of the 1970s, then predominantly still in childhood or at most early adolescence. Yet they were the first generation to have known primarily the world of the post-1968 order, with very little memory of either the Prague Spring or its abrupt termination but a strong sense of state socialism as an undesirable, unreformable system.

And in this mentality, it was the double morality of normalisation that played the strongest role: a sharp division between the ‘power-sphere’ and private life, an official policy of autarkic puritanism versus a widespread yearning for ‘ideological diversion’ alongside imported consumer goods. Moreover – and this aspect is clear even from the StB analysis, if reading somewhat between the lines – it would equally appear that the ‘folk devil’ aspect of a broad popular fear of ‘unorganised/harmful’ youth, and equally the shock of nonconformist music or fashion, had lost its legitimating power. Normalisation-era Czechoslovakia, despite

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<sup>434</sup> ‘Průběžná informace a výkaz preventivně-výchovných opatření za 1. čtvrtletí roku 1984 – sdělení, sekce 7-8, Volná mládež’. ABS, f. A 36, inv. no. 368. Quoted in Tomek, Prokop: ‘Volná mládež’ pohledem StB napříč 70. a 80. lety, in Kudrna et al., 2016, p. 81-82.

all the traditional characterisations of stagnation, immobility, even ‘stopped time’<sup>435</sup>, was nonetheless not immune to processes of change. Against the efforts of the political police, and secondarily the KSČ hierarchies, to ensure stability, order, or (in the oft-mocked cliché of official discourse) ‘calm for work’<sup>436</sup>, complete social paralysis was continually undermined by organic-demographic change (i.e. births and deaths, new generations reaching maturity – or perhaps more significantly entering into the crucial ‘youth’ category) and the integrative-absorptive powers of any social order in confrontation with the new.

Petr ‘Mauglí’ Kadlec, one of the main organisers of underground rock concerts in Brno and South Moravia in general during the 1980s, was also the main distributor of *Vokno* for his region. He would travel to Prague, to the boiler-room near St. Thomas’s Church in Malá Strana, where Stárek was then employed, for a single copy of the magazine, which he then conspiratorially handed over to a friend “on the fifth track at the Brno station” for its subsequent circulation in a circle of around thirty to forty readers<sup>437</sup>. His own first encounter with the underground, during the 1970s still numerically limited throughout Moravia, is not only worth citing for its own telling period details, but indicates the increasing effect of medialisation on the Czechoslovak public sphere:

It was the TV program ‘Attack on Culture’. We saw it at my grandfather Richard’s, who claimed to have a colour set. Which wasn’t true, he just stuck coloured plastic over the black-and-white screen, light blue or pink. Some of his friends were actually taken in by it. [...] I thought damn, that’s really something, I’d like to know this crowd myself.<sup>438</sup>

The significance of this incident lies not only in the completely reversed effect of official media propaganda, at least among younger viewers, but more importantly in its illustration of the media-dynamics of the era, along with still broader social processes in the background.

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<sup>435</sup> Or, to cite a remark from a conversation in the early 1990s – source and location unremembered – “here the Seventies lasted nine years, eleven months and seventeen days longer than they should”.

<sup>436</sup> *Klid na práci*. This verbal formulation, like the word ‘normalisation’ itself, entered public awareness through Gustav Husák’s address to the meeting of the Central Committee of the KSČ on 17 April 1969, regarded as the start of the rollback of the Prague Spring reforms.

<sup>437</sup> In: Denčevová et al., p. 169, 173.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Television is, in many ways, an almost polar opposite medium from that of samizdat – a key component of power elites (totalitarian or monetary), monodirectional, passive, detached, fluid, continually striving for highest production value. Yet at the same time, it constituted a significant presence in state-socialist societies, and a growing one in the final decades as ownership of television sets gradually became near-universal. The system-stabilising aspects of television, whether as propaganda, distraction or (rarely) ‘repressive desublimation’ of apparent social critique, were nonetheless offset by its ability to project – even unwittingly – socially objectionable elements of reality that could thus gain particular inspirational force. Not only had television had significantly increased its social penetration even since the start of normalisation, stimulating if not entirely satisfying the unmet cultural needs that formed the primary motivation for entry into underground activity.<sup>439</sup> Rock music itself, as the catalyst in cultural politics that shaped Czech dissent even if it did not necessarily launch it (accepting Bolton’s analysis<sup>440</sup>), changed during the 1980s both in its internal forms and expressive means and in its treatment by state authorities. And in taking a more detailed, perhaps even granular view, we should view the latter category not only as the inner circles of the StB or the Communist Party but as the many local and regional cultural functionaries and, perhaps more significantly, increasing generations of official socialist youth leadership for whom electric guitars and syncopated backbeats held no shock value but indeed the reverse.

As Kudrna notes in *Kapela*, even though socialist Czechoslovakia long remained the outlier in the Warsaw Pact in official opposition to rock music, the Central Committee of the Union of Socialist Youth [*Socialistický svaz mládeže* -SSM] was eventually allowed to confirm its guidelines for rock festivals in October 1985, with a planned official “Rockfest” to

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<sup>439</sup> For an overview of television and its role in the culture of Czechoslovak normalisation viz.: Kaňka, Petr-Kofránková, Václava - Mayerová, Ingrid – Štoll, Martin (eds.): *Autor-vize-meze-televize*. Praha-Bratislava: Česká televize – Vysoká škola múzických umení v Bratislave – ÚSTR 2015. In English, primarily Bren, Pauline: *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2010.

<sup>440</sup> Bolton 2012, esp. chapter 4, ‘Legends of the Underground’, pp. 115-124.

be held in Prague's Palace of Culture the following June, using as the model the GDR official rock festival 'Rock für den Frieden'.<sup>441</sup> Between an ever-older generation of Communist functionaries intent on keeping a tight rein on youth culture and the rejection by the greater part of the illegal or semi-tolerated rock scene of the "marking of cows in the 'Pakula' [Prague slang for the Palace of Culture]" – citing the words of Filip Topol<sup>442</sup> - generational change had managed to penetrate even the official structures. Expanding the cultural palette, the less policed folk and "Czech country" music scenes formed their own cultural grey zone between the state entertainment industry and underground rock; conversely, individual rockers, most notably Milan Hlavsa of the Plastic People, made their own concessions for tolerated public performance.

In another sense, though, the technological changes in cultural mediation that state socialism was slow to adopt and bring into mass ownership but did not necessarily oppose on ideological grounds were no less crucial for the decade. Mass television ownership and the growing popularity of the videocassette allowed for a very different, and indeed far wider, sort of cultural pluralism than samizdat ever could. Knowledge of the world on the other side of the Ore Mountains could be picked up through accessible West German or Austrian broadcasts, or spread through cassette recordings, with a Western mass culture of popular escapism (films, popular music) making itself felt in the public awareness. As the subsequent chapter will make clear, many of the social changes after the fall of state-socialist rule were in fact latent in the last decades of normalisation – including the prefiguring of the underground's strange later status after 1990. No less strange, indeed, than the final chapter of *Vokno's* history.

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<sup>441</sup> Kudrna-Stárek, *ibid.*, p. 252-253.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

## Chapter 4

### Transitions in Space and on Paper: 1989 and *Vokno*'s Final (Legal) Years

*I rolled myself up in the carpet for the night... [then] bought half a kilogram of Polish salami and a huge jar of pickles, that was all we had...* Michal Blažek<sup>443</sup>

While keeping in mind the many possible definitions of the term, samizdat can nonetheless be said to have essentially ended with the collapse of the Leninist or Soviet form of state socialism, i.e. with the dissolution of state censorship and the planned economy<sup>444</sup>. In Czechoslovakia, in a sense, its precise chronological point of termination could be placed even slightly before the official transfer of power from the Communist party-state and the establishment of the new political order in the first weeks of 1990. The open publication of information sheets without consideration of any immediate threat of state intervention began within days of the police attack on the 17 November student demonstration in Prague, months before the first free elections, and even several weeks in advance of the announced end of the previous political order at the end of 1989<sup>445</sup>.

The start of public circulation of printed matter – as discussed elsewhere, the non-networked dissemination of unofficial publications – shortly after “November” is a vitally important moment of social change, deserving its own treatment in full. Yet another matter, a

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<sup>443</sup> Michal Blažek, a sculptor and architectural restorer, was a cofounder of the Prague gallery for young artists U Řečických, discussed below as the site of Prague's first independent press centre during the events of November 1989. His personal testimony is available in print most prominently through Brolík, Tomáš: “Týdeník Respekt: Rok jedna”. In: *Respekt*, no. 48, 2014, special supplement *25 let Respektu*, p. 3. I have also heard the description from him personally, most recently 16 November 2019, Prague.

<sup>444</sup> As before, I would agree with Machovec's thesis on the incompatibility of samizdat with an open society and economy, viz. in particular Machovec 2017 *ibid.*, esp. p. 131-159, or Gruntorád, Jiří: *Samizdatová literatura v Československu sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let*. In: Alan, Josef – Bitrich, Tomáš: *Alternativní kultura - Příběh české společnosti 1945–1989*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2001. Also note the arguments of Komaromi, Ann: “The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat”. In: *Slavic Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, autumn 2004, pp. 597-618.

<sup>445</sup> Direct accounts, as noted in detail below, tend to be the products of the immediate actors – not only the authors but even the periodicals. Note in particular Švehla, Marek: *Konečně svoboda*. In: *Respekt*, special supplement *Zlatá devadesátá*, 18 September 2017, as well as *25 let Respektu*, *ibid.* A very broad overview of censorship in Czech-language publishing is offered by Janáček, Pavel et al.: *V obecném zájmu. Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře, 1749–2014*. Praha: Academia 2015.

clearly separate phenomenon though immediately related through chronological succession, is the emergence during (more or less) the single year of 1990 of a recognisable print ‘agora’ – in other words, bearing the signs of both civil and market society<sup>446</sup>, with its unique, linguistically and nationally based hierarchies from prestigious cultural journals to popular tabloids, and the persistence of this specific media-ecology<sup>447</sup> through the subsequent decades up to the present. How samizdat periodicals found, metaphorically speaking, their ecological niche or respectively entered the fossil record is yet a further question of its own, which will form the main topic of this chapter – and moreover one likely to illuminate many aspects of a period only now starting to receive adequate treatment in historical analysis.

As discussed before, samizdat was formed in response to highly specific conditions of politics, history and geography; consequently, and to a large extent understandably, scholarly analysis of samizdat has overwhelmingly focused on the inseparable circumstances of its era<sup>448</sup>, first during its period of activity and subsequently as a kind of “archaeology of the recent past”<sup>449</sup>. Often, and particularly in the case of retrospective analyses, the presentation is charged with a special urgency to preserve the memory of a past gradually moving out of living memory, particularly in public educational efforts (e.g. the recent program by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes<sup>450</sup>). At times, the rhetoric is even expressed as moving into incomprehension or incomprehensibility<sup>451</sup>, hoping to pass this knowledge on to

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<sup>446</sup> Note Cohen-Arato 1992, *ibid.*, also viz. Baker, Gideon: *Civil Society and Democratic Theory. Alternative Voices*. London: Routledge 2002.

<sup>447</sup> The term is, famously, from McLuhan, Marshall: *Understanding Media*. New York: Mentor 1964; also note Fuller, Matthew: *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press 2005.

<sup>448</sup> E.g. the approach taken in the introduction to: Goetz-Stankiewicz, Markéta: *Good-Bye, Samizdat: Twenty Years of Czechoslovak Underground Writing*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1992.

<sup>449</sup> For an exploration of the transitional dimension note e.g. Kind-Kovács, Frederike-Labov, Jessie (eds.): *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013.

<sup>450</sup> Viz.: <http://www.dejepis21.cz/aktualita/cold-war-conversations-o-socialism-realised>

<sup>451</sup> E.g. Gruntorád 2001 *ibid.*, or his other statements in various media, particularly <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10419676635-fenomen-underground/413235100221016-uz-na-to-s-u-ptoze-to-mam-za-par/8452-jiri-gruntorad/>



the “free-born” generations thought (indeed at times hoped) to be incapable of understanding this bizarre phenomenon<sup>452</sup>.

Much less attention, though, has been paid to the actual results of samizdat’s shift into a different mode of knowledge-production, or more accurately two modes: legal/non-conspiratorial and monetarised/profit-driven. Furthermore, there remains the task of elucidating how each personal network became absorbed into post-1989 structures or dissolved, how each publication established itself in an open publishing market or disappeared from it, and from these findings establishing a more general picture of the social processes at work during the post-“November” era.

We can assume that *Vokno* as samizdat concluded with issue number 15, which as noted previously was compiled, typed (in full) on a computer and printed on a mimeograph machine in May 1989<sup>453</sup>. For our study of *Vokno* in our chosen terms of social action under state oppression, we could take this moment as an ending point. Yet as a periodical, though, *Vokno* did not end in 1989. It made the shift into legal publication with surprising rapidity, and persisted for half a decade, with the final issue – no. 30 - appearing in the early summer of 1995.



Cover of the last issue of *Vokno*, no. 30, 1995.

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<sup>452</sup> Considering that the historical discussion of this period is still in its infancy, and strictly speaking only applies indirectly to the central topic of the present work, I am basing this contention on recollections of conversations from the period.

<sup>453</sup> *Vokno*, no. 15, 1989xx; viz. [https://www.vons.cz/data/pdf/vokno/vokno\\_15.pdf](https://www.vons.cz/data/pdf/vokno/vokno_15.pdf).

The *Vokno* of the 1990s differed substantially from its pre-1989 incarnation, in ways both immediately obvious (printing technology, distribution) and more contingent (differing staff or range of subject matter), yet it still demands attention alongside the earlier samizdat. Not merely as a kind of coda to the narrative of struggle and repression, but instead as a disruption of the historiographic narrative of totalitarianism as a closed trajectory, ending in the “Year Zero” moment of the regime’s fall. It would form a far more informative conclusion to the present work – notably, far more informative than simply celebrating the move into legal publishing – to end with a brief discussion of the transitional *Vokno* and through it the period immediately after state-socialism’s end, so often termed the era of transition.

“Transition” can be dismissed an empty buzzword, a dated cliché of the 1990s<sup>454</sup>, yet – for a historical sociology that by necessity discusses even the coarsening and distortion of ideas in popular-journalistic use – it nonetheless forms a genuine entity that requires examination in its own right<sup>455</sup>. During the 1989-2001 period, transition came to be equated with the dismantling of state socialism in Europe, Russia and Central Asia<sup>456</sup>. Despite a number of efforts to link democratisation in the former Soviet region to the end of authoritarian right-wing regimes in Latin America and the ending of the apartheid state in South Africa<sup>457</sup>, of particular importance – as we shall discuss later – with regard to the formulation of broader, less Eurocentric theories of civil society<sup>458</sup>, transition remained, and to this day has remained, predominantly associated with European post-Leninist political and social orders. At the same time, the media-generated semiotics of the early Nineties produced

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<sup>454</sup> Note e.g. Nodia, Ghia: “Chasing the Meaning of ‘Post-Communism’: a Transitional Phenomenon or Something to Stay?“. In: *Contemporary European History*, vol. 9, issue 2, July 2000, pp. 269-283.

<sup>455</sup> E.g. King, Charles: “Post-Postcommunism: Transition, Comparison, and the End of ‘Eastern Europe’“. In: *World Politics*, vol. 53, issue 1, October 2000, pp. 143-172.

<sup>456</sup> For a typical instance note: Lewis, Charles Paul: *How the East Was Won*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005.

<sup>457</sup> E.g. Baker 2002, *ibid*.

<sup>458</sup> There is an extensive literature on civil society and/against Eurocentricist assumptions. Note e.g. Lewis, David: “Civil Society in Non-Western Contexts: Reflections on the ‘Usefulness’ of a Concept”. Civil Society Working Paper 13, London School of Economics, 2001, or Lahiry, Sujit: “Civil Society Redefined”. In: *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. LXVI, no. 1, Jan-March 2005.

a series of striking visual images depicting transition through strongly ironic juxtapositions – Lenin statues being dismantled, a scrapped Trabant in a skip<sup>459</sup>, global brand advertisements against socialist-realist public artwork. Over time, these images have formed a vital part of collective-memory identifiers for this particular era, not least for their regular employment in cover designs of academic publications, yet the great preponderance of them also anchor transition not only economically (as the success-narrative of the Western consumer society), but also geographically (Europe or at most Russia west of the Urals and north of the Caucasus)<sup>460</sup>. With all these caveats firmly in mind, though, I would like in this section to argue that “transition”, treated carefully, can prove a useful analytical term if properly historicised to fit not merely a set of social processes but equally the unvoiced assumptions political, social and (not least) academic power-relations that in chronological parallel tried to classify and shape them.

A second crucial angle for the post-transition era, i.e. the present, should be (in the formulation of Dipesh Chakrabarty) the simultaneous “provincialization” of European totalitarian history and the de-provincialization of the actual paradigm to extend beyond Europe’s less fortunate “ganglands” (Norman Davies) or “bloodlands” (Timothy Snyder) into the non-European world. With reference to the previous discussion, de-provincialisation extends beyond the question of placing the subject into a new geopolitical configuration, with the rise in importance of the Global South and the reconfiguration of Cold War conceptions of East and West into an understanding of the former Communist sphere now as merely the Eastern section of the Global North, in many senses its economic-geopolitical periphery yet nonetheless in current understandings a component. The central insight of Chakrabarty<sup>461</sup>,

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<sup>459</sup> <https://www.ddrbildarchiv.de/info/ddr-fotos/sperrmuellcontainer-jerusalem-strasse-berlin-27369.html>

<sup>460</sup> E.g. Kanth, Rajani Kannepalli (ed.): *The Challenge of Eurocentrism: Global Perspectives, Policy, and Prospects*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009.

<sup>461</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh: *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

underscored as well in the no less significant writings of Raewyn Connell<sup>462</sup> or Gurminder Bhambra<sup>463</sup>, is the need to re-evaluate well-worn universals in social analysis, and to subject them to a thorough critique for their limitation to the realm of Europe, or at most European-dominated settler societies<sup>464</sup>. There is even a strong argument that the mental schema in post-Communist Europe equating totalitarianism per se with the Hitler/Stalin dyad not only thoroughly disregards Arendt's own extrapolation of totalitarian methods to Western Europe's imperialism, but could even be said to indulge in a still more dangerous form of methodological nationalism: restriction of the scope of scholarly-historiographic inquiry to an exclusive focus on the national collective, if not a further reification of the nation and its varied actors from dissidents to nomenklatura as mere passive victims ground between the millstones of Moscow and Berlin. An attempt at imagining an integration of the European Communist experience into post-2001 globalised understandings of power and hegemony will be attempted in a subsequent chapter, yet it is worth bringing this question to the forefront particularly to highlight the peculiar "provinciality" of the Eurocentric understanding of transition and transitionality, not to mention the various end-of-history debates for the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet the picture is still more complicated with the arrival of additional factors, not least the post-1989 internationalisation of scholarship beyond the unidirectional model of the exile "explicator" in the West and the stereotype of the "Sovietologist" inferring conclusions through over-interpretation of exceedingly sparse data. Not only has the term "transition" fallen out of favour for its application to the geographic region of post-Communism, but it has

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<sup>462</sup> Connell, Raewyn: *Southern Theory. Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007.

<sup>463</sup> Bhambra, Gurminder: *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

<sup>464</sup> The question of whether to include the settler societies within the entity of "Europe" is open – Connell, for one, strongly disagrees, placing Australia along within Latin America's southern cone well into the area of the Global South.

clearly moved (or – pardon the pun – “transitioned”) from politics and international relations into gender studies: gender transitions and “T+” issues are now by far the more frequent associations with “transition” as a search keyword<sup>465</sup>. Nor, for that matter, have the seismic alterations in global power-balances since the start of the millennium (i.e. post-2001) fully “provincialized” the Cold War division, pace Chakrabarty, whether into a truly balanced understanding or a mere regional dispute within today’s Global North: scholarly investigation remains, if anything, more divided between focusing narrowly on the European/Soviet sphere itself and largely ignoring it. And within the immediate environment of Czech scholarship, historical policy and collective memor(ies), we equally need to emphasise one final matter: in contrast to the pre-1989 period, where the urgent historiographic question is dealing with received ideas and fixed characterisations of the era, what faces history and the social sciences in general with the legacy of the 1990s is the need to create even the first layer of conceptualisations and characterisations, however vague and impressionistic they might be at first, and to hope that in doing so the understanding, i.e. the mental integration, of the pre-1989 past both remembered and transmitted can proceed with greater ease and less unnecessary argument.

With all these disparate trajectories in mind, and bearing in mind the specific retrospective urgency of the time of writing, just past the third decade of the 1989 anniversary, perhaps it would be worthwhile to consider, indeed to historicise, the circumstances of the early 1990s and what it meant not merely for *Vokno* specifically but also for oppositional activity from the normalisation period in its emergence into an open society. As banal and overused as the phrase “open society” may seem, it is worth reiterating that the

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<sup>465</sup> Note the recent work of Rogers Brubaker: *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. It is indeed symptomatic that Brubaker’s research in a previous era addressed questions of nationalism and national identity, most notably Brubaker, Rogers: *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

end of censorship and the command economy represented distinct and quantifiable social changes, and that it is hardly over-normative to assume that they represented an improvement. Yet the peculiar historical and social environment of the subsequent era, which may well deserve the rather unattractive neologism “transitional”, bore all the same many traces of the pre-1989 order, whether through path-dependencies, historical inertia, or even the relatively “inorganic” rapidity of the sudden institutionalisation – over a mere few months - of a basic structure of civil and market liberties. If only for historical accuracy’s sake, we need to recall how, from both a historical and a sociological standpoint, the conditions for cultural production under direct state management differ from those where the state does not view aesthetic divergence as an immediate assault on its authority. Yet no less significant is examining the process of the integration of the excluded elements into a new social-construction entity, in our case the new spheres of unmanaged cultural life and a market-determined print economy, a process that the present work is, in its own way, attempting to create beyond the conventional narratives of 1989 and its aftermath.

Instead of viewing the period of *Vokno*’s years of legal production as one of “transition”, i.e. ignoring the question of “transition toward what?” and uncritically taking the era’s prevalent rhetoric of catching up with the West (or indeed catching up with “normal life”) at face value, a more useful historical description might be that of integration. The word does not obscure the severe social and cultural restrictions of state socialism, indeed underlines the harshness of its exclusive, separating (indeed segregating) forces and power-methods, yet also does not posit a normative teleological status as the final result, and hence avoids a kind of self-historicization with 1990s utopianism. Moreover, it draws attention less to the historical (indeed, more memory-generating) iconography of transition-imagery specified earlier than to the process of how the societies where state socialism had ended brought the excluded elements into the newly constituted social organism. In other words, the

present chapter offers a view not only of *Vokno*'s integration into the public sphere, and its eventual disintegration into a series of different publication projects, but even a way of understanding a historical epoch that has long remained in the shadow of a single Great Event (November 1989) and only now is assuming sufficiently abstracted contours for absorption (integration) into historical and popular understanding.

To examine this moment of integrative transitionality or of transitional integration, it might be appropriate to leave behind the pre-cyberspace virtuality of the printed page or samizdat paper agora for an examination of the physical-spatial ordering of the open public sphere. *Vokno*, during the second half of the 1980s, had been edited – per Vodrážka's testimony – “exclusively in apartments”<sup>466</sup> for reasons of security; even the quasi-open spaces like the Nová Víska communal residence (or still more open ones, like the Prague pub ‘U Lojzy’ discussed in Chapter II) at this stage appeared too risky. Almost in strange parallel with the increasing presence of quasi-autonomous cultural activity during the period, *Vokno*'s convergence with metropolitan cultural dissent implied, perhaps even necessitated, a move into the private residential sphere of the urban apartment (or, for its further reproduction and distribution, private, i.e. non-communal rural dwellings). If we understand samizdat as much about spatiality (the dimensions of distribution and production, specifically the limitations imposed upon it) as about the paper objects, then the crucial aspect for samizdat's move into open-society conditions is less about the copies themselves (however important the shift to offset printing may have been technologically) than about finding separate office and editorial spaces. Not only is this a question of creating spaces separate from the domestic sphere, spaces for entry into the civil society that had only been present in nascent form until then, but equally about the presence, the physical in-habitation of the urban environment, and the generation of autonomous culture as a part of the public cityscape – and of the new role of the

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<sup>466</sup> Vodrážka, op. cit., *Paměť a dějiny* 2015, p. 54.

city in the post-totalitarian order, whether in the nation-state itself or through its new connection to the wider world of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century version of early globalisation.

One particularly apt symbol of print integration, or perhaps more tellingly “de-samizdatisation”, might well be the building located in Prague at the address Bolzanova 7, which immediately after the collapse of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia served as the editorial for a group of former samizdat publications at the centre of Prague dissent, in other words well-positioned for their role as information sources right at the moment of November 1989. For several months in 1990, Bolzanova 7 was the literal physical and geographic centre of autonomous publication in the Czech language beyond the (still-active) exile press. Alongside this undeniable historical significance, though, the location of Bolzanova 7 is not merely emblematic but actively instructive, drawing attention to the essentially spatial dimensions of publishing activity, both linguistic and physical. On the one hand, it implied the end to the private and/or domestic aspect of samizdat, yet additionally, if more indirectly, the separation of the intellectual aspects of periodical production from the physical, including the move from the craft-like aspect of typewriting and silkscreening towards industrial production on offset presses. A further dimension, inextricably linked to the end of the command economy, is that machine printing, a contracted activity entirely separate from the editing process and agreed with a profit-motivated company printing whatever commissions they happened to receive, adds yet another layer of differentiation, indeed a hierarchical separation between writing and physical production: the model in which each participant turns the crank of the Ormig duplicator in the communal kitchen is now far away indeed.

So far, we have spoken of a move out of samizdat, but it is also a move into – what? What is the media-ecology that follows the legalisation, or more accurately, what was the media-scape of the transitional period? In linguistic terms, every publication is limited and



defined by its language; concomitantly, the circulation range of a periodical, whether national newspaper, samizdat circular or handmade fanzine, is itself a definition of its group of readers. In one sense, the process of the move from kitchen-table editing and secret printing to a genuine editorial office could be viewed as the achievement of national scope. With no small irony, recalling the increasing appeals at the time for economic privatisation as a vital necessity, we might coin the phrase the “nationalisation” of samizdat. For after all, if the printed page is a form of the civil public sphere, it is nonetheless a partially exclusive one based on linguistic capability – which, in most cases, is the result of birth and acculturation to a specific nation-state or acknowledged linguistic minority. Classically, Benedict Anderson noted the relation between the periodical and the emergence of language-based collective awareness, expanding shared literacy (and its material practice through buying and reading periodicals) to the wider territory of the perceived, i.e. imagined nation.

The significance of this mass ceremony - Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers - is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?<sup>467</sup>

The move from the samizdat sphere, essentially a “private public” creating its own space between the family (familial) and the state, could equally be described as a move into a national space, or perhaps more accurately, a re-mapping of a national print-sphere previously divided between official (public), samizdat (hidden) and exile (outside the state boundaries) back into the conventional geographic delineations.

However, among the scholars of nationalism it may be Ernest Gellner who has set down the received image of nationalism and nation-building through his trenchant depiction of the processes of collective self-reification inherent in the national configuration of the

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<sup>467</sup> Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1990, p. 34-36.

“smaller” linguistic communities, with a special eye towards post-Habsburg Europe. Gellner’s paradigm case of the imaginary yet distinctly ‘Austro-Balkan’ kingdom of Ruritania is invariably applied to a wide range of real-world cases, regardless of geographical location, to invoke the severe difficulties of harmoniously mapping language onto geography. And the current result of the efforts to match the two, as he noted with characteristic irony, has most often been the brutal reality of physical displacement: the ethnographic map that

resembles not Kokoschka, but, say, Modigliani [...] generally plain where one begins and another ends, and there is little if any ambiguity or overlap.<sup>468</sup>

And it should be admitted: it is hard to avoid the impression, when examining Czechoslovakia’s post-1968 “normalization” (not to mention the effects of the Holocaust, the post-1945 expulsion of the German population or the class-based levelling after the Communist coup of 1948) that a different artistic analogy might hold. In other words, less Modigliani than Mark Rothko, taking into account the massive social homogenisation imposed by thoroughgoing state control and concomitant social conformity among the wider population.

Nonetheless, Gellner’s predominantly linguistic understanding of nationalism bending along an arc towards homogeneity, interchangeability and the wider battery of modernising processes leads to an assumption that the Modigliani colour-fields are as uniform and homogeneous in reality as the nationalist imagination presents them. A language, or more precisely a state linguistic order, is in its standard print form (leaving aside spoken dialects or macaronic code-switching in less neatly arrayed border areas) universal to the territory or its politically induced diaspora (itself regarded less as extraterritorial than as further social damage from 20<sup>th</sup>-century totalitarianism). The social order within this unified colour-field, though, is rarely as smooth as the painterly metaphor suggests. The “paper virtuality” of print,

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<sup>468</sup> Gellner, Ernest: *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 139-140.

whether legal or samizdat, needs to be supplemented with a more finely calibrated awareness of physical space: the crucial role of differences of size and scale, and the spatialities of post-Habsburg national entities, including (though not limited to) the relation between urban centres and rural peripheries. Or rather, to look less at the homogeneities but also the differentiating factors, in parallel with the investigation of publications and space. Perhaps it is no insult to add to Gellner's formation a further consideration - the need to study not only Ruritania as a country but equally the differences between Zenda and Strelsau, between peripheries and – specifically – the entity of the small-nation capital and its outsized function as cultural-social arbiter<sup>469</sup>. And this Ruritanian-minded sociology would examine as well what Gellner only left us to infer: the web of far more interwoven, not to say gnarled and incestuous, personal connections and often near-unbelievable coincidences found both in 'synchronic' social descriptions as in 'diachronic' historical analyses. These often-improbable personal links and Situationist-map topographies should not be left to their simple registry in nationally confined scholarship, let alone to the realm of the easy feuilleton or free-floating gossip, but demand its own examination with the appropriate tools of scholarly rigour.

The story of Bolzanova 7 is relatively simple. In the early weeks of January 1990, an unoccupied former office building of the still state-owned Czechoslovak State Rail was offered by the state authorities to an organisation known as the "Independent Press Centre" (*Nezávislé tiskové středisko*). Despite its rather anodyne name, the NTS had a particularly intriguing background and formative path: it consisted of authors associated with Prague's primary samizdat periodicals, primarily *Revolver Revue* and its more explicitly political offshoot *Sport*, along with other projects less closely affiliated with cultural dissent, such as

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<sup>469</sup> The reference is of course to the original novel by Hope, Anthony: *The Prisoner of Zenda*, from 1894. Oddly enough, Zenda – if real – would lie in the Czech Sudetenland, being situated close to the border roughly between Dresden and the (fictitious) capital Strelsau.

the samizdat revival of the prestigious First Republic daily *Lidové noviny*.<sup>470</sup> Literally within hours of the first rumours and eyewitness reports of the police attack on student demonstrators along Národní třída in central Prague on 17 November 1989, several contributors (including two central personalities of the samizdat *Revolver Revue* authorial collective, Jáchym Topol and Ivan Lamper) met in the flat of another member of the group, a student of the Charles University Faculty of National Sciences named Alexandr Vondra, to put together the first mimeographed bulletin for uncensored reporting, *Informační servis*<sup>471</sup>. Three days later, sculptor Michal Blažek, then head of the young artists' forum, offered the space in the association's gallery, "Galerie u Řečických", at the address Vodičkova 10, to the NTS, after closing it the night of 17 November (sleeping overnight on the floor wrapped in a carpet) and organising in it the first press conference of the dissident coordinating organisation Civic Forum, along with a supply of food – by his recollection, a stick of cheap salami and a jar of pickles<sup>472</sup>.

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<sup>470</sup> Perhaps the most extensive descriptions, with ample pictorial material, have been provided by two of the major publications to emerge from the NTS: the special issue of the cultural quarterly *Revolver Revue*: "15 let *Revolver Revue*", ERR 9/2001, ed. Hořejší, Tamara, specifically pp. 45-48, or: Brolík, Tomáš: "Týdeník Respekt: rok jedna", *Respekt*, 23.11.2014, accessed at: <https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2014/48/rok-jedna> or <https://www.respekt.cz/25-let-respektu/ivan-lamper-nebyt-toho-taxikare-respekt-by-nevznikl>.

<sup>471</sup> Hořejší, *ibid.* A far more extensive discussion of the events leading to the formation of *Informační servis* is available online from the panel discussion between participants Zbyněk Petráček, Jáchym Topol and Jaroslav Spurný: *Informační servis – tři desetiletí českých nezávislých médií*. 20 November 2020, Václav Havel Library, Prague, <https://havelchannel.cz/cs/01359>.

<sup>472</sup> Note: Geisler, p. 48-49, Švehla, p. 491 and following; also viz. Petráček, Zbyněk: "Zprávy a chaos U Řečických", in *Lidové noviny*, 14.11.2009, accessed at: [https://www.lidovky.cz/noviny/zpravy-a-chaos-u-recickych.A091114\\_000118\\_in\\_noviny\\_sko](https://www.lidovky.cz/noviny/zpravy-a-chaos-u-recickych.A091114_000118_in_noviny_sko), or Pospíchal, Petr: "Vzpomínky na revoluce: 20. listopad", *Deník Referendum* [online], at: <http://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/19201-vzpominky-na-revoluci-20-listopad>.



Michal Blažek (front left) with poet Vít Kremlička printing *Informační servis* in 1989. Photo: Jaroslav Kukal; source: *Respekt*

The precise course of events is, understandably, somewhat uncertain, based on differing recollections among the various participants<sup>473</sup>; what is of greater importance for the present considerations is the extreme rapidity of the response from Czech samizdat and the striking cohesiveness of its participants once events came to a head. The NTS took as its mission the provision of information directly to international journalists and press agencies, avoiding the still largely compliant state media such as the Czech Press Office (ČTK). More significantly for the present concerns, though, is that the improvised press centre in U Řečických was the first place where both Stárek and Jirous headed once they were released – as possibly socialist Czechoslovakia’s very last political prisoners – at the very end of November. The story of *Informační servis* and its transformation into what, for the past three decades, has been regarded as the most prestigious Czech weekly news organ, *Respekt*, has been told elsewhere, primarily on the website of *Respekt* itself;<sup>474</sup> suffice it to state for the time being that it was the Prague underground represented by the second generation of dissent who immediately took action and who had supplied to them access to the field in which the

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<sup>473</sup> And, of course, the instant mythologisation of the NTS in the following days as international reporters arrived: for one example viz. the Washington Post as of 5 December 1989: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1989/12/05/in-prague-a-second-breath-of-spring/cec89952-845f-43c1-9e3e-ee100a6f009a/>

<sup>474</sup> E.g.: <https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/1999/47/respekt-v-datech>.

action could be realised. At a moment of unexpected yet near-universal politicisation, as the regime fell apart from day to day, it would seem as if the well-connected Prague section of cultural opposition found themselves in the right place at the right time for the final act in 20<sup>th</sup>-century European power-shifts, where conditions were set for decades into the future.

More or less still in December 1989 (the reports and recollections fail to provide a specific date)<sup>475</sup>, it was clear not only that circumstances now favoured creating a new, free and legal print media, but the organisation had far outgrown the gallery space. One floor above the offices still occupied by the “Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Society”, a semi-permanent office was created for the publications of NTS:<sup>476</sup> *Informační servis* – after 14 March 1990 publishing as a conventional newsweekly *Respekt* – alongside the editorships of several other periodicals, both samizdat publications now unexpectedly thrust into legality as well as entirely new titles. Some of them belonged to the original base of the NTS: *Revolver Revue*, for instance, maintained its offices here until 1994. Others emerged out of the 1989 moment, such as the independent university newspaper *Studentské listy*<sup>477</sup>, or the short-lived cultural journal *Konzerva/Na hudbu*, essentially consisting of Michal Blažek (from Galerie u Řečických) for commentary on the visual arts and composer Petr Kofroň (later head of the National Theatre opera company) for music<sup>478</sup>. And for the purposes of the present work, another tenant was the now definitively ex- samizdat *Vokno*.

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<sup>475</sup> Brolík, *ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> *Nezávislé tiskové středisko* was, however, only registered officially as an enterprise, with the status of “cooperative” [*družstvo*] as of 27 July 1990, according to the official documentation available at: <https://rejstrik.penize.cz/00550604-nezavisle-tiskove-stredisko-v-likvidaci>

<sup>477</sup> For the history of this periodical, note: Bartůněk, Martin et al. (eds.) *Takoví jsme byli... Studentské listy po 30 letech*. Nakladatelství Právek: Praha 2019.

<sup>478</sup> Literally “Can / For Music”. Twelve issues were published until 1996, according to the holdings of the Czech National Library; the title was registered with the Ministry of Culture until 2003:

[https://www.mkcr.cz/databaze-periodickeho-tisku-pro-verejnost-978.html?do\[loadP\]=1&item.id=662](https://www.mkcr.cz/databaze-periodickeho-tisku-pro-verejnost-978.html?do[loadP]=1&item.id=662). More on *Konzerva /Na hudbu* is available at the website for the Czech alternative press [bigmag.cz](http://bigmag.cz/?page=casopis&id=252&lang=cs): <http://bigmag.cz/?page=casopis&id=252&lang=cs>.

*Vokno* kept its editorial offices in Bolzanova 7 up until the journal's final issue, which as noted earlier appeared in May 1995. Comparing the legal periodical to the samizdat version, we can see in miniature – a micro-history, as it were – the social processes of integrating previously separated areas of life under state socialism into the sought-after end of a unified entity of reunited nation-state and harmoniously democratic civil society. Yet if we maintain our eye for social scale, between the seemingly “global” (yet in retrospect highly Eurocentric) social processes associated with the 1990s in general and the individual specifics of who happened to do what in each capitol city in the post-Communist sphere, we should nonetheless also consider the immediate personal-historical contingencies of *Vokno*'s transition into legality. First of all, there is the post-prison career of František ‘Čuñas’ Stárek, who as one of the last political prisoners found himself assigned to a radically different field of activity immediately after the old regime's fall: joining the newly established “Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Democracy” (*Úřad pro ochranu ústavy a demokracie*) of the federal Interior Ministry as of its founding on 16 February 1990<sup>479</sup>. This institution essentially formed the post-Communist national intelligence service and was succeeded by the current Czech intelligence agency (BIS), where Stárek remained until resigning in 2007<sup>480</sup>. Indeed, few more dramatic shifts of fate for post-1989 dissidents could be imagined, particularly bearing in mind Stárek's personal background, as detailed previously<sup>481</sup>. And as for the periodical itself, with his departure for public service, *Vokno* lost its single strongest link to the earliest period of North Bohemia's underground circles. The magazine that established its professional editorial offices in Bolzanova ul. essentially was composed of the team assembled, per Miroslav Vodrážka's account<sup>482</sup>, in response to Stárek's final trial and

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<sup>479</sup> Stárek, understandably, has said very little about this 17-year period, except for mentioning it in his unsuccessful 2016 campaign for the Czech Senate. See e.g.: [https://www.expres.cz/zpravy/frantisek-starek-cunas-senat.A160712\\_205753\\_dx-zpravy\\_p](https://www.expres.cz/zpravy/frantisek-starek-cunas-senat.A160712_205753_dx-zpravy_p)

<sup>480</sup> Viz: <https://www.bis.cz/historie/>

<sup>481</sup> I.e. as the subject of the StB action ‘Satan’, viz. esp. Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 160 and following

<sup>482</sup> Vodrážka, *ibid.*

arrest in 1989, the overwhelmingly Prague-based ‘underground within the underground’ with a significantly greater knowledge of the Anglophone counterculture and a significantly greater rejection of mainstream habits (vegetarianism, teetotal or straight-edge abstinence)<sup>483</sup> than the original underground had ever attempted.

The two main contributors to *Vokno* in 1989 and after, Miroslav Vodrážka and Lubomír Drozd, (earlier known both in interactions and on the page as ‘Čaroděj’ [Wizard, alternatively ‘Wizard of Oz] but now using his more frequent pseudonym Blumfeld SM<sup>484</sup>), had been crucial figures at the end of the samizdat period following Stárek’s trial and imprisonment in 1989, and had themselves ensured the production of the last samizdat issue (yet equally the first ‘digitally’ produced one using a word processor rather than a typewriter). As evident from issue no. 15, and indeed from their contributions still earlier, their central focus was on the international “information blockade” separating socialist Czechoslovakia from the creative achievements of Western musical, artistic and literary countercultures. Hence it is no surprise that in the post-1989 period, *Vokno* shifted far more intensively into a mediating role, presenting international – i.e. Anglo-American – cultural information in Czech translation, rather than specifically offering a forum for domestic self-expression. As Vodrážka himself stated regarding Drozd’ (Čaroděj),

... for me, he was the guarantee of a somewhat different idea of the underground, since he identified far more with the American or Western counterculture, as defined by its intellectual creator, the visionary Theodore Roszak.<sup>485</sup>

In yet another sense, with Stárek ensconced in a political function and Jirous largely uninvolved with public life after 1990, tendencies already visible in the *Vokno* of the final samizdat years became a determining factor. The religious-mystical orientation of the

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<sup>483</sup> See Vodrážka, note 377 infra.

<sup>484</sup> Viz. e.g. his biographical entry in the Film Academy (FAMU) database: <http://cas.famu.cz/research-collection/item.php?id=1153>

<sup>485</sup> Vodrážka, Miroslav: “Minulost je před námi”, interview with Adam Drda, *Revolver Revue* no. 103/2016, p. 151; reprinted in Pokorná, Tereza, Onuferová, Edita (eds.): *RR rozhovory*. Praha: Edice RR 2016.



Templova ulice seminars, combined with Vodrážka's 'masculine feminist' sensibility and the notably 'straight-edge' orientation of his immediate circle, rejecting the hard-drinking pub-and-concert sociability of the earlier underground (particularly in light of both Jirous's and Jiří Němec's increasingly problematic habits)<sup>486</sup> for a significantly more ascetic as well as explicitly intellectual standpoint:

An underground style marked with an emphasis on spiritual symbolism, an aesthetic of transcendence through musical form and an alternative lifestyle (*No Drugs, No Alcohol, No Meat*) [English in original]. It expresses a political stance against the atheistic totalitarian regime.<sup>487</sup>

Vodrážka's position – if anything, a “more positive” deviation than previously and a step much further apart from the Czech mainstream at the time – was nonetheless somewhat isolated even within the publication's post-1989 collective. More typical, and indeed holding much greater influence on the final period of *Vokno*, was the role occupied by Drožd', listed on the masthead with his two pseudonyms as 'Čaroděj – Blumfeld'. To cite from his editorials in issue 17:

We aim to make *Vokno* open to all tendencies of the cultural-social margins and open it to all forms of the art of the extreme.... What interests us more is deviant culture. Culture that deviates or has deviated from the main path. [...] We are interested in the low undercurrents of culture, but also in the spirit of the age. Postmodern consciousness, post-industrial society. The problems of this day are what to want to reflect while doing so from our own tradition. From the tradition that is the spirit of the underground. [...] We wish to present on the pages of *Vokno* cultural, ecological, social, spiritual, psychedelic and sexual 'dissidents'.<sup>488</sup>

Or, with a more explicitly political appeal, his editorial for issue 19:

The question is, what this underground of the 1990s, the 'underground for plurality' [...] will be, or even if it could be or should be. Even though I myself, at least somewhat, have tried even earlier to cut off the branch under this unclear term 'underground' and even if the branch may be gone, the idea remains. And it is completely irrelevant how we wish to term the phenomenon of the underground for the future, what attributes we could attach to it. Undermining, subversive culture? Heretical culture? Invalid culture? Second, parallel, alternative, independent, different culture? All these at once.<sup>489</sup>

Drožd', as will become clear below, did not go quite so far in his criticism of the new order as other deliberately marginal, indeed self-marginalising, voices of the decade; his approach, much as in the samizdat era, was to bring to the attention of the Czech reading public the

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<sup>486</sup> Viz. *ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>487</sup> Vodrážka, Miroslav: album booklet to *Underground Temple Story*. Prague: G.Parrot 2016.

<sup>488</sup> *Vokno*, no. 17/1990, p. 1

<sup>489</sup> *Vokno*, no. 19/1990, p. 2-3.

subversive, heretical, invalid or alternative cultural goods from the actual source of the global postmodernity of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If anything, the *Vokno* of the early 1990s took its role of an informational channel to Anglosphere postmodernity to an extent far beyond its samizdat incarnation.<sup>490</sup> Looking at the table of contents, e.g., of issue 19, we can note (besides Drožd’'s editorial) that a mere five of the twenty-five main articles – precisely one-fifth of the total address specifically Czech topics:

- a polemic about the “Kick a Hole in the Drum” concert held at The Kitchen in New York for the benefit of the imprisoned *Vokno* editors and the actions of Mejla Hlavsa of the Plastic People during the group’s visit to the USA<sup>491</sup>;
- an interview with the founders of 10:15 Promotion, one of the first booking agencies for independent rock groups<sup>492</sup>
- an interview with artist Michal Machat along with reproductions of his drawings;
- Jiří Kostúr’s memoir of the start of *Vokno* written during Stárek and Jirous’s first prison term in 1984;
- a block of poetry by J. H. Krchovský (Jiří Hásek), regarded as the major poetic talent of the 1980s Prague underground and a significant contributor to both *Vokno* and *Revolver Revue* in samizdat.

The remaining articles, however, are heavily oriented toward the Anglosphere, in music (the Dead Kennedys, Siouxi and the Banshees, David Peel), visual art (Julian Schnabel, Keith Haring), or literature (Jean Giono, William Burroughs, Sam Shepherd, a substantial biographical study of Jack Kerouac). Somewhere between the two are an interview with a Czech émigré, Jiří Wein, then living in Japan (though speaking largely about his US experiences)<sup>493</sup>

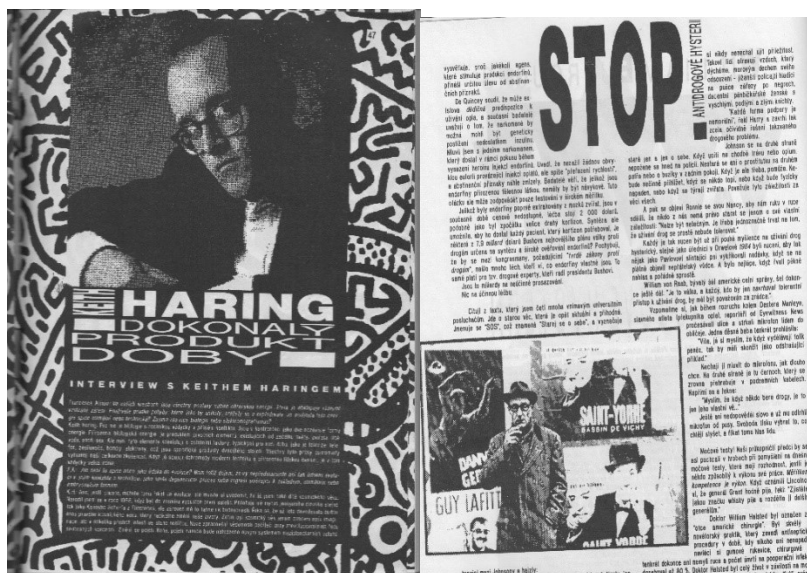
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<sup>490</sup> Not without its own controversy at the time – viz. the polemical response from the Catholic literary critic Martin C. Putna attacking the mainstreaming of the underground with this turn towards an international counterculture, away from the Christian tendencies visible earlier. Putna, Martin C.: *Mnoho zemí v podzemí*. In: *Souvislosti* no. 1, 1993.

<sup>491</sup> Krčil, Bob: ‘Prokopnutý buben, aneb Příběh jednoho dobročinného koncertu’. *Vokno* no. 19/1990, p. 31-37.

<sup>492</sup> ‘10:15 Promotion, v pondělí odpoledne’, p. 64-67.

<sup>493</sup> ‘Vyslanec neolitu – Rozhovor s J. Weinem’, interview by ‘P. Blumfeld’ [Drožd’, Lubomír], p. 73-76.

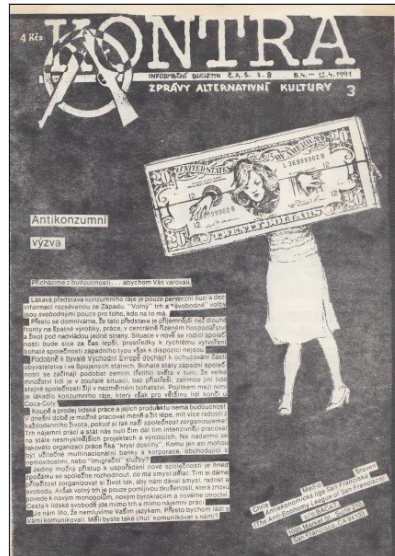


Pages from *Vokno* no. 19: Keith Haring and William Burroughs

Still, even this shift in emphasis not only matches the increasing tendency to look abroad already in samizdat, but no less visibly reflects a second factor of the age - the vastly greater publication possibilities for domestic work. A far more radical transformation – in both senses of the word – occurred with *Voknoviny*, the one-time informational supplement to *Vokno*<sup>494</sup>. It remained in publication through 1990, but was renamed *Kontra* at the end of the year; new editor, Jakub Polák (1952-2012), by 1991 became the explicitly political left-anarchist *A-Kontra*, at the time among the strongest critical forums within the Czech media sphere as a whole<sup>495</sup>.

<sup>494</sup> It should be noted, however, that *Voknoviny* was revived by Stárek as an informational bulletin for underground and proto-underground music and cultural events after his departure from BIS. See: Šeliga, Vojtěch: *Současná undergroundová subkultura a Voknoviny*. MA thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague 2018.

<sup>495</sup> *A-Kontra* is covered by the ‘Czech and Slovak Subculture Archive’, administered by the Charles University Faculty of Arts, Department of Contemporary history, at the following online address: <http://ziny.info/a/a-kontra/>. For more on the periodical’s history, see Kořinská, Tereza: *Vývoj anarchistického tisku v ČR po roce 1991 na příkladu A-kontra a Existence*. MA thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague 2017.



*A-Kontra*, issue no. 1, 1991.

Now remembered mostly for his truly heroic work as one of the most vociferous Czech defenders of Roma rights<sup>496</sup> (and moreover the recipient of the František Kriegel award for 2000<sup>497</sup>), Polák in the 1990s clearly represented a trajectory for pre-1989 dissidence that diverged sharply from the model of institutionalisation of formerly critical voices during the “transition” era, and for the erstwhile cultural opposition, perhaps represented the opposite pole from Stárek’s assumption of a leading function in law enforcement. Yet, simply put, if we look beyond various received ideas and media impressions of the later trajectories of the compact oppositional networks that could easily fit into a single building, it is extremely difficult to establish any single narrative or description of their fates in the 1990s. Neither the early-Nineties anecdotes of “boiler-room to ministry” nor the later description of humanistic values sidelined by hard-headed market economists remain particularly coherent when

<sup>496</sup> Note Polák’s obituary from the Roma activist website Romea, dated 26.9.2012: <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/po-tezke-nemoci-zemrel-jakub-polak-znamy-anarchista-a-zastance-prav-romu>

<sup>497</sup> Awarded by Nadace Charta 77, viz: <https://www.kontobariery.cz/Nadace-Charty-77/Ceny/Cena-Frantiska-Kriegla>

matched against the actual patterns of diffusion (integration) into the social moment of “transitionality”<sup>498</sup>.

Among the most stimulating sociological analyses of the Czechoslovak transition of a (more or less) contemporary timeframe, it might be worthwhile to bring up the analysis proposed by Gil Eyal in his 2003 study,<sup>499</sup> specifically his analysis of the post-November elite configurations in Prague and Bratislava, drawing attention to the post-1989 ascent of “a coalition of Czech dissident intellectuals and internally exiled technocrats”<sup>500</sup>. Or in another analytical optic, Eyal’s analysis viewed Czech (Czechoslovak) dissent as

first and foremost a rejection of the teleological, constructive rationality of social engineering and the proposal of a competing model of intellectual work that was radically antiteleological. Any attempt to engineer society, dissidents argued, was bound to achieve precisely the opposite goal because it would ruin the very fabric of civil society, namely the qualities of individual freedom, responsibility, and self-determination. [...] ...These intellectuals arrived at the moment of transition in 1989 burdened with a deep suspicion of “the people,” whom they knew were not at all responsible or civil as required. [...] ...Both radical reformers and dissidents had opposed the social contract of “goulash communism,” which in their eyes made the population accomplices of the regime in the economic and moral sense.<sup>501</sup>

Eyal’s characterisation of “dissent”, or more precisely dissident intellectuals, it must be noted, focuses predominantly on the core of Charta 77 signers who completed university studies in the 1960s and assumed elected or ministerial posts in the first post-Communist government<sup>502</sup>. In other words, the “dissident intellectual” of his formulation is a notably generation-specific category, i.e. too young to have experienced Stalinist rule or active membership in the KSČ but older than the generation whose first contact with the political sphere assumed the cultural form of the regime’s music policing. And criticisms could certainly be raised against his reification of “dissent” into a somewhat undifferentiated, to coin a phrase excessively

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<sup>499</sup> Eyal, Gil: *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites: From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 2003.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii. Since Eyal’s wider aim is to explain the division of Czechoslovakia in 1993, he characterises the opposing elite to the east of the Carpathians as a “coalition of Slovak reform communist technocrats and collaborationist managers and intellectuals”, the latter specifically nationalist-minded historians.

<sup>501</sup> Bockmann, Johanna, and Eyal, Gil: “Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism”. In: *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 108, no. 2 (September 2002), p. 340-341.

<sup>502</sup> Eyal 2003 *ibid.*, p. 66, specifically Table 1, which lists the parliamentary and presidential appointments from Charta 77 (Stárek, incidentally, is not among them).

“Havlo-centric”, idea of antipolitics, ignoring the vast differences of opinion within Charta 77, particularly between the religious and secular tendencies, not to mention the often contradictory responses towards the countercultural (cultural-oppositionist) underground as indicated in the previous chapter. Yet nonetheless, his questions regarding the self-generation of the new hegemonic elite, based on distinct class interests and achieved through the generation of a discourse of individual authenticity and self-cultivation, “the elevation of individual responsibility into a class emblem”<sup>503</sup> go a long way toward explaining the dominant tendency of Czech public life, specifically the discourse generated in the journalistic agora, during the 1990s. Even among the various standpoints of cultural dissent that kept a critical eye towards the building of Czech capitalism (which at this point could equally apply to Catholic conservatives as much as countercultural sympathisers), a systematic anti-systemic approach like that of Polák remained in the definite minority; quiescence towards the new order, beyond the occasional aesthetic lamentation over the vulgarity of the age, was definitively the norm.

What, though, did the 1990s milieu, whether conceived as “paper agora” or increasingly cybernetic “discourse-field”, mean for *Vokno* specifically? Or rephrasing the terms of the question somewhat, how favourable was the social space of “transitionality” for the promotion (as Drožd’ and Vodrážka hoped) of a counterculture in Roszak’s sense<sup>504</sup>, or at least a space for the cultivation of different modes of awareness? The answer to both questions lay in the program of the 1990s *Vokno* - its Anglo-centric yet chronologically eclectic points of reference, which at times seem to incorporate in concentrated form the entire late 20<sup>th</sup> century, more or less the four decades from Kerouac’s first road-trip to Keith Haring’s death. And it is necessary, at this juncture, to recall the full extent of the

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>504</sup> Vodrážka, *ibid.*

pervasiveness in the 1990s of a rhetoric of “catching up” with the “normal world” of the West: from Jürgen Habermas’s characterisation of the *nachholende Revolution*<sup>505</sup> through the various theories of an inevitable convergence<sup>506</sup>, up to the hopes toward- the re-unification of the “captive West” of Central Europe with its natural homeland, in Milan Kundera’s highly influential phrasing<sup>507</sup>.

Against this intellectual backdrop, *Vokno* could be regarded as an agent of this larger historical process, allowing its readership to “catch up” with roughly four decades of independent/alternative or counter/culture – yet at a significant cost to itself. For with Jirous’s “information blockade” now vanished, the role of the intermediary would correspondingly shrink, in relatively simple economic analogies. And in parallel, not only had the 20<sup>th</sup>-century countercultures that had inspired the early underground already lost their freshness in the (Cold War) West by 1990, but the social configurations domestically had shifted markedly from the defining moment of the 1970s even before 1989, and with the increasingly diverse cultural fields of a capitalist economy only increased the extant trajectories.

With greater specificity, the path travelled by *Vokno* in its five legal years not only contributed to its eventual disappearance as a periodical, but moreover illuminates the change in the entire framework of relations inside Czech society that meant the disappearance even of the situation in which the original underground could emerge against all odds, whether of censorship, police persecution of youth subcultures, or educational and/or class-based divisions. If the cultural micro-management of the immediate crackdown of normalisation had

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<sup>505</sup> Habermas, Jürgen: “What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left”. In: *New Left Review*, no. 183, 1990, pp. 3–21

<sup>506</sup> Certain scholars have linked the ‘convergence’ models to the theories of Talcott Parsons; viz. specifically Mark, James; Iacob, Bogdan; Rupprecht, Tobias; Spaskovska, Ljubica: *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019, viz. p. 6 as well as chapter 3, ‘Europeanisation’, pp. 125–172.

<sup>507</sup> Note the widely circulated essay (originally in French): Kundera, Milan: “The Tragedy of Central Europe”, tr. Edmund White. In: *New York Review of Books*, vol. 31, no. 7, 26 April 1984.

abated slightly during the 1980s, its utter absence after 1989 also meant that the cultural hunger mentioned by so many underground participants no longer found itself canalised into forms of direct aesthetic-semiotic refusal, but could be met by a far wider cornucopia of alternatives.

By 1994, *Vokno* had sufficiently ensconced itself in public awareness as to become an easily appreciable satirical reference from popular novelist Michal Viewegh, mentioned as a fashion-attribute of Prague's gilded pseudo-bohemian youth in his novel *Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia*.<sup>508</sup>

I thumped the dashboard with my fists – several cigarette butts fell into my lap along with a ripped copy of *Vokno* review and a tatty card giving the visiting hours at the Bohnice mental hospital. “I’ll come and see you every other Wednesday”, I informed Oskar after examining it more closely.

One year later, Viewegh unleashed a notably mean-spirited caricature of the editorial staff of *Revolver Revue* in his volume of literary parodies *Nápady laskavého čtenáře*, which Zbyněk Petráček – a contributor and producer to the journal's samizdat form and after 1989 a prominent political commentator – noted as a sign of a clear social advancement: to be mocked by Viewegh, in short, offered confirmation not only of secure establishment in the cultural landscape but indeed a reassurance of how far things had moved since the days of illegality.<sup>509</sup> Nonetheless, of the two most prominent cultural publications in adjoining offices at Bolzanova 7, the latter has survived up until today, while the former has not. And it is worth examining why *Vokno* ceased publishing when it did through comparison to other publications assuming a similar samizdat-to-national-prominence path.

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<sup>508</sup> Viewegh, Michal: *Výchova dívek v Čechách*, Český spisovatel: Prague 1994; tr. A. G. Brain: *Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia*, Readers International: London 1997. This excerpt was originally published separately in the Czech edition of *Playboy* – commissioned by its then editor, Jaroslav Kořán, mentioned in chapter 2 in connection with the incident of Jirous's arrest after eating the front page of the official Communist newspaper *Rudé právo*.

<sup>509</sup> Petráček, Zbyněk, in Hořejší (ed.), op. cit.



With the benefit of hindsight, one major factor was clearly the editorial focus, or more specifically its mono-directional activity as a cultural “importer”. Here, the contrast with *Revolver Revue* is telling indeed, since the latter’s deliberate search for forgotten Czech writers, artists, or other creative personalities from well before 1968, as well as its focus on promoting new domestic work, may have appeared somewhat provincial to the 1990s Czech reader, yet paradoxically won the journal a crucial international reputation as a place to look for upcoming talent. Above all, it was highly regarded among the wider academic community in Western Europe and among the exile-émigré diaspora of American ‘Bohemicists’, as I can personally attest.<sup>510</sup> Moreover, *Vokno* had its own immediate competition in Prague’s early-1990s English-language press for those seeking an even more direct access to Anglophone culture. A second threat to *Vokno* in the 1990s, though, lay in its increasingly metropolitan position, in which the offices of Bolzanova 7 may have formed the culmination, but which had already been immanent since the samizdat re-launch after Stárek and Jirous were released from prison and both editing and production had moved to Prague. And finally, the social changes affecting prospective readership, in other words not only broadening social differentiation and subcultural diversification, but moreover the political quietism or indeed outright assent for the “transitionality” order robbed subcultural revolt of its countercultural critique. Speaking in extremely broad and somewhat crude categories, the “discourse-field” of private discontent of the 1970s did give way to a public sphere regarded as boundlessly pluralistic (even if, retrospectively, it may not seem as much so), yet one in which critique of the new order had little place. If 1989 was a revolution, it was, in Jan Gross’s words, one that judging by the number of outside experts crisscrossing eastern Europe (from business-school graduates to constitutional lawyers), apparently can be imported ... It is so because, unlike those of its predecessors (that is,

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<sup>510</sup> Two of the most influential transmitters of Czech language and culture in the USA during this period, both with teaching positions at prestigious universities – Peter Kussi from Columbia and George Gibian from Cornell – both spoke highly of *Revolver Revue* to me as the most important publication of the decade.

other great revolutions), the future, the destination, the end point of this revolution is well known. It actually exists. It can be reached by an overnight train.<sup>511</sup>

The end of both cultural and economic planning, in short, meant that the aesthetic discontent that pushed young rock fans in the provinces into a wider practice of action as critique, or indeed reflecting critically on the world that state-socialist modernity had provided for them, now had no material underpinnings. It would take many years after *Vokno*'s last issue in 1995 for things to change.

The final blow to *Vokno* came with the defection of its two most important graphic designers, Klára Kvízová and Petr Krejzek, to create the journal often regarded as *Vokno*'s successor, the cyberpunk-influenced *Živel*.<sup>512</sup> In the words of Krejzek himself,

Such a unique 'enterprise' was something we could create only thanks to the complete freedom of expression. Looking back, I can see how daring a step it was. We had no idea about our marketing targets, something that today no magazine would ever get started without. Simply, *Živel* had to appear. It accumulated within itself all the informational utopia of the Nineties, and this was matched by Klára's design and the orientation of the texts which [...] focused on a positively viewed future.<sup>513</sup>

Of course, the high production values of *Živel* and its notable distance from both the aesthetics and the stance of the old underground. Krejzek himself preferred to describe the new journal with the term "overground"<sup>514</sup>, not only outlining the distinction from the previous sensibility but highlighting a presence within the thick of the open-society agora in specifically economic terms. The shift, indeed the transition, of a major part of *Vokno*'s staff from oppositional (indeed adversary) culture to artistic design shows clearly the process of a new generation's turn towards professionalisation and convergence with the rising market economy. The suddenness of the establishment of official status, though, along with the spatial and personal links to the new order, only provokes a question that perhaps lay in the

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<sup>511</sup> Cited in Betts, Paul: "1989 At Thirty: A Recast Legacy". In: *Past & Present*, vol. 244, issue 1, August 2019, p. 292. Betts also notes the characterisations by both Francois Furet and Jürgen Habermas of 1989 as a revolution offering nothing new – whether approving (Furet) or lamenting (Habermas) this lack of originality.

<sup>512</sup> Literally 'element'. The most extensive discussion of *Živel* in scholarly literature to date has been: Kejlová, Sabine: *Časopis Živel a alternativní kulturní scéna 2009—2012*, BA thesis, Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague 2014; viz. specifically p. 11-12.

<sup>513</sup> Krejzek, Petr, interview in *Revolver Revue* no. 64/2006, p. 264.

<sup>514</sup> According to *Živel*'s co-founder: Adamovič, Ivan: "Zakládání kyberkultury v Čechách". In: *Nový Prostor*, no. 515, 2018.

background from the outset: Was samizdat always moving towards the resumption of “normality”, to forming the new establishment once the normalisation-era gerontocracy finally left the scene? Or in another formulation – and one that can be generalised further to include other areas of post-1989 life – was it essentially a shadow establishment, a conservative element hoping for its correct, “normal” institutionalisation?<sup>515</sup> Eyal, for instance, brings up in his conclusion a warning about

the obvious tendencies towards commercialization, commodification and consumerism not simply as the encroachment of capitalist power, but also as allies of the marginal fractions<sup>516</sup>

laying the groundwork for the rise of neoliberal hegemony.

One way out of this quandary is to compare *Vokno* at the turn of the decade, between samizdat and legality, to a similar phenomenon in the publishing sphere in the era. In cultural histories of the late 20th century, particularly those that examine the world of pre-cyberspace periodicals, one question is likely to remain a vexing topic of debate. The last decade before the cyberspace revolution witnessed a rapid flourishing of self-crafted paper-based journalism, very often closely tied to independent musical cultures, the publications that rapidly became known as “zines”<sup>517</sup>. Chronologically, though, the efflorescence of zine culture in the 1990s is no less remarkable for its following upon a very different form of self-publication activity – i.e., pre-1989 samizdat. The historical proximity between the two tendencies is far too strong to be ascribed to coincidence alone – yet the exact form of the connection is harder to discern. Zine culture, while definitely established long before 1989 and its subsequent ramifications, was clearly given its post-1989 impetus by the reflected moral credit of anti-communist dissidence, or more specifically the credit of cultural

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<sup>515</sup> Such contentions have been voiced in the past decade by left-wing critics of a younger generation. Note esp. Rychetský, Lukáš: *Underground bez sentimentu*. In: *A2*, no. 8, 2019, or S.D.Ch. (Vojtíšek, Milan): *Nepřičetné bytí undergroundu*. In: *A2*, no. 17, 2015.

<sup>516</sup> Eyal 2003, p. 203.

<sup>517</sup> For the ‘international’ (non-postcommunist, predominantly Anglophone) view of zine culture, see: Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground, Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London, New York: Verso 1997.

opposition to a state order of aesthetic policing, a brave defiance of the world of grey polyester suits and “estrada” musical kitsch<sup>518</sup>. Samizdat, by contrast, essentially vanished as a political phenomenon with the ending of state control over content and production, often with its authors and publishers rapidly – in some cases, as we shall see, almost literally overnight – moving into the sphere of an official post-1989 culture.

In many respects, the early *Vokno* significantly resembled the zines of the decade to come: its stress on immediate personal testifying, its anchoring in musical subcultures, its gritty handmade aesthetic, its deliberate embrace of the socially autonomous sphere of its recipients. Moreover, Drožd’ had managed to visit Britain in 1977, right at the start of the punk movement, and in his own words

returned from London with two fanzines... so I knew that similar publications existed in the free world, and what I brought back I found attractive for its graphics and its content. I think I bought them in Portobello Road, which was London’s hippie street.<sup>519</sup>

And yet not only the points of similarity or even direct influence are offset by no less significant differences – lying less within the textual and physical form of the periodical itself than within its broader social ramifications and its actual role among opposition-minded youth in normalization-era Czechoslovakia. In other words, a certain correspondence or visual similarity of a certain physical object (the handmade paper-based periodical) in diverging historical and social settings need not necessarily imply that the actual pragmatics of the creation and circulation of the similar objects are indeed similar<sup>520</sup>. Semiotic references on a cultural level, in short, may often obscure the necessity of “sociologising” the culture behind both sign and signifier, let alone the conditions for the basic material emergence of one and the free exercising of the other.

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<sup>518</sup> The main text so far on the culture of Czechoslovak normalisation is: *Tesilová kavalérie. Popkulturní obrazy normalizace*. Ed. Bílek, Petr A., Činátlová, Blanka. Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2010.

<sup>519</sup> Blumfeld S.M. [Drožd’, Lubomír], *ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> This question will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, particularly the role of the material resources in a planned economy.

First, a truly effective analysis, though understandably lying outside the abilities of the present work, would bring into our scope of consideration the emergence of subcultural self-created publications in the final years of Communist rule that more closely match Western zines than more traditionally political or intellectual samizdat. Likewise linked to popular music or sports fandom<sup>521</sup>, the zines of the Communist/post-Communist regions represented still another manifestation of the search for an independent culture outside of either state-imposed or commercial paradigms. Chronologically, they span the 1989 ‘breakpoint’ on either side, from the early to mid-1980s up until the shift away from paper to cyberspace in the early years of the current millennium<sup>522</sup>. And, more notably, they lie outside of the established paradigms of dissent and assent, of (totalitarian) state and (democratic) civil society, pointing the way towards a public sphere without the omnipresent pressure of continual agonistic conflicts between state control and autonomous culture. Machovec, for instance, stresses the importance of including “even utter graphomaniac prattling, babbling rubbish”<sup>523</sup> as authentic samizdat, though with the caveat that the more likely a given self-published paper text would have seemed “political” in the eyes of the authorities, the greater the likelihood of prosecution and (implicitly) the greater anti-systemic impact, perhaps even a certain advantage in a moral hierarchy.<sup>524</sup> Yet the category of less openly regime-challenging samizdat is a broad one, as well as reaching back significantly beyond 1968. The Czech “tramping” subculture, for instance, was an object of suspicion for the StB yet largely tolerated;<sup>525</sup> participants circulated self-printed songbooks and newsletters usually without much interference yet occasionally (through tramping enthusiasts with connections to Charta

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<sup>521</sup> For sports in the Czech context, note: Lomíček, Jan: On Football Fanzines: A Communication Platform for Czech and Other European Football Fans. In: *Forum Historiae*, 2020, vol. 14, no. 1: Fanzines in Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspective, pp. 120-139.

<sup>522</sup> Note e.g.: Hroch, Miloš: Not Out of Date, but Out of Time: The Materiality of Zines and Post-digital Memory. In: *Forum Historiae*, vol. 14, no. 1: Fanzines in Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspective, 2020, pp.17-27.

<sup>523</sup> Machovec 2019, p. 138

<sup>524</sup> Machovec, *ibid.*

<sup>525</sup> Pohunek, Jan: “Konflikty českého trampingu”. In: *Historická sociologie*, no. 2, 2011, pp. 95-106.

77) joined in to help produce more explicitly political samizdat.<sup>526</sup> And even if music fanzine-creation continued to retain its anti-systemic charge thanks to the prevalence in official structures of older rock-phobic generations, there were additional genres of such publications that began to appear well before 1989 yet did not fit into the two-cultures model. Sports fanzines, for instance, represented a genuinely “independent” subcultural activity in that they existed outside the state organising structures, yet it would be hard to class them as explicitly political. (Especially, pre-1989 sports fanzines had yet to establish the link between fandom, hooliganism and the radical Right that has existed since the early 1990s<sup>527</sup>.) And sci-fi fanzines, often based in universities or official technical-hobby clubs, represented a further complication to the neat dichotomy or agonistic morality-play of “dissent-conformist” differentiation.<sup>528</sup>

Implied in the various critiques of anti-Communist dissent as an essentially conservative force yearning for official legality if not actually to seize power as the new establishment is the assumption that political (or perhaps we could use the term political-aesthetic) samizdat formed at most a mere exigency of a situation regarded as “abnormal”. Further, there is a second assumption that samizdat production could be subsumed into a unified, organised, unequivocally political opposition – which is definitely an overstatement even within pre-1989 Czechoslovakia, even taking into account the high degree of personal concentration of dissent into relatively restricted networks. What the contrast with zine production reveals is, I would like to argue, the error within the tendency to reify samizdat

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<sup>526</sup> Náhlík, Petr: “Trampský samizdat”. In: *Studia ethnologica pragensia*, no. 2, 2017, pp. 225-243, specifically p. 225-226.

<sup>527</sup> See e.g. Prokūpková, Vendula: The Role of Fanzines in the (Re)production of Subcultural Capital. The Authenticity, Taste and Performance of “Coolness” in the Zines of the Subculture of Czech White Power Skinheads in the 1990s. In: *Forum Historiae*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 1: Fanzines in Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspective, pp. 103-119.

<sup>528</sup> For pre- and post-1989 Czech fanzine culture, the primary study is: Hroch, Miloš, et al.: *Křičím: „To jsem já.“ Příběhy českého fanzinu od 80. let po současnost*. Page Five: Praha 2017. Incidentally, one of the co-editors, Ivan Adamovič, went from the sci-fi fanzine sphere of the 1980s to editing *Živel* in the subsequent decades.

into a system of production where the printed object (whether by typescript, offset or even conventional press) is the final aim. While the preservation and cataloguing of the physical substance of pre-1989 publications is understandably an urgently vital task, in historical-analytical terms samizdat should be viewed less from the librarian's or archivist's perspective than the network analyst's; the material object – even for all the difficulties of its physical creation – invariably bore less importance than the conditions of its circulation among the readers, who very often were its further (re)producers within the broader distribution network.

Viewing this paradigm, in turn, from a slightly different angle, the spatiality of samizdat formed its own map – perhaps a “countermap” – of interpersonal connections involved in the production / consumption / reproduction linkages: a map almost invariably kept invisible (for reasons too obvious to bear description) but nonetheless highly resilient in its reliance on “who knows whom”<sup>529</sup>. It is a spatialising of openness (the “free” public arena of the reader/author/typist community) that is forced into a largely unwanted enclosure, simply to ensure safety from the political police. Indeed, there is a strong argument to be made – as will be attempted in the subsequent chapters – that the wider trajectory of Czech samizdat from the later 1970s onward tended strongly towards the expansion of the network from that of immediate personal friendships into a broader, increasingly impersonal proto-civil society. As should be clear from the previous chapters, not only did underground publication keep reaching for an ever-improved level of technological sophistication, but even more crucially displayed (as evident from the statements of participants themselves<sup>530</sup>) the awareness that such “mainstreaming”, as it were, was vital to the formulation of sufficient

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<sup>529</sup> The question of personal relations, or more accurately of politically vulnerable social networks under state socialism, is discussed in a subsequent chapter.

<sup>530</sup> Predominantly, this idea has been stated in recent years by Stárek, perhaps most completely in his interview: “Žádná diktatura nepřežije nástup IT technologie”, interview with Michal Jareš, Tvar, no. 16, October 2008, p. 4. Nonetheless, similar sentiments were found in other interviews, specifically Chnápková-Chnápko 2017, Pitáš 2018.

interpersonal space as the medium for true intellectual freedom<sup>531</sup>. Only in a civil society – understood not in any sense as a normative label of approval but as the intellectual understanding forged in the late-20th-century reaction to Europe’s totalitarian legacy<sup>532</sup> – can there be the distance for independence in general, and indeed for independent thought or independent cultural production.

As the following chapters aim to demonstrate, the de-materialising aspect of samizdat production, as paradoxical as it might sound, is nonetheless understandable when considering the material conditions of a fully state-controlled economy. Again, to cite Machovec as an unusually qualified authority as “participant-scholar”:

I, for one, tend to agree with opinions, suggesting that the criterion may not be so much of a purely political, but more of an economic character, at least as far as the totality of Stalinist, or neo-Stalinist type is concerned (but probably of a fascist type as well).<sup>533</sup>

The extent to which the command economy served as a no less effective instrument of social control has yet to receive its due within Czech historiography, let alone in investigating the area of cultural-semiotic resistance specifically. Increasingly, scholarship addressing the semiotic-aesthetic aspects of socialist *Alltagsgeschichte* has focused on the conditions of material uniformity and its unintended consequences: on one hand the subsequent fetishization of imported goods<sup>534</sup>, on the other the creation - more to the current point - of the “Socialist Biedermeier” of domestic art or craft-objects.<sup>535</sup> Samizdat, by contrast, was a

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<sup>531</sup> Here we may note an interesting convergence between e.g. the Christian-communitarian stance of Jiří Němec in his essay ‘Nové šance svobody’ (Němec 1979xx *ibid.*), where the community of resistance stands outside of necessitated relationships both familial and state-enforced, and the current of ‘metropolitan’ sociological thought dating back as far as Georg Simmel, viz. *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. In: *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, tr. Wolff, Kurt. New York: Free Press, 1950, pp.409-424. The question of the ‘open community’ will, of course, be discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter.

<sup>532</sup> The relevant corpus of writings on both civil-society theory and on the historical question of its implementation in post-Communist Europe will be detailed in a subsequent chapter.

<sup>533</sup> Machovec, Martin: “The Types and Function of Samizdat Publications in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1989”. In: *Poetics Today*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1-26

<sup>534</sup> As discussed in the subsequent chapter in specific detail.

<sup>535</sup> The crucial discussion of this cultural atmosphere in normalisation-era Czechoslovakia is Činatl, Kamil: “Časy normalizace”. In: *Tesilová kavalérie. Popkulturní obrazy normalizace*. Ed. Bílek, Petr A., Činátlová, Blanka. Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2010, pp. 166-187, esp. p. 178.



network where the consumer-producer divide was by necessity deliberately blurred, and where the “object” was never intended for possession or contemplation, but instead recirculation and active duplication<sup>536</sup>. Never was there any deliberate stress placed on the production conditions as a guarantee of authenticity or of aesthetic force: no adherence to typescript when, for instance, offset printing suddenly appeared as a realistic possibility. Hence it was no surprise that the publication as a de-individuated – in Walter Benjamin’s sense, entirely aura-free<sup>537</sup> – industrial product was grasped with such avidity once it became a feasible and legal alternative, as in the offices at Bolzanova 7. The smooth fluidity of periodical circulation, with professional print technology and the full logistical support of post office and retail sales, was anything but a betrayal, a sell-out: instead, it was the necessary final point of ensuring a place within civil society where previously it had required such incredible risk and effort to create something even approximating such a “civil” order in the first place.

And a further aspect of the process of creating a genuine public space is itself mirrored in the spatial relations of the Bolzanova 7 offices. Here, we return to spatiality but not in the integrative sense of the post-Habsburg/Ruritanian capitol city – instead, the dislocation of a distinct, professional editorial space away from the forced dissolution of production into daily life that samizdat production implied<sup>538</sup>. An editorial office distinct from home is, once again, a semi-public space, an interior where efforts towards the widest of public spheres are concentrated. Samizdat, contrastingly, had to be produced in a domestic space: the flat or the weekend cottage, or occasionally the farmhouse of an underground commune; and no less crucial was the private-within-the-private, i.e. the secret chamber or attic where presses,

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<sup>536</sup> Note, e.g. Stárek’s admonition to *Vokno*’s readers in issue no. 4: “So – for fuck’s sake [*doprdele*] – lend it around! This isn’t an ornament for the bookshelf!”.

<sup>537</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner mechanischer Reproduzierbarkeit*, originally: *L’œuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée*. In *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1936, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 40-67.

<sup>538</sup> Note the contrast with *Nová Víska* – even despite the clear separation required by the conspiratorial nature of samizdat production. Viz. Stárek-Kostúr 2010, *ibid*.

typewriters or finished copies could be hidden in the event of a police raid. The moment of 1990, when an open society was being constructed literally from minute to minute, implied less of a physical “incorporation” of the new ex-dissident cultural elite than the assumption of professional methods and the re-valorization of the long-discredited public space. As important as access to printing technologies and materials was the necessary separation of the professional from the private, the vital “room of one’s own”<sup>539</sup> in which creative participation can emerge.

In a deliberately crude yet revelatory analogy, the samizdat vs. fanzine split of the early 1990s could be matched to a longstanding and deeply influential (even if somewhat problematic) division within worldwide social thought<sup>540</sup>. Legalised, legitimated and indeed newly assimilated samizdat now expressed a desire for the distance and differentiation of a liberal, open-society *Gesellschaft*, including integration into the capitalist marketplace as a vital, indeed necessary factor. Post-1989 zines, contrastingly, could form a yearning for the strongly communitarian ties of *Gemeinschaft* – regardless of their geographic production point on either side of the dissolved Iron Curtain – as the close community of readership circulation forming a safe haven of kindred spirits in the anomic whirl of free-market triumphalism<sup>541</sup>.

*Vokno*, left uncertainly balancing between these two stances in the agonistic moment of Communism’s collapse, understandably found itself faced by its own transitional dilemma; for those with living memories of the era, even amid the endlessly proclaimed optimism,

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<sup>539</sup> The allusion here is to the famous essay: Woolf, Virginia: *A Room of One’s Own*. London: Hogarth Press 1929.

<sup>540</sup> Regarding the classic (if notably problematic) dichotomy of Ferdinand Tönnies applied to cultural production, note especially: Stauth, Georg; Turner, Bryan S.: Nostalgia, Postmodernism and the Critique of Mass Culture. In: *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 5, 1988, pp. 509-526.

<sup>541</sup> For an updated version of the dichotomy, highlighting its applicabilities to current questions note Brint, Steven: *Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept*. In: *Sociological Theory* vol. 19, no. 1, 2001.

transitionality was merciless in its elimination of anything more ambiguous than these new Modigliani-colourfields of sharply defined ideological stances. *Vokno*'s Bolzanova 7 neighbours like *Respekt* or *Revolver Revue* successfully "transitioned" into full professionalism and ever-increasing production values; the periodical as anodyne industrial product. With its commitment to the social ambiguity of the Western counterculture, the legal post-1990 *Vokno* itself occupied too much of a liminal state to undergo the same process. While, as the previous paragraphs detail, personal factors, i.e. the succession of individual editors and authors, understandably had their own part in *Vokno*'s fate, it is tempting to ascribe its tortuous course through the early 1990s to a kind of inevitability. Not, of course, a Marxist-teleological one, but a necessity of the immediate historical situation of the startling sudden outbreak of an open society, where the differentiation of the semi-enclosed/semi-open network no longer needed to be guarded with such excruciating care but instead now became the broadest principle of social organisation. Now, ironically, the Czech nation had become what *Vokno* had, on such a modest scale, hoped to achieve for its isolated participants. The spatiality of a free society, in the "lairs of skulls"<sup>542</sup> or in isolated sociabilities<sup>543</sup>, had begun to occupy the physical realm.

Now, the conditions were ready for secondary communities to emerge, among them the new subcultural fanzines of all possible orientations – including the skinhead or football-hooligan cultures actively hostile to the liberalism of indifference and eager to follow the narrowest calls for belonging. Subcultures of the post-1989 period, even including the "neo-underground" attending the series of summertime rock festivals organised by various

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<sup>542</sup> Anderson, *ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> As will be discussed subsequently, these 'isolated sociabilities' could vary from the 'islands of positive deviation' viz. Bútorá-Bútorová 1989 *ibid.* to the negative forms found in e.g. Pelc 1985xx/1990.

underground veterans – “Skalákův Mlýn”<sup>544</sup> or “Lábusovky”,<sup>545</sup> nonetheless form a qualitatively different response than that of the underground – and not only because of the vastly reduced interest of state power, but equally because of the ability of an open society to allow, reflect, absorb (or co-opt) critique and be altered by it. There comes a point within historical analysis where it becomes necessary to say: yes, things then were different, and in the present case, the twentieth century and the particular Eurocentric will-to-power that in popular understanding can be linked to the idea of “totalitarianism” are separated from the current predicament and new social challenges. The disappearance of *Vokno* from the Czech spheres of print-space and physical space is only one such confirmation.

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<sup>544</sup> Miroslav ‘Skalák’ Skalický purchased a former gristmill in south Moravia after 1989; the concerts held there can be found on the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/uMeziricka/>

<sup>545</sup> Organised in early spring by Vladimír ‘Lábus’ Drápal in Dobroměřice near Louny, viz: <https://bandzone.cz/koncert/461106-dobromerice-kulturak-na-navsi-labusovky>

## Chapter 5

### Heineken Cans and Typescript: Socialist Counterculture and Materiality

... they treated every object from the West with a peculiar devout veneration. My uncle, for example, placed all of his empty beer cans in a row on the top of the kitchen cabinet, as if the phalanx of colourful soldiers from Gösser and Heineken were triumphantly salvaging something from that unreachable, scintillating, exciting world in which perfumed women and smoothly gliding cars proceeded along streets glittering with advertisements.<sup>546</sup>

- Krisztina Tóth

In the favoured cliché of historical writing borrowed from Hegel, the owl of Minerva takes flight only in the gathering darkness; hence *Vokno*'s end a quarter-century ago at the time of writing brings us to the task of not merely describing the publication itself, but equally subjecting it to analysis. Examining the linkage between the publication and the social group associated with it (at least at the introductory stage), i.e. the provincial or “Northern” Czech underground of the 1970s, can hopefully place *Vokno* into the context of a wide-ranging nexus of questions brought up by the topic of the social order of European state socialism and its wider implications for theories of society and social organisation. Moreover, the discussion in the following chapters has additionally a still broader, hopefully not too immodest ambition: to address the question of the nature of post-Stalinist state-socialist societies and the integration of its legacy and understanding into less geographically delimited social-theoretical frameworks – outside the specific area of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century “Second World”.

As the previous chapters have revealed, there is only a partial overlap between the social milieu of the provincial underground and the later history of *Vokno* as a samizdat periodical, not to mention its final five years of legal publication. Indeed, as the previous chapter indicated, not only were the personal and thematic continuities greater between the later samizdat period and the “legalized” post-1989 years, but the shift from the geographic-

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<sup>546</sup> Tóth, Krisztina, “Lukewarm Milk”, tr. Otilie Mulzet. Accessible at: <http://www.tothkrisztina.hu/blog/lukewarm-milk/>. Original in: Tóth Krisztina: *Vonalkód*. Budapest: Magvető 2006.

cultural peripheries towards the metropolis following the forced hiatus during Stárek's and Jirous's prison terms<sup>547</sup> could be regarded as evidence of a far more radical change within Czech countercultural circles than (arguably) the dramatic events of 1989 itself. However, this discrepancy in and of itself is less a signal of the conceptual weakness of the social phenomenon – let alone indicating its possible unsuitability for its historical study - than a revelation of wider social and historical processes within state-socialist Czechoslovakia, comparable to (yet not entirely congruent with) wider trajectories of social change both in the Warsaw Pact geopolitical sphere and in the wider sphere of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity.

My primary contention in the subsequent chapters is to draw upon the example of *Vokno* – constituting, as I have argued, a form of social action between the cultural and political – to argue for the social and political importance of the Czech underground, not only within the Soviet Bloc, but within wider ramifications of the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular critique of various manifestations of industrial modernity that could be termed 'countercultures'<sup>548</sup>. Put somewhat less rhetorically, it is to argue that the motivations leading to involvement with cultural dissent in post-1968 Czechoslovakia matched similar motivations of dissatisfaction, indeed semi-articulated social critique, across the Cold War geopolitical divide. In the present and subsequent chapters, I will endeavour to examine in further detail certain key aspects of 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity as addressed by this vernacular critique. Obviously, the argument relies on my assumption of the argument for European state socialism as one of modernity's variants, not as an anti-modern challenge.<sup>549</sup> And no less

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<sup>547</sup> If, indeed, this change could not be termed 'cooptation' by Prague's dissident intellectuals: viz. Vodrážka 2012 *ibid.*

<sup>548</sup> As noted previously, the term "counterculture" presents its own series of analytical difficulties; suffice it to say for the present usage that it is predominantly a historical reference, limited to the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>549</sup> I will, of course, discuss later the reasons for my decision to favour the "modern" side in the arguments over the historical character of European state socialist or Leninist political-social orders. Key works in this regard include, most notably: Arnason, Johann Pall: *The Future That Failed: Origins and Destinies of the Soviet Model*. London: Routledge, 1993; see also Beilharz, Peter: *Socialism and Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

obviously, it remains vitally necessary to navigate between the providing sufficient attention to the similarities between capitalist and state-socialist modernity and holding onto an awareness of the undeniable specificities of state-socialist versus market-capitalist organisational modes.

Retaining this awareness of specificities and differences, in turn, brings up the second major point of argument: the specific importance of the power-and-control aspects and ambitions of European state socialism and the role of aesthetic dissent (cultural or semiotic) within and against them. These areas, in short, are the realms of state control within the non-political realm, or in other words of everyday life (assuming, of course, that such a distinction is indeed tenable<sup>551</sup>): over

a) the material aspects, predominantly through state economic planning. Here, the immediate case of the *Vokno* underground, combining samizdat production with more traditionally “Western” forms of youth subculture (specifically fashion and music), draws attention to the role of the command economy in controlling the accessibility of means of cultural-semiotic expression: not only clothing (blue jeans etc.) or musical instruments but – as detailed in previous chapters - the production materials for a publication like *Vokno*.

b) the aesthetic dimensions. Aesthetic social control should be understood as operating not only through censorship of conventional artistic work, but equally through the efforts of the state in everyday life, from the formulation and implementation of Socialist Realism up through the post-Stalinist promotion of an explicitly modernist taste-making canon from high art to domestic design.

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<sup>551</sup> For a useful review of both post- and pre-1989 scholarship on everyday life in state socialism, viz. Zakharova, Larissa: “Everyday Life Under Communism: Practices and Objects”, introduction to the special issue of the same title, *Annales HSS* 68, no. 2, April-June 2013.

In this situation, the presence of cultural rebellion or “semiotic revolution”<sup>552</sup> within state-socialist systems had to face not only state power with its varying degrees of surveillance, repression, co-optation or (much more rarely) benign neglect, but also the varying responses – not always sympathetic – of the wider society. (Not to mention, of course, even a notable current of antipathy within Czech dissent – as noted previously with the stances of Ivan Sviták<sup>553</sup> or Rio Preisner<sup>554</sup>, or e.g. Václav Černý<sup>555</sup>). Post-1968 Czechoslovakia, though, represents an exceptional instance for two significant reasons. First, of course, is the level of opposition to new cultural impulses by the state authorities and the “repressive forces” (i.e. the regular and the secret police).<sup>556</sup> As the research team of Ladislav Kudrna at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes has recently confirmed,<sup>557</sup> the particular attention that the Interior Ministry under Jaromír Obzina devoted to the control of popular music (and by extension unofficial youth culture in general) exceeded not only the markedly more liberal policies of e.g. Poland or Hungary, but even the Soviet Union or the GDR.<sup>558</sup> The specific, directed animus of the Czechoslovak state authorities toward rock music was in fact twofold, attacking both the self-organisational aspect of youth subculture (the ‘unorganised’ if not ‘defective’ youth) and its preference for a divergent aesthetic (initially in clothing and music). It is not within the scope of the present study to speculate on why the post-1968 Czechoslovak *nomenklatura*, out of all the Warsaw Pact states, chose a

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<sup>552</sup> Hebdige 1979.

<sup>553</sup> Sviták 1985xx, *ibid.*

<sup>554</sup> Preisner 1986xx, *ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> Viz. Černý, Václav: O všem, dokonce i o „hippies“ a „novém románu“ and Nad verši Věry Jirousové a o kulturním stanovisku našeho undergroundu. In: Černý, Václav. *Tvorba a osobnost*. Praha: Odeon 1992., p. 553-562 and p. 900-908. An extensive discussion of Černý’s importance in Charter 77 and Czech dissent in general is provided by Bolton 2012, specifically p. 145-147.

<sup>556</sup> And no less the general public. Viz. Pixová, Michaela: “Alternative Culture in a Socialist City. Punks and Long-Haired People in Prague in the 1980s”. In: *Český lid*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2013, pp. 321-340.

<sup>557</sup> Kudrna-Stárek 2017, *ibid.*

<sup>558</sup> Kudrna (*ibid.*) discusses the parallel with the GDR, p. 236-40. For more on GDR rock, the primary work is Rauhut, Michael: *Rock in der DDR*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2002. A treatment of GDR music-based youth subcultures in English is Fenemore, Mark: *Sex, Thugs and Rock 'n' Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.



more confrontational tactic than elsewhere<sup>559</sup>, but rather to examine the aspects in which this animosity took form in the power-exercising methods of the state, and the resulting response from the aesthetic-semiotic rebels in their own cultural production and self-perpetuation.

Socialist Czechoslovakia was – even after the wartime genocide and postwar ethnic cleansing, the violent social levelling and massive emigration after 1968 – still a complex modern society of the Global North, even within the deeply Eurocentric East-West framing of the Cold War era. As noted in Chapter 1, the social analysis performed in the 1960s by Machonin and others distinctly confirmed the tension between the rhetoric of control and egalitarianism and the far more diversified observable reality of varying collective social groups and actors<sup>560</sup> - hence by extension, we not only can but should assume that the technologies of social control extended into other areas of life than direct police repression. For a more adequate understanding, it therefore demands analysis through the techniques of sociology, in addition to the historical investigation of archival sources. Of the various possible lines of attack, the first to be addressed is specifically power's material base, or more accurately the interactions of the human and the material components. The samizdat productions, the material objects through which cultural opposition was manifested, are themselves part of the network of significance that formed a social entity such as the underground. And it is also a point for consideration whether even the human relations so carefully described in the previous chapters, both within the underground community-networks and their interactions with state repressive forces, are indeed as revelatory of the

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<sup>559</sup> With regard to the GDR, Rauhut (ibid.) speculates that the relatively greater tolerance of the GDR in the musical sphere might have been linked to the desire for Erich Honecker in the early 1970s to reinforce his reputation as a reformer, in contrast to his predecessor Walter Ulbricht.

<sup>560</sup> For more on Czech / Czechoslovak sociology in the period before normalisation, note particularly Voříšek, Michael: *The Reform Generation. 1960s Czechoslovak Sociology from a Comparative Perspective*. Praha: Kalich 2012.

nature of the vanished state-socialist order as the relations of human and object, if not of the actual autonomy of the objects themselves.

Concentrating on the “non-human” aspects of Czech society in the period of the 1970s might, at first glance, appear less paradoxical than unnecessarily perverse. However, the approach to be applied here has its own pedigree in social thought, most notably in two different lineages that might seem to complement each other. The first is the investigation of the functioning of the planned economy itself as an implement of power, and by extension the use of the material world towards state-stabilising ends. Under the term “dictatorship over needs”, it was first set out as a revisionist-Marxist argument in the book of this title published in 1983<sup>561</sup> by three leading Hungarian left-wing dissident thinkers (Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, György Márkus) shortly after their emigration to Australia yet following a long period during which their only allowed professional work was in sociographic data collection.<sup>562</sup>

The argument, or perhaps more precisely the three connected arguments offered by Fehér, Heller and Márkus analyse the state-socialist system predominantly from a theoretical (and, as stressed above, reformist-Marxist) standpoint, arguing against the extant reality from Marxist premises, finding the “dictatorship”, in the wording of the book’s conclusion, to be:

...a value degradation, a demolition of the potentially free individual whose voluntary association would form an emancipated society, in the imagination of Marx and every socialist. For us the dictatorship over needs is a historical dead-end despite its self-reproductive capacity.<sup>563</sup>

Central to the repression of the system – rather than police surveillance, censorship, or other factors – is its economic practice: less of a planned economy than a command economy

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<sup>561</sup> Fehér, Ferenc; Heller, Agnes; Márkus, György: *Dictatorship over Needs. An Analysis of Soviet Societies*. Blackwell: Oxford, 1983.

<sup>562</sup> Note in this regard Beilharz, Peter: “Agnes Heller: From Marx to the Dictatorship Over Needs”. In: *Revue internationale de philosophie*, vol. 273, issue 3, 2015.

<sup>563</sup> Fehér, Heller, Markus, *ibid*, p. 222.

managed by the ruling party-bureaucratic stratum.<sup>564</sup> On one side, the effect is one of state paternalism: socialist society conceived as, essentially:

one big family. Everything that a subject may get (consumer goods, a flat, heating, clothes, theatre tickets, etc) is 'due to the state'; it is not granted as a right or given in exchange for something else, but provided as an amenity which can be revoked.<sup>565</sup>

With the imposition of a paternalistic order from above, social life becomes subjected to the disciplining measures of industrial production, or as Fehér noted,

the factory as the model of social relations for the new society. The choice of the model implied that goal-rationality became the leading principle of the radical social projects. [...] The choice also meant that in the very model relations of personal dependence were intertwined with the universal network of hierarchical relations—a typical feature of capitalist factory life [...]<sup>566</sup>

And, in parallel, the assumption by the Party-elite of the utter rationality of their decisions implied the intellectual vitiating of any possible critique:

While the planning elite correctly criticized capitalist irrationality and took over the legacy of modern rationalism, the Marxian version *confiscated even the right of critical common sense* from those outside the elite itself.<sup>567</sup>

Heller, in turn, addressed the question of socialist economic planning primarily philosophically, in reference to her previous work<sup>568</sup> using the idea of “radical needs”: qualitative, non-material fulfilment that is “the consciousness of alienation”.<sup>569</sup> Hence the programmatic ignoring, indeed dismissal, of radical needs within the command economy is, ipso facto, a demonstration of the totalitarian character of late socialism, as opposed to the outright institutionalised terror of Stalinism.<sup>570</sup> Admittedly, there are many points where criticisms could be made of the applicability of the Fehér-Heller- Márkus analysis to the present situation: There is the historical and social specification of the authors’ quantitative findings from Hungary, where the pre-1945 situation (significantly delayed industrialisation,

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

<sup>566</sup> Fehér, Ferenc: “The Dictatorship Over Needs“. *Telos*, 1978, no. 35, pp. 32.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>568</sup> Heller, Agnes: *The Theory of Need in Marx*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976, republished London: Verso Books, 2018.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>570</sup> Fehér, Heller, Markus, *ibid*.

high proportion of landless peasantry) and in consequence the Communist state strategies of socialist modernisation differed radically from those prevalent in the Czech lands<sup>571</sup>.

Similarly, the place of this argument in the broader lineage of the Eastern Marxist critique of “really existing socialism”, emerging in the 1960s between Hungary, Yugoslavia and pre-1968 Czechoslovakia<sup>572</sup>, might itself pose a methodological conundrum, indeed a sort of intellectual indigestibility, for Czech historical and social analysis in retrospect, as a strain of thought that (for many different reasons) did not survive Czechoslovak normalization. Suffice it for now to draw upon one of the lines of argument: that the restrictions associated with planned economies are not simply accidents of economic efficiency, but in and of themselves constitute part of the register of techniques of social control.

First – directly following the Hungarian authors’ argument - the state limitations on production imply a kind of indirect moral condemnation, an assertion of the illegitimacy, or indeed the “false consciousness”, of any needs not met by what the state produces.<sup>573</sup>

Unavailability of certain goods is not simply the result of inefficiencies or bottlenecks: their absence from state-controlled commerce is essentially an ethical judgment.<sup>574</sup> The shortages and restrictions of the command economy were less of a bug than a necessary feature, related to the (highly un-Marxist) normative judgments of the state in its resource allocation.

As a secondary process, the limitations of availability lead to a fetishization of commodities far outstripping the capitalist version of this phenomenon. An illustration – only seemingly banal – of the second process is the habit, quite widespread in the final two decades of state socialism, of collecting and displaying the detritus of the capitalist world as objects of

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<sup>571</sup> Fehér, Heller, Markus, *ibid*

<sup>572</sup> For a comprehensive summary see: TARAS, Raymond (ed.): *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe*. M. E. Sharpe: Armonk (NY), 1992.

<sup>573</sup> Fehér, Heller, Markus, *ibid*

<sup>574</sup> Fehér, Heller, Markus, *ibid*

strong symbolic and aesthetic power. The sight of an empty Heineken can<sup>575</sup> on a mass-produced blond-wood modular-furniture system – indeed, thanks to cultural inertia, still to be seen even for several years after 1989 - could almost be regarded as one revealing emblem of the era.<sup>576</sup> This contradictory situation, in which a Marxist economic order only further strengthened, indeed literally reified commodity fetishism instead of weakening it, may have first been defined by critical Marxists, but it has been echoed as well by analysts of an entirely non- or anti-Marxist orientation.

One argument in this regard, cited in the present work in previous chapters yet unfortunately overlooked in wider scholarship, is the idea voiced by Martin Machovec that the production of samizdat under Communist regimes has a specific status even outside its violation of state censorship.<sup>577</sup> Access even to supplies of paper beyond an individual's immediate need (let alone the chronic shortages of various other commodities), supplemented with the artificially high price of typewriters (along with all other domestic appliances), meant that the production of “illegal” written material was not only hindered by its purported illegality, but equally by the conditions imposed on simple material reproduction by the state command economy.<sup>578</sup> As a result, Machovec has argued, it is a misnomer to apply the term “samizdat” to unofficial printings of censored materials in authoritarian regimes that

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<sup>575</sup> Tóth 2008, *ibid.* A more elaborate discussion of the phenomenon is in Yurchak, Alexei: *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005, especially chapter 5, “Imaginary West. The Elsewhere of Late Socialism”, pp. 158-206.

<sup>576</sup> During the discussion following the presentation of an earlier version of these findings, several participants from the pre-1989 generation openly spoke of the practices of collecting and even recirculating objects of Western provenience, even to the extent of picking through waste bins at a rest-stop frequented by West German and Austrian truckers to find discarded packaging items.

<sup>577</sup> Machovec has stated this important point in several essays across the decades, many of which are also available in English in the recent collection: Machovec, Martin. *Writing Underground. Reflections on Samizdat Literature in Totalitarian Czechoslovakia*. Prague: Karolineum 2019. Also note *ibid.*: “Czech Underground Literature, 1969-1989: A Challenge to Textual Studies” in: *Voice, Text, Hypertext: Emerging Practices in Textual Studies*. Ed. Modiano, Raimondo; Searle, Leroy F., Schillingsburg, Peter. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004.

<sup>578</sup> Machovec, Martin. *Pohledy zevnitř. Česká undergroundová kultura ve svědectvích, dokumentech a interpretacích*. Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská 2008.

nonetheless maintain market economies (e.g. right-wing dictatorships in Latin America)<sup>579</sup>. Even if the political authorities had greater means of physical violence at their disposal, not hesitating to murder opponents directly, the existence of market relationships outside of direct state control nonetheless allowed for a wider space of social activity than did the dictatorships of the Soviet stamp.<sup>580</sup>

The question of state socialism's totalitarian character and its comparison with other contemporary non-democratic state orders, specifically the right-wing dictatorships of Latin America in the final decades of the Cold War, is both vast and vexing, and will be addressed in greater detail subsequently. For the time being, samizdat's material status should bring up a still wider range of questions beyond those of simple material procurement. The unique status of samizdat as a dynamic of material and action, where the relations of consumer and producer are so peculiarly conflated, brings us to the second strategy of approaching the conditions of late totalitarian rule. since samizdat's position as a deliberate blurring of previously separated categories of object and action could illustrate this strategy's key point. I have in mind specifically the recent approach termed, in the words of its leading exponent Bruno Latour, actor-network theory (ANT). (As with the earlier presentation of the "dictatorship over needs" thesis, the present treatment should be understood only as a deliberate coarsening of a highly complex intellectual approach.)

Latour's analysis involves not only human agents but also the non-human world, from natural forces (weather, bacteria etc.) through material objects, as active participants in the interactive processes that make up social life. The process of analysing the human / nonhuman interactions, in turn, is encapsulated in Latour's oft-cited characterisation of ANT:

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<sup>579</sup> Note esp. Machovec 2019, p. 132.

<sup>580</sup> A similar contention, though relating more to questions of law and government, is found in Tucker, Aviezer: *The Legacies of Totalitarianism: A Theoretical Framework*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015.

It would be fairly accurate to describe ANTas being half Garfinkel and half Greimas: it has simply combined two of the most interesting intellectual movements on both sides of the Atlantic and has found ways to tap the inner reflexivity of both actor's accounts and of texts.<sup>581</sup>

bringing together the pragmatic, action-based (interactionist) “ethnomethodology” of the American social scientist Harold Garfinkel and the semiotic analysis of the French-Lithuanian thinker Algirdas Greimas. For the present, I am only implying the use of ANT as a “weak hypothesis” - limiting its scope to the examination of a broader range of social actors within the study of European Communist rule – with “strong application” – i.e. making the hypothesis that the economic policies of state socialism endowed non-material objects and semiotic indicators with a greater degree of action-capability than is usually the case in other forms of social organisation. More concretely: the unavailable/suppressed/fetishized material goods of the command economy assumed, in essence, a life of their own within the social field between rulers, populace, opposition, repressive forces and the other human participants; conversely, the high level of aesthetic control within state-socialist orders gave the material forms of social life, from artwork through fashion to urban planning, a particular semiotic legibility (decipherability) among the social participants.

A combination of Latour's approach with the “dictatorship over needs” thesis, consequently, presents a particularly fruitful methodological approach for discussing Czechoslovak society during the first decade of normalisation. Even a weak application of these two standpoints, admitting the “agency of objects”, or rather the special attribution of agency to objects given by Heller's stress on the moralistic aspect of socialist production, suggests a dimension of power relations outside the usual framework of the state repressive forces. In this dimension, the *enforced fetishization* of commodities in the scarcity economy,

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<sup>581</sup> Latour, Bruno: *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford 2005, note 54, p. 54-55).

therefore, is matched on the opposite side by the no less forceful *compulsory semioticization* of everyday life under the shadow of ideological prescriptions.

Again, the argument appealing to the extreme level of semiotic force within the everyday life of late state-socialism seems at first sight to contradict the usual understanding of the historical reality. A common interpretation, particularly in the years after 1989, was expressed perhaps most succinctly in the following aperçu from Zygmunt Bauman:

What it could not do and did not brace itself to do was to match the performance of the capitalist, market-centred society once that society abandoned its steel mills and coal mines and moved into the postmodern age (once it passed over, in Jean Baudrillard's apt aphorism, from metallurgy to semiurgy; stuck at its metallurgical stage, Soviet communism, as if to cast out devils, spent its energy on fighting wide trousers, long hair, rock music and any other manifestations of semiurgical initiative).<sup>582</sup>

Nonetheless, considerable scholarship since the turn of the millennium has shifted the scholarly consensus away from the somewhat reductive assumption of post-Stalinist societies as throwbacks to a more semiologically naïve sensibility, or at least as indifferent as this dichotomy indicates.<sup>583</sup> The “legacy of the socialist state as a material entity - robustly present in everything from Cuban oranges and East German paper napkins to the pseudo-Modernist built environments”<sup>584</sup> has acquired its own body of interpretive attention in Anglophone scholarship, if primarily in the fields of the social anthropology of material culture<sup>585</sup> or collective memory<sup>586</sup>. And Czech scholarship, in turn, has also taken this historiographic dimension into consideration in the past decade, e.g. the 2015 study by Pažout et al<sup>587</sup> or – more specifically applicable for the present purposes – the history of

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<sup>582</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt: *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge 1992, p. 169.

<sup>583</sup> Or, for that matter, treatments of even the previous historical stage of Stalinism itself: note e.g. Fitzpatrick, Sheila: *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Russia in the 1930s*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press 1999.

<sup>584</sup> Fehérváry, Krisztina: “Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture”. In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 51, no. 2, April 2009, pp. 426-459, here p. 428.

<sup>585</sup> Note in particular Crowley, David - Reid, Susan E.: *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post- War Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Berg 2002, or Bren. Paulina - Neuberger, Mary: *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012.

<sup>586</sup> E.g. Gille, Zsuzsa; Todorova, Maria (eds.): *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. New York-Oxford: Berghahn 2010, or for the notably idiosyncratic case of the GDR Berdahl, Daphne: “(N)Ostalgie” for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things. In: *Ethnos*, no. 64, vol. 2, 1999.

<sup>587</sup> Pažout, Jaroslav: *Každodenní život v Československu. 1945/48-1989*. Praha-Liberec: ÚSTR-Technická univerzita v Liberci, 2015.



Czechoslovak fashion by Konstantina Hlaváčková<sup>588</sup>. Still, the semiotic-interactive aspects of the imposition of a unified aesthetic standard upon the everyday – involving, of course, a second-level planning bureaucracy alongside the economists, in this case one of architects, designers, cultural theorists etc. – and the clash with, or co-optation of, the objects and aesthetic-semiotic principles of the “capitalist abroad” form a particular section of the totalitarian experience that has yet to be fully integrated into the understanding of its repressive potential. And, simultaneously, of its converse: its stimulation, perhaps even construction or formulation, of the revolt against its ever-present scope, in whatever form this stylistic opposition happened to take.

Likewise, the semioticization process had both its immediate and diffuse components: the ideology encoded in a political poster, for example, is more blatant than that encoded in the blond-wood modular cabinet set mentioned previously, yet both objects have (still today) a dimension of meaning through their association with the regime.<sup>589</sup> Bearing this peculiar status in mind, it is worth considering whether an application of Latour’s ANT (even in its weakest form) to the historiography of European state socialism could provide researchers with an additional dimension to consider the relations of control and autonomy within the framework of the Party-State political order. The study of state-socialist materiality is not only an area of historical interest in itself, though, but arguably forms the crucial factor among the “non-human agents” involved with the emergence of the Czech underground. If we understand the underground as less of a political opposition than an aesthetic revolt, we need to know not only something about the aesthetic sphere that it rejected, but also what the

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<sup>588</sup> Hlaváčková, Konstantina: *Móda za železnou oponou: Československo 1948-1989*. Praha: Grada, 2017. *ibid.* *Kytky v popelnici – Flowers in the Dustbin*, exhibition catalogue, Prague: UPM-Museum of Decorative Arts, 2007.

<sup>589</sup> For one of the more original treatments of the material culture of state socialism, see the unfortunately titled study: Scribner, Charity. *Requiem for Communism*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2003.

material media were that transmitted evidence of different (non-regime-approved) cultural forms.

To understand the Czech underground's "revolution through style" – pace Hebdige – we need to investigate the formative situation in which the countervailing style, i.e. the entire surrounding aesthetic realm, was not merely a reflection of social hegemony but of direct control. And whenever its oppositional action assumed a different form than Hebdige's trajectory – not merely (and admittedly) Anglocentric but in very significant ways "open-society-centric"<sup>590</sup> – there emerges the immediate necessity of stating what it was reacting against and, by extension, shaping its rebellion and divergence. Here we arrive at the presence of an additional layer of actors whose involvement was no less crucial than that of the repressive forces: the directors, managers and taste-shapers who, alongside the economic planners, created the material-semiotic world from which the underground aesthetic revolt emerged. The phrase offered by cultural historian Kamil Činátl, "socialist Biedermeier"<sup>591</sup>, is attractive and in many ways accurate, yet beyond the aesthetic (and/or fetishistic) responses lies a distinct network of power, from censors through designers, whose own share in the mechanisms of the totalitarian order should be rightfully evaluated.

A truly complex description of the late-socialist aesthetic – if we understand it as spanning the full range of disciplines from art through architecture, design, fashion etc. – would need to examine not merely the physical results in the individual field<sup>592</sup> but (perhaps still more significantly) the economic and political ties and configurations of the institutions

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<sup>590</sup> This idea will be developed in greater detail in Chapter 7, addressing the differences (and similarities) between the Czech underground and other forms of youth subcultures in both open and closed societies.

<sup>591</sup> Činátl, Kamil: *Věčné časy: československé totalitní roky*. Praha: Respekt Publishing, 2009.

<sup>592</sup> Note e.g. Hubatová-Vacková, Lada-Říha, Cyril (eds.): *Husákovsko 3+1. Bytová kultura 70. let*. Praha: UMPRUM 2018. Skřivánková, Lucie et al.: *The Panelaks. Twenty-Five Housing Estates in the Czech Republic*. Praha: UPM, 2017. One unusual project in this area, revealing the fluidity of state-socialist aesthetics between traditionally "high" and "low" forms, is the mapping and preservation of public artworks (sculptures, mosaics, murals) from the 1970s and 1980s: Karous, Pavel et al.: *Vetřelci a volavky / Aliens and Herons*. Praha: Arbor Vitae 2015, also note the project website and its own "crowdsourcing" of contributions: [www.vetrelciavolavky.cz](http://www.vetrelciavolavky.cz).

in charge of the stylistic aspects of the planned economy. Not only in the years of Socialist Realism, but even in the post-Stalinist era of the “return” to international modernist aesthetics from the 1958 Brussels World Exposition onward<sup>593</sup>, the state retained its directivist organs, such as the state design institute ÚBOK, the “Institute of Interior and Sartorial Culture” whose monopoly as public tastemaker – perhaps “taste-manager” is more accurate - remained largely unchallenged up until 1989.<sup>594</sup>

There undeniably exists a strong temptation, particularly at this point in the argument, to claim that ÚBOK and similar state bodies represented as much of a power-manifestation as the StB, indeed as directly totalitarian an “actor” as the police. One consequence of this assertion would be to offer a kind of resolution in the previously mentioned split in current Czech historiography between the study of the “repressive” and the “everyday” aspects: that essentially the repression of the state permeated each moment of its material being, creating, in Yuri Lotman’s sense, a “semiosphere”<sup>595</sup> where the power of the totalitarian order was reinforced on all sides.<sup>596</sup> For the polemical value alone, the equation of state-socialist physical and visual space with police surveillance, the prefabricated housing estate and the “*tesil*”<sup>597</sup> shirt with the agent and the file, is attractive – and could even offer something of a useful correction to a tendency in the most recent artistic historiography toward an overly

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<sup>593</sup> For a scholarly discussion of the Brussels Style, see Kramerová, Daniela-Skállová, Vanda: *Bruselský sen: Československá účast na Světové výstavě Expo 58 v Bruselu a životný styl I. poloviny 60. let*. Praha: Arbor Vitae, 2008. An indication of its place in wider historical-cultural collective memory is best given by the website: <http://expo58.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>594</sup> ÚBOK (Ústav bytové a oděvní kultury) has received relatively little discussion in scholarship until only recently. For its influence on clothing, see: Hlaváčková 2017; for interior design, see: Skřivánková et al. 2017.

<sup>595</sup> Лотман, Юрий М.: О семиосфере. *Труды по знаковым системам*, no. 17, 1984, pp. 5–23; tr, Wilma Clark, “On the Semiosphere”, *Sign System Studies*, no. 33, 2005, pp. 205-226.

<sup>596</sup> Certain references have been made toward the application of Western cultural studies and the (Marxist or Marxist-derived) analyses of ideology and hegemony within late-socialist popular culture, viz. e.g. Machek, Jakub: “Normalizace a populární kultura. Od domácího umění k Ženě za pultem”. Introduction to Bílek-Činátlová 2010, esp. p. 14-15.

<sup>597</sup> *Tesil* was (and still is) the trade-name of an artificial-fibre fabric, now mostly used for automotive textiles, produced by the company Silon ([www.silon.eu](http://www.silon.eu)).

positive assessment of the quotidian legacy of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>598</sup> However, the argument falls short of the reality upon closer analysis, specifically for two major reasons.

First, there is the obvious ethical question of concrete harm inflicted: exposure to state-socialist material culture, however distasteful,<sup>599</sup> cannot rightly be equated with the effects of the same state's policing and surveillance. Nor is the question of collaboration with the "style police" as clear-cut a question as that of StB collaboration - itself often ambiguous and subject to varying evaluations even from persons involved.<sup>600</sup> And the idea of a necessarily adversarial dichotomy between the cultural spheres underground and the quasi-tolerated (before 1968) "above-ground" is itself far from accurate.



Jindřich Chaloupecký, left, Ivan Martin Jirous, right. Photo from 1969, repr. in *Revolver Revue* no. 25, 1994

Not only did the *Vokno* underground rely on the intellectual guidance of university-trained figures like Jiří Němec (psychology) and Ivan Martin Jirous (art history), but – as the next

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<sup>598</sup> E.g. the discussion of ÚBOK in the exhibition "Lifting the Curtain" at the 2014 Venice Biennale. Viz. Bujas, Piotr; Kovačević, Igor; Meder, Iris (eds.): *Lifting the Curtain: Central European Architectural Networks / Lever de rideau: Les réseaux d'architectes en Europe centrale*. Prague-Liège: Centre for Central European Architecture & Éditions Fourre-Tout, 2018.

<sup>599</sup> However, this is not to say that the reaction to state-socialist material conditions was entirely frivolous: as described previously, the idea of "aesthetic torment" formed a vital motivating factor for involvement not only in the underground itself, but even within less clearly oppositional yet less supervised cultural activity. Note e.g. the contribution of the present author: Tharp, Martin: "Aesthetic Torment and Samizdat Whispers: Questions for the Study of Czech Countercultural Social Movements Before and After 1989 in a Global Perspective". Distributed Paper – ISA World Congress, Toronto, 19 July 2018.

<sup>600</sup> E.g. the case of Egon Bondy, as described in Chapter 2. As for the methodological considerations of StB files note e.g. Křen, Jan: *Dokumenty StB jako pramen poznání minulosti. Soudobé dějiny* vol. 12, no. 3-4, 2005, pp. 708-733.

chapter will discuss in greater detail – themselves relied upon mentors from the previous generation with even greater involvement in state-managed structures. A crucial influence for Jirous<sup>601</sup>, for instance, was art critic Jindřich Chalupecký – who in the early 1960s held an influential position within the textile-design section of ÚBOK, a circumstance that, in spite of his post-1989 prominence, has been addressed only very recently.<sup>602</sup>

The second objection, which is more germane for the present chapter's argumentation, is that ascribing such strong hegemonic force to the state-produced material world radically exaggerates its effect, serving not as one actor among many, but as a central, totalising determinant. In the more theoretical and speculative sense, it approaches an inverse fetishism, matching the “Heineken-can” phenomenon detailed previously, but instead charging objects not created within capitalist economic relations with their own special force.<sup>603</sup> And more prosaically, the persistence of material traces from earlier eras – as noted before, particularly in the depopulated Sudetenland – kept its own heterogeneity active, if not in fact stimulating a different interpretive sense of the pre-1948 remnants.

Simultaneously, though, the state imposed its own level of “complexity” through the simple matter of its inability entirely to exclude the heterogeneous, from the Western discards and hard-currency shop finds<sup>604</sup> on one hand to the material legacy of the immediately pre-Communist past on the other. If for Hebdige, semiotic revolt lay primarily in the decentering of found elements, a bricolage of objects (usually garments) removed from their assigned

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<sup>601</sup> Viz. Švehla, *ibid.*

<sup>602</sup> Lomová, Johana: The Production of Art. Jindřich Chalupecký on Textiles and Means of Artistic Production. Institute of the Present; <https://institutulprezentului.ro/en/2019/11/15/the-production-of-art-jindrich-chalupecky-on-textiles-and-means-of-artistic-production/>; accessed 22.1.2020.

<sup>603</sup> For instance, Scribner (viz. note 503) interprets both the *Alltagskultur der DDR* centre in Eisenhüttenstadt and the West German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys's project *Wirtschaftswerte* [Economic Values] as the melancholic evocation of a lost world. Scribner 2003, p. 114-121.

<sup>604</sup> The role of hard-currency retail in late state socialism has been discussed e.g. in Bren, Paulina: “Tuzex and the Hustler. Living It Up in Czechoslovakia”. In: Bren-Neuberger 2012, *ibid.* For more on Tuzex itself: Knapík, Jiří – Franc, Martin et al.: *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967*. Praha: Academia 2011, p. 963-965

contextual significance<sup>605</sup>, the situation out of which Czech countercultural bricolage originated was one of decenteredness – the relics of the past and the West having already been wrenched away from their own contexts into a new context striving towards semiotic unity, if not uniformity.

Artificial fibres, it should be noted, formed one of the chief targets of underground mockery, e.g. in Miroslav ‘Skalák’ Skalický’s song for The Hever and Vazelina Band, “Polyester Scum” [*Tesilová verbež*]:

Tesilová verbež kráčí na čaje,  
tesilová verbež kráčí na čaje,  
na čaje kráčí, na čaje kráčí, tesiloví sráči  
[...]  
Ve vodřenejch džínách přichází chuligán,  
ve vodřenejch džínách přichází chuligán,  
chuligán vchází, chuligán vchází, vlasama si hází.

Pořadatel s pleší na něj vyskočil,  
plešatej pořadatel na něj vyskočil,  
vyskočil na něj, vyskočil na něj, tlust’och vostříhanej.<sup>606</sup>

... yet also the hypocritical fetishism of the West among the regime’s adherents:

Teď stojí před Tuzexem fronta na džínky,  
to jim poradily progresivní maminky,  
jejich maminky, pivní kvasinky, teď maj chuť na džínky.

Tesilová verbež už nosí džíny,  
nesmíme je míti za manekýny,  
za harlekýny, za manekýny, vždyť už nosej džíny.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Hebdige 1979, p.

<sup>606</sup> Skalický, Miroslav: *Tesilová verbež - Básně a písně z let 1972 – 2003*. Praha: Pulchra 2013.

<sup>607</sup> Skalický 2013, *ibid.*

Nor should we forget the characterisation that another significant *Vokno* participant, Stanislav Pitaš, provided of his chief StB agent for the Náchod district:

“my objection... was that he had bad breath and wore disgusting polyester”<sup>608</sup>

Alongside the semiotic dimension of the objects, we need as well to stress their materiality, or more accurately their accessibility under the dictatorship over needs. With this consideration, we approach the aspect of the Czech underground that places it at a distance from Hebdige’s subcultures where the semiotic revolt is the primary activity. For after all, the underground was as much of an activity as a culture, where creative action was paramount, focusing on production (of music, of samizdat) within the framework of unavailability-as-morality<sup>609</sup>. In the most truly (and indeed unironically) Marxist sense, the means of production assumed the central role: acquisition of the electric guitars, amplifiers, speakers etc. for the music; the typewriters, carbon paper, or even later the mimeograph and offset machines for samizdat.

The musical dimension of the underground and its relationship to cultural resistance does not explicitly form part of the present work, and has been already covered by Hagen and other scholars<sup>610</sup>; moreover, samizdat - as the present work argues – should be seen as a qualitatively different endeavour, both shaping the underground and connecting it to other oppositional formulations. As an instance of the paths taken by samizdat, in its form as a physical medium the bricolage-revolt of samizdat, arguably itself a hippie-punk hybrid<sup>611</sup>, through the typescript history of a text parallel to *Vokno* yet not actually a part of the

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<sup>608</sup> „smrdělo mu z huby a nosil hnusný tesilový kalhoty“. Pitaš, Stanislav Guma, interview, Šonov u Broumova, 18.4.2017, also note his interview in *Babylon 2012*, *ibid.*: „Napsal jsem stížnost na estébáka Raušera, že mu smrdí z huby, k výsledku chodí ve špinavých tesilkách a že mě to ponižuje“.

<sup>609</sup> Fehér-Heller-Márkus 1983, *ibid.*

<sup>610</sup> Above all, Hagen, Trever: *Living in the Merry Ghetto: The Music and Politics of the Czech Underground*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019; Kudrna-Stárek 2017, *ibid.*, also note Vaněk, Miroslav. *Byl to jenom rock-n-roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956-1989*. Praha: Academia 2010.

<sup>611</sup> More on the relation between these two avowedly antagonistic tendencies and their fusion and/or synthesis in state-socialist conditions will be discussed subsequently in Chapter 7.

publication, specifically Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl". The micro-history of Ginsberg's work in Czech samizdat, starting from its appearance as "Kvílení", in Jan Zábřana's Czech translation, and continuing in the 1970s via the paths of its dissemination among discontented, counterculturally-minded youth. The circumstances of the poem making its way to Zábřana and its official publication (in part as early as 1959 in the journal *Světová literatura*<sup>612</sup>) form one historical narrative, matched on the other side by its distribution at the start of the 1970s as a samizdat typescript – in fact the first samizdat attempt by Stárek almost a decade before *Vokno*.<sup>613</sup>

We should not forget that the copying (i.e. retyping) of otherwise inaccessible written texts was not unknown even before 1968; Ivan Martin Jirous, for instance, during his student years took a typewriter to an abandoned farmhouse in the village of Brancourov to produce copies of various favourite writings (e.g. Andre Breton's *Nadja*) which he then circulated among his friends with the heading "Opsáno na Brancourově".<sup>614</sup> Superficially, the idea of samizdat as home craft necessitated by censorship or physical inaccessibility, could be placed in parallel with the post-1968 explosion of domestic decorative crafts or "home art", discussed in detail e.g. by Blanka Činátlová.<sup>615</sup> Yet the larger historical-social implications of samizdat combine the economic and cultural restrictions with the additional question of the processes for the (semi-legal or illegal) availability of unauthorised texts, whether through the semi-permeable membrane of socialist internationalism (primarily during the cultural liberalisation of the 1960s, though not entirely) or through the persistence of historical objects of pre-war date (e.g. the Czech translation of *Nadja* from 1935, kept hidden in the storage area

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<sup>612</sup> *Světová literatura* no. 6, 1963, pp. 60-80.

<sup>613</sup> Stárek, personal communication (repeated occasions).

<sup>614</sup> Švehla, *ibid.*, p. 37-40.

<sup>615</sup> For the "domácí umění" of the normalisation years as a specific category, note the analysis by Činátlová, Blanka: "Invaze barbarů do české kultury: Antropologický rozměr domácího umění". In: Bílek-Činátlová 2010, pp. 154-165.



of the Prague City Library copied by a friend of Jirous's sister in shorthand<sup>616</sup>). Again, the question of the "activation" of material objects, specifically data media such as vinyl records and printed books, remains a significant area of life (even "everyday life") in late state-socialism that indicates a clear totalitarian dimension to the legal-social order. In this case, the totalitarian element implies the politicisation of access to objects from both present and past that lie outside the framework of state production – and conversely the granting of a counter-systemic force to these same material goods, precisely through the moralistic (or at least strongly normatively tinted) judgment of Heller et al.'s "dictatorship over needs".

Yet where the underground emerges as its own form of resistance is, paradoxically, in its refusal of socialist commodity fetishism – specifically the fetishizing of the non-systemic (Western or handcrafted) goods that could in other interpretative frameworks be regarded as somehow resistant to the aesthetic-productive monopoly of the late-totalitarian state. To cite *Vokno* itself, from the editors' note on the first page of issue 4:

Finally, we would like to speak of a matter that we cannot influence directly. This is the inaccessibility of the magazine due to its limited mobility. This means – damnit! – lend it around, this is no ornament for the bookshelf!<sup>617</sup>

True, the admonition from Stárek indicates that the circulation of *Vokno* may not have proceeded as rapidly as its creators hoped, yet the principle is clear: to keep the printed artefact moving through the readership network<sup>618</sup>, and not to hang onto it as a private possession. And here it should be recalled that under the "dictatorship over needs", the difference between fetishized objects – from Heineken cans to books – is subsumed or even obliterated. Indeed, the political economy of the printed book under state socialism, particularly in the cases of less conformist domestic authors or of works translated from the "capitalist abroad", resembled very closely the shortage-control dynamics of less seemingly

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<sup>616</sup> Švehla, p. 39.

<sup>617</sup> *Vokno* no. 4, p. 2

<sup>618</sup> As detailed in the subsequent chapter.

elevated commodities, with its own black market of “under-the-counter” titles (*podpultovka*), compulsive queue-joining and other habits.<sup>619</sup>

Samizdat production may not have arisen as a conscious rejection of the desire for the accumulation of prized artefacts, from the collecting of empty Western packaging to the production of e.g. a “rabbit funeral possession made from bottle caps”,<sup>620</sup> but it did reject the impulse to reify creative potential into fixed objects. Within the dissident networks – themselves a complex social phenomenon to be addressed in the subsequent chapter – samizdat typescripts operated functionally (and, it could be said, even semiotically) as the complete opposite of the fetishized Western commodity, or conversely the object of domestic decorative craft: not as objects in their own right but as circulatory tokens, invitations into a group of like-minded “polotovary” (semi-finished goods) that had to be copied while being read as the “price of admission” to the samizdat network<sup>621</sup>. In this sense, samizdat is less of an object than the material remnant or trace of the underground as process: an escape not only from ideological restrictions on content, but indeed from the wider sphere of state-socialist material relations, including even the “heterogeneous” (Western / handcraft) responses to state-produced, hence state-approved materiality<sup>622</sup>. Or perhaps, from another interpretive standpoint, samizdat production represented not an opposing material substance but an oppositional practice to the entire relational system of material culture in the era.

Of course, the de-materialisation of the data medium in samizdat form never functioned perfectly – as the warning from *Vokno* makes clear – and moreover the continuing will toward technical improvement of the production process away from typewritten craft

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<sup>619</sup> An impressive recent study on the late-socialist book market is Šmejkalová, Jiřina: *Cold War Books in the ‘Other’ Europe and What Came After*. Leiden-Boston: Brill 2011, especially the description on p. 193-194.

<sup>620</sup> Činátlová, p. 155.

<sup>621</sup> Viz. e.g. Chnapková, Sylva, interview, *ibid*.

<sup>622</sup> E.g. Fehérváry 2009, *ibid*, also note Molnár, Virág: “The Power of Things: Material Culture as Political Resource”. In: *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 205-210.

towards industrial offset printing (though only after 1989 in *Vokno*'s case) was given its own ironic reply with the 1990s boom in zine culture, as discussed in the previous chapter. Still another question is the somewhat equivocal stance towards extra-socialist materiality on the part of the underground itself. Not only were certain Western objects prized for their own perceived countercultural standing, e.g. the bluejeans repeatedly patched together in *Nová Víska*<sup>623</sup>, but even certain points of an anti-systemic aesthetic stance could view homemade craftwork perhaps not necessarily as an “island of positive deviation” but at least as bearing a resemblance to Anglophone urban-countercultural forms, whether the Warhol-Haring tendencies of pop art or an anticipation of ironic post-punk camp. Against Činátlová's dismissal of ‘domestic art’ as “manneristic and infantile”,<sup>624</sup> and implicitly as complicit in maintaining the social order (‘system-stabilising’ or ‘repressive desublimation’, in the terminology of Western Marxists<sup>625</sup>), the one-time *Vokno* contributor and close associate of Lubomír Drožd', Pablo de Sax (Pavel Veselý)<sup>626</sup> has established a collection and online forum for this genre ([www.domaciumeni.cz](http://www.domaciumeni.cz)), though expressing his appreciation for such work primarily through arguments of individual creativity and stylistic uniqueness.<sup>627</sup>



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<sup>623</sup> Stárek 2012, *ibid.*, note 175.

<sup>624</sup> Činátlová, p. 164.

<sup>625</sup> The term is, of course, from Marcuse, Herbert: *One-Dimensional Man Studies in Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. London: Routledge 2002 (originally Boston: Beacon Press 1964).

<sup>626</sup> Note Romanová 2012, esp. p. 30.

<sup>627</sup> Vítvar, Jan H.: Pár piv, a máme zajíce. *Respekt*, 29.4.2017.

Yet from a broader, perhaps necessarily more distant standpoint, this division may prove less significant than the insight into samizdat as a kind of escape from enforced materiality: the paper agora as a realm of ideas (or in the case of underground and later subcultural tendencies, emotions and reactions) where the material carrier was – paradoxically - less important than its interpersonal message yet vitally significant through the difficulties of its own creation<sup>628</sup>.

These considerations are, it cannot be stressed too firmly, only initial and speculative. For the present, though, it is worth reflecting on the nature of social controls within the system, specifically on the “soft power” and manipulative hegemonic structures of Czechoslovak normalisation. At the very least, we should consider that the historiographic strategies of focusing on totalitarian repression and on microhistorical investigation of the everyday may not, in the end, necessarily be opposing but in fact complementary approaches.

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<sup>628</sup> It must be said, of course, that samizdat-as-dematerialization was hardly universally applicable to the range of unofficial publication practices of late state-socialism. On the one hand is the Polish case of semi-(or even entirely) professional printing; meanwhile in Russian samizdat there appeared significant trends toward artistic, even “gift or keepsake” book-objects. For the latter, viz. Komaromi, Ann: “The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat”. In: *Slavic Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, autumn 2004, pp. 597-618, esp. pp. 600-601.

## Chapter 6

### Six Degrees of Agency: *Vokno*, Its Networks and State Power

“He offered a bet that we could name any person among earth’s one and a half billion inhabitants and through at most five acquaintances, one of which he knew personally, he could link to the chosen one...”<sup>629</sup>

If the materiality of European state socialism, establishing dimensions both cultural and economic, is one aspect that in a sense acts to “frame” samizdat conceptually; the other side, suggested by the metaphor of de-materialisation, is that of the interpersonal network of participants and the physical side of oppositional activity: writing, typing, re-typing, transporting, reading. Dissident political action across all levels was, as many observers (participants and scholars) have noted, inevitably grounded in personal acquaintance.<sup>630</sup> The Czech provincial underground, in turn, formed a specific network even within larger schemes of dissent, and a network that through its own admission remained easily identifiable not only to police surveillance but visually diverged from the standards of physical appearance and (to a lesser extent) common behaviour prevalent at the time<sup>631</sup>. The question of whether to classify the underground, including but extending beyond the single publication *Vokno*, as precisely a movement or a subculture is more complex than might appear at first sight, forming the central focus of the subsequent chapter. In the present chapter, I will assume it as a given that within the system of cultural, aesthetic and material control prevalent in

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<sup>629</sup> Karinthy, Frigyes: “Chains”; viz. infra.

<sup>630</sup>For references from within Charter 77 alone, the list is enormous; perhaps the best-known descriptions is the (semi-fictional) memoir: Vaculík, Ludvík: *Český snář*. Praha: Petlice 1981xx, Toronto: 68 Publishers 1983, Brno: Atlantis 1990; *ibid*, *A Cup of Coffee with My Interrogator*, tr. George Theiner. London: Readers International, 1987. Also note the interviews in: Kantůrková, Eva: *Sešly jsme se v této knize*. Praha: Toužimský a Moravec 1991, including contributions from both Dana Němcová and Věra Jirousová, as well as more recently Linková, Marcela – Straková, Naďa: *Bytová revolta. Jak ženy dělaly dissent*. Praha: Academia-Sociologický ústav 2017. In terms of recent Czech scholarship viz. Vilímeček, Tomáš: *Dvojitý způsob života. Studie o Chartě 77 a československé společnosti (1977-2000)*. In *Šest kapitol o disentu*. Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny, sv. 51. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny 2017. In English, the most extensive discussions are in Bolton 2012, particularly chapters 3, “The Shadow World” and 7, “Dreams of a Dissident”, the latter focusing on Vaculík 1981xx, *ibid*.

<sup>631</sup> Descriptions of the public harassment of visual nonconformity (though in a slightly earlier period to the one covered here) can be found in Blažek-Pospíšil 2010.

Czechoslovakia during the last decades of the Communist state, a conscious and coherent practice of differing from and objecting to the state-mandated forms should automatically be counted as a social movement in the widely understood sense of the term, leaving aside for the moment the more specific analysis of how the relation between movement and subculture functioned on a more concrete and/or granular level.

Moreover, the use of network-analytical interpretive tools should also contribute to the present work's wider aim of establishing a view of (one) European state-socialist society that is not merely chronologically dynamic (i.e. historical), but more generally relational: in the words of Mustafa Emirbayer, "dynamic, continual and processual".<sup>632</sup> In particular for a social order where the designation of "totalitarian" is at least justifiable, the study of the relations not only of power but also of agency – including opposition both political and cultural – would need to examine the "co-deterministic" nature of action and structure, as well as extending the two beyond the simplistic dyad of dissent versus policing.<sup>633</sup> And as will be discussed in greater detail below, both the impingement of police surveillance and the ambiguous position of secret-police collaboration from within oppositional networks provide their own vexing conundrums that evade the easy categorical assignment.

A careful analysis of the 1970s underground would first involve the many links and connections reaching far beyond the personal biographies of the immediate *Vokno*-affiliated generation (largely born in the first half of the 1950s<sup>634</sup>), at times chronologically extending even before the actual Communist coup d'état of 1948. Here, two key directions of inquiry suggest themselves: personal networks beyond the generational cohort (who knew whom) and

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<sup>632</sup> Emirbayer, Mustafa, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology", In: *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103, no. 2, September 1997, pp. 281-317, here p. 281.

<sup>633</sup> Note e.g. Dépelteau, François: "Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency". In: *Sociological Theory* vol. 26, no. 1, March 2008, pp. 51-73.

<sup>634</sup> All the informants interviewed in the present study were born between 1950 and 1957, viz. appendix. Of course, the "inspirers", e.g. Jirous or Němec, tended to be older.

patterns of intellectual-cultural influence (outside direct personal contact). Within the present chapter, one of the primary tasks will be establishing the framework for understanding these two directions as bivalent and mutually self-constituting: in the sense that the cultural perspective “cuts against the grain of [...] structural determination in network analysis”.<sup>635</sup> At the same time, the analysis of the network between *Vokno* and other sections of cultural (and/or political) dissent brings up wider historical-social aspects of their positioning in wider structures: familial, state/repressive, even national. Most frequently addressed in Czech historiography is the “species of authorised scoundrelism” exemplified by the agent provocateur and the informant,<sup>636</sup> though it is the aim of the present chapter to include the wider ramifications as well.

On one hand, it is worthwhile in itself to discuss the presence of specific leading individuals associated with the 1970s underground active in earlier forms of independent cultural activity. The most notable case is perhaps that of poet-philosopher Egon Bondy, as mentioned previously<sup>637</sup>, the one survivor from the Stalinist-era *vie de bohème* of Bohumil Hrabal and Vladimír Boudník<sup>638</sup>. And on the level of aesthetics, particularly the moral aesthetic of absolute, unfiltered, harsh authenticity, of deliberately grimy proletarian absurdity, one could even trace a somewhat more generalised “underground sensibility” as far back as the artistic association “Skupina 42” during the Nazi occupation. Likewise, attention

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<sup>635</sup> McLean, Paul: *Culture in Networks*. Polity Press: Cambridge 2017, p. 112.

<sup>636</sup> The quotation, taken from Joseph Conrad’s classic novel *The Secret Agent* (1907), is cited here from Marx, Gary: “Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agent Provocateur and the Informant”. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1974, p. 403.

<sup>637</sup> Note again the discussion by Bolton, *ibid*, p. 120-122, also Machovec, Martin: “Od avantgardy přes podzemí do underground. Skupina edice Půlnoc 1949-1955 a undergroundový okruh Plastic People 1969-1989”. In Alan 2001, *ibid*.

<sup>638</sup> Hrabal, Boudník and Bondy famously lived together in a half-ruined house in the Prague industrial suburb of Libeň, known as „Na Hrází věčnosti“ (At the Edge of Eternity). The classic portrayal of the group is given in Hrabal’s fictionalised memoir of Boudník, *Něžný barbar*. The primary scholarly discussions of the early Bondy-underground are Pilař, Martin: *Underground. Kapitoly z českého literárního undergroundu*. Brno: Host 1999, or Zand, Gertraude: *Totaler Realismus und Peinliche Poesie. Tschechische Untergrund-Literatur 1948-1953*. Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang 1998; tr. Zuzana Adamová, *Totální realismus a trapná poezie: česká neoficiální literatura 1948-1953*. Brno: Host 2002.

should be drawn (as mentioned previously) to the clear personal connection between Jindřich Chalupecký (1919-1990), originally Skupina 42's primary theorist and critic<sup>639</sup>, later a significant advocate for international conceptual art<sup>640</sup>, and the young Ivan Martin Jirous at the end of the 1960s. Or, no less significantly in another trajectory of influence, Jiří Němec's intellectual lineage in both its phenomenological and Christian components.<sup>641</sup>

Secondly, an even more unusual development is the emergence of that previously noted connection between working-class countercultural youth and consciously oppositional intellectuals. Conventional paradigms of high culture versus low culture – inasmuch as the state-socialist order both confirmed and conflated the two along various dimensions<sup>642</sup> – can only be fitted to this dissident-counterculture alliance with great difficulty; moreover, the extensive network of personal connections between “high” and “low” cultural spheres within Czech oppositional circles – or indeed the difficulty in classifying where a single individual might fall within any “high-low” schemata – is itself unusual in the cultural hierarchies that articulated Europe's state-socialist orders.<sup>643</sup>

Essentially, the first question examines the state-socialist counterculture as an autonomous entity within a society of control, with various mechanisms applied through its course ranging from observation to direct physical violence: how autonomy, in other words, was created in a setting commonly described as totalitarian. Contrastingly, the second

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<sup>639</sup> For an overview of the authors and artists associated with this group viz. Pešat, Zdeněk-Petrová, Eva: *Skupina 42: Antologie*. Brno: Atlantis 2000.

<sup>640</sup> A selection of Chalupecký's critical essays is available as: Chalupecký, Jindřich: *Cestou necestou*, ed. Zina Trochová. Jinočany: Nakladatelství H&H 1999.

<sup>641</sup> Viz. e.g. *Souvislosti* 2001, *ibid.*

<sup>642</sup> Or perhaps better put: the multidimensional character of vertical stratification – viz. Machonin, Pavel: “The Social Structure of Soviet-Type Societies, Its Collapse and Legacy”. *Czech Sociological Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, Fall 1993, pp. 231-249, esp. p. 241.

<sup>643</sup> Sociological analyses of hierarchies in European state socialism have focused on the discrepancies and conflicts between political-economic power (the Party nomenklatura in its political and managerial functions) and cultural-intellectual capital (both dissident intellectuals and compliant technocrats); e.g. Szelenyi, Ivan: “Varieties of Social Structure During and After Socialism”. In: *Chinese Sociological Review*, vol. 46, no. 2, Winter 2013–14, pp. 3–31, specifically the division between “*Bildungsbürgertum* and *Besitzbürgertum*”, i.e. knowledge vs. ownership, p. 11. On a more interactive level, though, see Ost, David (ed.): *Class after Communism*. Special issue, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, vol. 29, no. 3, August 2015.



question assumes, as indeed much archival evidence has revealed (or may even reveal in the future), that the repressive forces had a significant participatory role inside oppositional structures, the countercultural ones not excepted, through the use of hired agents and informers.

Social network studies have in recent years increasingly assumed a prominent role in investigations of human society.<sup>644</sup> While much of the impulse behind the growth of the discipline could be traced to the demands and rewards of the information-technology sector, it nonetheless forms an important quantifiable area of “meso-level” investigation, i.e. occupying the middle range between micro-level social analysis (e.g. phenomenological, interactionist or ethnomethodological methods) and macro-scale theorising (the “grand theories” of Weber, Durkheim, Parsons et al.).<sup>645</sup> Yet the application of social networks to historical-sociological analysis, even of the recent past – specifically, the investigation of social networks among living participants whose lifetimes spanned periods of radical social change – is rather less common. And for the retroactive analysis of repressive societies in which effective research was severely hindered by political demands, most notably European state socialism, the field is largely uncharted ground.

A second consideration, in turn, might well consider the importance of applying a similar level of “meso-investigation” within the current controversies of post-totalitarian historiography: the respective importance of, on one hand, the archival documentation of past crimes of the state and its repressive forces, and on the other of the examination of the textures and materialities of everyday life. In previous chapters, I have already tried to point out the weaknesses of this division, specifically its implied assumption of *Machtgeschichte* as

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<sup>644</sup> For an overview of the start of the use of networks, note: Borgatti, Stephen P.- Mehra, Ajay - Brass, Daniel J. – Labianca, Giuseppe “Network Analysis in the Social Sciences”. In: *Science*, vol. 323, 2009, pp. 892-895.

<sup>645</sup> See Bolívar, Mireia: “Macro, meso, micro: broadening the ‘social’ of social network analysis with a mixed methods approach”. In: *Quality and Quantity*, vol. 50, no. 5, September 2015.

invariably and inevitably opposed to *Alltagsgeschichte*. In between the close reading of the first and the wide-ranging span of the second, there is definitely room for analysis of intermediary levels of interaction between the two, drawing attention to the presences as much as the absences of state power, while equally avoiding the traps of normative judgement in the search for how the realms of power and daily life overlapped, touched, merged or diverged.

Beyond the matter of simple historiographic accuracy, my aim in the present chapter is to propose a possible model for networked social action even under conditions of direct political repression, and, as such, needs to bring into consideration how oppositional social networks worked in the presence of heavy police surveillance and disruption. And in stressing the heterogeneity of networks in an oppositional counterculture, such an analysis can equally shed much-needed light upon the various forms of social interaction within a state-surveillance society, among conformists and oppositionists alike.

To bring the Czech underground into the conceptual framework of network analysis, I will take as a starting point a relatively simple principle, indeed one captured in the popular phrase “six degrees of separation”. The concept that an individual in the modern world has a sufficiently dense web of social contacts that only five acquaintances separate them from any other is most directly derived from the play of this title by the American dramatist John Guare, premiered in 1990<sup>646</sup>. Nonetheless, its essential idea was first presented, according to most accounts, by the Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy in 1929 in one of his many journalistic texts, “*Láncszemek*” (Chains).<sup>647</sup> To cite Karinthy’s own wording:

To demonstrate that people on Earth today are much closer than ever, a member of the group suggested a test. He offered a bet that we could name any person among earth’s one and a half billion inhabitants and through at *most five* acquaintances, one of which he knew personally, he could link to the chosen one.

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<sup>646</sup> Guare’s play was later adapted into a film bearing the same title, directed by Fred Schepisi (1993).

<sup>647</sup> Karinthy, Frigyes: ‘Láncszemek’, first publication: “*Ki kérdezett...?*”. *Címszavak a nagy enciklopédiához*. Budapest: Singer-Wolfner, 1926. Translation from Barabási, op. cit.

Karinthy's contribution to modern network studies was made clear to scholarship primarily through the popularising study of Hungarian-born Albert-László Barabási<sup>648</sup> with relation to another concept that, in his words, "occasionally reads like an English translation of Karinthy's "Láncszemek" rewritten for an audience of sociologists"<sup>649</sup>: the experiment by American social psychologist Stanley Milgram. In his article "The Small World Problem"<sup>650</sup>, he noted that the results of the random-letter-response experiment conducted at Harvard, contacting unknown persons in Wichita and Omaha to have them send the response to a person they thought might know the second contact in Cambridge, Massachusetts, arrived at the following, somewhat surprising conclusion

...as more tracers and folders came in, we learned that chains varied from two to 10 intermediate acquaintances, with the median at five [...] A median of five intermediate persons is, in certain ways, impressive, considering the distances traversed.<sup>651</sup>

For one, Milgram's contribution represents an empirical confirmation, if something of a controversial one<sup>652</sup>, of Karinthy's idea, presented initially as an almost incidental aperçu. Secondly, though, there is the question of the position of this experiment in Milgram's intellectual trajectory as a social investigator. After all, it immediately followed in the wake of the "obedience experiment" that he conducted in 1961 at Yale, now popularly known simply as the "Milgram experiment", where volunteers were asked to administer (simulated) electric shocks to a "research subject" even over his increasing objections. Notoriously, the Yale experiment found that a majority of the volunteers were willing to keep increasing the voltage of the purported shocks when urged by a person of seeming authority, in line with the original theses of a psychological tendency toward obedience that could lead, among other outcomes,

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<sup>648</sup> Barabási, Albert-László: *Linked. The New Science of Networks*. New York: Perseus, 2002, p. 25-27.

<sup>649</sup> Barabási, p. 27.

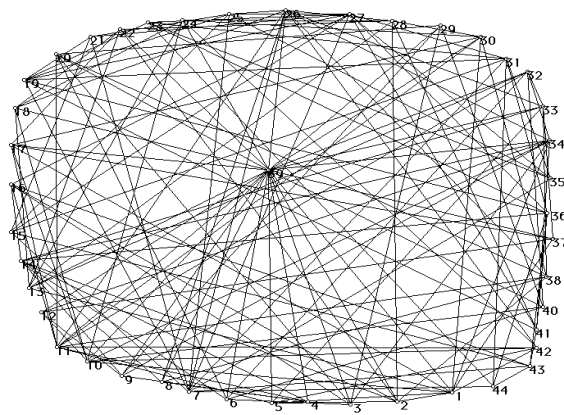
<sup>650</sup> Milgram, Stanley: "The Small World Problem". *Psychology Today*, vol.1, no.1, May 1967, p. 61-67. A more rigorous presentation is: Travers, Jeffrey and Stanley Milgram: "An Experimental Study of the Small World Problem". *Sociometry*, vol. 32, no. 4, December 1969, p. 425-443.

<sup>651</sup> Milgram (1967), p. 65.

<sup>652</sup> The most critical treatment at present is probably Perry, Gina: *Behind the Shock Machine: The Untold Story of the Notorious Milgram Psychology Experiments*. New York: The New Press, 2013.

toward willing involvement with totalitarian political regimes. There is, quite likely, a strong and tenable connection to be made in the sociology of ideas between the start of network analysis and the experience of modernity's dark side<sup>653</sup>.

It is perhaps not “over-sociologization” to note, for instance, that Milgram was in the same high-school graduation class as Phillip Zimbardo: the instigator of the other notorious American social-psychology experiment in obedience and authoritarianism, the “Stanford Prison Experiment”.<sup>654</sup>



Centralisation: a diagram of the Erdős number among professional mathematicians.

By turning to the somewhat over-popularised idea of wide-ranging connections,<sup>655</sup> I would like to avoid an excessively mathematical emphasis on nodes and nodality<sup>656</sup> towards a more qualitative understanding of interconnections: what network analysis reveals about social structures and social bonds within the order often termed “modernity”, and in that particular case-study offered by the state-socialist modernity of Europe under Soviet political hegemony. Social networks, in other words, brought conscious state agents, quasi-

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<sup>653</sup> Note specifically Alexander, Jeffrey C.: *The Dark Side of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

<sup>654</sup> Blass, p. 149

<sup>655</sup> Even inspiring, in the 1990s, its own parody for the US film world, “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon”. It may well not be a coincidence that the “Bacon Law” follows an earlier practice in the sphere of mathematics, the “Erdős number” for mathematicians who collaborated with the peripatetic Hungarian Pál Erdős: viz. the Erdős Number Project, <https://oakland.edu/enp/>.

<sup>656</sup> Borghatti et al 2009, *ibid*.

collaborators, dissidents, the opposition-minded, and the utterly indifferent all together. An individual in an active opposition network would, through its links and ties, not only find the deep and long-enduring friendships with fellow dissidents that so many respondents speak of, but also have a “connection” forcibly established with the supervising officer of the secret police, as well as with unknown (or at times suspected) agents within the network.<sup>657</sup>

Likewise, the immediate network participants had to work alongside those partially within the conformist world and partially in the opposition, usually for material or logistical support – and this is not even to speak of other links of family or pre-dissent friendships leading in still wider directions.<sup>658</sup>

Looking at the chronological course of the formation of Czech opposition in the 1970s, historians have often noted the extremely high level of chance and contingency in the decisive personal encounters – most of all in the formulation of Charter 77 as an oppositional network connecting metropolitan intellectuals to subcultural youth. The initial personal encounter between Václav Havel and Ivan Martin Jirous in March 1976, for instance, has been described as almost accidental<sup>659</sup> in spite of its undeniable historical significance. Yet against the idea of simple chance, perhaps even a distant evocation of the surrealist *recontre fortuite*<sup>660</sup> there remains the record of somewhat less immediately evident personal networks within – to take up an idea noted previously in the present work – the “Ruritanian” scope of a relatively small and geographically centralised nation-state. If one observational optic could

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<sup>657</sup> Bolton (ibid.) cited Ludvík Vaculík’s descriptions of his interactions with his secret-police interrogators (Vaculík ibid.); in turn, Stárek has occasionally spoken of later conversations with the StB agents watching the Nová Víska commune (Fenomén undergroundu, ibid.). Also note the interview with Stanislav ‘Guma’ Pitaš, ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Viz. e.g. the introduction to Alan et al, ibid., which establishes three stages for this network: initial affinity, widening of the group for practical realisation, and finally spatialisation (finding a locality free from outside – and not merely police-related – observation). Alan et al., p. 29-30.

<sup>659</sup> Bolton 2012, p. 135-136; for further detail Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 190-191, based on Havel’s recorded testimony for a Czech Television documentary on Jirous, 1999 (viz. p. 190. footnote 477)

<sup>660</sup> The phrase is, of course, from Lautréamont, later assumed by the French Surrealists; Surrealism as an explanatory device for Czech historiography has its own long history, viz. e.g. Sayer, Derek: *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century. A Surrealist History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013.

find the underground “a world apart from Havel’s circles”<sup>661</sup> in terms of cultural standing, an analysis using different proportions of scale would stress the relative closeness between social levels even across a purported divide – not to mention the various other factors of the post-1968 social disruptions, the “pull” and “push” factors blurring cultural hierarchy, or other connective circumstances arising from the peculiarities of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history discussed elsewhere.<sup>662</sup>

One further complicating factor in describing oppositional networks under state socialism is the ability of the state to generate “opposition” out of simple nonconformity. There are few cases where this link is more visible than that of youth subcultures in the European satellite states and the USSR itself at the end of the 1960s, when unusual fashion choices became directly politicised as offenses against “socialist morality” or public decency<sup>663</sup>, and men’s hair length became a topic of significant police concern.

I have myself previously outlined<sup>664</sup>, the relation between subculture and opposition under Communism demands somewhat more complex treatment than has often been the case, yet such complexity should not blind us to the radical over-simplification on the other side of the equation, i.e. on the part of the Party-State whose repression in many ways shaped and guided often inchoate or nascent impulses of discontent. Nonetheless, the idea of complexity and vagueness – not as descriptions of methodology, but as social facts that the methodology needs to address – is central to network analysis.

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<sup>661</sup> Bolton 2012, p. 134.

<sup>662</sup> Indicative of the immediate situational requirements of oppositional activism in the 1970s is, contrastingly, the process of establishing the personal connection between Havel and Jiří Němec: though the two had known of each other in the 1960s, the disputes around the journal *Tvář* found them on opposite sides and their pre-Charter meeting had, in fact, to be arranged through considerable mediation and in the “neutral territory” of the flat of conservative Catholic Václav Benda. Kudrna-Stárek 2017, p. 198-199.

<sup>663</sup> Note Blažek, Petr-Pospíšil, Filip: *Vraťte nám vlasy! První máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu*. Praha: Academia 2010.

<sup>664</sup>Tharp 2018, *ibid*.

The crucial work in this area is, of course, one of the most frequently cited papers in the social sciences: Mark Granovetter's "The Strength of Weak Ties" (1973)<sup>665</sup>. Granovetter, drawing on his empirical studies in the sociology of American labour markets, found that persons with a wider network of relatively distant acquaintances were more successful in job searches than those with smaller numbers of closer friends:

...weak ties, often denounced as generative of alienation [...] are here seen as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and their integration into communities; strong ties, breeding local cohesion, lead to fragmentation.<sup>666</sup>

Ascribing such importance to weak-tie social networks not only brought into question a major strain of American social analysis that previously had focused on modern life as a force of atomization and fragmentation, whether the turn-of-the century industrial metropolis<sup>667</sup> or the post-1945 suburb.<sup>668</sup> More to the point at hand, it closely matches (as Granovetter himself noted in his reconsideration of the topic a decade later)<sup>669</sup> the classic analysis of modern versus pre-modern societies of Ferdinand Tönnies: weak ties as a trait of *Gesellschaft*, strong ties of *Gemeinschaft*.<sup>670</sup>

Much intellectual energy among historians and similar observers has been devoted to the question of how "modern" the state-socialist, really-existing socialist or "Leninist" social order(s) really were. Was 20<sup>th</sup>-century Communism a perversion/culmination/blind alley of modernity, or was it instead a retreat from modernity's challenges into a state-administered *Gemeinschaft*-fantasy? Understandably, any resolution of this conundrum lies far outside the modest scope of the present contribution. Indeed, its tendency to culminate in such polarized

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<sup>665</sup> Granovetter, Mark: "The Strength of Weak Ties". *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 6. (May, 1973), pp. 1360-1380.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid, p. 1380.

<sup>667</sup> Most particularly, the "Chicago School" of urban ethnography: viz. Cohen, Albert K.: "A General Theory of Subcultures". In Gelder, Ken – Thornton, Sarah (eds.): *The Subculture Reader*. London: Routledge 1997 (originally 1955).

<sup>668</sup> Riesman, David (et al.): *The Lonely Crowd. A Study of the Changing American Character*.

<sup>669</sup> Granovetter, Mark: "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited". *Sociological Theory*, vol. 1, 1983, pp. 201-233.

<sup>670</sup> Granovetter here cites the work of Rose Coser on weak-tie or low-density *Gesellschaft* as a necessary component of modern individualisation, p. 203-204.

conclusions may well be far more misguided than informative. Still, I would nonetheless like to contribute one observation: a clear aspect of non-modernity within societies under continual ideological monitoring is the reinforcement of the strongest possible ties, and a continual attack or undermining towards the weaker ones. This is not to say that weak ties as such did not exist under state socialism – nor, for that matter, should this analysis discount the force, if not the outright utilization, of many pre-modern social residues as highly effective social-control tools by the forces of state authority (nationalism, xenophobia, strongly familial or localist structures of social organisation and sociability). However, the historical record of the system’s duration clearly suggests that across its span, whether in the form of Stalinist collectivism or post-Stalinist familial atomization, lower-density social interactivity invariably remained severely limited.

“Other nations have principles, Czechs have families” – so runs the quote attributed to one Czech dissident, the translator of medieval German Jindřich Pokorný<sup>671</sup>. However reductive this observation may be, even if we admit that the harsh lapidary aperçu forms a part of the social landscape of Communist and post-Communist Europe, it nonetheless holds a certain degree of truth. Even if family ties as a system-stabilising force in Europe’s totalitarian orders has – indeed, like all inner-generated tools of social control – long been neglected by analysis, its presence as an involved factor is indeed often evoked by former participants, and thus should count as evidence of a kind. In general, the idea of “familialism” in the social sciences is associated primarily with Mediterranean Europe, specifically southern Italy, thanks to the influential field study by American political scientist Edward C. Banfield.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Originally, I attributed this quotation to the interview conducted with Pokorný in October 1998 by Adam Drda and Viktor Karlík, Pokorný, Jindřich: Kádrový posudek si každý napsal sám. In: *Revolver Revue*, no. 39/1999, reprinted in *RR rozhovory*. Praha: Edice Revolver Revue 2016, pp. 421-440.

<sup>672</sup> Banfield, Edward C.: *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958. It should, though, be noted that Banfield’s methodology and conclusions have been strongly criticised by later researchers; a good summary of the critiques is: Ferragina, Emanuele: “The never-ending debate about *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*: Banfield and ‘amoral familism’”. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, Oxford: Anthropological Society of Oxford, 2009, 1 (2), pp.141-160.



However, its applicability to state socialism is well worth investigating: specifically, the creation of self-contained nuclear-family units through the social planning of the regime, whether economically (e.g. the dissolution of extended-family agriculture or entrepreneurship into collective ownership) or spatially (the individual, indeed individuated unit of the prefabricated high-rise apartment).

The question of space and spatialities – implying spaces adapted both for conformity and resistance – within state-socialist planning has been somewhat neglected in Czech historiography, or perhaps more accurately addressed only partially.<sup>673</sup> As mentioned previously in specific detail, the existence of shared spaces – whether the communal living arrangements of the “baráky” or even dissident-friendly cafes or pubs<sup>674</sup> – was crucial to the establishment and cultivation of the underground’s “vitally weak” ties.

It’s hard to believe it, but even then, there was one small protection from the Bolsheviks. And it was in those stinking, smoke-filled fourth-class pubs among the “proles”. The worst they could do was ‘checking’, meaning that two officers, with great earnestness, wrote down the ID number and name of the delinquent slacking off with a beer. And the cops went there in groups of two or more, the drunks didn’t care what happened, and so a sort of fragile agreement prevailed. And no bugging possible, because of the shouting.<sup>675</sup>

Olga Stankovičová’s description of the ‘čtyřky’ – per the official scale of classification of Czechoslovakia’s entirely state-owned hospitality industry, the lowest class – is worth noting not merely for its powers of evocation, but even more for its apt characterisation of the anonymizing properties of this milieu. (Not to mention, of course, the clear invocation of status differences, as an underground-sympathetic dissident yet nonetheless a metropolitan intellectual.<sup>676</sup>) A public space where the state’s interference was limited to non-existent

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<sup>673</sup> As Bolton remarks (p. 95 *ibid.*): “Historians have yet to map out all the various mini- and proto-salons that developed in the early 1970s in cafes, private apartments, cottages in the countryside, pubs, and other private and public spaces, but there were many, many more.” He does, though, mention the Němec family apartment in Ječná ulice along with more frequently documented locations, e.g. Café Slavia (*ibid.*) or Klement Lukeš’s flat (p. 94-95).

<sup>674</sup> Or even the smoking area behind the Radotín secondary school. *viz.* Hagen 2019, p. 254.

<sup>675</sup> Stankovičová, Olga: Ze vzpomínek (Staré čtyřkové hospody v komunistické Praze). In: *Revolver Revue*, no.120, vol. XXXV, 2020.

<sup>676</sup> Olga Stankovičová (1945-2011), who was employed as a librarian both before and after 1989, belonged to the second-wave underground associated with samizdat *Revolver Revue*; additionally, she organised (with Olga Havlová and psychologist Jarmila Bělíková) an unofficial salon, the “Self-Sufficient Popular Library in the

(recall even the criminal-dropout table-milieu of Jan Pelc's only partially fictionalised U Boučků<sup>677</sup> or Prague's notorious U Zpěváčků<sup>678</sup>), the fourth-class pub was likewise a refuge from structures no less confining to the young, i.e. the family and its demands.

Oddly enough, the effects of state housing and spatial policies on family structures, and the resulting need of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century youth to seek a more bearable community in subcultural groups, was best described by the British sociologist Phil Cohen in 1972, using the specific example of prefabricated social housing in east London: the replacement of wider networks of extended kinship and workplace/locality friendships with:

only the privatized space of family units, stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation, juxtaposed with the totally public space which surrounded them and which lacked any of the informal social controls generated by the neighbourhood.<sup>679</sup>

.....

Cohen's description of the "nucleated" working-class family in the "sky-prisons" of high-rise construction, "isolated from the outside but also undermined from within"<sup>680</sup>, should seem all too familiar to a Czech reader, even if several significant factors differed notably (specifically the far lower rate of women's participation in the British workforce at the time and the pressures of a market economy severely limiting public space around new social-housing). And the corresponding social effects – a rise in both early marriages and escape to subcultures (or "negative" subcultures of youth delinquency) – are no less parallel. Cohen's insights deserve to be addressed by historians treating state socialism on the Continent, yet with one major caveat: the historical parallels do not match his conclusion that post-war modernist housing and urban spaces had such a defining role in subcultural growth. The generation of

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Grave" [*Svépomocná lidová knihovna Hrobka*] for prewar pulp literature. Viz. Stankovičová, Olga: „Chtěla bys být čarodějnicí? Moc...“, interview with Olga Havlová and Jarmila Bělíková, originally *Revolver Revue* no. 10, 1988xx; reprinted in *RR rozhovory*, *ibid.*, p. 11-32.

<sup>677</sup> Pelc 1991, *ibid.*

<sup>678</sup> For a reference: personal visits in 1992-1993, also note Tockstein, Jindřich: Muž bez uší, interview with Petr Placák, in: *Babylon*, 1/2010, 11 January 2010.

<sup>679</sup> Cohen, Phil: "Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community", originally in *CCCS Working Papers*, 2 (1972), pp. 5-53, reprinted as Chapter 2 of: *Rethinking the Youth Question. Education, Labour and Cultural Studies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the first Czech underground did not grow up in prefabricated housing estates, since the mass housing construction now associated in collective memory with an undefined “Communist era” had yet to be built.<sup>681</sup> In particular, the Sudeten industrial cities (with a few exceptions, such as the Socialist-Realist showpiece new town in Ostrov nad Ohří) largely retained their pre-war built fabric until the start of the 1970s, even displaying in their decrepitude an advantage over better-administered regions: the many abandoned structures where the disaffected young could meet in secret – e.g. the disused mineral bath in Teplice mentioned by Stárek<sup>682</sup>, or Skalický’s semi-ruined shack ‘Barrel House’ in Chomutov<sup>683</sup>.

Conversely, it would be hard to prove that the normalisation-era prefab settlements necessarily served as generators for extensive subcultural activity. This is not to assume that the housing estates inevitably created uniform social passivity, but to note the extremely heterogeneous social composition of their population during this period and recall (again, as discussed previously) the increasing class differentiation between the middle-class “islands of positive deviation” in cultural (e.g. amateur theatre), outdoor (boating, scouting) or other types of association and the significantly more working-class temptations of negative deviation (e.g. crime, football hooliganism etc.).

Nonetheless, in its wider outlines, Cohen’s model of the nucleated family and the subcultural escape finds very strong parallels in the biographical records of significant underground participants, particularly as detailed in Chapter 2. A more fruitful hypothesis might focus, instead, on family “nucleisation” as the outcome of earlier historical factors: the disruption of traditional rural life (and with it extended-family structures) through agricultural collectivisation and the massive movement of new arrivals into the emptied settlements of the

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<sup>681</sup> For the chronological development of mass housing in Czechoslovakia, see Zarecor, Kimberley Elman: *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity. Housing in Czechoslovakia 1945-1960*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2011.

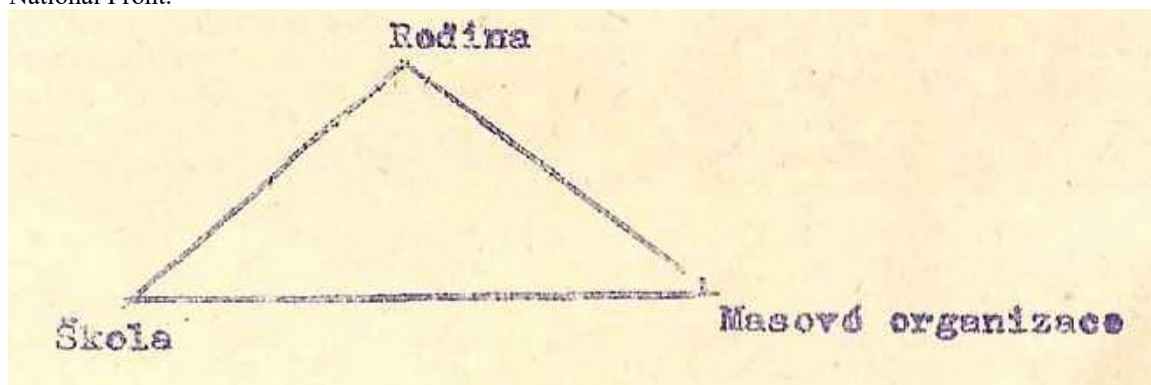
<sup>682</sup> Personal communications, also Stárek-Kostúr 2010, p. 253.

<sup>683</sup> Stárek-Kostúr 2010, p. 236-251.

‘post-German’ Sudetenland. Not to mention, in turn, the atomising effects of top-down technocratic modernity as made physically evident in the region – as Spurný noted with regards to Most but applicable throughout, the “economic reduction of the world around us [...] up through the complex technocratic approach manifested in urban planning and architecture”.<sup>684</sup> Secondly, it would seem logical that the often-discussed atomising effects of state control over extra-familial life definitively contributed to the concept of genetic relations in the “haven in a heartless world” characterisation even beyond the expected course of the modernisation process.

As one satirical, indeed self-styled ‘pataphysical’ essay in the fifth issue of *Vokno* noted, even the regime itself was aware of how effectively the gap between family and state in Czech society could stimulate youth discontent:

If in the Bermuda Triangle people disappear and vanish, in the case of the Czechoslovak Triangle the opposite occurs, the surprising appearance and existence of persons and groups that no one expected. The situation is aptly captured by the daily *Průboj*, which we quote: ‘Asocial groups often emerge from the leisure time of youth somewhere in the no-man’s-land in the triangle between the family, school and mass organisations of the National Front.’

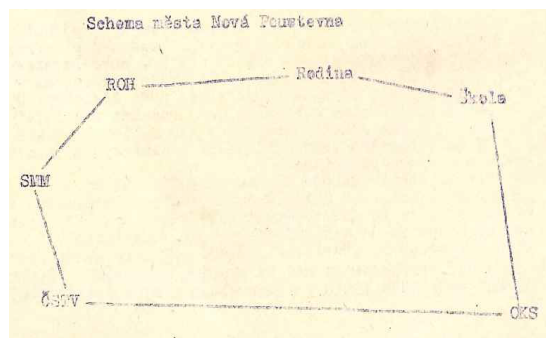


The author (Eduard Vacek, unsigned<sup>685</sup>) added a mock letter from a (fictitious) Young Pioneers leader, instead proposing as a preferable diagram the following hexagon to include the ‘mass organisations’ separately (legend: ROH – trade union, SMM – Socialist Youth Union, ČSTV – Czechoslovak Physical Training Alliance, OKS – District Cultural Centre)

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<sup>684</sup> Spurný 2016, p. 260, also note the entire concluding chapter, “Dialektika věku technokratů”, pp. 260-269.

<sup>685</sup> [Vacek, Eduard]: *Antiberudský trojúhelník v Československu*. In: *Vokno*, no. 5, 1981xx, p. 99-100



Eduard Vacek, 'Anti-Bermuda Triangle'

The periodical *Průboj*<sup>686</sup> was itself the 'Regional Weekly of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of the Ústí nad Labem Region', hence its vulgarisation of later 20<sup>th</sup>-century sociological theories of strain and anomie is not mere propaganda for the general public but represents a genuine attempt at social analysis on the part of state power. Yet since state power, as has been made abundantly clear in the previous chapters, saw little difference between typing samizdat and vandalism, unauthorised musical performance and toluene-sniffing, the precision of the analysis offered in the article Vacek cited can indeed be questioned. Moreover, if indeed the strain and anomie interpretation offered by the North Bohemian Party leadership was as significant a social force as the diagrams seemed to indicate, the question then arises as to why youth discontent in the later 1970s remained as limited, indeed 'canalised' into a relatively small selection of autonomous activity networks, as the story of *Vokno* makes all too clear. And in this question, state repression – in the commonly understood sense of immediate police action – is only one element contributing to the limitations. The analysis by Ivo Možný, regarded as the leading authority on Czech family sociology and in particular the form of socialist familialism, presented in his discussion of the "family reasons" behind the Velvet Revolution<sup>687</sup> a reading of the late-socialist family not as an isolated unit but instead as linked into broader

<sup>686</sup> The literal meaning of the word is 'hop-stake', but its more familiar connotation might be translated as 'successful struggle'.

<sup>687</sup> Možný, Ivo: *Proč tak snadno... Některé rodinné důvody sametové revoluce*. SLON-Sociologické nakladatelství, Praha 2009.

kinship networks – not through any aims of resisting the political order but simply for material advantage:

The ordinary Czech family today reflectively orients the activities of all its members toward the promotion and protection of family interests. [...] It knows that the nuclear family as an isolated unit is at a disadvantage and would find it hard to survive if it does not link its forces to other nuclear families, preferably on the principle of kinship networks, which are the modern counterpart to the traditional family. [...] Familialism became a highly influential philosophy of the lived world and thus a major social force. [...] In its extreme position, it placed loyalty to the family into sharp opposition to loyalty to higher units and even though it is a traditional moral norm, complete disloyalty to extra-family interests is in the interest of the family – *whoever doesn't steal from the state steals from the family*.<sup>688</sup>

Možný's more general conclusion – that the rapidity of the downfall of the Communist order was the consequence of the familialist tendencies of the Czechoslovak nomenklatura seeing in market capitalism a way to ensure the orderly reproduction of family advantage – is less relevant to the present discussion than his assumption that socialist familialism assisted in keeping dissent (understood as metropolitan Charta 77 circles) separated from the ordinary citizenry through the far greater extent of their own widespread international social networks<sup>689</sup>. Možný's analysis, in its focus on "ordinary" society, does bear traces of a kind of "methodological regionalism" that leaves the differing situation of the ex-Sudetenland consigned to the realm of the marginal, if not active social pathology (as noted in Chapter 1, a highly prevalent characterisation on both expert and popular levels, persisting up until the time of writing). Perhaps Možný's analytical essay gives scholarly backing to Pokorný's mordant one-liner, indeed drawing attention to another internal stabilising factor beyond simple civic passivity, yet what he nonetheless makes fully clear is the extent to which the state-socialist order sharply limited the non-familial aspects of social-interactive networks even in ensuring its own downfall. At the same time, it is worth noting that Možný focuses his attention in the cited work on two sections of the state-socialist middle class, assumed to form the future elites of market democracy: the Communist Party nomenklatura in administrative or managerial functions and the non-Party trained professionals of the 'grey zone' – to which he, as a

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

researcher in official institutions though hardly a regime functionary, himself belonged.<sup>690</sup> If we add to the picture the lives of the youthful second dissident generation such as Topol or Machovec, significantly different in their prospects under the pre-1989 system but eventually to assume a similar trajectory into the cultural sphere<sup>691</sup>, we nonetheless have left outside of our scope the children of the state-socialist working class. And it is here that the familial element, indeed the practice of familialism itself, diverges the most radically. While early family formation, particularly in the normalisation years, could be said to form the one common factor across class levels, and indeed could be regarded as itself a form of social levelling (i.e. the attraction of early marriage as the only path towards independent living in the state-dominated housing market), nonetheless the family patterns, and in particular the determination of children's lives by parental demands, in Czech families, as in most industrialised societies of the era in command or market economies, diverged sharply along the educational distinction, as it still does today. For a contemporary view, to cite Kateřina Nedbálková,

The children of workers are like floating corks left to their fate; parents leave them an open space, active encouragement or concrete guidance toward a professional career is entirely lacking [...] It illustrates the independence that workers' children are left in, whom their parents would like not to be unemployed and disobedient [...], but the concrete course of their life career is primarily up to themselves. Children are left a free hand, since their parents lack the contacts and the competences that would carve out or smooth down their path for them.<sup>692</sup>

And while it is difficult to draw more than analogical conclusions between the conditions in the 1970s and the 1990s, it is worth noting that the first major study of inequality reproduction in the Czech context strongly echoes even in its title the classic British study of working-class youth in the early 1970s, i.e. the 'mute inglorious Sid Viciouses' in Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour*.<sup>693</sup> Not merely the defiance of educational authority in Willis's English Midlands

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<sup>690</sup> Šiklová 1990, *ibid.*

<sup>691</sup> Hagen 2019, *ibid.*

<sup>692</sup> Nedbálková, Kateřina: Tak daleko, tak blízko: Dělnická třída v České republice. In: *Sociální studia*, 3/2012, p. 95-96.

<sup>693</sup> Willis, Paul: *Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs*. Aldershot: Gower Press 1977. The connection between the publication date and the simultaneous emergence of both Charta 77 and the media recognition of punk is entirely coincidental; Willis performed his research in 'Hammertown' (assumed

comprehensive-school pupils, but equally the looseness of familial control over their activities clearly matches many of the testimonies from the early *Vokno* circle, the Nová Víska commune, or even more peripheral underground participants.

What the divide of educational or cultural family capital means for socialist familialism, in essence, is that while the internal controls and parental guidance in the family unit may be weaker, external forces – custom, workplace discipline, and of course the hand of the state – may correspondingly have wielded proportionally greater impact. By contrast, one possible definition of an anti-regime subculture within a state socialist order could be termed the “generation of weak ties in a society of strong ones”. Or, conversely, it might be advisable in fact to reverse the conventional sense – even as described here - of understanding a network as connections<sup>694</sup> and instead view it precisely in its separations: not bringing members together but holding them at a distance. A subculture, in other words, did in fact resemble the kind of proto-civil-society that analysts of Cold War and post-1989 Europe claimed as a necessity<sup>695</sup> – but notably in that it needed first of all to generate networks of weaker ties for such a “civil” order even to be possible.

One may well pose questions regarding the effectiveness of these attempts, or even whether it may have been, under the influence of all the social and intellectual damage caused by the attempts to isolate and control the populace of post-1968 Czechoslovakia, more of a pseudo-civil order than the proto-civil organisation I have outlined. Nonetheless, the Czech underground’s version of a subculture-network can, judging from the previous discussions, be rightfully characterised as the creation of adequate interpersonal distance for genuine connections – or to use a less normative vocabulary, connections less determined by immediate social factors: family, school, work, etc.

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name) from 1972 until 1975, i.e. shortly after the secondary-schooling period of the majority of *Vokno* participants.

<sup>694</sup> McLean 2017, esp. p. 16 and following

<sup>695</sup> Viz. the following chapter for more on civil society before and after 1989.



One central feature of research into Czech underground networks that initially seemed a slight hindrance but could indeed be considered something of a significant finding is the question of nicknames. Every central participant was known by a joking, often sarcastic moniker – “Čuñas” (Piggy), “Zelí” (Cabbage), etc. – often to the extent that this nickname became the sole identifier of the individual. “And what was his official name...?” was an often-heard question during the “snowballing” portion of biographical interviews, suggesting the next level of contacts.

To be sure, the use of nicknames within friendship circles in Czech is notably more common than in other language communities, while even among more “respectable” dissident circles nicknames were not unknown.<sup>696</sup> The degree of separation between the underground identity and the official one, though, is definitely revealing not only of a strong level of in-group loyalty, but conversely of a distancing from the non-underground network – perhaps, even, of ensuring a level of separation from the unwanted networks of family or official life.

A second “separating” feature is the semiotic self-definition of a subcultural milieu – of assuming a strikingly different physical appearance both to set oneself off from the wider mass of society and to offer indications of affinity to those within the subculture but not immediately part of one’s direct personal network. This feature, as most notably and classically discussed by Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*,<sup>697</sup> was perhaps exercised by the Czech underground in notably less flamboyant form than, say, Hebdige’s Mods and Teddy Boys, let alone the punk movement – indeed, sartorial manifestations of underground status tended to follow the deliberately careless, natural aesthetic of the 1960s hippies than the carefully cultivated display-methods of subcultures both before and after. Against the backdrop of “socialist Biedermeier” and artificial fibres that so deeply marked the visual world of

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<sup>696</sup> See the chapter “Slang chartistů” in: Suk, Jaroslav: *Několik slangových slovníků*. Praha: Inverze, 1993., with a list of nicknames including Magor (Jirous) and Starej (Němec), viz. p. 114.

<sup>697</sup> Hebdige 1979, *ibid.*

normalisation Czechoslovakia, and the still pervasive suspicion against long hair on men in particular, the use of a countercultural appearance was sufficiently strong a deviation to create instant community within, and repulse the world without.<sup>698</sup>

With these considerations in mind, it is probably worth noting that the Czech underground, in forming a relatively loosened, or “de-densified” network, differs notably from a different type of social movement: the conspiracy. As the previous descriptions of the activities at Nová Víska reveal (let alone the later Prague period of post-imprisonment *Vokno*), it is beyond question that the underground had to preserve secrecy in planning its activities (concerts, samizdat), and in fact established a gradation of involvement particularly for those with serious legal consequences (specifically the typing and printing of *Vokno* itself). Moreover, even the most elementary level of access required the assumption of semiotic difference (hair or fashion) to serve as an unequivocal display of commitment, excluding not only “weekend” visitors but also police agents.<sup>699</sup> Yet all these requirements were agreed upon (it seems hard to say ‘imposed’) by the participants only out of simple necessity in avoiding direct police persecution, and not out of specific in-group standards of appearance-control, any more than – to take one instance – the cropped hair of Stárek or Jirous upon their return from prison would have been regarded as a violation of subcultural norms.

In contrast to the prevalent border-guarding of subcultures in capitalist open societies, as described by Hebdige and others – “plastic punks or safety-pin people, burrhead rastas or rasta bandwagon, weekend hippies, etc. versus the ‘authentic’ people”<sup>700</sup> – the boundary maintenance of the Czech underground did not serve as protection for a social ‘imaginary’,

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<sup>698</sup> Viz. Pixová 2013, *ibid.*

<sup>699</sup> The contrast with a subculture of “weekend” autonomy is particularly noteworthy when members of the underground discuss the semiotically similar yet (largely) personally separate subculture of Czech “tramping”, viz. Bren, Pauline: “Weekend Getaways. The Chata, the Tramp and the Politics of Private Life in Post-1968 Czechoslovakia”. In: Crowley-Reid 2002, pp. 123-140. Several respondents specifically stressed the difference between tramps and ‘*androši*’ in conversation. e.g. respondent Hait, Viktor, interview Prague-Kolovraty, 26 May 2016.

<sup>700</sup> Hebdige 1979, p. 122.

however hard-won, but as a highly practical necessity. And as revealed through the testimony of Jan Pelc, community guarding not only was turned against the intrusive force of the state, but equally could be aimed at individual arriving from the working-class / criminal margins, whose relatively inchoate rejection of the system did not necessarily match the expectations or the necessary discipline of underground activity<sup>701</sup>. Even with this listing of caveats, though, the testimony of participants shows entry into underground networks to have been far more a question of semi-permeability rather than direct exclusivity, even if establishing links to the most actively oppositional core (or alternately “first league”<sup>702</sup>) often required a certain period of self-integration and introductions through the right persons. One occasionally voiced explanation for this situation was, in fact, that there was little desire to turn someone away who seemed genuinely to be looking for something that the state culture-industry could not supply. Another possibility – if only in the level of speculation – could involve distant echoes of the legacy of 1968: the clear illegitimacy of the Soviet-installed Husák régime, and a belief that an awareness of this illegitimacy was prevalent even among the uninvolved, inactive or “silent majority” of Czech society. And thirdly, there is – as the upcoming chapters hope to demonstrate – the particular sociological “alchemy” that occurred with the addition of dissent, understood as programmatic and planned political opposition, to the base of cultural-aesthetic opposition that we understand as a subculture: the shift, indeed transformation, from the in-group network of a subculture into a wider form of social movement and/or (proto-) civil society.

The idea of the “semi-open” network as vital to the underground’s oppositional stance is additionally confirmed through comparison to the strong self-guarding and exacting gatekeeping of an active conspiracy. Genuinely conspiratorial movements within the Czech subcultural context tended not to look towards Anglo-American liberal models (Ginsberg,

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<sup>701</sup> Pelc 1985xx, *ibid.*

<sup>702</sup> In the words of Vladimír ‘Lábus’ Drápal, *viz.* Denčevová et al. 2012, pp. 188-189.

Kerouac etc.), but instead towards notably illiberal visions, most notably the emergence of racist skinheads at the end of the 1980s and their spread in the following decade.<sup>703</sup>

At the same time, state-socialist policing of dissident movements tended overwhelmingly to avoid one category of police agents regularly employed elsewhere: the agent provocateur. The idea of introducing into undesirable social networks police agents intent on reinforcing extant or latent disagreements, targeting fault-lines of opinion, let alone deliberately leading members on to risky or violent activities with the aim of bringing discredit onto the movement in entirety – would appear never to have occurred to the Czechoslovak secret police.

Conversely, the provocateur as a tool of police repression appears far more regularly in considerably less strict social orders. Here, the classic study is the contribution by American sociologist Gary T. Marx<sup>704</sup>, in which the “neglected category” of the police informant is revealed as largely secondary to that of the provocateur. Writing in the USA in the early 1970s, Marx’s primary focus understandably was directed to the efforts of police provocateurs in the movement against the Vietnam War (urging direct action, provoking conflict, starting violence in previously peaceful demonstrations etc.), though he drew no less attention to the long history of similar techniques used against labour organisation reaching well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet nonetheless, the USA of the Gilded Age or the tumultuous 1960s remained a social order with a clear separation between state power (however often it overstepped its legal bounds) and a sphere of independent public opinion capable of judging state power on

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<sup>703</sup> Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid in the post-Communist geopolitical sphere to analysing far-right subcultures explicitly in parallel with more positively viewed ones, though it is worth noting several presentations from the recent Prague conference “Building the Scenes? Fan/zines in Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe before and after the Fall of Berlin Wall” in February 2019, specifically the contributions of Vendula Prokūpková and Jan Charvát. See: Prokūpková, Vendula: “The Role of Fanzines in the (Re)production of Subcultural Capital. The Authenticity, Taste and Performance of “Coolness” in the Zines of the Subculture of Czech White Power Skinheads in the 1990s”, or Charvát, Jan: “‘Tis with the Chalice that We’ll Defend Our Country against the Cross...”Analyzing and Comparing the Contents of Neo-Nazi Fanzine *Skinformátor* and Utraquist Zine *Kalich*. In *Forum Historiae*, 2020, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 103-119 and pp. 84-102 respectively. Also note Slačálek, Ondřej – Charvát, Jan. *Setkávání na okrajových scénách. Průsečíky politického a subkulturního radikalismu v polistopadovém Česku*. In: *Český lid*, vol. 106, no. 1, 2019, pp. 107-126.

<sup>704</sup> Marx, Gary T.: “Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agent Provocateur and the Informant”. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 80, no. 2 (1974), p. 402-442.

its own. Encouraging strikers or demonstrators to violent acts implicitly assumes the autonomy of a general public in whose eyes the movement was to be discredited. While we cannot discount the possibility of the archives to disgorge yet further surprises, it may be fair to say that normalization-era Czechoslovakia, by considerable contrast, confined its attempts to discredit political opposition to denunciations in the media<sup>705</sup> or mockery in popular entertainment.<sup>706</sup> The episode “Mimikry” in the explicitly pro-regime television series *Třicet případů majora Zemana*, which infamously presented a group of long-haired rock enthusiasts as drug-addicted aircraft hijackers, represents one highly notable instance of the regime’s symbolic violence towards its counterculture(s); imagining that an StB agent could stimulate an actual attempt at physical violence or crime from the underground or even its more distant periphery is, admittedly, a considerable stretch.<sup>707</sup>



The fictitious underground band Mimikry, from the *Major Zeman* episode of the same title. Source: ČT

In place of the provocateur, we need to turn instead to the questions raised previously around the presence of StB agents in the wider network of *Vokno*. And, more importantly, to bring into the analysis not only the well-documented actions of the singer František Horáček

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<sup>705</sup> Note the famous attack on Charter 77, “Ztroskotanci a samozvanci”, *Rudé právo*, 12.1.1977.

<sup>706</sup> Starting in the 1960s, the satirical magazine *Dikobraz* regularly published mocking caricatures of ‘hippies’ as lazy and antisocial. Note e.g. Pokorná, Terezie: *Háro. Vzpomínky a dokumenty*. Praha: Edice Revolver Revue 2010.

<sup>707</sup> The *Major Zeman* TV miniseries, aired 1974-1979, has been discussed extensively by scholars of the era. In English, the main treatment is Bren, Pauline: *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2010, most of all chapter 3.

(‘Jim Čert’)<sup>708</sup> or philosopher-poet Egon Bondy<sup>709</sup> but also the post-1989 revelations of cases where personal sympathy, shared memories or other factors of individual psychology provoke less clear-cut feelings of antipathy or aggrieved defensiveness in participant interviews.<sup>710</sup> The underground personal networks unquestionably included, to an extent still include, a few individuals with their own StB connections who have been mentioned in passing with notably less condemnation than the more prominent figures mentioned above. One example is poet Miroslav Jirec, whom I was not able to contact but granted one interview over two decades previously:<sup>711</sup> in his own admission an “informer-schizophrenic”, who felt “as if he’d had a drunken blackout and couldn’t remember anything” for his youthful agreement with the Karlovy Vary police branch.<sup>712</sup> Or another case is the underground associate known under the nickname “Hurvínek”, about whom I can only say that he was mentioned in one interview with some acknowledgement of extenuating personal circumstances. This is not, of course, to say that the question of informants is entirely resolved – indeed, on certain occasions I witnessed quite heated arguments over the forgivability of one case or another – but instead to note that even the matter of (retrospectively) integrating or expelling those who informed is not entirely clear-cut.

By way of conclusion, it might be worth citing a description by Dana Němcová:

Those various “underground” focal points were many, but there never were any conditions for connecting them. A magazine was prepared in one place, ceramics in another, somewhere else was just a house where they partied. It was connected by a kind of lace-like network, but never once did we want to connect them in an organised way and deliberately shape a kind of platform.<sup>713</sup>

Perhaps, in the end, we might arrive at the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that the presence of police agents within the underground was less of a weakness – a sign of easy penetrability

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<sup>708</sup> Viz.: Drda 1999, Makovička 2016, *ibid.*

<sup>709</sup> Viz. Vodrážka 2015, Machovec 2015 *ibid.*

<sup>710</sup> One exception was the conversation with Viktor Hait, who recalled arguing with Stárek about whether to invite Čert to perform at an underground event in the early millennium: “These were our songs! Just have him in the corner like a jukebox!” Viz. Hait, interview 2016.

<sup>711</sup> Jirec, Miroslav: *Dvě piva, někdy třeba i zavináč*. Interview with Petr Placák, published in Placák, Petr (ed.): *Kádrový dotazník*. Praha: Nakladatelství Babylon 2001, originally in *Revolver Revue* no. 34, 1997.

<sup>712</sup> Jirec 2001, p. 142.

<sup>713</sup> Cited in Romanová 2012, p. 89.

from the hostile state – than, in essence, a kind of strength. If the Czech underground was only the most provisional and flimsy attempt at a civil society within impossible conditions, it nonetheless displayed one important characteristic: fluidity, openness, and a collective organisation in which both connection and separation have their clear and significant role. Still within the realm of speculation, perhaps we could assume that even the thought of a public sphere capable of legitimation or delegitimation was sufficiently threatening to the power-holders of the normalisation era to be avoided at all costs; only atomisation and surveillance offered hope of retaining a fragile hold on power.

These reflections provide a point of transition to the ideas of the two final chapters; by way of addressing the present chapter's initial questions, though, we might make reference to the earlier ideas of the set frameworks of state-socialist organisation: not simply the familial but also the material. A network of shared affinities – an economically disinterested as well as non-consanguineous grouping – could well be regarded as a further extension of “de-materialisation”: away from material fetishism toward friendship as a radical act. More about these somewhat vague thoughts will be defined in greater detail subsequently.

## Chapter 7

### Jeans and Typewriters: Counterculture, Subculture or Movement?

... the cultural forms that existed in ‘East’ and ‘West’ (to use the Eurocentric terminology of the Cold War) appear uncannily similar. They may have differed violently in their way of dealing with the problems of modernity, but they shared a faith in the modernizing process developed by the West that for us today has been unalterably shaken.<sup>714</sup>

In the previous chapter, the network around *Vokno*, regarded as (more or less) congruent with the concept of the provincial or ‘Northern’ Czech underground of the 1970s and 1980s, was marked with the designations of both ‘subculture’ and ‘social movement’. Yet the social group itself only fits into the standard sociological classifications of either subculture or social movement with the greatest difficulty. Not only does it escape easy academic pigeonholing, but its unique history and trajectory even casts doubt on the usefulness of the distinction. My aim in the present chapter is to look beyond the immediate *Vokno* production and distribution network and examine the emergence of the Czech underground, considered as a conscious and deliberate movement refusing the cultural hegemony of the Communist regime, out of the subculture(s) of non-conformist working-class youth in the 1960s. This historical process contrasts with traditional explanations<sup>715</sup> rather than making its appearance (following the extant literature on subcultures<sup>716</sup>) as a separate phenomenon of intellectually based middle-class disaffection. In parallel, I argue that the difference is in no way an instance of the perceived incompatibility of “Western” theories on a separate “Eastern” reality: the peculiar

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<sup>714</sup>Buck-Morss, Susan: *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2000, p. x.

<sup>715</sup> Viz. e.g. Williams, J. Patrick: “Youth-Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts“. In: *Sociology Compass* vol. 1/2, 2007, pp. 572–593 for an attempt at integrating both Eastern and Western youth subcultures. Also note for a contemporary perspective from the pre-1989 era that takes a theoretical rather than merely geopolitical approach Bar-Haim, Gabriel: “Eastern European Youth Culture: The Westernization of a Social Movement“. In: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1988, pp. 45–65.

<sup>716</sup> Beyond, of course, Hebdige 1979 *ibid.*, and the other writings of the Birmingham School to be cited later, the primary works should include among others Muggleton, David: *Inside Subculture. The Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford: Berg 2000; for a later view note Gildard, Keith et al: *Hebdige and Subculture in the 21st Century*. Palgrave Studies in the History of Subcultures and Popular Music, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2020.



contingencies of open vs. closed societies in the postwar Global North led to differing outcomes from notably similar initial social manifestations.

To start, it is necessary to note that the “underground” as a phenomenon within Czech society cannot be confined exclusively to the pre-1989 period, but remains a vital, if not major, cultural force even at the time of writing: e.g. the public and media interest, such as the extensive Czech Television documentary series *Fénomen underground* (2015)<sup>717</sup>, or the recent publications on the underground’s police persecution from the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR).<sup>718</sup> Also, there exists a neo-underground of music groups and even festivals organised by key figures of the old underground (Lábusovky, Magorovo Vydří etc.)<sup>719</sup> that not only preserve the musical and fashion aesthetics of the underground from the 1970s and 1980s, but involve the era’s leading personalities directly. Secondly, there is the question of the post-1989 integration of the underground, at least partially, into the new social order, as discussed in the present work in . The sudden fall of the state-curated culture industry and the elevation (however brief) of a counterculture that, at least in the early 1990s, seemed almost a shadow cultural elite assuming its place on the ruins of the old (e.g. both Filip and Jáchym Topol, the journal *Revolver Revue*) forms an integral part of the underground’s chronology.

One conclusion – a somewhat self-evident one, yet worth reiterating – is that the underground was not simply an accompanying side effect of Communist rule, destined to vanish along with the regime itself. Nor, conversely, was it a phenomenon uniquely endemic

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<sup>717</sup> <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10419676635-fenomen-underground/>

<sup>718</sup> Kudrna, Ladislav (ed.): *Reflexe undergroundu*, 2016 *ibid.*, *Podhoubí undergroundu*, 2017, *ibid.*, *Od mániček k undergroundu*, 2018 *ibid.*, Kudrna-Stárek: *Kapela. Pozadí akce, která stvořila Chartu 77*, 2017 *ibid.*, *Kniha v barvě krve. Násilí komunistického režimu vůči undergroundu*, 2020 *ibid.*

<sup>719</sup> As discussed previously, the festival known as Lábusovky, held on the last Saturday in March in the village of Dobroměřice u Loun in North Bohemia, is organised by Vladimír “Lábus” Drápal, previously an organiser of illegal musical events and now director of the town theatre in Louny. Magorovo Vydří, in early July, is one of many alternative cultural events held at Skalákův Mlýn in Meziříčsko, south Moravia, one of the rural refuges of underground activity from the 1970s and revived after 1989 by Miroslav “Skalák” Skalický on his return from forced exile in Austria.

to Czech social and cultural conditions. Cultural influence from the “capitalist abroad”<sup>720</sup> was continually present even across the Iron Curtain, and it would only be logical that the cultivation of an oppositional style would draw upon the international counterculture for its inspiration.<sup>721</sup> The immediate question, though, is not the provenience of the stylistic elements that defined the revolt, but their immediate application to state-socialist society, marked not only by far greater repressive forces but even more so by another aspect of totalitarian rule which formed the focus of the previous chapter: the state micro-management of aesthetic and stylistic production. Not only could, for instance, the police of normalisation-era Czechoslovakia employ brutal tactics against non-conformist youth with complete impunity, as in the “Budějovice massacre” of 1974<sup>722</sup>, but an even larger state apparatus dictated cultural policy through regulations, directives, or even through the “taste-making” infrastructure of economic planning and state institutes for the design of all products offered by the command economy, fashion definitely not excepted.

And as discussed earlier, the political police were not the only repressive force of socialist regimes. The limiting strictures of the planned economy – restricting not only semiotic rebellion through available fashion, but even more strongly the accessibility of any materials for independent cultural production from musical instruments to typing paper - should be understood as a tool for social control in and of themselves, even if Czech scholarship tends to stress the police aspects of state-socialist repression at the expense of others. As noted previously, it is only a slight exaggeration – particularly when treating a semiotically-based youth subculture - to place on a similar level the Czechoslovak State

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<sup>720</sup> My translation of the official term “*kapitalistická cizina*”. The distribution of goods from the West that carried a charge of cultural-stylistic opposition – denim clothing, LPs and the like – is a chapter all to itself, while the channels and trajectories of ideas and concepts are themselves connected to the material form of their media and its presentation.

<sup>721</sup> Viz. Maslowski 2021 for the politics of symbolization.

<sup>722</sup> As mentioned in passing previously, this event was a police attack on a concert by the Plastic People of the Universe and other unregistered groups in the village of Rudolfov outside České Budějovice.

Secret Service (StB) and the state design office ÚBOK (Ústav bytové a oděvní kultury-Institute of Residential and Fashion Culture) for its own ‘semiotic’ policing of the accepted forms in the visual sphere. Constraints both legal and material should not be underrated as influences on the eventual form of the Czech underground.

However, to assume that they necessarily keep it separate from similar movements in the Cold War West is, I would argue, inaccurate for a number of reasons. First, the macro-structural similarities of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity – as industrial societies in the Global North – between Europe’s West and East are becoming increasingly visible as the period passes into history, and technological-social changes retroactively homogenise the late-modern experience in both closed and open societies.

As a corollary, the applicability of analyses grounded in the study of the West is assumed as a given by scholars within the region. Current Czech scholarship on Communist-era subcultures<sup>723</sup> stresses the connection sought by admittedly “Western-minded” youth to Western hippies, punks, etc. as international identities, and oral testimony from subcultural participants overwhelmingly confirms the desire to take inspiration from what they knew of cultural forces abroad. This background is worth keeping in mind when we turn to the application of now-classical methods of cultural studies on the realities of Czech subcultures in the previous century. I am thinking, of course, of the Birmingham School analyses in the 1970s and 1980s, chronologically directly parallel to the years of the Czech underground, and in particular Dick Hebdige’s enormously influential text from 1979 (hence directly contemporary with the samizdat journal VOKNO), *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.<sup>724</sup> Since a Czech translation of Hebdige’s *Subculture* was published close to the start of the present

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<sup>723</sup> See: Blažek, Petr,-Pospíšil, Filip. *Vraťte nám vlasy! První máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu*. Praha: Academia 2010

<sup>724</sup> Hebdige 1979, *ibid.*

research project,<sup>725</sup> the semiotic-cultural approach it proposes has increasingly found its place in Czech scholarship, if generally matched to post-1989 phenomena and only rarely matched to its immediate historical counterparts.

True, there is much in Hebdige's analytical framework that is very obviously inapplicable to the trans-Iron Curtain context, particularly the crucial importance of Afro-Caribbean performative modes to the "masculine display" of the early British subcultures. This absence, or at best a highly mediated, third- or fourth-hand presence, of the "Black Atlantic"<sup>726</sup> in Europe east of the Fulda Gap should be examined by post-Communist cultural studies much more than it has been).<sup>727</sup> At the same time, a less cultural/semiotic aspect, if more of a historical-sociological fact, mentioned yet left relatively undeveloped in Hebdige's analysis is the connection of the earliest working-class subcultures to the world of crime, specifically economic crime, and the "masculine display" practiced through the figure of the black-market dealer. Here, the similarity between the British spiv and, say, the Czech *šmelinář* – considering that extensive illegal business was common in immediate post-war Europe regardless of political alignment – is undeniable, as is the subsequent development of the categories of threatening youth and moral panics over youth subcultures.<sup>728</sup>

The connection between subcultural and criminal activities in early-Fifties Europe is undoubtedly complex: for the purposes of necessary simplification, I would reduce the difference to a process of semiotic displacement: of predominantly non-criminal (if non-conformist) youth assuming the semiotic features of the public display and posturing of the

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<sup>725</sup> Hebdige, Dick, tr. Miroslav Kotásek: *Subkultura a styl*. Praha: Dauphin 2012.

<sup>726</sup> Gilroy, Paul *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso 1993.

<sup>727</sup> Considering the extensive Afro-creolisation of Anglophone popular culture, both in the USA from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Britain from the postwar era, the reflection (or absence) of these "Black Atlantic" roots in the extra-systemic youth cultures of Communist-held Europe deserves its own separate survey.

<sup>728</sup> On moral panics, note the classic studies of Cohen, Stanley: *Folk Devils and Moral Panics. The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*. London: Routledge 1972; Hall, Stuart et al.: *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. Basingstoke: Macmillan 1978.

black-marketeer. Secondly, the post-1945 emergence of “youth” as a social category<sup>729</sup> with an autonomous identity, an ideological charge of both hope and potential menace (criminal as well as potential victims of mutual propagandistic infection), and no less a degree of newfound disposable income is again capable of supporting an interpretation as a structural symmetry on both sides of the divide. Moreover, the economic, physical and spatial changes brought about in working-class life through post-World War II modernisation were no less disruptive to traditional living patterns when undertaken by democratic-welfare state regimes than by Communist ones. The building of “new towns” and the shifting of population analysed in Britain by Phil Cohen as crucial to the generation of the first subcultures<sup>730</sup> recall the “new workers’ cities” (Havířov, Sztalinváros,<sup>731</sup> Nowa Huta, Eisenhüttenstadt,<sup>732</sup> etc.) and the massive displacements both forcible and freely undertaken (e.g. the resettlement of the Czech Sudetenland). Cohen’s own characterisation of subcultures as

an attempt to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture, and to combine these with elements selected from other class fractions<sup>733</sup>

matches well, almost disconcertingly so, with what we know of the first decade of “building socialism” – and even more so with the peculiar social environment of the hastily repopulated Czech-Sudeten industrial cities.

As a result, these semiotic-sartorial cultures of working-class display were as much a part of Stalinist Europe in the early 1950s as the era’s show-trials or pompous historicist architecture. The combination of directive modernisation, disruption of traditional social

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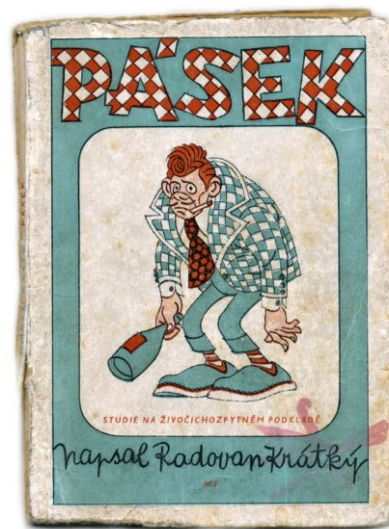
<sup>729</sup> Intriguingly, and not entirely tangentially, the social category of “youth” in the Global North seems largely to match the precise lifespan of the Cold War itself. After 1989, the tendency has been more to speak of sharply defined generations: Generation X, Generation Y, millennials, etc. And if moral panics have certainly not vanished, they are almost invariably expressed in very specific class and ethnic – not generational – articulations.  
<sup>730</sup> Cohen 1997.

<sup>731</sup> Note Horváth, Sándor: *Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2017, specifically, Chapter 8, “Hooligans”, pp. 217-232.

<sup>732</sup> For the latter two viz. Jajeśniak-Quast, Dagmara: “Nowa Huta, Eisenhüttenstadt and Ostrava-Poruba in Early State Socialism: The Proletarianization and Ruralization of New Cities”. In: Borodziej, Włodzimierz-Holubec, Stanislav – von Puttkammer, Joachim: *Mastery and Lost Illusions. Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*. Oldenburg: De Gruyter 2014, pp. 121-137.

<sup>733</sup> Cohen 1997, *ibid.*, p. 57

structures, yet also increased spending power among gainfully employed youth in well-remunerated manual occupations had an immediate effect.<sup>734</sup> However, similar factors were no less determinative in the urban centres: remaining with the Czech case, the “Vyšehrad Horsemen” [*Vyšehradští jezdci*], an aggressive and Westophilic youth gang, brawled and partied in the metropolis itself.<sup>735</sup> Each nation behind the Iron Curtain had its own unique term for the phenomenon, matching the now linguistically unified ethno-states of the region: the *Halbstarke* of the GDR,<sup>736</sup> the Czech *potápkové*, the Polish *bikiniarze*, the Hungarian *jampecek*, the Romanian *malagambiste*, the Russian *stiljagi*.<sup>737</sup>



Caricature of the ‘pásek’ youth subculture of the 1950s. Source: vysehradskej.cz

One consequence of this cultural and linguistic separation is that relatively little has been written about the Stalin-era youth subcultures as a single phenomenon crossing not merely national but even geo-political borders. Among the few trans-national treatments is the

<sup>734734</sup> Jaješniak-Quast 2014, *ibid.* – also noting the sudden forced integration of Roma families into the Polish and Czech socialist cities in this period.

<sup>735</sup> Little scholarship has addressed this group: note e.g. the memoir by Jaboud [Boudný, Jaroslav]: *Trafouš, páskové, Vyšehradští jezdci a jiné vzpomínky: Dětství a mládí v Praze padesátých let*. Praha: Nakladatelství Zdeněk Bauer 2011, or the interview with one former member, Jindřich “Harry” Kadrnoska: Zeman, Jiří: “Skutečný příběh vyšehradských jezdců”. In: *Reflex* 12 May 2004. Also note the crowdsourced local history blog: <https://vysehradskej.cz/vysehradsti-jezdci/>.

<sup>736</sup> Janssen, Wiebke: *Halbstarke in der DDR: Verfolgung und Kriminalisierung einer Jugendkultur*. Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag 2010.

<sup>737</sup> Applebaum, Anne: *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*. New York: Doubleday, 2012. p. 473.

brief discussion in chapter 17 of Anne Applebaum's *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*, where each of the national terms quoted above are specified for the given country. Applebaum's somewhat Whiggish assumption that sartorial differentiation necessarily represented a conscious resistance to the system as a whole, though, may not entirely match the actual situation. Though the youth subcultures were obviously the subject of moral-panic rhetoric in the print media, they were never directly targeted as an ideological threat, and indeed served a useful function for drawing attention away from the far more serious social problems associated with the building of socialism and massive shift from agricultural to industrial employment – e.g. the resettlement of the Czech Sudetenland, or the construction of new heavy-industrial complexes staffed by former rural labour.<sup>738</sup>

Even more, the young men of the display-subcultures managed, like Hebdige's example of the Teddy Boys, to attract partners and settle down into domestic life as the “orderly socialist citizens” of the regime's rhetoric, or at most to emigrate to the West, rather than to defy the extant system in more directed forms of action.<sup>739</sup> To describe their stylistic revolt, as it was, as a movement of lasting opposition would require more than a stretch of the imagination, beyond the eventual “compliance ... of pursuing personal agendas”.<sup>740</sup> What began to emerge just over a decade later was notably different. Petr Blažek and Filip Pospíšil documented, perhaps even retroactively defined a second level in Czech subcultural activity, through their study *Vraťte nám vlasy!* [Give Us Back Our Hair!]<sup>741</sup>. The category of the *vlasatec* [longhair], appearing towards the midpoint of the 1960s, became once more the focus

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<sup>738</sup> Pinkas, Jaroslav: Svazáci a páskové – „jiná“ padesátá léta. In: Pažout, Jaroslav (ed.): *Každodenní život v Československu 1945-1989*. Praha-Liberec: ÚSTR-Technická univerzita v Liberci 2015.

<sup>739</sup> On questions of resistance under Czechoslovak Stalinism, viz. Sommer, Vítězslav: Cesta ze slepé uličky „třetího odboje“. *Koncepty rezistence a studium socialistické diktatury v Československu*. In: *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. XIX no. 1, 2012, pp. 9–36.

<sup>740</sup> Tilly, Charles: “Domination, Resistance, Compliance ... Discourse”. In: *Sociological Forum*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1991, pp. 593-602, here p. 601.

<sup>741</sup> Blažek, *ibid.*

of police harassment, occasional moral panic, or even more frequently hostile mockery.<sup>742</sup> Understandably, the chief (and most socially provocative) trait of the *vlasatci* was long hair on men, yet any assumption of full compatibility with Western hippies is belied by the no less notable clothing styles: ordinary mass-produced garments sliced and torn, or pieced together with pins, often marked with inscriptions in ink; occasionally even inscriptions directly tattooed. Police photographs of *vlasatci*, or even their (confiscated) clothing, reveal a stylistic orientation that now seems almost a decade ahead of its time – in other words, far closer to the punk idiom of the late 1970s. Aesthetically, the proto-punk forms of the *vlasatec* clearly prefigure the general “look” of Czech oppositional culture(s) almost up until 1989, or even through certain aspects of cultural inertia well into the 1990s: a deliberate celebration of decay and ruin, against the mandatory optimism of official rhetoric.<sup>743</sup>

Such highly visible differences from Western hippie culture cannot be explained only through the limitations of state fashion production, making bright colours and organic fibres exceptionally difficult to obtain. The extremely legible inscriptions on clothes and occasionally bodies reflect much different stances than the slogans of peace and love: it is hard to forget the youth with the English inscription across his upper torso, in the stark police mugshot: “MY LIFE IS A GREAT ERROR”.<sup>744</sup> Here we see this expression of 1977’s oft-cited punk shibboleth “No Future” as evidence of a genuine chronological disjuncture –

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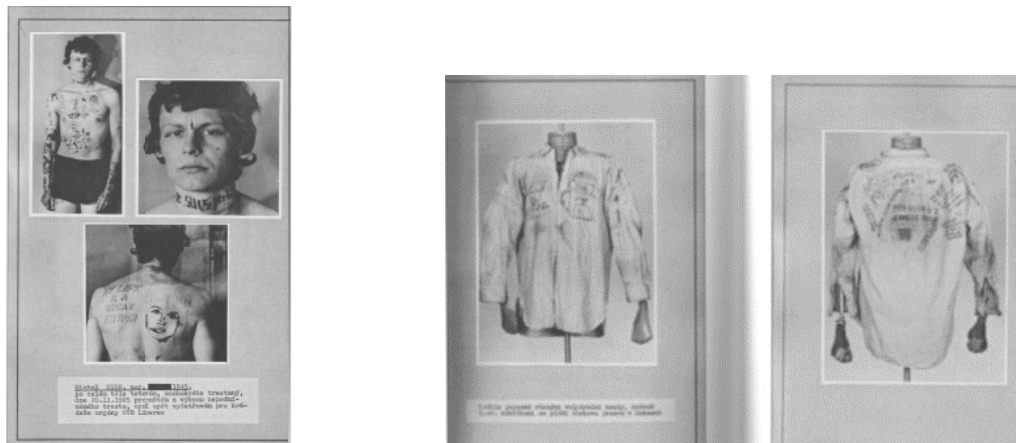
<sup>742</sup> A thorough summary of anti-“*vlasatec*” jokes and caricatures, both pre- and post-1968, was published as a special supplement to the cultural journal *Revolver Revue*: Pokorná, Terezie: *Háro. Vzpomínky a dokumenty*. Prague: Edice *Revolver Revue* 2010.

<sup>743</sup> One intriguing image – if hardly constituting genuine historical evidence of a distinct phenomenon – is the mention of young factory workers creating a fashion of extravagant disrepair in their working garb (tying their torn overalls together with binder wire) in Bohumil Hrabal’s short story “Automat Svět”.

<sup>744</sup> Blažek, p. 555



placing the Communist world, in fact, ahead of the West<sup>745</sup> in the erosion of hope, and a celebration of one's own impotence, even worthlessness, as the only possible resistance.<sup>746</sup>



Above: photograph of Michal Kudr; below: shirt “with various vulgar slogans” confiscated at Mácha’s Lake, 1965. From the confidential police album “Dokumentace k osobám tzv. vlasatci nebo máničky, které byly vyšetřovány příslušníky VB pro závadnou nebo trestní činnost”. In: Pospíšil-Blažek (2010).

As much as the proto-punk sensibility of the *vlasatci* of the mid-Sixties can be matched in cultural-historical terms to the proto-punk influences on Czech underground creative work, whether in musical or samizdat form, there are inevitably other factors that problematise too neat a fit between the two. For one, the connection between the disorganised, spontaneous rejection of the 1960s and criminality – i.e. non-political transgressions – is far stronger in personal terms than was ever the case with the circles of the *Nová Víska* community or *Vokno* more generally. Secondly, even if the aesthetics of the career criminal

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<sup>745</sup> Hungary’s relatively little-studied early-1970s subculture of the “csövesek” – literally ‘drainpipe-dwellers’ – bears a striking resemblance to this sensibility between proto-punk aesthetics and underclass-dropout status. Note e.g. Horváth, Sándor: “Patchwork Identities and Folk Devils: Youth Subcultures and Gangs in Socialist Hungary”. In: *Social History*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2009, pp. 163-183. On the other hand, the high level of solvent abuse and the equally high social exclusion of the *csövesek* placed them in the understanding both of the regime and the various dissident circles not as a protest movement but merely a symptom of social decay – at times even extending, in later years, to the Hungarian punk subculture itself, which even dissidents feared for its possible fascist affinities. For a demonstration of the stance of Hungarian oppositional intellectuals to the youth subcultures of the last decades of the regime, note the following essay by a prominent philosopher: Krokovay, Zsolt: “Politics and Punk”. In: *Index on Censorship*, no. 2, 1985, pp. 17-21.

<sup>746</sup> Note Franc, Martin: *Opora režimu nebo potenciální kriminálnici?* In: Knapík-Franc 2018 *ibid.*, pp. 509-511.

(tattooing, graffiti) shaped punk self-presentation in the Anglosphere,<sup>747</sup> the necessarily text-heavy format of Czech samizdat publication, particularly with the limitations of spirit duplication in *Vokno*'s earliest issues, made the 'cut-up' jumble of typography, illustration and text far too ambitious until the easy availability of photocopying, i.e. only post-1989.<sup>748</sup> And for a third aspect, there is simply the question of chronology: the *vlasatci* of the mid-1960s in large measure had either grown into "socialist respectability" or sunk into criminal (criminalised) marginality a decade later.<sup>749</sup>

State socialism was hardly a favourable condition for the socially self-reflexive observation of independent social science, and despite all their aims towards an all-embracing scope of monitoring society, the secret police were woefully incompetent at the interpretation and evaluation of any social currents seen as a possible threat. Hence, our current understanding of the actual motivations and attitudes of the *vlasatci*, or other even less well-mapped instances of disaffected youth of the period, will be based in large measure on the clumsy guesswork of the repressive forces, and on occasion from the personal testimony of former participants.<sup>750</sup> From what we can reconstruct of the subculture of the Czech *vlasatci* in the years immediately prior to the 1968 Soviet invasion, i.e. a period now viewed retrospectively as a lost age of exciting cultural activity and hopeful experimentation, they formed an opposition to the system around them that used the rhetoric of despair ascribed to punk e.g. by Hebdige himself:

Once inside this desecrated circle, punk was forever condemned to act out alienation, to mime its imagined condition, to manufacture a whole series of subjective correlatives for the official archetypes of the 'crisis of modern life' [...] Converted into icons (the safety pin, the rip, the mindless lean and hungry look) these

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<sup>747</sup> For a compendium of punk visuality: Savage, Jon – Gibson, William – Vaucher, Gee - Sterling, Linder: *Punk. An Aesthetic*. New York: Rizzoli 2012. More analytically: Prinz, Jesse: "The Aesthetics of Punk Rock". In: *Philosophy Compass* vol. 9, no. 9, 2014, pp. 583–593.

<sup>748</sup> As it happened, it was *Vokno*'s metropolitan successor, *Revolver Revue*, that brought the "crime-aesthetic" into Czech high culture – through bringing back to critical attention the artist Alén Diviš: viz. the extensive block of Diviš's sketches from his Paris imprisonment during the Nazi occupation of France in *Revolver Revue* no. 17, 1991.

<sup>749</sup> Jaboud 2011 *ibid*, also note Tockstein, Jindřich: Muž bez uší, interview with Petr Placák, in: *Babylon*, 1/2010.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

paradigms of crisis could live a double life, at once fictional and real.<sup>751</sup>

As many later observers, often considered as following a “post-subcultural” turn, have pointed out,<sup>752</sup> Hebdige’s analysis of subcultures leaps directly from the Mods and Rockers of the early 1960s straight to 1977 and the birth of punk, entirely omitting the counterculture(s) of the later 1960s. However, this gap is not an oversight, but lies at the centre of his argument: the earlier and the later forms of working-class youth disaffection shared in their concentration upon semiotic revolt a disengagement with politics, ideology, or any community beyond the immediate network of fellow-subcultural participants. To cite his unequivocal differentiation of subculture from counterculture:

The term ‘counter culture’ refers to that amalgam of ‘alternative’ middle-class youth cultures – the hippies, the flower children, the yippies – which grew out of the 60s, and came to prominence during the period 1967–70. As Hall *et al.* (1976a) have noted, the counter culture can be distinguished from the subcultures we have been studying by the explicitly political and ideological forms of its opposition to the dominant culture (political action, coherent philosophies, manifestoes, etc.), by its elaboration of ‘alternative’ institutions (Underground Press, communes, cooperatives, ‘un-careers’, etc.), its ‘stretching’ of the transitional stage beyond the teens, and its blurring of the distinctions, so rigorously maintained in subculture, between work, home, family, school and leisure. Whereas opposition in subculture is, as we have seen, displaced into symbolic forms of resistance, the revolt of middle-class youth tends to be more articulate, more confident, more directly expressed and is, therefore, as far as we are concerned, more easily ‘read’.<sup>753</sup>

In the view of one commentator, Oliver Marchart, Hebdige’s displacement of this crucial distinction into a footnote only underlines the “whole macropolitical aspiration” of the subcultural thesis: implicit politicisation of subcultures by the ideologically powerful observer (whether social scientist or secret-police agent) is made clearly separate from explicit politicisation by the actors of less symbolic, more articulated, and indeed more articulate movements.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>751</sup> Hebdige, p. 65

<sup>752</sup> Note specifically the introduction “What Is Post-Subcultural Studies?” in Muggleton, David - Weinzierl, Rupert: *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2003, in particular the sections “The End of Subcultural Heroism” (pp. 6-9) and “The Post-Heroic Phase of Subcultural Studies” (pp. 9-13); also note the first chapter, “Rethinking Subculture: A Critique for the Twenty-First Century” of Huq, Rupa: *Beyond Subculture. Pop, youth and identity in a postcolonial world*. London: Routledge 2006, pp. 9-24. For an evaluation of the post-subcultural tendency in comparison with the “classic” Birmingham School understanding, viz. Bennett, Andy: “The Post-Subcultural Turn: Some Reflections Ten Years On”. In: *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 14, no. 5, August 2011, pp. 493-506.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148

<sup>754</sup> Marchart, Oliver: “Bridging the Micro-Macro Gap: Is There Such a Thing as a Post-Subcultural Politics?”, in: Muggleton - Weinzierl 2003, p. 89

The elision of countercultures in Hebdige's analysis is, essentially, in line with his validation of the punk sensibility and the punk aesthetic: moreover, it exists in parallel to a definite intellectual trajectory prevalent in the non-Communist world in the wake of the social shifts of the 1960s.<sup>755</sup> One might aptly term this mental tendency, following the wording of Jürgen Habermas, as “dark postmodernism”<sup>756</sup> – a nihilistic transgressivism, a totalising critique, a refusal of the process of negotiation and engagement that the politically conscious counterculture intended with its creation of alternative or counter-institutions. No critique of dark postmodernism from a position of sociology of ideas has yet investigated its connections to the post-punk stance in popular culture, though the idea is at least worth exploring in the future.

Of greater importance to the present discussion, though, is the question of whether such a split between subcultures and social movements – inarticulate semiotics versus deliberate critique – would hold true in all circumstances where subcultures and social movements could conceivably arise. And it is here that I would like, at last, to bring up the moment of transformation between the pre-1968 proto-punk subcultures and the emergence of an aesthetically based social movement with a similar form of semiotic disruption – the Czech underground – as a liminal, interstitial formation, not merely caught in the division between “punk” and “hippie” but no less uncategorisable in its social and political vision, without an immediate parallel in (to use the late-20<sup>th</sup>-century geopolitical terms) either East or West. Or in a different framing: the movement from aesthetic revolt toward a political-aesthetic critique.

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<sup>755</sup> Note Romanova 2012, p. 52 for the parallel with both punk and Surrealism.

<sup>756</sup> See Habermas, Jürgen: *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press 1987, specifically chapters 5 (Horkheimer and Adorno), 8 (Bataille) and 9 (Foucault).

Bolton has described the crucial function of the Czech underground as supplying both an anti-systemic stance and a pattern for action:

In fact, the underground played a far more interesting and important role, helping to explain how Czech dissidents developed forms of organization and self-identification around which they could mount a more effective opposition to the regime. The underground provided models of oppositional behavior built around feigned naïveté, as well as a critique of consumerist culture that did not distinguish between Communism and capitalism. It also revealed the value of self-mythologization in forging and maintaining an oppositional identity.<sup>757</sup>

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Self-mythologization can, of course, work both internally and externally, shaping the shared self-conception of the underground as a group, yet also the presentation to the outside world – in this case, a category spanning similarly disaffected youth up to the StB and uniformed police. And no less, it can operate on both material and intellectual levels: the ideas and theoretical reflections of Jirous, Bondy, Němec et al., however crucial they were for maintaining cohesion in the underground as a group<sup>758</sup>, were reinforced by other methods: the shared music-and-fashion preferences subsumed under the “subculture” moniker, or the strengthening of friendship ties through the visual auto-documentation of photography (e.g. the *Nová Víska* chronicle confiscated by the police, the “self-surveillance” of subsequent photo albums<sup>759</sup>). A third dimension, of course, is the post-1989 formulation of the underground legend in national (and even to some degree international) collective memory, in historiography,<sup>760</sup> or in media presentation.<sup>761</sup> But once the defining myth, the distinctive collective identity is in existence, there appears the question of how it is to continue: i.e. to

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<sup>757</sup> Bolton, p. 117-118.

<sup>758</sup> Bolton, *ibid.*

<sup>759</sup> It is indeed indicative that for daily events, concerts, celebrations etc. the *Nová Víska* inhabitants kept such extensive photographic records – let alone the later “self-surveillance” of personal photo albums and archives. On at least two occasions, Stárek showed me personal photo albums of various circles of friends both before and after *Nová Víska*, now in the ÚSTR archives. For more on photography and its role in sociability, modernity and surveillance, note the subsequent chapter.

<sup>760</sup> Viz. Maslowski 2021, *ibid.*

<sup>761</sup> In particular, around the figure of Ivan Jirous: recall, as noted earlier, the privately expressed reservations towards Švehla’s biography or the discussion in *Magorova konference*: Drda, Adam: Atrakce: velký magor a ještě větší básník. Mediální obraz Ivana Martina Jirouse po roce 1989. In: *Magorova konference*, *ibid.*, pp. 177-184.

perpetuate itself through action in a strongly and openly inimical social environment. And here we come to the point where we can discern the shift from semiotic revolt toward deliberate collective action from within – not as the inevitable result of state pressure.

To start, the internal dynamics of the Czech underground, if we assume that the description in the previous chapters is correct, match surprisingly well with recent theoretical works on social movements in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the new millennium. More specifically, the underground and similar subcultural-resistant tendencies within late European state socialism could justifiably be discussed alongside the social movements either classed historically as “new” in the 1990s, i.e. stressing “identity and grievance” over class and (assumedly Marxist) ideology<sup>762</sup> or alternately assigned to the category of “postmaterialist” tendencies.<sup>763</sup> Likewise, the core questions for social movement analysis of Della Porta and Diani – structural change, cultural representations, transformation of values into collective action, surrounding contexts<sup>764</sup> - fit particularly well with the underground’s deliberately international dimension, while also reinforcing the idea that it was not simply a revolt against the immediate forces of oppression and thus remained bound to a specific, historically terminated social order. Understandably, if regrettably, the striking omission of cultural revolts in pre-1989 state socialism within more recent, internationally scaled synthetic social media theories is likely a historically conditioned response to 1989 itself,<sup>765</sup> and the unspoken assumption (outside the region or the scholarly communities involved with it) that the legacies of that time are merely of antiquarian interest. Moreover, social movements

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<sup>762</sup> Johnson, Hank-Larana, Enrique-Gusfield, Joseph R. (eds.): *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1994; note in particular Chapter 1, “Identities, Grievances and New Social Movements”, pp. 3-35.

<sup>763</sup> Inglehart, Ronald: “Post-Materialism in an Environment of Insecurity”. In: *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 75, no. 4, December 1981, pp. 880-900.

<sup>764</sup> Della Porta, Donatella-Diani, Mario: *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Second edition, Oxford: Blackwell 2006.

<sup>765</sup> Della Porta and Diani briefly mention religious activism in Poland and the Baltic states (p. 110 *ibid.*); another major work of the early millennium, *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (eds. Snow, David – Soule, Sarah A. – Kriesi, Hanspeter). Oxford: Blackwell 2004. discusses the Chinese democracy movement (p. 401).

within the Communist bloc cannot all be classified as “post-materialist” – Solidarity in Poland, for instance, was definitely not, at least in its original union-based organising around price rises and bad working conditions. But even beyond the question of matching observed reality to the Procrustean bed of theory, there lies the sense of the previous discussion: that the underground, in essence, can be considered “post-material” not necessarily within Inglehart’s analytical trajectory, but indeed out of its deliberate and programmatic rejection of socialist materiality as one of the system’s power-technologies.<sup>766</sup>

Citing another respected theoretical authority on social movements, Charles Tilly, we find that our historical analysis of Czech post-1968 underground activity also – and somewhat unexpectedly - coincides with his definition as an “innovative, consequential synthesis of three elements”:

- 1) a sustained organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities, let us call it a campaign
- 2) employment of combinations from among the following forms of political action: creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions.....call the variable ensemble of performances the social movement repertoire
- 3) participants’ concerted public representations of WUNC; worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies; call them WUNC displays<sup>767</sup>

Paradoxically, it is the unusual acronym WUNC that underscores the subculture-to-counterculture self-definition of the underground, as well as Bolton’s self-mythologization, if we understand the first criterion of “worthiness” lying not merely in the appearance of mainstream respectability<sup>768</sup>

At the same time, there exists a certain body of scholarship on the Czech underground, primarily associated (if not institutionally at least personally) with the ÚSTR project “Underground 1960-1989”<sup>769</sup> that favours the “movement-over-subculture” characterisation.

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<sup>766</sup> Maslowski cites, similarly, Charles Tilly’s “third-generation repertoire” as applicable to the Czech underground: international scope, use of expert knowledge and symbolic dimension. Maslowski 2014, p. 148.

<sup>767</sup> Tilly, Charles: *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties*. Boulder: Paradigm 2005, p. 216.

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>769</sup> <https://www.ustrcr.cz/projekty/underground-1960-1989/>

Nonetheless, there exists within it a notable tendency (with only rare exceptions<sup>770</sup>) to assume the movement-characterisation as simply a given, at most a mere exigency of state repression. How a culture of disaffection shifted into a conscious, concerted collective effort aiming towards the greatest level of autonomy within the strictures of normalisation-era Czechoslovakia remains relatively overlooked,<sup>771</sup> in a body of scholarship that generally favours the most strictly empirical-descriptive historiography and a strict division between archival research on the repressive forces (from the professional historians) and direct narrative testimony from participants.

The most directly sociological analysis might be the contribution by Nicolas Maslowski in *Magorova konference*, noting that the underground's "assumption of a society-wide change" is an essentially political demand even within its purported refusal of the political, against the widespread politicization, indeed hyper-politicization, of "culture, habits, concerning ordinary norms and practices of everyday life".<sup>772</sup> And – still more germane to the discussion at hand – the high intellectual-symbolic aspect of underground action, with the cultural alternative serving as "a school in itself" despite many participants' lack of formal educational credentials<sup>773</sup> underscores the "macropolitical gap" between sub- and counterculture outlined previously.

Within the course of the present research, I have noted one significant aspect among personal testimonies from participants: the existence of a cultural fluidity within late-20<sup>th</sup>-

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<sup>770</sup> Specifically, the contributions. Cholínský, Jan: České undergroundové hnutí optikou historiografie – mýty a realita, Valenta, Martin: Kulturní dynamika šedesátých let 20. století a její dopady v západním Německu a Československu. In: *Reflexe undergroundu*. Praha: ÚSTR 2016, pp. 34-74 and 126-162, also note Cholínský, Jan: Hnutí hippies jako součást kontrakultury a kulturní revoluce na Západě. In: *Podhoubí undergroundu*. Praha: ÚSTR 2018.

<sup>771</sup> Cholínský himself dismisses any positive contribution of the underground, finding its sole importance to lie in its "resistance to criminal totalitarian communism" and in the absence of any ex-Communists within its personal networks, viz. p. 74, *ibid*. For a critique of ÚSTR scholarship, note Mětelec, Matěj: Od mániček k undergroundu: konzervativní underground, nebo kontrakultura? In: *A2larm*, 14 November 2020, accessed at: <https://a2larm.cz/2020/11/od-manicek-k-undergroundu-konzervativni-underground-nebo-kontrakultura/>.

<sup>772</sup> Maslowski 2014, p. 148.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.



century Czech society in which working-class resistance to impulses from “above” and intellectual isolation from social currents “below” were, for a certain degree of time, suspended in the combination of external and internal forces that led to the thoroughgoing social homogenisation that matched the efforts of the police as a repressive source in itself. Even in the early 1970s, working-class identity was not yet equal to anti-intellectual resentment; conversely, *particularly* in the early 1970s, the massive proletarianization of nonconformist Czech intellectuals created a situation unusual even within other European state-socialist societies. Among young workers in provincial towns, there existed enough of an engaged minority to take an interest, say, in samizdat reproductions of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*<sup>774</sup> alongside blue jeans smuggled from abroad. Oppositional thinkers like Ivan Martin Jirous or Jiří Němec could, in turn, engage with the proto-underground almost – in bizarre irony – as Gramscian organic intellectuals<sup>775</sup> of a non-Marxist yet clearly anti-hegemonic bent.<sup>776</sup> Still further factors that long pre-dated Communist rule, including cultural transmissions of national collective memory (the “awakeners” of the Czech National Revival in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>777</sup>), added to the unusual situation of convergence across the boundaries of education and cultural capital.

Contextual shaping forces of history, geopolitics and language-based national culture, as the previous pages have shown, cannot be ignored; yet in the end the transformation of inchoate youth revolt into something matching most accepted definitions of movements would never have occurred without the international countercultural influences from the

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<sup>774</sup> I.e., the typescript of Jan Zábřana’s Czech translation of *Howl* that formed the first samizdat project of the pre-*Vokno* underground network. Personal communication, František Stárek, 2017.

<sup>775</sup> Strikingly, the leftist dissident Petr Uhl, who knew Němec well before his exile, drew parallels between the latter’s activity among disaffected youth and Latin American liberation theology, “but of course without using any ideological vocabulary”. In: Romanová 2012, p. 82.

<sup>776</sup> See specifically Masłowski, *ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>777</sup> Above all, Jirous’s evocation of heroic parallels in Czech history – the Hussites and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century National Revival [*obrození*] in his *Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození*. In Jirous 1997, *ibid.*

“capitalist abroad”, nor the structurally similar (if undeniably far more repressive) forms of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity to oppose. As Tilly himself warned,

understandably, students of social movements past and present customarily locate them firmly in their local or national contexts as they exaggerate the autonomy and originality [...] <sup>778</sup>

All the same, the situation is still more complex than asserting either national particularities or transnational situational dependencies. Examining the case of the transition from subcultural to countercultural activity, from semiotic revolt to a deeper critique of socio-aesthetic-semiotic control systems, from *vlasatec* to *androš*, the inference to be drawn is that even within the hyper-semiotic environment of state socialism, semiotic revolt only starts to become destabilising with the addition of a thought-out program. Metaphorically, the shift from the crucial material being denim (external display) to the carbon paper necessary for samizdat production (active political engagement) implied a change of kind rather than degree, and a unique set of political circumstances related to Czechoslovakia’s position in the Warsaw Pact and its earlier conditions of small-nation collective understanding even within Habsburg days. But in the end, the program of countercultural dematerialization, with the emphasis on circulation (self-reproduced typescripts), on connections (underground networks) and on shared sociability not only formed an independent culture: it suggested <sup>779</sup> a possibility for autonomy from all levels of hegemonic control – whether violent or subtle – that prefigured, if not necessarily predicting, what could be once the repression no longer was exerted. For this prefiguration, it is now time to turn to the final chapter.

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<sup>778</sup> Tilly 2005, p. 225.

<sup>779</sup> Contra Cholínský 2016, *ibid.*

## Chapter 8

### In the Wolf's Belly: Islands of Deviation, Underground Sociabilities and Proto-Civil

#### Societies

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*No choice but to turn to what they write, to that form of Czech writing and knowledge which in the eyes of the Institute for Czech Literature and the entire Academy of Sciences does not exist. A type of non-existence that we choose as a second definition [...] What is Red Riding Hood writing in the wolf's belly? – Zdeněk Vašíček<sup>780</sup>*

During the previous chapters, which have attempted to place *Vokno* and its wider network into an understanding of its place within late state-socialist Czech (Czechoslovak) society, many different concepts have been applied to this particular personal-historical configuration that I have termed the provincial underground: social movement, resistance network, counterculture. A final point for examination should be another term regularly invoked almost to the point of over-repetition, yet historically of considerable significance for conceptualising (and, to be fair, setting a standard of achievement) for several years on either side of 1989: the compound “civil society”. Since the very title of the present work, “Paper Agora”, itself assumes – explicitly - the connection between samizdat publication and the idea of a proto-civil society, by rights this final chapter should attempt to clarify what applicability this idea has to the historical reality of *Vokno* as a concrete historical instance of social action. And no less, it should bring into question the assumptions – often taken all too automatically – regarding dissent (dissident action) vis-à-vis or even against theoretical concepts of social organisation, and most finally to test whether the samizdat agora and its theoretical interpretations do, in fact, match in reality.

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<sup>780</sup> Vašíček, Zdeněk: Co psala Karkulka ve vlkově břiše. Samizdat, Brno 1980xx, in: Vašíček, Zdeněk – Mayer, Françoise: *Minulost a současnost, paměť a dějiny*. CDK-Triáda: Brno-Praha 2008, p. 7.

A second, perhaps less theoretical and more historiographic consideration is the relation of the underground imagining of its social space(s) to the models of the counterculture of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century – a phenomenon not yet fully global, and specifically tied to Anglo-American models, as stressed previously<sup>781</sup>. To what extent can a counterculture, in the sense of Roszak et al. striving to establish a life-pattern outside the dominant paradigm within a small collective<sup>782</sup>, be related to ideas of civil society, particularly in situations in which maintaining a community is extremely difficult? In this aspect, the virtual-network collective of samizdat and the physical collective of the communal dwelling can be, somewhat polemically, regarded as homologous manifestations of a similar intention. A second dimension offered by inclusion of the ‘commune’ is the history of this living practice even beyond the immediate source, per Stárek, for the Czech underground in the opening scenes of the film *Easy Rider*.<sup>783</sup> The American prehistory of the hippie commune reaches back deep into the very origins of the republic, with a long series of living experiments of both religious and utopian (communalist-socialist)<sup>784</sup>; even with the inevitable discrepancies of cultural transferral and transplantation, a certain utopian ambition underlay the Czech ‘*baráky*’ and should not be discounted in their discussion and evaluation.

The Czech underground as social action may best be characterised as the generation of communal sociabilities, rather than explicitly political engagement with the ruling power structures. Of course, in the interpretation of Josef Alan, the sociability (*společenství*) would have implied politicisation in any event: first with the widening of the affinity-circle

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<sup>781</sup> Anglo-American, though, need not imply by necessity methodological nationalism – note e.g. the cultural analysis of Stuart Hall and the influence on Birmingham cultural studies from Homi Bhaba. For a consideration of the relation between cultural studies, sociology and the extra-European (yet still Anglophone) dimension of critique viz. e.g. McLennan, Gregor: “Sociology, Eurocentrism and Postcolonial Theory”. In: *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2003, pp. 69-86.

<sup>782</sup> Roszak 1969, *ibid.*

<sup>783</sup> According to Stárek’s version, the idea of a communal living situation for his circle of friends first arose after viewing *Easy Rider* in Budapest around 1970. Personal communication.

<sup>784</sup> For an early history, note Fogarty, Robert S.: *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990.

necessary for realisation and then with the inevitable clash with state power,<sup>785</sup> yet invariably the politicisation was regarded as a secondary effect. These sociabilities remain linked most frequently in both memory and historiography (or indeed the maintaining of old connections and affiliations thirty years on) to the collective experience of performing and listening to unofficial or indeed illegal rock music but assuming more permanent, perhaps even more reproduceable form through bringing the momentary sociability of the clandestine rock concert into a physical-spatial dimension, specifically the virtual space of samizdat and the physical space of the communal residences. And as argued previously, it could easily be regarded as an attempt to escape from the confines of the state-organisation-family triangle of regulated public life and a familial sphere of privacy as impotent isolation<sup>786</sup>. Yet the crucial question at this point should focus less on the internal, self-defined dynamics of the underground sociabilities (and the two sociability-frameworks defined above) than on the wider aspect of their effect for Czech society – civil or not – as a whole. Was the paper agora of *Vokno* a genuine forerunner, or at least a kind of training-ground or kindergarten, for a social order outside of state socialist restrictions? Or was it merely a refuge from the state-managed world, slightly more sophisticated than the weekend-cottage phenomenon of roughly the same period, at best a form of mental self-care for participants but of limited scope for those outside of the immediate readership-production networks<sup>787</sup>? Or – thirdly – is this division between (following Arndt) the Husák-vintage *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* itself a mischaracterisation<sup>788</sup>?

From the standpoint of the post-Communist experience, it might appear that historically speaking, the civil-society categorisation emerged out of a strange hybrid of

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<sup>785</sup> Alan, *ibid.*, p. 29-30.

<sup>786</sup> Viz. Možný 1999, *ibid.*

<sup>787</sup> Giustino, Cathleen M – Plum, Catherine J. – Vari, Alexander (eds.): *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*. New York: Berghahn Books 2013

<sup>788</sup> Arendt, Hannah: *The Human Condition*. Second edition, intro. Canovan, Margaret. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998.

activism and scholarship, formulated in dialogue between active dissent on one side of the Iron Curtain and analytical reflection on the other. On a second plane, we can even describe the generation of this cross-geopolitical interchange as a meeting of two written genres – the essay and the scholarly paper, with the samizdat (and equally the exile/tamizdat) process playing a crucial role, perhaps even the defining one, in the first. With this all too concrete historical condition in mind, it is hard not to speculate that the origins, perhaps even the material genealogy, of late-20<sup>th</sup> century civil society concepts in this realm of kitchen discussions and illicit typescripts have been severely underrated by scholarship both then and now. Or, for that matter, the imprint of state and police power on an intellectual construction that in its very formulation is both empirical and normative.<sup>789</sup>

At the same time, since the turn of the millennium the inevitable historicization brought about by time's passage and social change has significantly blunted the force of civil society as a normative guideline, an etalon or standard for (predominantly) post-Communist or post-totalitarian societies to hold as a measure of achievement. It has been subjected in the past decade to increasingly harsh critiques, whether as an excuse for state withdrawal from the public realm or as a euphemistic mask for economic exploitation and the weakening of social protection – even, as expressed through one analytical categorisation of civil society, as “neoliberal gobbledygook”.<sup>790</sup> And with the ever-spreading hybridization of power categories, along with the rise of illiberal movements (not merely restricted to religious fundamentalism or ethnic supremacy) as non-state actors or at most parallel currents to non-liberal political

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<sup>789</sup> For more on this bifurcated aspect of civil society see the discussion by Kopecký, Petr: “Civil society, uncivil society and contentious politics in post-communist Europe”. In: Kopecký, Petr and Mudde, Cas (eds): *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Postcommunist Europe*. Routledge: London 2003, esp. pp. 7-10.

<sup>790</sup> Jezierska, Katarzyna: “Defining In/Defining Out: Civil Society through the Lens of Elite NGOs”. In: Jacobsson, Kerstin-Korolczuk, Elżbieta (eds.): *Civil Society Revisited: Lessons from Poland*. Berghahn: New York 2017, p. 118.

orders, the optimism of the clear-cut distinction between state and society may well seem, viewed thirty years after state-socialism's collapse, more than a bit archaic.

Subjecting the analytical framework itself to a necessary historicization, we find that the key text for defining civil society in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato's *Civil Society and Political Theory*, drew attention to the dissident contribution to the theorizing of the concept, yet recognised its notably ad hoc, immediately pragmatic cast:

The juxtapositions are well known: society *against* the state, nation *against* state, social order *against* political system, *pays réel against pays légal* or *officiel*, public life *against* the state, private life *against* public power, etc. The idea was always the protection and/or self-organization of social life in the face of the totalitarian or authoritarian state<sup>791</sup>

Even more significantly, Arato and Cohen – in a sense writing the “textbook” for civil-society promotion and development in the wake of state-socialism's all too recent collapse – make the far older historic origins of civil society thought explicit. And no less, their discussions not only of political philosophy but of actual social analysis, even if at the level of grand theory (Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann as the primary examples), bring another dimension – the neglected aspect of the non-political impact – into the equation. Yet the final result of the authors' discussion of the dissident legacy in both theory and practice is an exposure, paradoxically, of the relative explicatory weakness of European anti-Communist dissent. Even in the case where perhaps the greatest civil-society construction was achieved in practical life, i.e. Solidarity-era Poland, the interpretations could not produce a unified understanding of the situation in which it managed to emerge:

... one view (Michnik) stressed the obliteration of all social solidarities and the resulting social atomization, except for carefully defined institutional complexes (the church) or historical periods (1956, 1970–71, and after 1976). Another position, more consistent with the theory of the new evolutionism, insisted on the failure of totalitarianism, whatever its intentions, to truly atomize society, or to completely disorganize families, face-to-face groups, and cultural networks. This position, however, would have required the working out of a paradigm

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<sup>791</sup> Cohen-Arato, p. 31.

to replace the totalitarianism thesis as the theoretical framework of the "new evolutionism," something never actually attempted<sup>792</sup>

Nor, for that matter, did an interpretation immediately drawing upon the Czech experience – i.e. H. Gordon Skilling's *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* – necessarily reach a different conclusion even under conditions far less amenable to independent social action:

Both the reality of 'independent activities' and the concepts employed to describe and define them seemed to run counter to the notion of the total domination of society by the state and to negate the essence of a totalitarian system. Paradoxically, however, in the European Communist countries, the systems were still regarded as 'totalitarian', in spite of tendencies toward autonomous activity which were present, sometimes in considerable strength.<sup>793</sup>

The argument could, in consequence, be put forward that a "truly totalitarian" order would have implied the utter impossibility of any social action, whether reduced to the minimum, as in Ceausescu's Romania, or eliminated in the circumstances of a punitive institution. Yet this *reducto ad Gulagum* (which is not to say that either of these two cited works makes it) equally misses the point: not that autonomous action is hindered by the same array of social-control implements found in state-socialism's mass penal institutions from Jáchymov to Magadan, but rather that the exclusion of such action from the public sphere, and state harassment of it when attempted in the private one may not have implied the full erasure of privacy but nonetheless formed a social order no less closed to effective action.

Secondly, as I argued in previous sections of the present work, the aesthetic-semiotic policing of the Czechoslovak socialist state implied the transformation of difference (self-differentiation) into critique, with both the state repressive and cultural forces on one side and the youthful subcultures on the other changing fashion into an increasingly programmatic

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<sup>792</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>793</sup> Skilling, H. Gordon: *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*. Macmillan: Basingstoke 1989, p. 158.



dissidence. Again, Hebdige's previously discussed, class-based differentiation between subculture and counterculture -

[w]hereas opposition in subculture is, as we have seen, displaced into symbolic forms of resistance, the revolt of middle-class youth tends to be more articulate, more confident, more directly expressed and is, therefore, as far as we are concerned, more easily 'read'<sup>794</sup>

- not only assumes a class disparity that only partially matches the hierarchies and stratifications of European state socialism, but moreover underscores the absence of the 'pull and push' forces of the socialist reality, the mixture of cultural uplift and cultural repression, that effaced the boundaries between the articulate and the symbolic.

As I argued in the previous chapters, the idea of the provincial underground as a proto-civil society is based – judging from its own statements as well as participant responses – on the effort to create an intermediary zone for sociability between the familial enclave and the state-controlled public realm. While pre-1989 familialism has been discussed in recent scholarship largely through its cinematic or literary representation<sup>795</sup> and the controversies over state power form an entirely different chapter, the relationship between intermediary sociabilities and extra-state organisations, whether openly dissident or precariously apolitical “islands of positive deviation”, and the civil-society ideals then being formulated still remains largely unexamined. Placing the interconnected sociabilities of the underground – in physical space (gatherings, concerts, whenever possible communal living) and the imaginary space of samizdat – in contraposition with the theoretical discussions around civil society both during its formulation and in retrospectively evaluating the concept's historic legacy should work to

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<sup>794</sup> Hebdige 1979, p. 65.

<sup>795</sup> For the normalisation-era family environment as a central prism for retrospective artistic depictions of the period in later years, note the discussion of family comedies in the 1990s – e.g. the film *Pelišky* or Michal Viewegh's novel *Báječná léta pod psa* along with its own 1997 film adaptation – in Pehe, Veronika: *Velvet Retro: Postsocialist Nostalgia and the Politics of Heroism in Czech Popular Culture*. Berghahn: New York 2020, especially chapter 2. It is worth noting that Petr Nikolaev, director of the latter film, also directed an adaptation of Jan Pelc's *a bude hůř* precisely a decade later, to far less commercial success.

cast light upon each other and reveal the degree of analytical usefulness of the concept often invoked but only rarely elucidated in specific empirical detail.

To start, we should examine the concrete differences between the Czech underground and other forms of action, perhaps best summarised as “collectives of divergence”, whether as open (often negative) deviation on one side of the equation and predominantly political action (e.g. Charta 77, environmental groups at the end of the 1980s) on the other. As noted previously, the underground not only differed but in certain ways actively set itself apart from other forms of subcultural activity, specifically the immediate post-war subcultures of Hebdige’s working-class masculine self-display (the Teddy Boys of Stalinism<sup>796</sup>) and the still largely undefined criminal-nihilist milieus best known to today’s observers through the (only slightly disguised) fictional writings of Jan Pelc<sup>797</sup>. Similarly, the illiberal subculture-movements of post-1989 nationalist or ethnocentric orientation, such as racist skinheads (as the main Czech manifestation of such activity<sup>798</sup>), which aim “to monopolize a functional or political space in society, claiming that it represents the only legitimate path”,<sup>799</sup> are themselves at odds with the spirit of the underground even in its most strictly enforced secrecy. True, it is undeniable that the constraints of state socialist life, and in particular the non-police strictures of taste and behaviour perhaps even more so than the actual process of police surveillance, were crucial in forming a sense of “oppositonality” even in seemingly apolitical actions:

Even daily escapes that groups and individuals initiated in spite of and against the teachings of the party, such as nudism, excessive smoking and drinking, the wearing of jeans, and listening and dancing to Western music, could still be described as ‘socialist’ because they developed in a spirit of defiance to state prohibitions, and as such they would be less meaningful if examined in a different context.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> Viz. Applebaum 2012 *ibid.*, Pinkas 2015 *ibid.*

<sup>797</sup> Pelc 1991 *ibid.*, also note Kolář 2018 *ibid.*

<sup>798</sup> E.g. Prokūpkova 2020 *ibid.*

<sup>799</sup> Diamond, Larry (1994) ‘Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation’, *Journal of Democracy* 5(3):4–17 in: Kopecký-Mudde, *ibid.*

<sup>800</sup> Vari, Alexander, introduction. in: *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, eds. Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum and Alexander Vari. New York: Berghahn Books 2013, p. 4.

And, as the discussion not merely of state-socialist aesthetic dissent in the previous chapters has reiterated, the extent of state politicization of the public space through its single unified form of socialist modernity shifted the boundary between acceptance and dissent quantitatively – if not, in mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century terms qualitatively – beyond the delineations in less authoritative methods of control.

At this juncture, the question of the totalitarian analytic paradigm returns once more: if the combination of ideological guidance of society and state monopolisation of the economy – along with the promotion of a unified aesthetic-semiotic sensibility – was a genuine historical circumstance (regardless of whether it was imposed by a narrow elite or emerged through general consensus), then how are we to understand action within it? We could quote in this instance the canonical (hence invariably problematic) description from Arendt of the relation between privacy and action in totalitarian orders, respectively the requirement of privacy for action to be possible in the first place:

Isolation and impotence, that is the fundamental inability to act at all, have always been characteristic of tyrannies. Political contacts between men are severed in tyrannical government and the human capacities for action and power are frustrated. But not all contacts between men are broken and not all human capacities destroyed. The whole sphere of private life with the capacities for experience, fabrication and thought are left intact. We know that the iron band of total terror leaves no space for such private life and that the self-coercion of totalitarian logic destroys man's capacity for experience and thought just as certainly as his capacity for action<sup>801</sup>

Yet the historical legacy of European state socialism nonetheless reveals the existence of a certain, indeed quite tangible and real, private dimension allowing for both samizdat periodicals and rabbit-figurines fabricated from bottle caps, leaving aside any question of their respective quantitative frequency or normative quality. The definitions of totalitarianism involving the reductive application of Arendtian ideas as easy slogans may well fall far short of capturing the actual nature of a system like normalisation-era Czechoslovakia – while conversely a more accurate description could focus less on the limitations of action than on

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<sup>801</sup> Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. London: Penguin 2017, p. 474.

the ability of the system to fabricate “action” (to be understood, of course, as anti-systemic activity) out of activities that may not have been launched with an anti-systematic impulse as primary.

One possible escape from this paradox is to consider how we can describe a given activity as anti-systemic: in what way does it not merely express a stance at odds with the state-socialist behavioural model, but actively work towards creating a separate social imaginary, a kind of mental (and in many cases even physical) counter-space to the external order? Perhaps we should place among the key criteria not the mere divergence from expected norms (in sense of the Stalinist-era youth subcultures or later the ill-defined yet clearly existent ‘dropout class’ of Pelc’s descriptions both fictionalised and essayistic<sup>802</sup>) but instead the production of a space for autonomous yet non-familial action. Understandably samizdat holds a major place yet forms one of only several types of activities, from organisation of cultural events up to e.g. the communal dwellings of the ‘*baráky*’. Essentially, the creation of underground samizdat came about to assist with coordination of the cultural activities that the underground viewed as more significant, predominantly (if not exclusively) in the area of music; moreover, drawing a clear distinction between the framework (*Vokno* in its network of creators, reproducers and readers) and the content (the creation of an aesthetic alternative to state-sanctioned and state-produced cultural consumables) itself elides the uniqueness of the samizdat experience. To cite Tomáš Glanc, the “immediate physical urgency”<sup>803</sup> of samizdat, between the (physical) object and the (social) process, makes the medium itself an inseparable component of the contents, while conversely the stance and preferences of the underground, in their unusual cultural-historical position between hippie and punk, themselves give priority to a no less urgent physicality.

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<sup>802</sup> Pelc 1990, *ibid.*

<sup>803</sup> Glanc, Tomáš: “Samizdat jako médium”. In: *Souvislosti*, no. 3/2013, p. 190.

Yet if one of the central aims of the present work has been to accentuate alongside the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the underground its composition as a human collective, the material forms of its collective actions – and again, from this optic the similarities between samizdat production and communal living outweigh the inevitable differences – are themselves frameworks for establishing separation from the external pressures of the state (from the conventional repressive forces as well as the more subtle ones) not for privacy per se – the privacy of the weekend cottage and the family circle – but to allow for something else. What this ‘something else’ would have been, this ‘positive liberty’ in Isaiah Berlin’s oft-cited terminology against the mere ‘negative liberty’ of cottaging and crafting, was never entirely articulated: the picture provided from *Vokno*, as we have seen, was remarkably eclectic though understandably skewed in favour of Anglo-American countercultures of the previous decade. Perhaps even there might have been more clarity for its legacy had the efforts of ‘Akce Kapela’, ‘Akce Asanace’ and other political-police projects been less devastating (and of course, this vagueness only once again shows the effects at standing on the wrong side of Husák-era law enforcement).

As a result, it might be preferable to alter somewhat the idea of samizdat as a nascent civil society to one of oppositional collectives serving instead as autonomous zones for cultivation of sociability. Georg Simmel’s characterisation of sociability (*Geselligkeit*) – words dating originally from 1917 – seems oddly well-matched to the sentiments expressed in the empirical (remembered) findings from 1970s Czechoslovakia:

...so perhaps in the *ancien regime*, where gloomy anxiety over a threatening reality drove men into pure escape, into severance from the powers of actual life. The freeing and lightening, however, [...] is this; that association and exchange of stimulus, in which all the tasks and the whole weight of life are realized, here is consumed in an artistic play, in that simultaneous sublimation and dilution, in which the heavily freighted forces of reality are felt only as from a distance, their weight fleeting in a charm.<sup>804</sup>

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<sup>804</sup> Simmel, Georg: "The Sociology of Sociability". In: *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 55, no. 3, November 1949, p. 261.

A creative sociability as action: symbolic (musical or written/samizdat) or even on the day-to-day level, given Simmel's "interaction not of complete but of symbolic and equal personalities"<sup>805</sup>, most notably with the previously noted deployment of 'underground identities' designated by nicknames, and thus deliberately set off from socialist familialism. Similar traits of sociability, of course, could be found elsewhere in oppositional circles, even extended to cover other areas of Czech dissent, specifically the forcibly "proletarized" Prague intellectuals of Charta 77. Yet to limit the description of the underground sociability to a mere recognition of necessity, as implied in the "merry ghetto" or "invalid siblings" attributions of Egon Bondy, would again miss a significant dimension of its function as, indeed, a daily practice of critique, rendering it merely reactive to state repression and obliterating the ways in which it looked towards a view of human community beyond not only the immediate circumstances of post-1968 Czechoslovakia but even of 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial modernity in its wider sense.

Sociabilities and friendships, moreover, have persisted beyond the necessity for the explicitly system-defying action of the years before 1989. As the research for the present work made amply clear, the sociability of "being together" in a shared space of experience (concerts, festivals) and memory is still a binding element for the immediate participating generation –evidenced not only through personal testimony but even my own participation in various events and meetups. Yet beyond the generational bond or the tie of shared memories, there lies a motivation that regards this shared identity as its own social practice: it might not be too great a stretch of interpretive reach to describe it in terms of friendship as one of Heller's "radical needs".<sup>806</sup> Even if a need "radicalised" by external circumstances, its continuation, including the efforts of maintaining the sociability (regardless of the infinitely

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<sup>805</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>806</sup> Heller 1976, *ibid.*

greater ease of the present moment), attests to the idea of an immaterial collectivity as a positive end, not as a mere rejection.

Yet all the same, the situation is deeply permeated with ambivalence, in Alain Touraine's sense, as "... the impossible identification of the actor with a situation defined in historical, economic or social terms".<sup>807</sup> Criticising the underground for its allegedly replacing state collectivism with a smaller groupthink clearly misses the mark; it is instead the double-edged nature of the surrounding world that confers ambiguity on motivations when realised in physical form. To cite one instance: recalling the importance of amateur photography, photo albums or chronicles to the underground, we cannot but recall the equal importance of similar photo-chronicles to the adversaries in the StB.<sup>808</sup> The words of Susan Sontag are perhaps applicable at this point:

there is perhaps no activity which prepares us so well to live with these contradictory attitudes as does picture-taking, which lends itself so brilliantly to both. On the one hand, cameras arm vision in the service of power—of the state, of industry, of science. On the other hand, cameras make vision expressive in that mythical space known as private life.<sup>809</sup>

Almost exactly the same could be said about the underground nicknames versus the StB assignment (when applicable) of code-names for individuals under surveillance and for its own agents. A cross-listing of the two might well provide amusing moments (e.g. Stárek as "Satan Piglet" ...), yet the similarities of the two practices, with the distancing effect of time and political context, are themselves a bit startling – even for those well aware of the vast difference between the two in terms of personal motives.

Similarly, the limitations of this 'sociability as practiced critique' in their impact as practical action are all too evident, and – as the historical record of the countercultures of the

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<sup>807</sup> Touraine, Alain: "A Method for Studying Social Actors". In: *Journal of World-Systems Research*. vol. vi, no., 3, fall/winter 2000, special issue: Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein, pp. 900-918.

<sup>808</sup> Note in particular [eds.]: *Praha objektivem StB – Prague through the Lens of the Secret Police*. Exhibition catalogue, Praha: ÚSTR 2009.

<sup>809</sup> Sontag, Susan: *On Photography*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux 1977, p. 138.

(unironically stated) ‘free world’ fully reveals – even without the efforts of the StB and other forces, any such transformative legacy would have remained ambiguous and fragmentary. And, as we know, it never formed a truly autonomous social entity, even assuming (as will be discussed below) that such a thing is even possible. The ‘isolation’ of the communal dwellings or the samizdat networks was, in a police state, only partial, and even the most egregious manifestations of this outside presence, such as the penetration of underground personal ties with StB agents (with significantly varying degrees of involvement), were only part of the necessary involvement within the wider world. The gradual shift of *Vokno* itself ever closer toward the metropole, in production and in participant-networks, shows the strong centripetal pull of intellectual hierarchies within even (or perhaps precisely for this very reason) the ‘anti-systemic’ levels in late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Czech society. And still further, if more abstractly, the ties of small-country nationalism (through shared cultural patterns as well as language) kept the provincial underground well in line with the working-class mainstream in more than a few aspects. (As noted previously, the teetotal-vegetarian stance of Vodrážka and his immediate circle, for instance<sup>810</sup>, hardly matched the far more ‘conformist’ proclivities of Nová Víska, with its kegs of beer and regular pig-slaughter festivals.<sup>811</sup>)

Independent sociability required a degree of privacy for its existence, but neither took the private realm as an end in itself (the ‘socialist escapes’ or domestic-art route), nor assumed radical divergence from the surrounding world as its primary goal. In this second aspect, specifically the openness to a degree of liminality within the underground (with various levels of semi-participation yet with the most public actions requiring a restricted core), it becomes clear that the underground sociability never assumed the stance of moral

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<sup>810</sup> Vodrážka 2016, *ibid.*

<sup>811</sup> Stárek-Kostúr 2010, pp. 252-301.



self-segregation that the main core of Charta 77 was accused of pursuing<sup>812</sup> but largely acted as pragmatically as it could, out of sheer self-preservation. Niklas Luhmann's assertion, within his own critique of civil-society theories, that "protest is one process in which society communicates about itself... not a privileged position outside society",<sup>813</sup> thus points – quite likely, unintentionally – toward the somewhat mordant, even bitter paradoxes encountered by oppositional activity in a situation where 'autopoiesis' lay within the hardly tender hands of Major Stárek and his local subordinates.<sup>814</sup>

Outside of the immediate underground, one major current within Czech dissent fully recognised the need for a broader conception of autonomy beyond that of intellectual independence. Perhaps tellingly, it was the conservative Catholic dissident Václav Benda who articulated most clearly the conception of independent activities within state socialism – making no explicit judgment on their moral character – as forming secondary spheres of life, designated with his term of the 'parallel polis':

The parallel cultural structure is today an undeniable and strongly positive factor in many spheres (in literature, but to a degree as well in popular music and the arts), entirely dominant over the moribund official structures. Equally undeniable (and negative, if more functional and human) is the parallel economy, founded on a system of theft, corruption and protection, which under the glossy surface of the official economy factually governs most relations, not only in everyday consumption but even industrial-commercial ones.<sup>815</sup>

Yet even with the clear link between economic and civil freedoms, it is not, in the end, possible to reduce the argument entirely to an economic one. Paradoxically, such a stance can be discerned most vividly in the post-1989 critique of the purported weakness of civil society after the demise of state socialism, e.g. the judgment of more left-wing oriented theorists like John Ehrenberg:

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<sup>812</sup> Viz. the critiques by Emanuel Mandler or Bohumil Doležal: e.g. Mandler, Emanuel: Na držení pozic jsem nikdy nebyl. Interview with Adam Drda, *Revolver Revue* no. 32, 1996.

<sup>813</sup> Cited in Arato-Cohen, *ibid.*

<sup>814</sup> Kudrna-Stárek 2017 *ibid.*

<sup>815</sup> Benda, Václav. "Paralelní polis", in: *Noční kádrový dotazník a jiné boje*, FRA: Praha 2003, p. 60, originally in *Informace o Chartě 77*, issue 1, no. 9, 1978.

The Eastern European dissidents who deployed the language of civil society in their attack on the socialist state might be excused their failure to appreciate the looming danger of the capitalist market. Whatever combination of naiveté, desperation, and irresponsibility was at work, they had powerful antagonists to contend with, important allies to satisfy, and few indigenous sources of theoretical support or practical activity on which to draw.<sup>816</sup>

Beyond the thinly veiled condescension of this remark, Ehrenberg's evaluation posits a traditional Marxist or quasi-Marxist account of inevitable destructive commodification, a "drowning in the icy waters of the cash nexus", that entirely ignores the sociological forces within post-Communist Europe that currently seem still more inimical to civil society: ethnocentrism, majoritarianism, even "red-brown" yearnings for the lost national unity of state socialist life.<sup>817</sup> Taking the present situation into consideration, it is hard not to conclude that a potential "habits-of-the-heart" interpretation of lasting, popular illiberality is more appropriate than one of the market-based dissolution of fixed social structures.<sup>818</sup> As it is, such a view definitely matches more closely with the tendency (at least in recent Czech historiographic practice<sup>819</sup>) to stress, with regard to the system-stabilising elements of post-1968 'normalisation', the importance of (even primarily grudging) mass consensus over direct state coercion.

Longstanding path-dependencies and conformist attitudes aside, one final standpoint regarding civil-society conceptions in confrontation with the underground experience in a definitively non-civil social system might be, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, to open the question of self-defined resistant collectives within an open social order. And here we return to the initial vague impressions of the *Easy Rider* commune yet continue beyond them to bring into the discussion the American communal tradition itself, a comparison relatively

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<sup>816</sup> Ehrenburg, John R.: *Civil Society. The Critical History of an Idea*. New York: NYU Press 1999, p. 469.

<sup>817</sup> In other words, "uncivil society", viz. Kopecký-Mudde 2003, *ibid*.

<sup>818</sup> Note as well the description of state socialism as itself an "uncivil society": Kotkin, Stephen: *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*. New York: The Modern Library 2009.

<sup>819</sup> E.g. Pullmann 2011 *ibid*.

neglected even in recent discussions of the Czech underground.<sup>820</sup> The communal experiments of the 1960s, it is well worth emphasising, did not emerge *ex nihilo* in the counterculture itself, but

represented a new outcropping of the much larger venerable American tradition of alternative culture, a part of which has involved communal living. Catalyzed by shifts in American culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the hip communes were not, in the beginning, products of hippiedom, but crucibles that played a major role in shaping and defining hip culture.<sup>821</sup>

A full explication of American communal organisations would not only overwhelm the present chapter's length but moreover, in the exceptional diversity of the communal impulses, prove distracting in the attempt to find or argue for a single primary trajectory of these communities. From major cultural centres (e.g. the New England Transcendentalists of Brook Farm or even the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Black Mountain College in North Carolina) to religious communities (Christian or not), secular utopian projects, all the way to dangerous cults (Charles Manson, Reverend Jim Jones), the vast spectrum recalls, if anything, Wittgenstein's *Familienähnlichkeit* more than any traditional social-science categorisation. And if we add to the equation the long-enduring legend of European settlement in the New World as itself a utopian communal project – the 'shining city on a hill' of the Massachusetts Bay Colony found in US political rhetoric from left to right – it seems, if anything, almost safer to disregard the communal and/or utopian heritage entirely.<sup>822</sup>

And yet the Anglo-American counterculture that, as we have seen over the past several chapters, proved so compelling as an alternative to the life of the 'orderly socialist citizen' would not have been possible without the range of social imaginations (and, to be sure, their ultimate lack of success) from the 1840s up to the 1970s<sup>823</sup>. If anything is to be drawn from

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<sup>820</sup> A brief mention – restricted only to the 1960s – is found in Cholínský, Jan: Hnutí hippies jako součást kontrakultury. In: *Podhoubí undergroundu*, *ibid.*, p. 161-163.

<sup>821</sup> Miller, Timothy: "The Roots of the 1960s Communal Revival". In: *American Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, Fall 1992, p. 74.

<sup>822</sup> Note e.g. Turner, Ralph H.: "Ideology and Utopia after Socialism". In: Johnston-Larana-Gusfield 1994, pp. 79-100.

<sup>823</sup> For an extensive history, note Sutton, Robert P.: *Communal Utopias and the American Experience. Religious Communities 1732-2000*. Westport: Praeger 2003.

the legacy of capitalist and socialist countercultures, we would do worse not to take the idea of the imaginary into account: the attraction of an anti-utopianism that saw spaces of the imagination as a refuge from the outside rather than a model for imposition. If the largely unknown historical background of the American commune is more than an amusing tangent – and I would argue that it is not – it is at least a matter for an entire study itself; not for the purposes of the present work. What should be recalled, though, is the connection between the small-scale collective social experiment and, not to sound too excessive, the Anglophone liberal tradition (i.e. as civil-society model for the entire past century) taken as a whole. A will to imagine that things might be different, rather than one of weary resignation, pervades the virtual and physical agorae of the underground: against a backdrop of deliberately manipulated atomisation and privacy-seeking, to engage in a collective project seemed, at the time, a genuinely different mode of existence. Whether or not the micro-civil societies could be transferred, even partially or as distant inspiration, into post-1989 realities<sup>824</sup> remains a question open for the present day – and no less obviously, for other analytical endeavours.



Drop City – geodesic dome from scrap metal, after 1966. In: Miller 1992.

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<sup>824</sup> One intriguing critique of the “Cold War liberal” anti-utopian position, exemplified by among others Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper, is: Olssen, Mark: “Totalitarianism and the Repressed Utopia of the Present. Moving Beyond Hayek, Popper and Foucault”. In: Peters, Michael (ed.): *Edutopias. New Utopian Thinking in Education*. Leiden: Brill 2006.

## Conclusion: Community, Action, Memory

*The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience. [...] We need to consider every attachment, every value, with our whole attention, for we do not know the future; we may never be certain of what may enrich it.*

- Raymond Williams<sup>825</sup>

The present work, in keeping with its declared aim at the outset, has not merely attempted a scholarly analysis of a somewhat obscure Czech samizdat project of the ‘normalisation’ era but tried to use it to address larger questions of social action in repressive orders. As the quotation above should make clear, it has been an examination of a community – its origins, its self-definition and self-constitution, its boundaries and its overlaps with other collectives – and the historical circumstances that shaped it: European state socialism in its final decades and the confrontation with the “Western” subcultural and countercultural impulses permeating the Iron Curtain in those years, yet hopefully not ignoring earlier historical features and dependencies of the *longue durée*, most of all the patterns and configurations, if at the level of secondary influences, of the post-Habsburg legacy<sup>826</sup> of language-based nationalism and national self-assertion.

These wider ramifications and contexts may well sound overly ambitious. However, as I noted (specifically in chapter 4), there is also the question – itself tied to the “post-Habsburg” historical situation of “small-country nationalism<sup>827</sup>” – of social scale within small nation-states, above all in the era of strict Cold War geopolitics and militarised borders, and within the collective spaces of small languages, even if (as was, again, very much the case

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<sup>825</sup> Williams, Raymond: *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1958, p. 334.

<sup>826</sup> Or, in other words, Ernest Gellner’s “Habsburg dilemma” – viz. Gellner, Ernest: *Language and Solitude. Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998.

<sup>827</sup> Most notably: Hroch, Miroslav: *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985, republished New York: Columbia University Press 2000; also note *ibid.*, *Národy nejsou dílem náhody. Příčiny a předpoklady utváření moderních evropských národů*. Praha: SLON 2009.

during the pre-1989 period) they often spread beyond the actual territoriality of their nation-states through political exile and emigration. In short, the “paper agora” of samizdat is both the physical medium of the printed (typescript or mimeographed) publication and, by extension, the community of the national language under the control of a given political authority in a specific linguistically defined nation-state.

Returning from the general to the specific, the present work starts with a socio-historical analysis of the background for the group associated with *Vokno*, i.e., the countercultural network in (primarily) North and West Bohemia at the start of the 1970s and the forces that shaped this social collective generally termed the “Czech underground”. The first chapter analysed the constitution of the underground against the backdrop of mutually reinforcing historical circumstances: European state-socialism in the last decades of the Cold War, the particular situation of Czechoslovakia following the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion and the subsequent political-cultural crackdown known as “normalisation”, and the geographical peculiarity of the main industrial zone along the edge of the Ore Mountains, not least the impact of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and the complex process of its post-1945 resettlement. It addresses the layer of mythmaking in the political area of public self-presentation<sup>828</sup> and later cultural-memory formulation<sup>829</sup> and aims to establish a more accurate picture of the formulation of the underground as a group through a social history of the Czech provincial working class in the final decades of the Communist regime. By way of conclusion, it applies the idea of generational analysis with respect to a shared experience at the intersection of historical events (1968 and its aftermath) and social strata (working-class youth in the industrial Sudetenland).

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<sup>828</sup> Bolton 2012, *ibid.*

<sup>829</sup> Topol 1999, *ibid.*

The subsequent section, Chapter 2, “Produced in Indecent Haste”, addressed the shift of this group’s activities from independent rock music (as performers, organisers and listeners) to the more conventionally political sphere of production of illegal or unofficial printed material, i.e. samizdat. It attempted to map the formulation of a kind of social core-and-periphery of varying degrees of involvement in samizdat work, as well as the process of its forming connections with more conventionally established metropolitan dissident intellectuals, particularly with leading individuals such as Ivan Martin Jirous, Jiří Němec or Egon Bondy. Another significant topic for the chapter was its analysis of the emergence of communal living arrangements, usually in deserted rural houses – known (at the time and subsequently) as *baráky*,<sup>830</sup> providing physical space for independent/illegal cultural and political activity as well as for cultivation of an independent sociability outside the state-administered sphere, analysed in deliberate contrast to the “weekend-cottage” phenomenon<sup>831</sup> that similarly emerged in less openly defiant, mainstream Czechoslovak society at roughly the same time. The production and distribution of the first issues of *Vokno* were examined in terms of the material necessities as well as the requisite social networks for dissemination, setting the two major analytical trajectories to be addressed in subsequent chapters, along with the attempts at establishing cross-border connections with similar samizdat projects (concretely the Lithuanian *Pastogė* and the Polish *Puls*). And finally, it performed a chronological analysis of the stages of the collective involvement of metropolitan-provincial actors within formulating *Vokno*, from aesthetic-subcultural disaffection on one hand (and the philosophical or artistic interests of the other side<sup>832</sup>) toward the more conventionally “political” action of illegal samizdat writing and printing, concluding that it was precisely through the interaction between intellectuals and counterculturalists, as a historically specific

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<sup>830</sup> Stárek-Kostúr 2010, *ibid.*

<sup>831</sup> Bren 2012, *ibid.*

<sup>832</sup> Specifically Němec’s combination of Christian ethics with phenomenology and Jirous’s shifting of interest from conceptual art to rock music.

and in many ways highly contingent occurrence of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s, that this shift from aesthetic rebellion to political action could happen.

In the subsequent chapter, Chapter 3 (“*Vokno* after Clearance”) I dealt chronologically with the final decade of the state-socialist system in Czechoslovakia and thematically with the effects on *Vokno* of the increased police and governmental repression directed against the Czech opposition in the wake of Charter 77, most notably the “Clearance” (*Asanace*) action of the political police (StB) among others<sup>833</sup>, and the immediate effects of this multifold crackdown on the *Vokno* participants. The dissolution of the commune in the North Bohemian village of Nová Víska near Chomutov by local authorities and the nationwide policies against both Charta 77 and alternative culture (e.g. “Akce Kapela”<sup>834</sup> among others) driving many participants into exile significantly reduced the *Vokno* production-network and its wider milieu numerically. Even more significantly, the arrest of several central (as well as less directly involved) participants in December 1981 and the subsequent “*Vokno* trial” of July 1982 led to a three-year hiatus in the publication of the periodical, with the leading figures remaining in socialist Czechoslovakia, Jirous and Stárek, imprisoned for this duration. The effects of repression and exile were examined in two key directions of inquiry with regard to the periodical’s “revival” in 1985. On one side, I brought up the question of the spatial and cultural dynamics of exile in shaping internal Czech debates and discussions within the oppositional samizdat/print media: not only the “enforced cosmopolitanism”<sup>835</sup> of exile life and its associated intellectual clashes and shocks, but also the various ways through which the dispersed network of Czech-language exile publications managed to maintain a limited yet

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<sup>833</sup> Lefeuvre 2014, *ibid.*

<sup>834</sup> Kudrna-Stárek 2017, *ibid.*

<sup>835</sup> This term in sociological usage is usually linked to the analysis of Ulrich Beck in his *World at Risk*. I heard the phrase “*vnucené kosmopolismus*” employed with application to European 20<sup>th</sup>-century political exile in a private discussion at the turn of the millennium; nonetheless, the record of exile matches well with Beck’s words: “cosmopolitanism cannot become a reality deductively by applying philosophical principles, but can only enter through the back door [...], unseen, unintended and under duress.” Beck, Ulrich: *World at Risk*. Cambridge: Polity 2007, p. 61.



real dialogue across the Iron Curtain with oppositional circles still active. One particular reflection of this added dimension was the debate over the underground as a direct counterpart of the Western counterculture, specifically the attacks from conservative positions (Ivan Sviták on the left<sup>836</sup>, Rio Preisner on the right<sup>837</sup>); from the other side was the contribution of a semi-fictionalised testimony of the Czech working-class milieu of “negative deviation” through the writings of Jan Pelc, transmitted to *Vokno* via one of the most prestigious forums for Czech exiled writing, the Parisian periodical *Svědectví*. As for the second main tendency, I addressed the shift of post-1985 *Vokno* from the geographical periphery to Prague, the increased interest in transmission of Western cultural knowledge (over participant-driven content) through the involvement of editor Lubomír Drožd (under the pseudonym Čaroděj Oz<sup>838</sup>), and the rise of the second generation of a Prague-based underground with significantly greater cultural capital, personal connections and artistic ambitions, embodied in the new samizdat periodical *Revolver Revue*.<sup>839</sup> Taking as the chronological concluding point the final issue, no. 15, appearing in summer 1989 and created in the wake of Stárek’s last arrest and imprisonment in February of the same year, this chapter ends with an analysis of the significant social changes occurring even in the Communist system’s final decade, in particular the increased disproportions in cultural access and the depoliticization of youth disaffection, and the consequent impact on dissent as an increasingly metropolitan phenomenon, at times even with its own counter-majoritarian inclination.

Chapter 4, “Transitions in Space and on Paper”, following the chronological thread, takes up the further fate of *Vokno* as a legal publication after 1989 and its own transformation, or following the favoured terminology of the era, “transition”, into the post-samizdat

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<sup>836</sup> Sviták 1985, 1985xx ibid.

<sup>837</sup> Preisner 1985, 1985xx ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Romanová 2012 ibid.

<sup>839</sup> Geisler 2012 ibid.

journalism market and media ecology, up until the publication of the final issue in 1995. Primarily, this chapter focuses on the decade of the 1990s viewed less as a radical break from the immediate past but more as a period of integration of previously excluded elements of society, even beyond the immediate circles of acknowledged dissent (Charta 77 etc.). Selected as the specific angle for discussing this integrative process is the idea of physical (urban) spatiality, here embodied through the process of finding quarters for the post-samizdat independent press and its subsequent professionalisation. The key location, in turn, was the former Czechoslovak Rail office building in Prague at the address Bolzanova 7, assigned to the original ad hoc journalism team of the Independent Press Centre (*Nezávislé tiskové středisko*)<sup>840</sup> compiled almost literally overnight out of Prague samizdat authors after the 17 November demonstrations leading to the regime's downfall. Not simply metaphorically, but factually the new address – housing the editorial offices of the publications of the previous “cultural underground”, including both *Vokno* and *Revolver revue*<sup>841</sup> – displayed the sudden centralizing of the former “adversary culture” as a kind of replacement cultural establishment, not only through the moral credit assigned by the previous anti-regime stance but equally through its move away from countercultural amateurism into conventional professionalism. This chapter then concludes with an analysis of the contrasting rise in the same decade of the global zine phenomenon as a demotic print-counterculture diverging significantly from samizdat as defined in the Cold War years,<sup>842</sup> and the wider implications of this contrast with respect to theories of elite generation after 1989, specifically citing the analysis of Gil Eyal<sup>843</sup> and reflecting on the changed roles of subcultures within the deliberate 1990s project of formulation of an “open” or “civil” society.

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<sup>840</sup> Brolík 2014, *ibid.*

<sup>841</sup> Hořejší 2001, *ibid.*

<sup>842</sup> Machovec 2019, 2014 *ibid.*, Komaromi 2004 *ibid.*, Gruntorád 2001 *ibid.*

<sup>843</sup> Eyal *ibid.*

With the chronological-historiographic axis of the present work completed, the subsequent chapters attempt an analysis of the “*Vokno* underground” from three successive perspectives that, in their thematic overlapping as well as differentiation, each address the matter of forming a collective of resistance within an explicitly inimical social order. First, Chapter 5, entitled “Heineken Cans and Typescript: Socialist Counterculture and Materiality”, turns toward the emerging field of material-culture studies alongside the everyday history of the European state-socialist experience<sup>844</sup> with a nod toward actor-network theory<sup>845</sup> and the application of Lotman’s semiotic analysis.<sup>846</sup> Its analytical thrust was to investigate socialist materiality<sup>847</sup> not only as the backdrop to the aesthetic-semiotic challenges of socialist-era sub- and countercultures, but as a technology of social control in its own right, posing the question of how the more subtle control-mechanisms of public aesthetics shaped the underground’s challenge yet also worked toward conformity for the wider masses. At the same time, it applied the analysis of European command economies as moralistic “dictatorships over needs”<sup>848</sup> in the analysis of Fehér, Heller and Márkus from Hungarian post-Marxist dissent to the material economy of state socialism. The conclusion drawn in this chapter is that the command economy’s generation of its own socialist commodity fetishism, reflected alternately in the over-fetishisation of imported objects or in the hypertrophied culture of domestic crafts,<sup>849</sup> found its oppositional counterpart in the deliberate dematerialization of underground life, and in samizdat’s shift of the printed page from a fixed commodity into a continual reader-generated process of reproduction.

From the physical to the (disembodied) social: such is the line of thought in proceeding to the immediately subsequent chapter, Chapter 6, “Six Degrees of Agency:

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<sup>844</sup> Pažout 2015 *ibid.*, Bren 2010 *ibid.*, Bren-Neuberger 2012 *ibid.*, Knapík-Franz 2017 *ibid.*

<sup>845</sup> Latour 2005 *ibid.*

<sup>846</sup> Lotman 2005 *ibid.*

<sup>847</sup> Scribner 2003 *ibid.*

<sup>848</sup> Fehér-Heller-Márkus 1983 *ibid.*

<sup>849</sup> Činátl 2009, *ibid.*

Vokno, Its Networks and State Power”, which discusses the *Vokno* underground using the tools of social network analysis. Here, my approach was to investigate the group of *Vokno* and wider underground participants, in the provinces as well as in Prague, as a dispersed social network<sup>850</sup> in which Granovetter’s concept of the “strength of weak ties”<sup>851</sup> became a deliberate oppositional strategy for two primary reasons: not only out of simple exigency with regard to police repressive and infiltrative activity, but even more significantly as an end in itself. Based on personal interviews as well as other testimony<sup>852</sup>, my findings revealed that among the participants, the looseness / weakness of underground network linkages often seemed a liberation from the confines of state-socialist familialism<sup>853</sup> as well as the institutional, state-supervised public collectives of school or workplace. The analysis also discussed the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century processes of coercive “nucleisation”<sup>854</sup> particularly affecting working-class families throughout the industrialised world, relating it to the growth of youth subcultures in the same period.

The discussion of working-class-based subcultures, in turn, provides the thematic link to the following chapter, Chapter 7, “Jeans and Typewriters: Counterculture, Subculture or Movement?”, which attempts to provide a definition of the *Vokno* underground that would match the generally applied sociological categories. In this chapter, I considered the subject of research as overlapping both counterculture in Theodore Roszak’s sense<sup>855</sup> of a life-practice of seeking a space for change and the forms of a social movement<sup>856</sup> in the sense defined by the accepted scholarly literature at the time of writing.<sup>857</sup> In the first section of the chapter, I addressed the seeming divergence between subculture and counterculture, noting the early

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<sup>850</sup> McLean 2017 *ibid.*

<sup>851</sup> Granovetter 1973 *ibid.*

<sup>852</sup> E.g. Denčevová-Stárek-Stehlík 2013 *ibid.*

<sup>853</sup> Možný 2009 *ibid.*

<sup>854</sup> Cohen 1997 *ibid.*

<sup>855</sup> Roszak 1995 *ibid.*

<sup>856</sup> Maslowski 2014 *ibid.*

<sup>857</sup> E.g. Tilly 2004, 2015 *ibid.*, Della Porta-Diani 2006 *ibid.*

manifestations of European socialist subcultures in the 1950s as a topic of recent scholarly attention<sup>858</sup> while also drawing attention to the significant difference represented by the rise of autonomous cultural production, assuming moreover an explicitly political form in the expansion from music to printed writings (*samizdat*), for the underground as it formulated during the 1970s. On one side, this historical anomaly placed the Czech underground, as I noted, in a liminal-intermediate position between the “hippie” (autonomous living experiments, explicit critique of the modern world) and the “punk” sensibilities<sup>859</sup>. On the other, the “jeans to typewriters” process, metaphorically expressed, was concluded to be the outcome primarily of the immediate historical forces of post-1968 Czechoslovakia, not only the crackdown on cultural expression but equally the forced “proletarianization” of oppositional intellectuals assigned to less-qualified work in the early 1970s and to a still greater extent after the launch of Charter 77. The second half of the chapter, addressing social movement analysis as an autonomous branch of sociology, places the underground into a wider, transnational context of “post-materialist” movements<sup>860</sup>, with the implication that its vision of autonomous sociability need not be consigned simply to the historical factors of state-socialist Czechoslovakia before 1989. Above all, the process of shaping the free-floating discontent of provincial rock fans into a movement was found to have been considerably facilitated through the involvement of intellectual authorities influenced by currents from outside the Warsaw Pact, and the receptiveness of the disaffected young to their input.

Finally, in Chapter 8, “In the Wolf’s Belly: Islands of Deviation, Underground Sociabilities and Proto-Civil Societies”, I bring in the third major terminological category, that of “civil society” as conceived in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century largely in response to European state-socialism, with a significant contribution by dissent and exile voices, and its later

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<sup>858</sup> Pospíšil 2009 *ibid.*

<sup>859</sup> Hebdige 1979 *ibid.*

<sup>860</sup> Tilly 2005 *ibid.*

invocation during the years after 1989; in other words, assuming a historical perspective both contemporary and retrospective. Placing the findings from the actual group of the *Vokno* underground in contraposition to the dominant civil-society literature<sup>861</sup> and its later critiques<sup>862</sup>, my analysis contrasted the spheres of the “activated” underground around *Vokno*, metropolitan dissent and the self-marginalising, self-destructive underclass<sup>863</sup> with the rise in the final years of state socialism of the “islands of positive deviation<sup>864</sup>” among the relatively well-educated, outwardly conformist levels of Czechoslovak society. My conclusion in this chapter was not to assume either the necessary role of the underground, as one factor among many, in constituting a kind of “civil-society kindergarten” before the regime’s inevitable crackup, nor the rejection of these varying social forms as mere self-care bubbles with little impact on the world outside, but instead to pose the question of whether the pursuit of a semi-open sociability<sup>865</sup> through a shared aesthetic vision might have offered a guideline or contribution to the post-1989 world that only now appears legible. Finally, it addresses the question of a qualified utopianism, manifested through the deliberate emulation of the American utopian tradition<sup>866</sup> not only in the organisation of the communal “*baráky*” but in both musical and written (*samizdat*) creative efforts.

With these issues in mind, the question is less about the relevance of *Vokno* as an individual historical case study than the applicability of the late-communist interplay of repression and resistance to paradigms of far different scale, geography, and historical background. In other words, how the set of social-historical specifics subsumed under “communism” or “totalitarianism” can be remembered not merely for national or regional

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<sup>861</sup> Arato-Cohen 1992 *ibid.*, Touraine 2000 *ibid.*,

<sup>862</sup> Kopecký-Mudde 2003, *ibid.* Ehrenburg 1999 *ibid.*

<sup>863</sup> Pelc 1991 *ibid.*

<sup>864</sup> Bútorá - Krivý – Szomolányiová 1989xx, *ibid.*

<sup>865</sup> Simmel 1949 *ibid.*

<sup>866</sup> Sutton 2003 *ibid.*

collective-memory rituals (or memory-policy institutions) but as illustrative of generally applicable dynamics of power and control, agency and action.

None of these are questions that can be answered immediately. Instead, to bring matters to an end, I should pay my final respects to those who created *Vokno*: writing, typing, duplicating, transporting. It has been their initiative and spirit that has kept me going through the present work and forms their most vivid legacy.

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