EMERGENCE AND DISSOLUTION:

THE NOVELIZATION OF CULTURE AND THE END OF COMMUNIST PARTY HEGEMONY IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE, 1945-1989

by

Hans Peter Meyer

B.G.S., Simon Fraser University, 1987

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
by Special Arrangements

© Hans Peter Meyer

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

October, 1991

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

APPROVAL

Name:	Hans Peter Meyer
Degree	Master of Arts, Special Arrangements
Title of Thesis:	Emergence and Dissolution: The Novelization of Culture and the End of Communist Party Hegemony in East Central Europe, 1945-1989

Examining Committee:

Dr. Paul Percival, Professor, Chair

Dr. Jerald Zaslove, Associate Professor
Senior Supervisor

Dr. Janos Bak, Professor

Dr. Martin Laba. Associate Professor

Dr. John Doheny, Professor, Department of English,
University of British Columbia, Examiner

Date Approved: 11th February 1992

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis

Emergence and Dissolution: The Novelization of Culture and the End of Communist Party Hegemony in East Central Europe, 1945-1989

Author:

(signature)

Hans Peter Meyer
(name)

February 12, 1992
(date)

\SAR\COPYRITE

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the role of culture in the transformation of social practices. Specifically it theorizes the role of the novelistic narrative in the development of oppositional movements in East Central Europe prior to 1989. The argument is made that within the context of censored, Soviet-style societies it was in the creative-expressive and *investigative* realm of the novelistic narrative that individuals first started to contradict official ideology in a socially meaningful way. Out of this was born not only an unofficial ideology, but also the nascent social groups that would later appear, as if by magic, out of the formerly grey and docile "masses" of "actually existing socialism."

Although this argument is informed by a variety of social and cultural theorists it is principally indebted to the work of the political theorist Antonio Gramsci and that of the literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. Gramsci's theories of political and cultural revolution are revised in the context of East Central European social history to develop an account of some of the recent political changes in the region. Within this account Bakhtin's notion of cultural emergence, the notion of epochal transformation, is given a context and a social-political vocabulary.

The three domains of human culture - science, art, and life - gain unity only in the individual person who integrates them into his own unity. This union, however, may become mechanical, external...The artist and the human being are naively, most often mechanically, united in one person; the human being leaves "the fretful cares of everyday life" and enters for a time the realm of creative activity as another world, a world of "inspiration, sweet sounds, and prayers." And what is the result? Art is too self-confident, audaciously self-confident, and too high-flown, for it is in no way bound to answer to life. And, of course, life has no hope of ever catching up with art of this kind. "That's too exalted for us" - says life. "That's art, after all! All we've got is the humble prose of living."

...The Poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life...

Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself - in the unity of my answerability.

Mikhail Bakthin

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been an intellectually isolated affair, written at a distance from a supportive and interested academic environment. It has not, however, been a lonely affair, and there are several people who have been with me through all of it, in their different ways. To them I owe many thanks.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Marie Elizabeth Meyer. Her determination to return to school after many years absence and pursue some important personal goals continues to be a source of inspiration for me.

For his unflagging interest in, and support for this thesis I would like to thank Jerry Zaslove. In the context of a long distance relationship and my sometimes curmudgeonly behaviour Jerry has been a rock for me. Always a great source of intellectual support, good humour, encouragement, and interesting photocopies Jerry has been all that I could ask for in a supervisor.

For the use of their office space and for their amiable company I have to thank Harold Macy and Judy Racher. With our little house crowded by two small children, their cabin was a much needed and appreciated retreat.

And those two children, Rosa and Matia, have also been an important part of the development of this thesis. In giving me their love and by demanding mine they kept me at a healthy distance from the social and emotional isolation that sometimes accompanies academic work.

Finally I would like to thank Lynda Drury for helping me get through this project. Without her understanding of what it takes to write a thesis and her commitment as a partner in our lives together, this would have a much more difficult and isolated endeavour than it was. Thanks for standing beside me through it all Lynda.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE INTELLECTUAL CLASS IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE 6
- Gramsci Revisited 9
- State Societies in East Central Europe 15
- Totalitarianism: Authoritarian and Paternalistic 18
- Hegemony or Coercion? Totalitarianism in Practice 26
- Intellectuals and the Class Struggle(s) 32
- The End of Revisionism 45
- Civil Society and the Opposition 48
- Establishing the State of Seige 52

CHAPTER TWO: CIVIL SOCIETY AND POWER IN THE LIFEWORLD 56
- Civil Society and the Case of Solidarity 57
- Civil Society and Political Society 62
- The War of Position in East Central Europe 69
- The Prehistory of Civil Society 78
- Self-Description and the Fiction of Power 80
- Isolation and Communion 87
- Body and Voice in East Central Europe 92
- Habitable Institutions 97
- Hegemony and Everyday Life 104
- Folklore and Politics 108
- Everyday Life and Bakhtin 116

CHAPTER THREE: THE BAKHTINIAN HABILITATION OF THE LIFEWORLD . 121
- The Context of Cultural Development 126
- Walter Benjamin and the Context of Habitable Institutions 129
- The Novel and Everyday Life 142
- Novelization and the Epic World 148
- The Novel and Social Warfare 153
- The World as a Novel in Utero 160
- The Novel as Social Activity 165

CONCLUSION 186

BIBLIOGRAPHY 193

INTRODUCTION

In a provocative essay on Mother Goose[1] the cultural historian Robert Darnton makes the case for national thematic differences in the various European expressions of these nearly identical stories. That is, cultural and socio-economic differences are expressed in subtle ways in the different national versions. It is Darnton's intention to alert the reader of Mother Goose - and by way of example and extension, of other seemingly innocuous or transparent narratives - to the expressions of lived experience that creep into even the most commonplace and formulaic of narratives.

While it is accepted wisdom that in pre-modern, "primitive," or oral cultures a key to understanding the native's culture, her conception of the world and her place in it, is to look to the narratives that dominate and interpenetrate much of life, it is only relatively recently that students of modern societies have begun to look at modern narratives for clues as to what our self-understanding and cosmology as natives of modernity may be.[2] This thesis proceeds from the premise that, even in a modern world where the pedagogical, integrative, and normative functions of narrative - functions expressed in the narratives of pre-modern societies as different as those of Medieval Europe and the Kwakuitl of the Pacific Northwest - have been largely eclipsed by the methods and manifestations of modern science and instrumental reason, even here narrative struggles as a cultural force. Or rather, even in the face of the rationalization and atomization that is part of the modern, scientific world, modern societies continue to develop narratives in an effort to cohere, to integrate, to counter their disintegration. It is not so much that narrative exists as a thing apart from life, but that life creates of its heterogeneity of experiences a form or shape that is the story. As will be argued, this is both a form of social reproduction and, importantly, of social self-protection, a mechanism whereby dysfunctional social developments are at least partially mitigated.

---

[1] "Peasants tell tales: the meaning of Mother Goose," The Great Cat Massacre, New York: Vintage, 1985.

[2] The work of Darnton fits here, but even more so does that of Clifford Geertz (see many of the essays in Local Knowledge, New York: Basic, 1983). The essays by Patrick Wright collected in On Living in an Old Country (London: Verso, 1985) are exemplary of the kind of cultural self-analysis I am referring to. As with much of the "cultural studies" work done by the likes of Paul Willis, Stuart Hall, and Dick Hebdige, among others, however, Wright's work does not concern itself with modern narratives so much as with the artifacts of popular culture and the social practices that they are involved in.

In making this argument the thesis involves itself not only in the contemporary discussion concerning narrative as a social and primarily literary phenomenon; it also broaches the subject of social transformation. That is, the theory of modern narrative, and specifically the novelistic narrative as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, is placed in the context of recent historical and social change, those occurring in East Central Europe.

The choice of East Central Europe grew out of an original desire to explore the role of narrative in a situation that explicitly restricted its role as a means of social self-expression and self-protection. If a case can be made that modernity, with its penchant for things scientific, technological, and rational, implicitly stifles the role of narrative as described (and Milan Kundera, as a writer of modern narratives, does make this argument[3]), then the totalitarian regimes of the post-World War Two Soviet bloc represented examples of articulated and exercised censorship. The question became: How do people tell stories they are not allowed to tell? How are denied and silenced life experiences given voice, shared in society? What are the consequences of an official repudiation of lived experience?

If the theorists of narrative who guided this research were figures like Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukacs, and Kundera, the political and social theorists were the likes of Agnes Heller, Mihaly Vajda, and especially Antonio Gramsci. Especially Gramsci for three reasons: Not only did his own work point to social transformation predicated on a cultural transformation, it also contained a social history of an emergent, nineteenth century Italian revolutionary intellectual stratum or class. Thirdly, his theories of social transformation had already been revised, turned "upside down,"[4] and applied to developments in Poland in an effort to account for the "impossible" emergence of a trade union in opposition to the ruling Communist Party-state.

The development of the thesis proceeds from an understanding of the social and historical context of the recent transformations in East Central Europe, to those pre-conditions that enabled a silenced and atomized society to rebuild itself. Specifically, Chapter One consists of an examination of aspects of Gramsci's political theory and social history as it relates to East Central Europe. This involves a further revision of certain themes and concepts, specifically of the notion of hegemony and the role of intellectuals within that notion. More important than revision, however, is the re-contextualization of these themes and concepts, a consideration of the social history of East Central European culture and especially of the intelligentsia as an existent stratum with very different possibilities open to it than its counterpart in Gramsci's Italy.

---

[3] cf. "The legacy of Cervantes" and "Jerusalem address: The novel and Europe," The Art of the Novel, trans. L.Asher, New York: Grove Press, 1988; see also Georg Lukacs, Theory of the Novel, London: Merlin, 1978, and Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," Illuminations, trans. H.Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

[4] cf. Z.A.Pelczynski, "Solidarity and 'The rebirth of civil society' in Poland, 1976-81," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Chapter Two entails both a more extended discussion of Gramsci's notion of civil society and a consideration of its applicability to the East Central European situation, as well as a move towards an understanding of the pre-conditions for civil society. Theoretically, this move manifests itself in a shift from the macro-social to the micro-social. From contemplating the transformation of societies the discussion moves to examining the ways in which power creates its own self-sustaining narratives and how these are built on the silenced bodies of its victims, those who dare to speak or act on experiences contradictory of the regime's fiction. From here the discussion moves on to how individuals coming out of an enforced silence begin to reconstitute the informal relationships of everyday life that can accommodate the expression and sharing of experience.

If Chapter Two ends with a discussion of how popular culture stands in a particularly rich or promising relationship to everyday life, especially in relation to the kind of cultural and political transformation Gramsci theorized, then Chapter Three proceeds to explore and develop a theory of the novel as the narrative force capable of meeting the heterogenous and chaotic experiences of everyday modernity. Traditional, or pre-modern societies are characterized by a relatively stable, seemingly unchanging, repertoire of not only social and cultural forms, but also life experience. Modernized or modernizing societies, however, know no such stability. As will be argued, it is the kind of flexibility that characterizes the novel that permits it to speak to and of the experiences of modernity. Thus it is posited that the novelization of culture is at least in part responsible for creating the social forms that not only accommodate the reality of experiences officially denied, but also lead to the transformation of that experience.

This is not to say that life and art are mechanically related, that there is a direct, observable cause and effect relationship. In fact this thesis is on several levels a critique of such a narrow or utilitarian conception of the relations between art and life. Nevertheless, in what Bakhtin calls the unity of the individual - perhaps a unity only really possible under conditions of extreme duress, such as experienced by those who daily lived the withered dream of actually existing socialism - the insights and revelations of created narratives begin, perhaps, to correspond to (in the sense of speaking *with*) the prosaic reality of everyday life.

CHAPTER ONE:

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE INTELLECTUAL CLASS IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

The revolutions, evolutions, or even devolutions in East Central Europe since the end of 1988 appear to have defied the analyses of experts from both within and without the region. Although many east bloc watchers welcomed those developments initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s, and cautiously heralded a "warmer" political climate in parts of the Soviet bloc, few could have foreseen what was trumpeted in the heady days at the end of 1989 as the new domino theory. That is, few could have foreseen that the various Communist governments from Warsaw to Sophia would so quickly capitulate to their respective oppositions. And, although the scepticism with which some, like Poland's Adam Michnik, a spokesman for the then outlawed Solidarity,[5] greeted Gorbachev initially may still have to be answered in the USSR proper, in most of the "satellite states" not only is such scepticism passe, but so, it would seem, is Mr. Gorbachev. Glasnost and perestroika, the "legitimate" terms he provided for the opposition in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, have been transcended in these countries. The question remains, however: How were the edifices of the various Communist Parties toppled, in some cases in states that had recently and actively (ie. militarily) opposed reform, openness, and restructuring under any name.

Perhaps the most transparent answer is simply that, given the obvious lack of popular support and the equally obvious impending economic crises, the governments of these states had no desire to maintain their increasingly tenuous and uncomfortable grip on power. Without the support of Moscow - without the protection and the threat of the "Brezhnev Doctrine" - power would have to be held through the unseemly methods of state violence, as was attempted in Romania with the fall of Ceausescu. After Hungary in 1956, Prague in 1968, and Poland in 1981 it would perhaps be safe to assume that there were few communists so convinced of their historical role that they would take on such measures. That is, with the exception of Ceausescu and his Securitat, who were perhaps more concerned with their personal fortunes (and misfortunes) than any ideological, teleological, or historical roles.

---

[5] "Gorbachev - as seen from Warsaw," East European Reporter, Vol. 2:3.

Such an answer, however, completely overlooks the fact that in several of these states where the governing party resigned or agreed to democratic elections, an opposition had coalesced under a system that appeared by its very nature to deny of such a possibility. Totalitarian states have not had a history of permitting independent political activity. Events in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia prior to August 1968 were largely the result of reform efforts within the Communist Party-government constellation, not of political independents, although these quickly emerged.[6] Several commentators have assured us that the road to reform within the ruling Communist Party was limited, perhaps exhausted (although, for one, Mihaly Vajda remained convinced that this was the only possible route to a warmer totalitarianism, what he called "paternalism").[7] The dominant theories of totalitarianism emphasize the efforts of the state to penetrate all areas of social life, to leave no room for activity except that monitored by the Party.[8] If these theories hold water then independent political activity would seem impossible in these societies. How then do we account for the kind of dramatic and overwhelming reversals witnessed in 1989, reversals that have not, as it were, fallen entirely from the sky but have been instigated or quickly appropriated by organized extra-governmental forces?

---

[6] cf. M. Torocsik, "Hungary 1956 - 25 years later," Telos 53; A. Hegedus, "Hungary in '56," Telos 53.

[7] Z.A. Pelczynski, "Solidarity and 'The rebirth of civil society' in Poland, 1976-81," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988, p.361; A. Michnik, Letters From

As a number of commentators, both within and without East Central Europe have found, certain ideas and concepts taken from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci have helped to delineate the course of events in the region, at least prior to 1989. Timothy Garton Ash, writing in 1986, referred to the prevalence of the notion of "civil society" in the oppositional literature, calling it a virtual "leitmotif..in the essays of [Georg] Konrad and [Vaclav] Havel as well as [Adam] Michnik," perhaps the three most prominent voices of opposition in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland respectively.[9] As late as September 1988 Ash continued to invoke the term as meaningful within the East Central European context.[10] Gramsci is certainly not the sole proprietor of the concept of civil society. Nevertheless, as Z.A. Pelczynski contends, a revision of Gramsci's usage comes

---

Prison and Other Essays, trans. M.Latynski, Berkeley: University of California, 1985, pp.135-144; M. Vajda, "East-Central European perspectives," Civil Society and State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988, pp.351-160.

[8] cf. J. Rupnik, "Totalitarianism revisited," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988, pp.271-277; Vajda, pp.349-350.

[9] "Does Central Europe exist?" The New York Review of Books, Oct. 10, 1986, p.48.

[10] "The opposition," The New York Review of Books, Oct. 13, 1988, pp.3-6.

closest to describing that which had been developing in opposition to the Party-State in the Soviet satellite states.[11] For the purposes of this essay we will follow the lead of Pelczynski, among others, in assuming the importance of a "revisionist, upside-down, neo-Gramscian" approach to developments in East Central Europe.[12] Before doing so, however, we will briefly look at several of Gramsci's concepts, and in the course of an examination of examples from East Central Europe, modify them to meet the demands of accommodating and explaining events in the region.

Gramsci Revisited

Antonio Gramsci's political and social theory originated as a response within a Marxist framework to the differences between the Russian political situation prior to 1917 and that of Italy in the 1920s and 1930s. The Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 was not a model for the Italian Communists, as Gramsci's analysis made clear. Consequently, different strategies entirely were required. The terms he used to both describe the situations of Russia and Italy (or bourgeois society generally) and to delineate a strategy, terms that have their resonance in our discussion of East Central Europe, include: state society, civil society, integral society, war of movement, war of position, and - most importantly for the purposes of this chapter - hegemony.

---

[11] "Solidarity and 'The rebirth of civil society' in Poland, 1976-81," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

[12] ibid., p.365.

For Gramsci, as for Marx, the state represented coercion, its power vested in the military and police forces. A "state society" was one governed by coercion, by the rule of law as enforced by the organs of power. Czarist Russia was an example of such a state society: the autocratic rights of the Czar were impinged on by few if any other rights; his policies prevailed over the largely decorative Duma; the military and police were at his disposal. Because power was geographically and formally concentrated in the capital of St. Petersburg and in the person of the czar a revolutionary "war of movement" could, by taking the czar and the capital, take the country.

Roger Bocock points out that such a war of movement was not in Gramsci's estimation possible in western European societies because there, unlike Russia, there was a well-developed "civil society."[13] Where the state society was ruled by coercion through a centralized institution and organ of power, civil society was governed by consensus. The centre of power was diffuse, found not only in the relatively more liberal and substantive democratic political institutions, but also in the many non-political institutions that comprised and maintained these societies. Although maintaining his position and class analysis as a Marxist Gramsci is distinguished from Marx, as Norberto Bobbio makes clear, by his revaluation of the concept of civil society.[14] As he, and Z.A. Pelczynski, note: the history of Gramsci's concept must be traced back through Marx to

---

[13] Hegemony, London: Tavistock, 1986, p.27.

[14] "Gramsci and the concept of civil society", Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988, p.83.

Hegel.[15] For Bobbio,

> Gramsci speaks of civil society 'as Hegel understands it'...and he immediately explains that he means by civil society 'the political and cultural hegemony which a social group exercises over the whole of society, as the ethical content of the State.'[16]

Pelczynski offers his learned understanding of Hegel's conception of civil society in these terms:

> Civil society...is an arena in which modern man legitimately gratifies his self-interest and develops his individuality, but also learns the value of group action, social solidarity and the dependence of his welfare on others, which educate him for citizenship and prepare him for participation in the political arena of the state.[17]

For Pelczynski, this Hegelian usage, after being radically reduced in Marx, is "revitalized" in Gramsci, who

> insisted that in modern, advanced western countries civil society was not just the economic sphere, nor a mere adjunct to the state. It was a sphere of various autonomous organizations and activities, which by no means merely perpetuated the ideology and class interests of the bourgeoisie. While in the economic and state sphere the modern bourgeoisie exercised more or less full 'domination,' in the civil sphere it did not always have a monopoly of political, moral and intellectual influence, or what he called 'hegemony.'[18]

Against an economistic or reductionist Marxism Bobbio and Pelczynski's arguments underscore these points: One, that for Gramsci the realm of civil society was not simply the "realm of economic relations" as it was for Engels, nor was its

---

[15] Bobbio, pp.82-88; Pelczynski, pp.364-365.

[16] pp.83-84.

[17] p.364.

[18] p.365.

"anatomy...to be sought in political economy" as Marx suggested.[19] Two, that the relations of base to superstructure were not simply deterministic, the base (which, for Marx and Engels, includes their notion of civil society) determining the superstructure (the state, etcetera). In fact, as Bobbio contends, Gramsci's revaluation of civil society placed it squarely in the sphere of the superstructural [20], and attributed to it, through the agency of ideology, a force "capable of shaping and creating a new history and contributing to the formation of a new power which will progressively emerge."[21] Contra Marx and Engels a superstructural element was given, in Gramsci, the ability to determine new historical forces, something Marxism proper had understood as belonging to the base. As Bobbio points out, this revaluation of civil society allowed a way out of a "sterile and indecisive class struggle" concentrated exclusively on the base, the limited struggle of trade unionism (the fate of Communism outside of Russia); it also obviated the "idolatry of the state" (the fate of Hegelianism - and, ironically, of Bolshevism). The revolutionary struggle would henceforth take place on two fronts. "One front is concerned with transcending the material conditions which operate within the base; the other is set against a false way of transcending these conditions (one which would be pure domination without consent)."[22]

Gramsci's strategy in civil societies - in Italy, that is - involved engagement in a protracted "war of position" in an effort to achieve hegemony over civil society, and through that hegemony alter both the relations of production and the state. "The concept of hegemony," Bocock emphasizes, "was the central, most original, idea in Gramsci's social theory and philosophy."[23] Whereas for Lenin - with whom Bobbio argues Gramsci's theories are in dialogue[24] - the question of leadership was not made problematic by that of domination and force, for Gramsci force was "subordinate to the moment of hegemony" and the "conquest of hegemony preced[ed] the conquest of power".[25] For Gramsci hegemony came to mean not only political leadership, but also cultural leadership. And this cultural leadership meant not only the maintenance of cultural and social values, ideas, etcetera - as in the case of existing bourgeois hegemony - but, as Bobbio notes, for Gramsci the revolutionary it more importantly meant the "introduction of a 'reform' in the *strong* meaning of this term when it refers to a transformation of customs and culture."[26] Because Gramsci contended that the ruling class was dependent on consensus as to its hegemony over society, the "soft underbelly of capitalism" - as Pelczynski puts it - lay in civil society, in those institutions and areas of social life that maintained and perpetuated that system. To attempt to seize the state or the means of production and ignore the power that lay in civil society was to ignore both the strength and the vulnerability of bourgeois societies. "Hegemony," as one commentator has remarked,

---

[19] Engels and Marx, cited in Pelczynski, p.364.

[20] p.84.

[21] p.88.

[22] Bobbio, p.90.

---

[23] p.21.

[24] cf. p.91 and p.99n.54:1.

[25] Bobbio, p.92.

[26] p.92.

> in bourgeois societies accounts for bourgeois production, reproduction, and ideology; but also for the institutions that oppose the bourgeoisie: it accounts for the mechanisms of involvement in capitalism that take in oppositional forms...It is about the shifting relationship of dominant and subordinate cultures and ideologies. It is the dialectic of resistance.[27]

One might add: it is also the dialectic of consensual or majoritarian domination, of, as Bocock says, "leadership...attained through the active consent of major groups of society."[28] The strength of the hegemonic order, articulated in all the institutions of civil society, is expressed in its flexibility, its ability to incorporate difference and resistance. A civil society, then, is one flexible enough to absorb the expressions of opposition and resistance that *appear* to threaten it.

Although civil society in Gramsci is separate from the state, the reality of such societies is that they incorporate or authorize the state. That is, although, as Pelczynski suggests, the state may be more or less "dominated" by the ruling class, it is legitimated by civil society, by its institutions, its ethics, its intellectual life to the extent that the ideas and interests of the ruling class have hegemony over civil society. In such a society, the rule of law, enforced by police and military organs, may be called upon to deal with oppositional elements it cannot absorb. In these circumstances Gramsci's civil society becomes, realistically, an "integral society" where features of civil and state societies are integrated. In practice liberal-democratic societies better fit the model of an integral society than they do that of a civil society. Ultimately, however, even in integral societies the power of the state and its actions are at least passively consented to by the "major groups" of society.

---

[27] Martin Laba, "Gramsci and popular culture," unpublished lecture, Simon Fraser University, November, 1987.

[28] p.11.

State Societies in East Central Europe

In his essay, "East Central European Perspectives,"[29] Mihaly Vajda furnishes some concrete historical and social material that begins the work of turning Gramsci "upside-down." The essay takes up themes elaborated in Jeno Szucs' essay, "Three Historical Regions of Europe,"[30] and turns them towards an understanding of the different extra- as well as inter-regional developments of the relations between civil society and the state.

Following Szucs, Vajda divides greater Europe into three cultural-historical regions. The westernmost comprises the region occupied by the medieval Carolingian Empire; the easternmost comprises that part of Europe formerly under the auspices of the Byzantine Church, its western border marked by the historic divide between Latin and Byzantine Christianity. These two regions mark the two most distinct models of historical, social, and cultural development; the third, central region represents an amalgam of the two.

In the West, Vajda argues, the nation-state emerged after an autonomous civil society. There, the gradual decay of traditional constraints bound up in the peasant villages and in feudal society, the existence of relatively independent feudal lands, the gradual emergence of autonomous social groups, such as the guilds and free cities, and of autonomous individuals laid the groundwork for social cohesiveness and independence before the nation-state consolidated itself. Vajda sees in this development, and its consequent history, the formal arrangement whereby the state is held responsible to society.[31]

---

[29] in Civil Society and State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

[30] in Civil Society and State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

In contrast, in the East, traditional constraints were maintained by an autocratic state. Villages and small towns retained their traditional hierarchies; serfdom virtually enslaved the peasantry until late in the nineteenth century; the Church, independent in the West, was intimately tied to the Russian Crown; the nobility were servile, dependent on the state for privileges, largely devoid of rights and autonomy. The intelligentsia produced by the servile aristocracy risked internal exile or imprisonment if it attempted to act autonomously, without the blessing of the Crown. This, or external exile, the choice of many independent Russians, to name Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin, and Emma Goldman as three rather luminous examples, was the fate of many of Imperial Russia's independent souls. What modernization was attempted was limited, and initiated from above by the state or its agents. The autocratic state of the czars controlled a society with virtually no independent institutions or individuals. Vajda has called this a "statal society"[32] and it conforms to Gramsci's own designation of a state society where coercion rather than consensus maintains power.

---

[31] pp.341-342.

[32] p.343.

In East Central Europe, that third European region between the historically Carolingian West and the Byzantine East, developments along the Western model were cut short by the expansion of the Turkish empire in the fifteenth century. Although these developments were not as advanced as in the neighbouring West, nevertheless, with the withdrawal of the Turks and the establishment of defensive, autocratic, multi-national states, "the consciousness and attitudes of individualism were alive and well, the desire and demand for autonomy ever present."[33] While most of the population was scattered in small peasant villages, and while agriculture was the chief industry, small towns did spring up, giving a home to some degree of small enterprise and non-traditional (that is, non-peasant) life. As Vajda remarks, however, despite the fact that East Central European societies never achieved the rigidity of the Russian statal society,

> Society as such was never strong enough to challenge that group which retained its grip upon political power. Certain liberties were obtained, but there was no possibility of reaching the stage where political power is delegated by society and made responsible to it.[34]

To cast Vajda's brief history in Gramscian terms: In the West the institutions and attitudes, including those of individual freedom and independent enterprise, that comprise civil society arose prior to the consolidation of the nation-state, which owed its legitimacy to civil society. Hence Marx's insistence that civil society determined the state. In the East, the state, through a vast bureaucracy and a system of imperial privileges rather than naturalized legal rights, subsumed all institutions under its dominion. Civil society, in any real sense, was either non-existent, or existed at the whim and margins of a thoroughly statal society. In East Central Europe, although some aspects of civil society existed, these were by and large subordinate to state society. Independent institutions and attitudes existed in varying degrees of autonomy throughout the region, but rarely were they able to affect any significant influence over the state. Where hegemony was exercised in the West, the traditional rule of force prevailed in the East; and in East Central Europe, while civil society at times aspired to a limited cultural leadership, political leadership remained firmly fixed in the military-bureaucratic apparatus of the various autocratic regimes.

---

[33] Vajda, p.343.

[34] ibid.

Totalitarianism: Authoritarian and Paternalistic

Since the Second World War certain classes of what Gramsci called state societies have come to be known as totalitarian societies. In these societies it is not just a case of the ruling class maintaining their dominion through the coercive organs of the state; it is also a case of the penetration of all remnants or traces of civil society by the state. As Jacques Rupnik and Mihaly Vajda suggest, however, there are different models and realities that exist under the rubric of totalitarianism. Even within the confines of the Soviet satellite states - those states that correspond geographically almost exactly to that historical social and cultural region demarcated by Vajda and Szucs as East Central

Europe - there existed several variations on the theme of totalitarianism, and these variations have implications for a nuanced, neo-Gramscian analysis of the "revolutions" of 1989 in the region.

Rupnik, in his essay, "Totalitarianism revisited," examines the career of the concept of "totalitarianism," especially its ascendency among "independent political thinkers in Central-Eastern Europe" after 1968.[35] This ascendence is perhaps equal to its descent as a popular concept among western political scientists at the same time. Rupnik associates these different career trajectories to differences in relations to the Soviet Union. The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the first stages of detente, when the west began to hope for a liberalized Communism, offering the carrot of massive bank loans for industrial modernization and reform.[36] For East Central Europeans, however, 1968 marked the "end of revisionism," the end of hopes for a non-totalitarian or warmer, human-faced Communism with the implementation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the invasion of Prague by armies of the Warsaw Pact.

Among the key themes that Rupnik discovers in contemporary or post-1968 treatments of totalitarianism by East Central European thinkers are those of the institutionalized lie, totalitarian language, the significance of memory as resistance and the state's desire to extinguish it,[37] censorship, and methods of maintaining the appearance or formality of a "social contract" through non-violent means. As he points out, several of these themes appeared well before 1968. Both Czeslaw Milosz's The Captive Mind and George Orwell's 1984 represent what Rupnik describes as the literary and philosophic treatments of totalitarianism. In these instances it is the Stalinist variety. The emphasis in both books, though to different degrees and in different ways, is on the power of language, access to and shaping of information, as well as the "logic" of the state's domination.

---

[35] in Civil Society and State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988, p.263.

[36] Rupnik, p.264; cf. T.G.Ash, The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, Kent, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, pp.318-320.

[37] cf. V.Precan, "Pogrom of historians" in Index on Censorship, April 1986, pp.24-28.

But Stalinism is no longer the bogeyman in contemporary - or rather, post-1960s - writing on the subject. With 1968 it is Marxism-Leninism that is being judged. August, 1968 meant,

> according to Kolakowski, the 'clinical death' of Marxist revisionism in Eastern Europe. From that moment, Communism 'ceased being an intellectual problem and became merely a question of power'.[38]

And the question of power becomes increasingly complicated. Rupnik's analysts tend to agree on one thing: that they live in a state society that no longer relies on terror for control, that surveillance and active harassment can by and large be supplanted by other, more sophisticated, more participatory means. One of these is the notion of a new social contract.

Rupnik focuses on the work of the Yugoslavian Milan Simecka to develop this idea. Within this new social contract

> the citizens 'adapt themselves' by giving up their individual rights (civil liberties) and collective rights (freedom of association) and receive in exchange job security and a slowly - though fairly steadily - rising standard of living.

---

[38] Rupnik, p.267.

Rupnik adds, "The advent of the consumer society [in parts of East Central Europe] has perfected this 'contract,' which has been in gestation since the 1960s."[39] As well, the issue of censorship no longer raises itself in any substantial, institutionalized form. Now it is, as Georg Konrad put it, "negative and defensive...Now it advises you what not to say."[40] This as opposed to a positive, aggressive censorship which was prescriptive, such as that institutionalized by the policy makers and aesthetic police of Socialist Realism. But more than a retreat from the prescriptive to the proscriptive marks the changed reality of censorship in the Soviet bloc: self-censorship has become so much a part of life in these societies that the very notion of traditional censorship (the kind easily vilified by opponents of totalitarianism) or of an official, institutionalized organ of censorship is for the most part unnecessary.[41] As Rupnik notes, "The relative isolation of dissident intellectuals...would seem, in a way, to confirm the effectiveness of these new techniques of totalitarian social control."[42]

This is also Mihaly Vajda's argument, although he contrasts totalitarianism - "which seeks to control every aspect of social life" - with what he considers to be East Central Europe's "paternalistic tradition." "A paternalistic system," Vajda contends

> will be satisfied so long as political decisions...remain in the hands of a privileged policy-making group. This kind of system has no need to

---

[39] p.276.

[40] cited in Rupnik, p.277.

[41] cf. Voslensky interview, Index on Censorship, April, 1986.

[42] p.277.

destroy those autonomies which do not impinge on its privileges.[43]

This vision of paternalism, as he indicates in his analyses of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, is perhaps most fully realized in the latter. In 1986 Ioan Davies called Hungary the "land of Kadar the King." Notwithstanding "a few breathless days in 1956 this is the most democratic society Hungary has ever known. But," he concludes, "it is a Magyar democracy, elitist and populist, centralized and pluralistic, traditional and avant-garde."[44] This confused and confusing country was held together by the paternalism of Janos Kadar, the man chosen by Moscow to "normalize" Hungary after the events of 1956. Vajda's contention is that Kadar's route to normalization had benefitted from the bloodbath of 1956. That is, "the ruling Communist elite...learnt to listen and to notice certain demands...It has learnt to channel [autonomous] forces into innocuous outlets, instead of suppressing them."[45]

In Czechoslovakia, however, the chosen route to normalization was to radically excise those elements of society that "sustained the traditions of autonomy and democracy." These traditions, as Vajda indicates by way of a brief historical sketch, were deep-rooted in Bohemia, and were revitalized in the inter-war years of this century. A Communist government that aspired to social dominance, whether through enlightened paternalism or totalitarianism, had first to wipe out the living memory of democracy and autonomy.[46] Hence the ostracizing of those who supported "socialism with a human face," the declassification of intellectuals and activists.

---

[43] p.349.

[44] Canadian Forum, May, 1986, p.41.

[45] p.356.

In Poland, Vajda charges the Communist elite with "shilly-shallying," unable to "come down on the side of either totalitarianism or paternalism." Unlike Hungary's experience, Poland's Stalinist elite was removed "relatively painlessly," and Vajda suggests this may be the reason for its equivocal responses to crisis.[47] Although the state has responded to pressure from below, it nevertheless fails to take the opportunity to practice what is in effect enlightened despotism, resorting instead to martial force whenever it perceives a threat to its continued domination of society, witness the suppression of the Gdansk strike in 1970, the crackdown of 1976, and the imposition of a military government in 1981.

In their discussions of the applicability of models of totalitarianism, post-totalitarian authoritarianism, and paternalism to the socio-political realities of the various states within East Central Europe Rupnik and Vajda broach the problem of Communist Party-states attempting to achieve consensual domination of society. This situation is roughly analogous to Gramsci's model of an integral state, underpinned by the consensual arrangement that Gramsci determined as hegemony in bourgeois society. That is, while the Communist Party-state responded with naked coercive force in certain instances, it had largely managed to find less explicitly repressive measures to continue its policies. Of course, the success of the regime, its ability to actually implement and carry through its policies rather than simply announce them, was entirely dependent on the degree to which consensus - perhaps in the form of a new social contract - was real, the extent to which it was active rather than resigned participation.

---

[46] pp.354-355.

[47] pp.352-353.

Measured in these terms the model of Hungary was most "successful" - though the rapidity of Kadar's fall from grace and the virtual elimination of the Communist Party in recent elections indicates the limited nature of even this success. The strength of Kadar's regime rested on its piecemeal liberalization, on the transformation of the Stalinist notion that "those who aren't with us are against us" into: "those who aren't against us are with us."

The Polish succession, however, wavered between the popularity necessary for consensual rule and the coercion deemed necessary to maintain itself. In the process it undermined its claims to real popular support.[48] Ultimately, the Polish Communist Party-state lost its claim to representing even the working class to the independent trade union Solidarity; and every effort to reform an economy in grave danger of collapsing merely increased the distance between hegemonic rule and outright authoritarianism, the latter made increasingly unworkable by the existence of social forces bent on non-compliance with the Communist Party-state in the area of the economy and actively creating the autonomous, sometimes legal or quasi-legal, often underground institutions that were part of an emerging civil society. As Pelczynski notes,

> It would not be stretching Gramsci's terms too much to say that during 1981 Solidarity's ideas achieved 'hegemony' over Polish society, but the state's 'domination' over the economy - and, even more, the police and the

---

[48] Vajda, pp.352-353.

army - remained intact.[49]

After the imposition of martial law, although the trade union and its related offspring of independent social groups were pushed underground, Solidarity retained this hegemony, as we saw in 1988 when the Communist government entered into negotiations with the man they had vowed never to negotiate with, Lech Walesa.[50]

In Czechoslovakia the problem for the government was less one of attempting to achieve the form and appearances of hegemony, than of obliterating all efforts to coalesce the declassed and disinherited of the normalized Husak regime. That is, *any* form of social activity became a target for harassment and imprisonment. Not only the signatories of Charter 77, calling for substantive as opposed to formal recognition of the Helsinki Accord on human rights, were targeted; so were musicians and music enthusiasts who, sometimes under the sign of John Lennon rather than V.I.Lenin, pursued an interest in popular music. As an indication of the classic totalitarian impulse to penetrate and monitor all social activities the indictment of the Jazz Section in 1987 has few contemporary equals.

Nevertheless, after Husak's government was installed in 1968, there was the attempt to legitimize the overthrow of the Dubcek regime. Vajda refers to this as the "superficial" appearance of a "free election." In contrast to the aftermath of Hungary in 1956, where rebels were branded as counter-revolutionaries, imprisoned, sometimes tortured and/or executed, the Prague revanchists gave former supporters of Dubcek et al the opportunity to "reconsider" their ill-fated support. In Milan Kundera's novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, the politically uninvolved Tomas is asked to "reconsider" certain statements during the warmer days of the Prague Spring. He declines, and loses not only the limited opportunity to recant past "sins" afforded him by the authorities of normalization, he also sees his rights and privileges as a doctor eroded, becoming in the end a truck driver for an agricultural co-operative. Tomas becomes one of the thousands of declassed professionals and intellectuals. Similarly, Kundera found himself unable to make a living in his profession as writer and teacher.[51] Vaclav Havel, internationally celebrated playwright becomes a brewery worker - when not imprisoned or placed under house arrest for Charter 77 activities. An outspoken member of the Catholic clergy is relegated to the cellar, performing the duties of stoker and janitor. The cultural leadership of society, not to mention those who had achieved political leadership, were "free" to beg forgiveness from the new government. If they chose not to exercise this "freedom" they were "free" to pursue careers involving less responsibility, less opportunity, less visibility, less of everything except humiliation and hard labour. Nevertheless, as per the Communist Party-state's fears, any form of non-state social activity that emerged had greater legitimacy, at least greater interest, for the public than those sponsored by the Communist Party-state. Witness the popularity of the Jazz Section, even in the face of naked repression. Hegemony, substantial or illusory, became the battleground, the stakes, in the struggle of the Communist Party-state against its various, largely unorganized, oppositions.

---

[49] p.371.

[50] Ash, 1988, p.4.

---

[51] cf. The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, trans. M.H.Heim, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1981, pp.68-72; "Introduction to a Variation," in Jacques and His Master, trans. M.H.Heim, New York: Harper and Row, 1985, p.1.

Hegemony or Coercion? Totalitarianism in Practice

In his discussion of the difference between the Leninist and Gramscian conception of hegemony, Bobbio points out that for Lenin hegemony refers to political leadership while for Gramsci it is a larger, more inclusive cultural leadership. In his notes on the Italian Risorgimento Gramsci marks the differences between the two in these terms:

> ...the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership.' A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate,' or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well.[52]

As Bobbio notes

> ...for Lenin, dictatorship and hegemony go hand in hand, and in any case the factor of force is the primary and decisive one.
> For Gramsci the conquest of hegemony precedes the conquest of power, while for Lenin the former accompanies the latter, or actually follows it.[53]

By the post-World War Two period, the political leadership of the nascent Communist world was at least appearing to follow a more Gramscian version of conquest, albeit without acknowledging the author of the strategy. That is, in the interests of consolidating their political power the Communist Party courted the various nationalities' cultural leadership. Yalta may have put much of Europe under Soviet influence, but real power lay in the nation-state's recognition of the cultural as well as political leadership of the Communist Party.

---

[52] Selections From the Prison Notebooks, ed. and trans. Q.Hoare and G.N.Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp.57-58.

[53] Bobbio, p.92.

Czeslaw Milosz's The Captive Mind illustrates this point well. In its many variations on the place and response of Polish intellectuals to the devastation of their lives and nation in the Second World War this book describes how the Moscow-based Polish Workers' Party (later the Polish United Workers' Party) was intent on *winning over*, not coercing, the most powerful and skilful of the young literati. At first the appeals were based in a humanist response to the ravages of fascism, the "logical" development of capitalist society. For many Poles who had come of age in the horror of Nazi controlled Poland the political leadership of the Communists, especially as it spoke in honeyed tongues - appealing to their vanity as cultural leaders, as men and women who grasped a sense of Truth and who would help educate and rebuild a prostrate nation - appeared reasonable. Milosz puts himself squarely within this group. He was a leftist before the war, and although like many Poles (and Lithuanians, of whom he counts himself one) on the left he may not have shared in the enthusiasm for the USSR that pre-war leftists of other nationalities expressed, nonetheless he was sympathetic. And, as he puts it, the pragmatic task of rebuilding a destroyed homeland overrode questions of ideology for many. The Party, not yet entirely synonymous with the state, wore a tolerant mask and provided political leadership and, significantly, moral leadership.

As in many parts of East Central Europe, the inter-war period in Poland had been one of degrees of rightist or proto-fascist oppression. The Pilsudski government, although initially drawing substantial support from socialists and liberals, drifted to the far right, entertaining anti-semitic and fascist, as well as traditional conservative interests. As Milosz notes, a return to the pre-war society was not an appealing prospect for many Poles. Likewise in Hungary, where the proto-fascism of Admiral Horthy hardly constituted a popular alternative to the initially benevolent and rhetorically palatable pronouncements and policies of the Stalinists. Perhaps alone among the handful of post-Habsburg, post-Romanov, post-Ottoman states in the region with an enviable inter-war polity was Czechoslovakia, which had enjoyed the fabled democracy of Tomas Masaryk. But, even here there were many who supported the Communists, perhaps because, as one of the most industrialized nations in the region, it had a relatively large working-class.

The neat dichotomy of totalitarianism/coercive rule versus liberal democracy/consensual rule/hegemony that dominates the perception of the differences between pre-1989 East and West tends to fall apart, or is at least complicated by the reality of the months and years immediately after World War Two. The various Moscow parties that emerged as the power brokers in the wake of Yalta in East Central Europe had a degree of legitimacy Cold Warriors in the West would not like to accept. Milosz's book, at once an indictment of the instrumentalism of Soviet Communism, is decidedly not an endorsement of the existing alternatives in Poland. There was no fully formed liberal democratic society waiting to be ushered in. The devastation was profound. Not only the tangible structures of Polish society, its cities and institutions, but also its social and cultural life had to be rebuilt. Milosz writes of the difficulty that many of the young people, who had lived underground, experienced when the underground no longer existed, not just as a place to be, but - importantly - as a source of meaning in their lives. The culture and social organization of the underground was not conducive to life "above ground," as it were. The appeal to direct and violent action on the part of a now obsolete and politically frustrated Home Army, now directed at those who publicly led the campaign for reconstruction, gave these public leaders the popular support for their program of liquidating the "terrorists." If nothing else, Milosz's account of post-war Poland suggests that the Communists had achieved not only legitimacy but a substantial hegemony over Polish society.

Again, it is unusual for us to think of hegemony, of consensual dominion or genuine leadership of the larger cultural arena, as an aspect of totalitarian regimes. But in certain instances those societies we consider to be state societies, totalitarian societies, have had the substance and appearance of popularly elected, hegemonic orders. The fascist states, such as Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, and Germany in the 1930s can be placed in this context. How to explain the acceptance, even active support, by the German people of the policies of the National Socialists? Can it not be argued that in the mid-1930s the party of German renewal achieved "leadership...through the active consent of major groups in society," Bocock's criteria for hegemony?[54] Likewise, in a specific historical and social situation, it can be argued that the Communist Party-states also achieved and enjoyed hegemony in post-war East Central Europe, even though it had demonstrated its totalitarian proclivities.

---

[54] p.11.

Perhaps the key point here is not just that the Communists seized an opportunity presented by the devastation of nation and society wrought by the military and police apparatus of the Third Reich, but that they deliberately set out to achieve a broader cultural leadership through the existing national cultural figures - that is, they were bent on *winning over* the post-war national intelligentsia. Gramsci analyses the major symptom of the post-World War One crisis in Italian society as consisting of the fact that the existing ensemble of economic-political-cultural relations - what he calls the "historical bloc" - was, as Bobbio says, "no longer able to attract the intellectuals, who are the protagonists of civil society."[55] The historical bloc that had maintained its hegemony prior to the First World War through the agency of supportive intellectuals was losing that hegemony as traditional and non-traditional (the marginal or non-institutionalized intelligentsia) pursued "morals" and "utopias," respectively. "[I]n other words, neither group has any link with reality."[56] For Gramsci, this opened up the possibility of Communist intellectuals establishing themselves as heirs to the role of agents of hegemony. In their case they would be representing the new and emergent historical bloc of a socialist ensemble of economic-political-cultural relations.

In practice the post-World War Two Stalinists attempted exactly such a manoeuvre. Not only did they assume prominent positions in the post-war coalition governments in East Central Europe; they actively pursued the involvement of non-Communist intellectuals in their cultural organs and enterprises. Ultimately, of course, cultural policies proved to be as instrumental as political ones. In virtually every instance of a coalition government it was the Communists who occupied the key Ministry of the Interior, and through this Ministry the savage and subtle elimination of substantive democratic possibilities was carried out in the East bloc. Likewise, the welcome mat to non-Party artists and writers was effectively withdrawn. First, pending their membership in the Party. Second, pending their acceptance of the steadily more limited dictates of aesthetic policy - the gradual implementation of the canon of Socialist Realism. It might be argued that the Communist Party could only ever be perceived as hegemonic prior to its incorporation as the Party-state (prior, that is, to its elimination of political and cultural alternatives through coercive measures). But even in this incorporation it could still boast considerable support amongst those traditional "protagonists of civil society," the intellectuals.

---

[55] p.90.

[56] ibid.

Intellectuals and the Class Struggle(s)

The Stalinist state of terror has, Jacques Rupnik asserts, unjustly born the weight of anti-totalitarian polemics.[57] Miklos Haraszti would agree.[58] As would fellow Hungarians

---

[57] Rupnik, p.267.

Georg Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi.[59] In Rupnik's survey and analysis of East Central European writing on the subject these three, among others, represent what he calls the "Hungarian thesis." The Hungarians elaborate points made by Milosz and Kundera concerning the attraction of intellectuals to both the "magic circle of power"[60] and the "inescapable" logic of dialectical materialism, diamat, what Milosz refers to as "the Method." Put succinctly, Marxism, but especially its Leninist-Stalinist version, provided intellectuals with at least three powerful and seductive notions: One, that it had an "objective" or "scientific" analysis of capitalist society; two, that it provided the means by which to overcome this exploitive society; three, it suggested a way for intellectuals to overcome their own alienation from the material world, especially that of the working class. With these notions it suggested a way of overcoming the impasse that Gramsci described as the crisis of post-First World War Italian society: the failure of liberal democracy to attract intellectuals as a viable culture and political-economy in the given socio-historical situation. Rather than redeeming the working class, Marxism redeemed the emergent intellectual stratum in industrialized societies.

Although this was all done in the name of the working class, it was understood and applied in a paternalistic fashion. Agnes Heller, a philosopher and sociologist who grew up and studied in Hungary, is blunt in her assessment:

---

[58] cf. The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism, trans. K.Landesmann, S.Landesmann, and S.Wasserman, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

[59] cf. The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power, trans. A.Arato and R.E.Allen, Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1979.

[60] cf. Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.

> Some of the best intellectuals coupled their overt contempt for capitalism with covert contempt for the empirically existing working class. The empirically given working class, they argued, is not aware of its real interests and real needs; theory should be brought into the working class from outside. The intellectuals know what the workers ought to think, feel and act, for they are in possession of 'science', the only true science regarding the functioning of society.[61]

The theory of the vanguard, of an enlightened elite leading a working class conscious of and accepting of this enlightened leadership is one of the major foundations of what we understand as Communist totalitarianism. Within this notion, as Konrad and Szelenyi argue so well, is the dynamic that creates a new social order, a new class structure, based not on ownership of the means of production but on its management. The emergent, dominant class is not the heralded revolutionary working class but the intellectual class: the technocrats, ideologues, writers and philosophers, those who have the education and facility with language and ideas to create the images and desires of the larger society. As Konrad and Szelenyi argue, these images and desires, these "general interests of mankind," have in every age been the descriptions of intellectuals, and as such have been the generalization of *their* particular interests. That is, philosophy, the reflective activity of intellectuals, has always, and in undeniably different ways in different ages, fixed the intellectual as the essence of humanness.[62] Marxism provided the "great ideological innovation" of positing

> an identity of interest between an intelligentsia striving to realize its transcendence and a working class struggling to acquire a consciousness of

---

[61] "On formal democracy," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988, p.132.

[62] cf. Konrad and Szelenyi, pp.13-14.

> its class situations...The left intellectuals of the day, [however,] were not aware that in the idea of a socialist society they were enunciating the ideology of class power for the intelligentsia.[63]

With Lenin's political theory the interests of the working class recede behind those of their revolutionary partners, though the former appear to stand as prominent so as to legitimize the interests of the latter.

Early on in The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power Konrad and Szelenyi make a distinction between social systems that underlines this point. In their typology there are three social systems, distinguished not only by economic relations, but also by the measure of intentionality or planning in them. They are: the traditional redistributive economy, the market economy, and the rational redistributive economy.[64] In the latter, which is also called the "socialist redistributive economy," economic relations are managed by specialists, technocrats or ideologues depending on the various "warming" and "cooling" trends in the Party-state edifice. That is, "scientific socialism," Marxism-Leninism, through the agency of intellectuals, determines the relations of production and consumption in society. The intellectuals represent the interests of the working class because they have either achieved technical knowledge and/or have risen in the Party, acquiring political skills and knowledge or ideology in the process (that is, they have become intellectuals). The rational redistributive economy is legitimated by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which accords an intellectual elite a "management" position on behalf of the whole of the working class.

---

[63] ibid., p.71.

[64] cf. ibid. pp.49-51.

Market economy, on the other hand, seeks its legitimation in the ideology of "free market." Like the ideology that legitimizes the rational redistributive economy it is dependent on a model that is an ideal type.[65] The free market model, however, accords intellectuals no special leadership role. They are like other producers and consumers in the market, simply sellers of labour, albeit of a specialized nature. Thus, the rational redistributive economy, besides appealing to the intellectuals' bias towards the primacy of knowledge and science (a superior ideology and Method), also serves their self-interest by removing them from the realm of common production and consumption.

This is one of Konrad and Szelenyi's most important points, and it has to be understood in the context of Gramsci's notion concerning the centrality of the intellectuals in constituting civil society and the hegemony of the dominant or ruling class. Konrad and Szelenyi argue, using historical examples that coincide with those put forward by both Jeno Szucs[66] and Mihaly Vajda,[67] that in the whole of Eastern Europe, roughly that demarcated by Vajda and Szucs as East Central and Eastern Europe, intellectuals never achieved the degree of autonomy their contemporaries enjoyed and suffered under in the West. In the market economy intellectuals had by the nineteenth century formed what Konrad and Szelenyi call a "social stratum," selling "their knowledge or their cultural wares on the open market."[68] In the rest of Europe, dominated by traditional redistributive economies where the economy and political power were concentrated in Imperial hands and distributed through the mechanism of privileges, opportunities for intellectuals were limited. Konrad and Szelenyi characterize the contrast in these terms:

---

[65] cf. Herman E. Daly and John B.Cobb, Jr. on their decidedly non-socialist critique of the "misplaced concreteness" of the market, and classical and neo-classical economic theory generally, in their For the Common Good, Boston: Beacon, 1989.

[66] cf. "Three historical regions of Europe," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

[67] cf. "East Central European perspectives," Civil Society and State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

> In the West a third force had already arrayed itself against the coalition of centralized state and landed nobility, and was to succeed in overthrowing it at the end of the [eighteenth] century. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, no alternative existed to this coalition, and anyone who wished to put his knowledge to some use in society had to enter the service of the absolutist state, or else abandon intellectual activity altogether.[69]

Clearly, what the intelligentsia lacked in Eastern Europe were the institutions that would enable the emergence of a civil society through which they might exercise their talents and skills without the necessary consent and support of the state. Given the ideology of Marxism, as passed through Lenin, intellectuals who could find no "home" in the bureaucratic or police services of the state found one in the notion of the vanguard and the rational redistributive economy. This follows Gramsci's analysis of post-First World War Italy where the existing historical bloc failed to attract the critical intelligentsia. Rather than constituting a civil society with which to oppose the Romanov and Habsburg autocracies, intellectuals in Eastern Europe took the "short cut," as Konrad and Szelenyi put it, to power: they created the Bolshevik solution. This provided them with both the legitimacy of representing working class interests and the political pragmatics to assume control over the state and economy. It is no coincidence that

---

[68] p.85.

[69] p.105.

Konrad and Szelenyi ascribe a confluence to the ethos of the rational redistributive economy and the class interests of the intellectuals.

What I have tried to argue here is that Gramsci's notion of hegemony must be rethought in the East Central European context. Vajda is correct when he faults Konrad and Szelenyi for not considering intra-regional social and historical differences in their attempt to describe the road to intellectual class power.[70] Nevertheless, their general thesis only acquires greater depth and nuance when considered through Vajda's "East Central European perspective." That is, Vajda describes the national socio-historical differences on the road to class power; he only adds more evidence for the argument that the route not only to class power but to hegemony lay along the "short cut" of Bolshevism. In East Central Europe, where virtually no institutions existed independent of the state-church constellation, the notion that cultural leadership could be developed and exercised outside of the existent spheres of politics and religion is difficult to conceive. Despite the very real differences in the historical development of Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Czechoslovak, and Rumanian societies, there is a consonance in their respective and relative lack of what Gramsci would call civil society.

In such societies cultural leadership of a consensual nature cannot be conceived entirely outside the realm of existing relations of power, and hence leadership. That Lenin could conceive of hegemony as involved with or anterior to the "conquest of power," as referring to *political* leadership rather than a more inclusive *cultural* leadership, is perhaps indicative of the even more limited and polarized situation in

---

[70] Vajda, p.360n.

Imperial Russia. Tactically, Lenin's conception of leadership and the Bolshevik programme succeeded in Russia, and later in East Central Europe precisely because there was no substantial civil society to complicate matters. Political leadership in East Central Europe, and more so in Eastern Europe (Imperial Russia and parts of the former Ottoman Empire), could be conceived as prior to cultural leadership because the institutions that serve broad national cultural interests were subservient to the state.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony differs from Lenin's in so far as it considers the real difference of developed bourgeois societies and locates within them what Konrad and Szelenyi call a "stratum," mediating and legitimating the operation of the capitalist mode of production. On the level of tactics, Gramsci could see the inapplicability of the theories of Lenin and Trotsky in bourgeois society. In these societies cultural leadership had already absorbed political leadership, as both Vajda's and Konrad and Szelenyi's accounts indicate. A "war of movement," so appropriate for Russia, was inappropriate for Western, bourgeois Europe.

For East Central Europe it was appropriate to only a limited degree: in the wake of the military and colonial enterprises of the Third Reich the movement of the Communists into important government ministries was entirely successful. The subsequent move onto the throne, as it were, was accomplished by various means, none of them quite as dramatic as a war of movement, all of them more active than the "war of position" advocated by Gramsci for bourgeois societies. Again, the tact of the Moscow-based politicians - the deferral of the outright seizure of power - lay in the nature of the tacit division of Europe at Yalta by Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt, and in the fact that the historical and social development of the nations of East Central Europe was different from that of Imperial Russia. Existing independent forces, such as Poland's non-Communist wartime underground Home Army, had to be dealt with in a way that would consolidate Communist rule. As has been argued, the post-World War Two East Central European Communists were interested in attracting to their ranks the national intelligentsia. Above all, the use of force or coercion had to be legitimized, made to seem reasonable and in the interests of the people. The "success" of the Communists can be measured in the rapidity with which they absorbed intellectuals into their services, either as active Party members or as compliant fellow travellers, dependent on the patronage of the Party and state. That they managed to maintain their grip on power is a testament to the adherence of the intellectuals as a class to the ethos of the rational redistributive economy, to their mutual estrangement from the interests of the working class and the pursuit of their own class interests, even though the consciousness of this self-interest may have eluded them.

Given this (mutually reinforcing and, from the perspective of social development and social solidarity, mutually debilitating) confluence of ideology and class self-interest, it can be argued that the rule of the Communist Party in several of the East Central European states, at least in the early post-war years, achieved a degree of hegemony in the Gramscian sense. Although experiencing the trauma of the post-war purges, these societies and Parties managed to consolidate themselves in arrangements that, until very recently, few commentators expected to change in any substantial manner. Several analysts, mostly Hungarians, like Konrad, Szelenyi, Vajda, and Haraszti, expected the paternalism of the Kadar government to set an example of gradual change in the East bloc. In their commentaries one finds the belief that the intellectuals, with the exception of a few isolated "dissidents," had largely accepted the ethos of rational redistribution - again, the programme or ideology of their class interest - and that reforms initiated were unlikely to challenge the centrality of their organ, the state, as the leading cultural and political institution in society. This is especially so of Haraszti, whose investigations into the place of the working class in a nominally "workers'" state bear bitter fruit in the notes on the "new class" (the intellectuals) that constitute The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism.

Haraszti might be considered one of those dissident or marginal intellectuals Konrad and Szelenyi pin their hopes on the last chapter of The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power. For them the "marginal intelligentsia" in the Communist bloc had a role to perform as both the critical social consciousness of its own class - it must recognize its own class interests as part of the intellectual class - and, as educated people, articulate the interests of the working class. Rather than repeating the vanguardist mistake, Konrad and Szelenyi enjoin the marginal intelligentsia to stand, not in front of the working class, but as a sort of counsel between the ruling elite and the ruled majority.

Haraszti certainly understands the attachment of intellectuals to the given system. The Velvet Prison does a remarkable job of describing how the Party-state maintained its hegemony through the active participation of intellectuals. It must be stressed that this hegemony refers principally to intellectuals, people who had been educated in the system and who by virtue of this education were guaranteed positions somewhere in the vast edifice of the Party-state bureaucracy. By observing certain standards or protocols the artist or intellectual achieveed the status and security to pursue his or her activities. Certainly, there is the question of censorship. But Haraszti, like Konrad,[71] minimizes the role that active censorship plays in contemporary (pre-1989) East bloc countries - in Hungary at least. As historian M.S.Voslensky stated in a 1986 interview concerning censorship in the Soviet Union, "Officially there is no censorship..."[72] The principal censor of ideas and projects in the USSR, Voslensky asserts, was the author.

> A Soviet citizen knows what he can write and what he cannot. Anyone who doesn't know this principle, or hasn't comprehended it, will not write. And even if he did, he would not be published.[73]

The assumption is that very few Soviet citizens would bother to write what they know a publisher would not accept. Every level of production was governed by informal self-censorship. But there is also the argument that self-censorship was also self-serving, that the price was quite attractive. The comfort of the Soviet system, the ease which it afforded its intellectuals, is well presented in Haraszti's acerbic account of "The magic of the artists retreat":

> The manor houses of the exiled aristocracy have been renovated - the nobility couldn't afford them anyway - staff hired, the heating turned on, and invitations sent out. This the moment of historic justice: authors fill the opulent rooms...Friendly togetherness, studios, desks, and first-class gossip about the apparat and colleagues (elements of an intense yet also tranquil creative atmosphere) await us. There are flowers in the park, a lake for the poet, a glade for the novelist, picturesque peasant houses in the village - nor is the capital too far away either...the dreams of Fourier's

---

[71] see above, p.942.

[72] Voslensky, "Officially there is no censorship...," Index On Censorship, April, 1986, p.29.

[73] Voslensky, p.28.

> productive Phalanstery and the amicable commune come true here. How many film scripts have been written in the wainscoted common rooms! How many poetic empires have been built here! What do they know about freedom, those who have no houses, never mind national artists' retreats![74]

If Haraszti's emphasis here is on physical comfort, Voslensky's is on mental ease when he suggests

> that writing a book in the Soviet Union is sometimes easier than in the West. One knows how to think and how to write because everything is predetermined, one's entire work consists basically of materials which support party-determined positions on a given topic. This is how self-censorship works.[75]

In Haraszti's analysis this state of affairs - the voluntary submission to self-censorship that virtually eliminates the position of the official censor - is accepted because it guarantees privilege and prestige:

> [I]n the arts as well as in other fields, we [the intellectuals] aim to have our cake and eat it too: to retain both the privileges of power and the legitimizing conceit of serving the people.[76]

As for dissenting intellectuals, they are "doomed to irrelevance."[77] A small minority within the system they are effectively ostracized, denied access to the means of publishing their opinions, and thereby denied a public, they are shut out - except, perhaps, to the ruling elite.

> Later, of course, some of them will be 're-discovered' and 'rehabilitated.' Such decisions will be reached by the central authorities...Almost all

---

[74] pp.50-51.

[75] p.29.

[76] p.52.

[77] Haraszti, p.150.

> dissidents can count on becoming part of the official curriculum when the time has come to denounce the failures of the previous dynasty.[78]

Haraszti's argument is that the state is able to absorb dissent when the time is ripe, that changes in personnel are mechanisms by which dissenting voices are incorporated and neutralized. The target of dissent stands; it has only moved a little, taken the sting out of the criticism by doing so, turned it to its own end, employed it as a sign of its openness, its legitimacy.

But the Hungarian analysis, particularly Haraszti's but Konrad and Szelenyi's as well, is strongest when dealing with a paternalistic totalitarianism. Haraszti is bitter about possibilities for substantial change because he sees the intellectual class firmly in control of the Party-state, skilfully or not so skilfully managing not only the economy (that not so well), but the entirety of society through its channelling of autonomous forces into innocuous activities, as Vajda puts it. Historically the situation echoes that of the Habsburg Empire, where autonomous forces could never substantially challenge the state and occupied a subordinate and marginal position. In Gramscian terms, the historical bloc of the Bolshevik parties in East Central Europe remained, for most intellectuals, the most attractive enterprise. For reasons of personal career advancement, prestige, wealth, significantly less compelling as an inherently meaningful revolutionary activity, intellectuals - the "protagonists of civil society," that force capable of altering relations of state and economy - remained faithful to the Party-state. This was perhaps more the case in a well developed paternalism, such as Kadar's Hungary, than in the neo-Stalinism of

---

[78] ibid.

Husak's Czechoslovakia; but again, the measure of an historical bloc's hegemony is indicated by its ability to attract the intelligentsia, by its ability to bring into alignment those potential sources of autonomy in what exists of civil society.

Clearly, Haraszti is vexed at the seeming ease with which Kadar and company sailed through the brewing social storms, and he consequently described a situation where the state's coercive powers had been so internalized that an effective condition of hegemony had been achieved. Martin Laba has described hegemony as the "dialectic of resistance."[79] Haraszti would see the flipside: hegemony as the dialectic of domination. The totalitarian state, especially as dressed in its new cloths, only consolidates its position as the legitimate "manager" of society by virtue of its skilful handling of resistance.

The End of Revisionism

Again, Haraszti is most appealing when dealing with totalitarianism dressed up as paternalism. In the cases of Poland and Czechoslovakia things are more complex. Even in these cases, however, the possibility of a paternalist route had existed for years. That is, reform within the Party-state edifice was a serious consideration. Critical Party members and even non-Party people could realistically hope that Dubcek's regime would realize "socialism with a human face." But the invasion of Prague by the Warsaw Pact in 1968, and the

---

[79] Martin Laba, "Gramsci and popular culture."

> ensuing Brezhnev period of conservative restoration throughout the Soviet bloc was perceived as the final defeat of the very idea of a fundamental reform of the system from within.[80]

As already noted, for reform minded intellectuals within the Party, such as Leczek Kolakowski in Poland, 1968 marked the "clinical death" of Marxist revisionism. From at least 1968 on Communism became simply another ideology in pursuit of power for many East bloc intellectuals.

The "end of revisionism" is important in attempting to chart the progress of the hegemony of the Party within East Central Europe. So long as critical intellectuals remained within the Party and state they conformed to the theses of Haraszti and Konrad and Szelenyi regarding intellectuals and their class interests - they conformed to the notion that they accepted the Party's leadership on the basis of consent rather than coercion. When the possibility of "detotalizing totalitarianism"[81] appears to have evaporated, when the hopes of the critical intelligentsia weredashed, then claims to a larger cultural leadership rang hollow.

In 1976 Adam Michnik charted the doomed course of revisionism in an essay called "The new evolutionism."[82] Historically interesting, this document proved to be a politically fruitful assessment of possibilities for change in Poland. In charting the demise of revisionism Michnik also charted the demise of what remained of Communist hegemony over Polish society and signalled the emergence of a new historical bloc.

---

[80] Rupnik, p.267.

[81] Rupnik, p.267.

[82] Letters From Prison and Other Essays, trans. M.Latynski, Berkeley: University of California, 1985.

Prior to the events of 1976, when worker's demands were met with the authoritarian response of violence and incarceration, critical intellectuals had failed, in Michnik's estimation, to make substantial contact with those who had expressed displeasure and dissent as far back as 1956, namely the working class. Jacques Rupnik credits Michnik's essay as being a "key turning point" for critical intellectuals; it marked the point "when the opposition ceased addressing the Party-state and turned rather to society itself."[83] In Michnik's words,

> I believe that what sets today's opposition apart from the proponents of [revisionism] is the belief that a program for evolution ought to be addressed to an independent public, not to totalitarian power. Such a program should give directives to the people on how to behave, not to the powers on how to reform themselves. Nothing instructs the authorities better than pressure from below.[84]

In 1979 Rupnik described the emergence and development of this opposition in Poland between 1968 and 1978 as "the end of revisionism and the rebirth of civil society."[85] Clearly, at least in Poland, the intelligentsia were abandoning the dominant "historical bloc" in favour of an ephemeral oppositional bloc. The Party-state, constituting a ruling elite, could no longer hope to hold those who, in developed bourgeois societies, would have historically constituted the separate realm of institutions Gramsci determined as civil society. Even in the historically and socially unprepared ground of Poland commentators such as Rupnik, among others, were testifying to the emergence of a society independent of the totalitarian system.[86]

---

[83] p.284.

[84] Michnik, 1985, p.144.

[85] cited in Pelczynski, p.361.

Civil Society and the Opposition

Others, however, were not so sanguine about these developments. In his post-martial law essay, "Solidarity and the 'rebirth of civil society' in Poland," Z.A.Pelczynski, referring directly to Rupnik's 1979 statements, commented on the "air of utopianism and wishful thinking about the 'rebirth of civil society'."[87] Perhaps the atmosphere of General Jarulzelski's Poland made any hopeful statements uttered in the years prior to it taste artificially sweetened. Pelczynski's argument is that, even in a "revisionist, upside-down neo-Gramscian version of Gramsci" it is difficult to make a case for the existence of civil society prior to August 1980.[88] Only with the "strikes of that month, and the signing of the agreements between workers and the government representatives in Gdansk, Szczecin and elsewhere, which allowed the formation of independent, self-governing trade unions," is it perhaps possible, he says, to speak realistically of the beginning of civil society.[89]

I have already recounted Mihaly Vajda's analysis of the different developments of state-civil society relations within Europe, and noted his conclusion that in East Central

---

[86] cf. Ash, 1986, p.48.

[87] p.363.

[88] p.365.

[89] Pelczynski, p.363.

Europe what had emerged as civil society had, historically, been in contest with the state, and was never able, as it had in the West, to establish its pre-eminence over or even complete independence from the state. Rupnik in "Totalitarianism revisited" raises Vajda's analysis (through a reference to Jeno Szucs), but in a curious way. That is, he challenges points made by Vajda using arguments employed by Vajda. Resisting first the notion, "put forward by several Hungarian historians and sociologists," that the "weakness of civil society in the region actually predates Communism," and second "that totalitarian systems have systematically attempted to destroy whatever civil society there was left at the end of World War II" he turns to Szucs' thesis about the three historical regions of Europe to prove East Central Europe's difference from the "Eastern or Russian model."[90] If we return to Vajda's - and Konrad and Szelenyi's - arguments about the development of civil society and the intelligentsia we see that there is: one, a distinction between the histories of East Central Europe and Eastern or Russian regions; two, in contrast to Western Europe an historical and structural weakness on the part of autonomous intellectuals and civil society viz. the state reaching back to the Middle Ages; three, that, as per the accounts of Vajda, Milosz, Haraszti, Konrad and Szelenyi, and Rupnik himself, the Communist regimes in East Central Europe did actively work to absorb or eliminate all independent intellectuals, all vestiges of independent institutions that remained after the devastation of the Third Reich's occupation. Rupnik's "dreams" of civil society, as Pelczynski put it, are founded in the historical fact that the various societies comprising the region stretching from the Baltics south through the Balkans did enjoy some limited degree of development in the realm of individual and institutional autonomy. However, as Pelczynski's analysis of Solidarity prior to martial law indicates, and as Vajda's intra-regional assessment of prospects for change suggests, the really existing civil society was vestigial.

---

[90] Rupnik, pp.285-286.

Nevertheless, as Timothy Garton Ash makes clear in an article published in the Fall of 1986, civil society had become the leitmotif of various opposition figures in East Central Europe.[91] Even with the banning of Solidarity independent activity flourished. Jarulzelski's military coup may have cut short the experiment of "the new evolutionism," Rupnik notes, but it did so "without being able to restore the *ancien regime*."[92] The really existing institution of Solidarity, although made illegal, still survived. All of this does not even consider the revived, more socially involved Catholic church which helped to consolidate and shelter some of the autonomous movements within the Polish state of seige.

Again, perhaps engaged in utopian thinking, but in a utopianism that appears to have born fruit, Rupnik refers to similar developments in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In Poland Solidarity may have been the midwife of civil society; in Czechoslovakia Rupnik saw Charter 77 in that role, creating the possibility, along with numerous samizdat publishers, of a "community of citizens," a "parallel polis" as he quotes Vaclav Benda; in Hungary it is not so much the rights of workers (much to the chagrin, perhaps, of Konrad, Szelenyi, and Haraszti) or of political or human rights per se that were creating the conditions for the emergence of a new historical bloc but, Rupnik claims, economic considerations, especially the semi-legal existence of a thriving second economy.[93] Whatever the situation, in a number of East bloc countries the emergence of autonomous individuals and especially of autonomous institutions, even if harassed and driven underground, was observable in the years after 1968.

---

[91] p.48.

[92] Rupnik, p.284.

With Pelczynski, however, it would be absurd to speak of a substantive civil society existing in Poland prior to the recognition of Solidarity's right to exist by the Communist authorities in the summer of 1980. Likewise, the notion of civil society could be but a fantasy prior to the dissolution of the Communist region in the fall of 1989. In Hungary things were different, and yet quite the same. Interestingly, it is the Hungarian model of paternalism that Vajda and Konrad and Szelenyi recruit as the most realistic model of a "warming" trend in the East bloc. With the retreat into authoritarianism on the part of Jarulzelski in Poland and Husak-then-Jakes in Czechoslovakia, not to mention the entrenched neo-Stalinism in Romania and Bulgaria, Kadar's regime seemed to offer at least some room to move. Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s was the "liberal" on the block, even if that liberalism was relative and tempered by the regime's realpolitik (its membership in the Warsaw Pact and Comecon; the Brezhnev Doctrine; etcetera). As Vajda points out, however, although "reform" was broached by the authorities, on the paternalist model - from top down, the ruling elite managing in the "best interests" of their constituents - of course, "these reforms were never allowed to reach the stage of democratic consciousness...It is not by chance that these reforms are almost exclusively *economic.*" Nevertheless, Vajda could not see economic liberalization, "giving free rein to people's 'bourgeois selfishness'," as avoiding the distasteful - for the regime at the time - prospect of political and social liberalization.[94] Thus democracy was seen as possibly entering Hungary through the back door. Although relatively liberal in the realm of economics, even in Hungary the foundations for a substantive civil society, a socially and politically independent realm, had yet to be poured.

---

[93] pp.284-286.

Establishing the State of Seige

In his notes on civil society and the state Gramsci discusses the transition from a war of manoeuvre to a war of position in terms of the movement to a state of seige. That is, the ground to be won or lost in a war of manoeuvre is no longer decisive in the overall struggle; it is in the much more critical realm of hegemony, of maintaining the state's legitimacy, or undoing it, that the struggle now takes place.[95] In the aftermath of the Second World War the Moscow based Communist Parties established themselves as the leaders of devastated nations. In a profound way they established their hegemony over both the existing working class *and* the national intelligentsia. This hegemony was legitimized by the appeal to the humanitarian content of Marxism-Leninism, the logic of dialectical materialism (what Milosz refers to as the "Method," in his estimation so powerful and irresistible to intellectuals), and finally the coercive techniques of Stalinism. In the process of establishing hegemony an already weak civil society was dissolved and absorbed by the totalitarian state. All impulses to autonomy within the region were held, to varying degrees, in a state of seige, kept in check, ultimately by active censorship and coercion

---

[94] p.357.

[95] Selections From the Prison Notebooks, pp.238-239.

As Gramsci points out, however, "In politics, the seige is a reciprocal one, despite all appearances, and the mere fact that the ruler has to muster all his resources demonstrates how seriously he takes his adversary."[96] That the adversary, independent thinking as much as independent activity, was taken seriously as a threat by the Party-state was never in question, as Milosz, Kundera, Vaclav Havel, et al can attest. Because for Marx, as Bobbio and Pelczynski have indicated, the realm of civil society was included in the realm of economic relations, any attempt at autonomous social activity outside those dominated by the Communist Party were considered aberrant, contradictory of the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, not to mention threatening to the hegemony of Party-state. Civil society, having been swallowed up by the Party-state, was, effectively, that entity under seige in Communist societies. Citing Marx, Gramsci notes, however, that as opposed to acute danger which "tempers," chronic danger "destroys."[97] The chronic danger of independent activity, especially as it arose in times of economic crisis and ideological impotence - the inability of the "Method" to produce much needed food and commodities, housing, working conditions comparable to those found in the exploitative capitalist societies of Western Europe, etcetera - destroyed the hegemony of the Communist Party. The Party-state moved, at different speeds in different countries, from a leadership or hegemonic position Gramsci describes as necessary for effective rule, to that of simple domination.[98]

---

[96] p.239.

[97] p.239.

Despite the fact that, as Vajda comments in his discussion of the history of institutionalized civil society in East Central Europe, the state dominated society, nevertheless remnants of autonomy, and desires for and memories of it, survived. In the totalitarian societies of East Central Europe the state "insists on setting the rules and exerting control over all social relationships"; yet each individual "harbours a virtual free society."[99] Even though, again with Pelczynski, civil society did not exist in Poland - or anywhere else in East Central Europe - prior to the summer of 1980, given the loss of the Party-state's hegemony, especially after 1968, among the historical "protagonists of civil society" (that is, the intellectuals), its preconditions did exist.

It is no accident that various notions of an autonomous society began to emerge in the 1970s in parts of East Central Europe. Having abandoned or been rejected by the "home" of the Communist Party-state, intellectuals began to articulate their disappointments and their grievances. But they were in no position to challenge the existing Party-state monolith, especially as it controlled all legal means of establishing institutions, publications, and the like. Gramsci has referred to the war of position as the struggle for, or over hegemony. Discontents in East Central Europe were engaged, perhaps not in a fully conscious or fully organized manner, in just such a war of position. Not having the ready-made institutions of an autonomous civil society they began to build them - witness Michnik's call for discussion with society, not the state. This process of building an extra-state social solidarity would be the process of discovering what Havel called the "power of the powerless." For independent institutions to be born individuals would have to revive their dreams and memories of independence. For Havel this meant the Herculean effort to resist "living the lie," to exercise one's power to "live in truth," to function in everyday life as much as possible as a free person, to deny the totalitarian regime its empty gesture of homage. The gesture was empty because no one, not even the authorities believed in the regime's ideological supremacy. It was simply time for those who were tired of the charade to stop playing, and get on with the work of rebuilding society.

---

[98] cf. p.55n.5.

[99] Vajda, p.350.

CHAPTER TWO: CIVIL SOCIETY AND POWER IN THE LIFEWORLD

If the discussion of Chapter One can be described as hinging on the question of hegemony in East Central Europe as an historical problem, centred on the relative weakness of the native intelligentsia as a social stratum and the consequent weakness of civil society in its relations with the state, the following discussion will hinge on the problem of constituting civil society in the recent history of the region. That is, after developing the concept of hegemony and its relative applicability to post-Yalta East Central Europe, and then charting the demise of Bolshevik hegemony in the region, this chapter will develop a concept of civil society capable of understanding the development of oppositional movements in the Soviet satellite states. Initially we will look at the genealogy of the concept from a politically and sociologically descriptive perspective. Once having established a case, not for the existence of civil society as such, but of its preconditions, the focus of the argument will shift to the ways in which such preconditions develop. This will be a shift also from the terms of political sociology to those of ethics and aesthetics. Central to this aspect of the argument is the notion, as developed through the work of Elaine Scarry and Agnes Heller, that the need to create and share images of oneself and one's experiences is the impulse that stands at the base of any organic or pre-institutionalized form of sociality. If Gramscian and neo-

Gramscian analysis can make the case for civil society against the empire,[100] it is here that authors such as Scarry, Heller, and Mikhail Bakhtin can make the case for those seemingly small and insignificant acts of human creativity, sociality, and perserverance that combine to make the forms of life out of which fully fledged institutions are built. The purpose here is to sketch out the beginnings of a theory of the pre-history or the protean forms of what is understood as civil society.

Civil Society and the Case of Solidarity

The case of Poland, and specifically of Solidarity within Poland, is perhaps the best example we have of the rebuilding of a society undertaken outside the aegis of the state. Again, it is with the help of analysts such as Jacques Rupnik and Z.A.Pelczynski that this rebuilding can be seen as having a coherence or form, discernible through the lens of a revised, neo-Gramscian perspective. This despite the fact that Pelczynski's development of Gramsci is delivered as a critique of Rupnik, especially of questions raised by Rupnik concerning the emergence of civil society in Poland. In looking at Pelczynski's argument it is possible for us to get a deeper understanding of both the situation in Poland and of the applicability (or inapplicability) of the concept of civil society within this situation.

Pelczynski's chief concerns in "Solidarity and 'The rebirth of civil society' in

---

[100] cf. A.Arato, "Civil society against the state: Poland 1980-81," Telos 47 (Spring 1981); "Empire vs. civil society: Poland 1981-82," Telos 50 (Winter 1981-82).

Poland, 1976-81" are: First, to check Rupnik's enthusiastic but premature announcement of civil society's arrival; second, to question whether in fact the Gramscian notion of civil society adequately fits the real experience of Solidarity - that is, if Solidarity's failure to anticipate and head-off the declaration of martial law was due to its being more a "political" organism than a "civil" one. With the aid of hindsight it becomes apparent, to Pelczynski, that civil society, while in fact arriving in Poland in the summer of 1980 (ie., later than Rupnik's announcement), did not have much opportunity to develop before the political momentum of Solidarity ran all existing aspects of the independent movement into the wall of the state's coercive apparatus.[101] A more "gradualist strategy," he speculates, such as that proposed by Cardinal Wyszynski, one that would have seen Solidarity "restrict itself to a largely trade-union role and to press for social and economic reforms," may have "defended the gains of civil society for many years beyond 1981."[102]

Pelczynski's criticism and revision of Gramsci on the notion of civil society hinges on his reading of De Toqueville. For De Toqueville, the non-state realm is divided into "political society" - "the realm of local self-government, parties, newspapers, public opinion, etc..." - and "civil society...the realm of the citizens' private, mostly economic activities based on self-interest."[103] Gramsci subsumes these two realms under the heading of civil society and thus misses the type of development that Cardinal Wyszynski warned against in his counsel to Solidarity. However, as subsequent research and commentaries suggest, although Pelczynski - with the Cardinal - may have been right about the implications of an "over political" Solidarity, civil society did not disappear with General Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law. On the contrary.

---

[101] cf.pp.371-378.

[102] p.377.

[103] ibid., p.379n.14.

In an article published in June, 1985 Timothy Garton Ash wrote that he saw in Jaruzelski's Poland "An entire world of learning and culture that exists quite independent of the state that claims to control it..."[104] The boldness, perhaps outright recklessness, of Solidarity's political activities in the Fall of 1981 created a situation where, if the state rejected the option of negotiation, it quashed the organization of Solidarity. In doing so, however, it not only confirmed the "end of revisionism" thesis for those liberals who remained within the Party-state; it also signalled that reform - this time working with the state but independent of it - of society and economy was untenable if the Party-state was involved. Thus the inability of the Jaruzelski regime to reform itself sowed the seeds of active and abundant underground or semi-underground movements. The inevitability of the crackdown seemed obvious, given the threat of Soviet military forces on the Polish border.[105] And for his part, perhaps Jaruzelski sensed the impossibility of effectively quashing the social impetus that gave birth to Solidarity. Even if this were the case, larger geopolitical concerns forced his hand. In any case, even as early as March 1982 analysts such as F.Dubet, A.Touraine, and M.Wieviorka would claim that, "If December 13 (1981, the day martial law was imposed) marked the end of a fight one could talk of the death of Solidarity." However, they continue, the fact

---

[104] "Poland: the uses of adversity," The New York Review of Books, June 27, 1985, p.5.

[105] cf. T.G.Ash, The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, pp.94-101.

> that a social and national movement had been born which lived more by the affirmation of itself than by its conquests, then it is clear that the *coup d'etat* and the ensuing repression will destroy Solidarity as little as the partitions of Poland in the past have destroyed national consciousness.[106]

The point here is one made clear by Ash: In its chequered history the Polish nation has survived its political defeats by virtue of its idealist and nationalist intelligentsia. It has been the historical mission of the intelligentsia, he notes,

> to uphold the spirit and culture of the nation against the powers that be...[This] is a subjective, idealistic self-definition in which the Idea takes absolute precedence over reality, and consciousness determines being. In the condition of unfreedom it proclaims the principle of As If. Try to live *as if* you live in a free country, it says, though today your study is a prison cell.[107]

But this self-definition is not unique to the Polish intelligentsia; it refers also to the self-definition of the other national intelligentsia of East Central Europe. Ash makes this point in his 1986 essay, "Does Central Europe Exist?" In the context of contemporary arguments from within the region about the historic and cultural viability of the concept of Central Europe Ash refers to the region as a "Kingdom of the spirit," comprised of "small nations subjected to large empires [with] an associated tradition of civic commitment from the 'intelligentsia'."[108] Underlining this point he later states that it is "in the autonomous sphere of culture, in the kingdom of the spirit" that "Central Europe confronts Eastern Europe."[109] That is, where the national intelligentsia has foregone the route of reformism it takes up its historic calling, asserting an independent, national voice (culture) against that of the empire. In this instance it is the Soviet empire, rather than the Romanov or Habsburg, that these voices assert themselves against.

---

[106] "A social movement: Solidarity," Telos, 53, p.136.

[107] op.cit., 1985, p.5.

[108] op.cit., p.47.

What the analyses of Ash and Dubet et al suggest is that Vajda and Konrad and Szelenyi are correct in their arguments concerning the social history of the intelligentsia in East Central Europe. In the case of Poland, post-December 13, 1981, the unwillingness of the regime to cooperate with Solidarity only reinforced the historic mission of the national intelligentsia. Against those, like Cardinal Wyszynski and Pelczynski, who questioned the political efficacy of Solidarity's headlong rush into an impossible (given the geopolitical reality) situation, stands the tradition and history of the intelligentsia in East Central Europe - and with them the fate of civil society. Vajda has written that unlike Western Europe, where civil society preceded and subordinated the state, and Eastern Europe, where the state effectively dominated all of society, East Central Europe was the sight of a "contest" between a subordinate and fragmentary but nevertheless still-existing civil society and the state. As Ash's essay, "Poland: the uses of adversity," suggests, the contest only grew fiercer with the imposition of martial law. And, as the events of 1989 indicate, that contest has been won, decisively, by those forces outside the Party-state, themselves now constituting a state subordinate to civil society.

---

[109] ibid., p.48.

Civil Society and Political Society

One of the problems with Pelczynski's analysis is his desire to evoke De Tocqueville without considering the social history of the East Central European intelligentsia. Perhaps this is also a weakness in applying Gramsci to developments in the region, something Pelczynski anticipates in his statement that there is no clear Gramscian explanation for "that remarkable Polish phenomenon" of the late 1970s - a Party-state clearly exercising political and economic domination, its hegemony "seriously undermined" by forces and ideas "without a fully fledged, institutional civil society to support [them]."[110] The strength of Gramsci's analysis lies in his attempt to understand the role of intellectuals in Italian history since the Renaissance. That is, he analyzed the socio-political history of the Italian intelligentsia from the perspective of the problem of political leadership and strategy. Obviously, given the differences that Vajda and Konrad and Szelenyi have described between developments in Western and East Central Europe, Gramsci's model is limited to those Western European societies where civil society could be said to exist at least on an equal footing to that of the state. A consideration of the history of East Central European intellectuals may revise certain Gramscian notions to make them applicable in the region. Let us return to Pelczynski's specific reservations with regard to Gramsci and attempt to answer them with material provided by Vajda and Konrad and Szelenyi.

Pelczynski divides Gramsci's notion of civil society into its Hegelian heritage -

---

[110] p.367.

that which is civil society in the narrow sense of being "concerned with egoistic, particular, mainly material interests" - and its De Tocquevillian content - "'political society', existing outside and in opposition to the state." For Pelczynski, the latter is "made possible by the existence of a degree of social autonomy," guaranteed by the independent institutions of the former.[111] In Gramsci's politics, the war of position that the opposition is involved in in its attempt to assume hegemony over the larger civil society takes place precisely because independent institutions exist. That is, political opposition - or "political society" - is made possible by, and is born of, an independent civil society.

Developments in Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s don't fit this model. "From the neo-Gramscian perspective, what was puzzling..." Pelczynski notes, "was that with the significant exception of the Catholic Church...'political society' emerged without any corporate, institutional underpinning." He goes on to say that,

> Given the lack of an independent institutional base, it would be more correct to say that the spread of a 'democratic opposition' or dissident movement in Poland at the end of the 1970s represented a rebirth of *political society...*[112]

That is, a De Tocquevillian "political society" emerges prior to a Gramscian civil society; but, as Pelczynski suggests, this political society understands its task in a Gramscian sense as it gropes "for ways to institutionalize itself and to become a civil society capable of confronting the Communist Party-state..."[113] Gramsci's model is overturned in two ways. One, political society, as Pelczynski states, emerged as a result, not of existing independent institutions in an existent civil society, but of the laxity and tolerance of the Party-state. Two, having emerged, political society then attempted to create its own institutional base. The Gramscian emphasis on the realm of civil society as the arena where a new historical bloc achieves its hegemony against the domination of the state is maintained; the genesis of this oppositional movement is, however, radically revised.

---

[111] p.368.

[112] pp.368-369.

[113] p.369.

Pelczynski is correct to point out the logical inconsistencies in a rigid application of a Gramscian model to the analysis of developments in Poland in the previous two decades. His employment of De Tocqueville enables us to see how that larger Gramscian civil society is perhaps more complex than he at first suggests; and in so far as it successfully articulates the substantial differences between existent or non-existent institutional bases and independent or oppositional political activity it possibly affords a tactical critique that Gramsci's analysis may require in societies that don't fit the Italian or Western European bourgeois model. As noted earlier, however, Pelczynski's use of De Tocqueville's distinctions stands in the way of his seeing Solidarity as more than "political society," pure and simple.

I have already referred to Dubet et al and their description of Solidarity as a "social movement" living "more by the affirmation of itself than by its conquests," and to Ash's references to a blossoming underground and an only semi-legitimate cultural movement, as well as his comments about the historical and political mission of the East Central European intelligentsia. One need only look to the role intellectuals played in the rebirth of the Czech nation in the nineteenth century to understand the basis of Ash's generalization.[114] Paul Thibaud, writing only months after the imposition of martial law, forecasts Ash's later report of Poland's active cultural life in these terms: The power or rather the ability of the Communist Party-state to govern effectively is dependent on the government's ability to engender "fear and discouragement in the populace. It is hard to obtain such a result against a movement as little centred on power as Solidarity."[115] Not having consolidated itself as a *political* movement, but having instead its roots in traditional trade union activities and the "social self-help" activities of KSS-KOR (Committee For Social Defense - Workers' Defense Committee), Solidarity was perhaps in reality closer to a Gramscian image of civil society than Pelczynski admits. Thus, against those, like Cardinal Wyszynski, who were concerned about protecting the civil rights and freedoms achieved by the Fall of 1981 there emerges a picture, confirmed later by the continued existence of an underground Solidarity, but even more strongly in the proliferation of non-state and anti-state activities in the cultural and economic realm tacitly accepted by the state, of Solidarity as a much larger and more substantial, even if not "institutionalized" movement than simple political society. As Thibaud said rather prophetically, in March of 1982, "What was a weakness can here become a strength."[116]

Pelczynski emphasizes the political nature of Solidarity and its accompanying developments because he, for analytical reasons, raises a critique of Gramsci (and commentators like Rupnik who engaged in Gramscian or neo-Gramscian analyses) based on De Tocqueville's distinctions. Although he is justified in criticizing both Rupnik's premature celebration of civil society's arrival and the applicability of a Gramscian model to Polish events, the recourse to De Tocqueville blinds him to the specific reality of Solidarity as an expression of a larger socio-cultural-political movement.

---

[114] cf. J.Skvorecky, "Czech writers: politicians in spite of themselves," The New York Times Book Review, December 10, 1989, pp.143-145.

[115] "The extent of the defeat," Telos, 53 (Fall 1982), p.126.

[116] p.126.

To some extent Ash's comments on the historical role of the intelligentsia make this obvious. As do Michnik and Milosz's essays on Polish political, cultural, and literary history;[117] as does Joseph Skvorecky's article on the history of the Czech language and nation.[118] That is, the realm of civil society, that limited and virtually powerless realm of independent institutions and individuals in East Central Europe, has historically been the home of a mixture of culture and politics. To separate political society from what ever else existed in this realm is to deny the validity of Vajda and Szucs' analyses, as well as those of Konrad and Szelenyi, and Skvorecky, of the deep socio-historical development in the region. To maintain Pelczynski's De Tocquevillian distinctions in the face of Polish development just because it affords a critique of neo-Gramscian interpretations is to forget that the history of civil society in Poland, as in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, is a history of *contest*, of political struggle largely through the medium of ideas, and only sometimes actions.

Again, Pelczynski is correct in pointing out the inapplicability of Gramsci as given. The revising of Gramsci does not, however, start with a radical separation - and the hypostatization of that separation - of a De Tocquevillian political society and a Hegelian "corporatist" civil society; it starts in understanding the remnants or history of civil society as *already* a realm of struggle, that the national intelligentsia in East Central Europe were long ago engaged in a de facto war of position with the Imperial states they were subject to. In this light Pelczynski's points about political society preceding civil society, and of emerging by the grace, so to speak of the state's laxity and tolerance, require reconsideration.

---

[117] cf. Michnik, Letters From Prison and Other Essays; Milosz, Emperor of the Earth, Berkeley: University of California, 1981, and The History of Polish Literature, Berkeley: University of California, 1983.

[118] pp.3, 44-45.

First, a De Tocquevillian notion of political society emerging prior to a civil society stands confronted with the fact that any semblance of civil society historically would acquire a "political" character or quality simply because it stands outside the state's realm, something as contradictory of or potentially threatening to the state in the Hohenzollern, Romanov, or Habsburg empires as in the Soviet empire. The question of genealogy, of whether political society precedes and creates civil society or vice versa, becomes a non-issue in this context. It is sufficient to say that developments in East Central Europe in 1989, and in Poland at least since December 13, 1981, suggest that however one defines civil society it has historically been incorrigibly "political." Second, the suggestion that political society emerged out of Party-state laxity and tolerance fails to adequately determine a base for political society. That is, something existed prior to the laxity and tolerance of the Party-state, something that manifested itself perhaps as political society, certainly as the preconditions for civil society.

Pelczynski's essay, despite these criticisms, stands as an important and informative treatment of developments in Poland immediately prior to Jaruzelski's crackdown. My point here has been to suggest that the revising of Gramsci lies not in reading his genealogy - not in resurrecting Hegel or De Tocqueville on civil society, though that may be interesting and instructive - but in reinvesting him with the social history of East Central European intellectuals. Also, in situations such as are offered by the examples of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia the nature of Gramscian categories and sites of conflict - such as civil society, the state, hegemony and domination - take on a character determined by the history of the region, a history distinct from both Gramsci's Italy and Lenin's Russia. Of course, any consideration of Gramsci in the context of East Central Europe must acknowledge that his concepts referred to developments and possibilities in an emergent (in the historical essays) and existing bourgeois society. In such societies the existence of civil society was a given and notions such as "war of position" and "passive revolution," among others, come to life, have theoretical - if not factual - credibility. Without the given of an existent civil society, as Pelczynski argues, even theoretical credibility is questionable. However, as has already been noted, if we revise Gramsci with some East Central European social history the puzzle of an emergent but unorganized and non-institutionalized opposition to the Communist Party-state begins to dissolve. That is, by applying Gramsci's method - his political evaluation of the social history of Italian intellectuals - to East Central European materials the Gramscian notions of "war of position," "passive revolution," and civil society are stretched, to be sure, but not to the point of breaking.

The War of Position in East Central Europe

Given the apparent impossibility in Italy of a successful "war of manoeuvre," such as the Bolsheviks has enjoyed in Russia, Gramsci developed the theory of the war of position. As Pelczynski describes it, the war of position was to take place in the realm of civil society, the "'soft underbelly' of capitalism." At stake was the cultural leadership or hegemony over society. The weapons of this war were the "ideas, values, culture, education, and voluntary associations" considered by Gramsci to be the supports of bourgeois hegemony.[119] In applying this notion to developments in East Central Europe the prevailing image of Soviet totalitarianism as a tightly controlled system suggested that, as Pelczynski notes, there was no "room for a sustained 'war of position' of independent social forces which could lead to an eventual capture of the system."[120] Nevertheless, with the death of Stalin and the subsequent periods of thaw (alternating of course with frigid periods of neo-Stalinism) there appeared to be more room for such developments.

As has already been noted, Gramsci's strategy was dependent on the existence of an established and independent civil society, a realm where ideas, values, cultural leadership generally was open for discussion. Such a realm did not exist in East Central Europe after the Communist Party consolidated itself as the Communist Party-state in the late 1940s. This is Pelczynski's point when he raises the straw man of the puzzling -

---

[119] Pelczynski, p.365.

[120] p.366.

from a Gramscian perspective - phenomenon of the undermining of the Party-state's hegemony by unorganized forces "without a fully fledged, institutional civil society to support it."[121] The puzzle is a straw man because it suggests that only a war of position, the conscious activities of an opposition based in an institutionalized civil society would, from a Gramscian perspective, be able to account for the phenomenon of the Party-state's continued domination but with diminished hegemony.

This is not necessarily the case. Of course, Gramsci requires revision and reformulation in this instance. But Pelczynski, as he has allowed, has not refrained from this task himself. As stated at the end of Chapter One, and as argued here, despite the fact that prior to August, 1980 there may have existed no "fully fledged, institutional civil society" in Poland (or elsewhere in the Soviet bloc for that matter) it is still possible - and important - to speak of the remnants of and the preconditions for civil society. At this point it is helpful to turn to Gramsci to define and revise his sense of "war of position" and to understand how such a revised war of position may in fact have been in effect prior to the various "wars of manoeuvre" of 1989 - despite the absence of a "fully fledged, institutionalized civil society."

For Gramsci questions about political and consequently military developments, such as a successful proletarian revolution, rested on the realistic understanding of "the three fundamental moments into which a 'situation' or an equilibrium of forces can be distinguished..."[122] These include: the social forces, represented by the various classes and their relations to the means of production; the political forces, or the degree of organization and self-consciousness of these classes; and finally the relation of the military forces to these classes.[123] For considerations of political development Gramsci stresses the importance of analyzing the second and third "moments," which he describes in terms of balance and fluidity - that is, with an eye to possible movement - as the "equilibrium of political forces" and the politico-military equilibrium."[124] In any given situation one must realistically assess the options for political activity. Russia in 1917 presented the Bolsheviks with the opportunity to engage in a war of manoeuvre as the balance of powers was either in their favour or could be upset so as to fall in their favour. In fascist Italy the case was otherwise for the Italian Communist Party (PCI). There, the politico-military equilibrium was manifest in the state's willingness to use its coercive apparatus at every opportunity to silence and quash its opponents, as Gramsci's personal history illustrates.[125] A revolutionary military strategy was fruitless in these circumstances. Consequently Gramsci turned to the development of the idea of the war of position.

---

[121] Pelczynski, p.367.

[122] Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p.107.

If Gramsci was turning to the war of position as an alternative to the war of manoeuvre it was as much to formulate a successful strategy as it was to head off suicidal "maximalist" tendencies in the PCI. In effect Gramsci was working to save what existed of the Italian socialist movement in the 1920s and 1930s. There are numerous references in Gramsci's work to the theory of "permanent revolution" and its limitations, coupled with the argument that when the war of manoeuvre is no longer possible, or no longer effective, then a new form of struggle takes place. This is a movement from the politico-military to the social-political moment, and it is the struggle for hegemony. For Gramsci this is *the* decisive terrain for two reasons. First, he does not rule out the war of manoeuvre but recognizes that any revolutionary military activity is dependent on an ideologically prepared population from which military volunteers and support can be drawn. Commenting on events in the unification and liberation of Italy in the nineteenth century Gramsci draws attention to Mazzini's faith in the inevitability of a "popular armed insurrection" against the Italian representatives of the Habsburg empire. He notes that

---

[123] ibid., pp.181-183.

[124] p.107.

[125] cf. L.Lawner, "Introduction," A.Gramsci, Letters From Prison, ed. and trans. L.Lawner, New York: Harper Colophon, 1975, pp.34-36.

> The concentrated or instantaneous form [of a popular uprising] was rendered impossible by the military techniques of the time - but only partially so; in other words, the impossibility existed in so far as that concentrated and instantaneous form was not preceded by long ideological and political preparation, organically devised in advance to reawaken popular passions and enable them to be concentrated and brought simultaneously to detonation point.[126]

In short, the war of manoeuvre must be preceded by an extensive war of position. Small scale military actions against the state are argued against, contrary to the voluntarist tendencies within and without the Italian parties of the Left. Although they mimic activities of the extra-parliamentary and extra-military Right, unlike the fascists they are not protected by the legal apparatus of the state. Furthermore, they only provide the state with an excuse to exercise its legal coercive powers. As Gramsci succinctly puts it,

---

[126] Gramsci, 1976, p.110.

"For certain classes a war of movement...is necessary - because it belongs to them..."[127] In Mussolini's Italy, the war of movement "belonged" to the fascists.

The second reason Gramsci saw the struggle for hegemony as decisive is that with it comes the legitimacy of determining social and political developments. That is, the struggle for hegemony is the struggle for the respected and consensual cultural leadership of society, leadership in the realm of ideas, morality, and culture. In this struggle, this war of position,

> The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute...the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the front...[128]

Once having entered this war of position the opposing forces "have entered a culminating phase in the political-historical situation" where the positions to be won in a war of manoeuvre "have lost their value and only decisive positions are at stake..." Gramsci refers to this as "reciprocal seige warfare," as exhaustive, requiring great patience and resourcefulness because the state of seige is a demoralizing and destructive one.[129] Ultimately, one of the parties in this reciprocal seige is weakened to the point where the other party can pursue a successful war of manoeuvre against them - that is, it is able to move against the other militarily because it has the support of the society.

In the context of East Central Europe several factors are obvious regarding this Gramscian notion of the war of position. First, as is apparent to any observer of the region, the possibility of a war of manoeuvre was not worth considering before the Fall of 1989. Given the degree to which these societies were "totalized" by Stalinism, and then "normalized" after their respective and isolated movements towards autonomy the willingness or ability on the part of society to engage in revolutionary military activity was marginal. Prior to Gorbvachev's reforms, and with the exception of Hungary in 1956, armed resistance to the Soviet regime had not occurred; and where workers and/or intellectuals had engaged in active opposition to either the national government or that of the Soviet Union factors, such as the lack of worker-intellectual solidarity (exacerbated by the Party's various campaigns against "intellectualism," "cosmopolitanism," etcetera), nationalism and the oppression of ethnic or national minorities,[130] and the isolation from and indifference to events in neighbouring East bloc nations (the failure to resist or even protest the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968), had all deemed the political and politico-military equilibrium to be decidedly not in favour of whatever oppositional forces existed.

---

[127] ibid., p.232.

[128] ibid., p.243.

[129] ibid., p.239.

Second, it has been in the realm of ideas and morality, of culture and of ethics generally, and increasingly in that of economic theory and activity, that the scattered oppositions of East Central Europe articulated a position against the existing Communist Party-state. As has been argued earlier, this was the historical "home" for any existent opposition to the state in East Central Europe. It was also a realm of activity that the Communist Party-state acknowledged as important. As indicated in Chapter One, the consolidation of Communist Party power over the various East Central European states, although largely the product of political machinations and coercion, was guaranteed by the active support of a significant element of the concerned population. There is a case, as argued in Chapter One, to be made for the Communist Party-state having a considerable degree of hegemony, consensual cultural leadership, at least in the years immediately after World War Two. Much of Czeslaw Milosz' The Captive Mind focuses on how the ideas and logic of the Party persuaded men and women who should have known better, or who did know better but did not have the intellectual or experiential tools capable of penetrating the "Method" (or who could see no alternative to Bolshevism except the sometimes only slightly more repellant example of fascism[131]), to play an active role in the consolidation of the Polish United Workers' Party control over Polish society. When various men and women had gained these tools, in Poland and elsewhere, and began using them to critique the system rather than defeat it through armed insurrection, the struggle for hegemony resumed. Or rather, the struggle over the ideas that constitute the hegemonic order resumed.

---

[130] cf. Vajda, pp.344-345.

It should be noted that at this point the struggle existed largely within the Communist Party-state. Konrad and Szelenyi make the point that questions of reform or criticism within the Party-state had taken the form of an internal class conflict, with criticisms emerging from the larger base of the intellectual techno-managerial class addressed to the de facto ruling elite of the intellectual class.[132] In this instance Party-state hegemony was not threatened. So long as criticisms remained within the confines of the Communist Party, so long as it spoke in the same language, assumed the same basic premises, as the official ideology, the Party-state continued to wear the clothes of leadership. It was when criticism figuratively spoke another language, when it raised questions about the emperor's - old rather than new - clothes, as it were, that the struggle for hegemony assumed the drastic and dramatic significance Gramsci attributes to it when he claims that it involves the "decisive positions" on which the life of the state depends.

---

[131] cf. Aleksander Watt on the delimma of Poles and Soviets confronting the choice of the two barbarisms, My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual, ed. and trans. R.Lourie, New York: W.W.Norton, 1990.

[132] cf. pp.184-219.

Again, the year of 1968 stands as important here because after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the end of the Prague Spring the struggle moved outside the domain of the Communist Party. With the "end of reformism" a nebulous, unorganized or minimally organized, non-state realm developed to challenge the larger cultural leadership or hegemony of the Communist Party-state. With the opposition now definitely outside of the paternal embrace, not subject to or respecting the language or ideas of the Party and not accepting its authority except as exercised by its coercive apparatus, a state of reciprocal siege was begun. Thus the critical intelligentsia had reassumed its historical role as the extra-state opposition, fighting with ideas and culture the (now diminishing) hegemony and (still intact) dominance of the Party-state.

In Poland Pelczynski referred to this as the "rebirth of *political society.*" As I have argued, however, Pelczynski's De Tocquevillian distinction between political society and civil society doesn't get to the heart of the matter. Rather, if we stuck by our Gramscian, not to say our historically informed guns the "puzzling" phenomenon of Poland in the late 1970s, as in Czechoslovakia and Hungary where so-called "dissident" movements were becoming visible, was not so much one of explaining the existence of a political society without an institutionalized base in civil society, but of describing the reawakening of a desire for an institutionalized civil society. This is an historical desire, something the traditional "protagonists of civil society" in East Central Europe had rediscovered with the failure of reformism. On a theoretical level the question of politics in the capital "P" sense of government at the state and international levels recedes. The objective becomes one of "simply" creating an independent realm of social and civic activity.

Instead of attempting to seize power by way of a war of manoeuvre, the various opposition forces simply attempted to "live in truth," to create a legitimate realm of existence not colonized by the Communist Party-state. Control of the state was removed from the agenda (it was, realistically, on the agenda of reformers because they were inside the governing body) and replaced by attempted indifference to it. As Michnik's "New Evolutionism" argued, it was now time to talk not to the Party-state but to the people. The war of position started at this point. Individuals and groups began to besiege the Party-state by challenging its ideas and assumptions with ones of their own, by suggesting in their actions and words that the Party-state's claim to cultural leadership was bankrupt and by offering alternatives that revealed this bankruptcy.

The power of such challenges was not taken lightly, as the Czechoslovak state's response to Charter 77 indicates. All that really counted was on the line. The power of the coercive apparatus, a reversion to a war of manoeuvre on the state's part, as Jaruzelski attempted in Poland, failed to protect these most "decisive positions." Business as usual in the period of normalization after 1981 failed miserably. Without the consent of the majority of the population a state cannot effectively govern, witness the retreat by Jaruzelski in 1989: negotiating with the outlawed Solidarity. Witness the demise of the Czechoslovak Communist Party-state, of the Hungarian Communist Party-state, the bloody end to Ceaucescu's regime in Romania, etcetera.

Again, these developments can only be explained in a Gramscian framework if we accept that Gramsci's concepts need to be historically revised to fit the specific national-historical case. In East Central Europe the very demand for civil society becomes a political demand, not only conditioned by recent - post-World War Two - history but also the history of the various empires and nations that have flourished, invaded, withdrawn, and collapsed since the Middle Ages. Rather than state, with Pelczynski, that in 1980 it was institutional civil society born of non-institutional or pre-institutional political society it may be more appropriate to speak of embryonic institutions, or informal institutions, the pre-conditions for a "fully fledged, institutional civil society." It was in and through these informal and ephemeral institutions that the war of position, a war waged for the formalization, the legitimation of these institutions, took place in East Central Europe.

The Prehistory of Civil Society

Before considering the preconditions for civil society and how they function to create a crisis in the ruling Communist Party-state body - how they create a condition of reciprocal seige - it is important to recapitulate the historical evolution and erasure of civil society in East Central Europe. As noted repeatedly in this argument, civil society was already historically underdeveloped in the region. Following from Konrad and Szelenyi, and from the accounts of Milosz and Kundera among others, the historical "protagonists of civil society," the intellectuals, after World War Two took the "road to class power" that the consolidation of the Communist Party-state's offered. The previously imperiled (with the exception of post-World War One Czechoslovakia) civil society of the secessionist states were, after the disastrous years of Nazi occupation, given only a few years, if that, to breathe fresh air before being abandoned by their "protagonists." The Leninist-Stalinist theory and policy of the state afforded little opportunity for independent intellectual or political activity and, again as Milosz, Kundera, and Haraszti (in his aphorisms on post-Stalinist intellectual politics and sociology) make clear the opportunity for what might be called realistic as opposed to socialist-realist self-descriptions was limited, to say the least. The strictures of socialist realism, introduced unevenly and strategically in the region with an eye to convincing artists of their social and political merit and, concurrently with the closing of independent publishing operations, providing a strong hand of direction, and, importantly, with the elevation of the intellectual into an indispensable part of the creation of the new socialist man, the new society, closed the doors and minds of independent critical thought. The Party and state subsumed the merits of civil society in the name of the ineluctable logic of dialectical materialism. Reading The Captive Mind, or passages form Aleksander Watt's My Century, and also Kundera's comments about the joy of being in the "circle of power" in his Book of Laughter and Forgetting, one gets the sense that it was the educated, the intellectuals, who were most susceptible to this logic, this flattery, and this power. In any case, totalitarian societies were created by the emerging Communist Party-states through the seduction and coercion of intellectuals, as well as the active suppression of non-Party intellectual, social, and political activity.

Self-Description and the Fiction of Power

Konrad and Szelenyi make the point that although historically our ideas as to what constitutes the true character of humanity have changed, it is the intellectuals of society who have created these images. In so doing they have been not only the arbiters, but also the models of what it is to be fully human.[133] As this chapter will argue, this is an important point to consider when the philosophers, as it were, have mounted the throne and gone from describing the world to changing it.

It is not only questions of power and management, pure and simple, that concern the intellectuals as a ruling class or stratum. Perhaps more importantly it is questions of knowledge, doctrine, policy, and understanding, questions of redeeming the image of humanity as sketched by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Where intellectuals govern it is a dangerous activity to forego their expertise in the pursuit of one's own understanding, one,s own conception of the world and one's experience in it. In this context - and this is the context of Bolshevized East Central Europe - the notion of self-description, as well as its radical interlocutor, socialist realism, are important, not only in considering the erasure of civil society but also the development of a pre-institutionalized opposition to the Party-state. Ultimately, the ability to own ones experiences in the form of self-descriptions and to share these even among a few individuals begins the work of breaking down the oppressive "liberatory" images of the revolutionary intellectuals; it also begins to create the conversation of everyday life that begets new images, new social and cultural forms, new communities.

---

[133] p.13.

The following discussion concerning the work of Elaine Scarry must be placed in this context. Her argument, although much broader, and more contentious than it appears in this discussion[134] touches it because she is interested in what I see as the problem of bringing silenced experience into social discourse. And although this discussion has dwelt almost entirely on the level of large scale social and political events and developments it is now appropriate to turn to the small events that constitute human life and experience. It is out of a recognition of how these small events are shaped, are denied, or are given voice that notions like democracy, domination, hegemony, and civil society come to have some qualitative substance.

In The Body in Pain Elaine Scarry refers to the problem of politics and self-description in these terms:

> Political power...entails the power of self-description. The mistaken descriptions cited [in The Body in Pain]...are in each instance articulated either by or on behalf of those who are directly inflicting, or actively permitting the infliction of, bodily hurt...As in an earlier century the most

---

[134] For a critical discussion of Scarry's book (The Body in Pain, New York: Oxford, 1985) see P.Singer, "Unspeakable acts," The New York Review of Books, February 27, 1986.

> searing questions of right and wrong were perceived to be bound up with questions of 'truth,' so in the coming time these same, still-searing questions of right and wrong must be reperceived as centrally bound up with questions about 'fictions.'[135]

The "mistaken descriptions" Scarry refers to include descriptions of torture and war that are "mistaken" because they displace the real activity taking place - the causing of physical pain, wounding, death - with terminology and ideas that create a fiction concerning the activity. So torture becomes "information gathering," despite the fact that documented instances of torture indicate that very little, if any, new information is ever obtained through torture.

Through an analysis of numerous documented cases, Scarry argues that the real description of torture is the deconstruction of the victim's belief system. This takes place in the separation of his or her physical body from other persons and, fundamentally, from civilization and society by turning objects and words into weapons, by reducing the victim to a state "anterior to language," and finally by turning the body against itself.[136] The purpose of this radical separation of the body from its world, says Scarry, is the creation of the "fiction" of the torturer's power.

> The physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of 'incontestable reality' on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used.[137]

---

[135] p.279.

[136] Scarry, p.47.

[137] p.27.

Peter Singer finds this assertion by Scarry itself to be "highly contestable."[138] Generally, Singer criticizes Scarry for lacking an historical analysis of torture, one which would have made her claims less sweeping. Even if her comments were limited to the modern period and contemporary uses of torture, however, Singer remains unconvinced of her argument about a relationship between torture and a regime's instability, and as examples he uses the stable but cruel "Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Stalinist Russia," and the unstable but liberal-democratic Weimar Germany to buttress his point.

Although sympathetic to the historical critique of abstractions that lies at the heart of Singer's discussion of Scarry, there is a response to his doubts - and to Scarry's sometimes vague generalizations - in looking at a regime's relationship not so much to the objective fact of stability but to the more subjective phenomenon of hegemony. The violence of the Italian Fascists is an example. It was Gramsci's argument - and this against the maximalist or militarist tendency within the PCI - that the regime will successfully employ a war of movement against its enemies only if has the support of a large part of society. That is, if it can lay claim to hegemony, as expressed in the consensually determined control of the military and legal organs within society. This has less to do with questions of "stability" than it does with the existing "equlibrium of forces," the existing contest for power and hegemony over society, and the regime's evaluation of its position within this contest. One could argue that if the regime *felt itself to be stable* and in a hegemonic position - if it did not harbour self-doubt as to its legitimacy, its ability to defeat its opponents in the realm of hegemony proper (i.e. the realm of ideas, values, culture, and so forth) - it would not resort to the "dirty wars" of torture and death squads. That it attempts to announce its incontestable domination of society through the "public relations" of torture and death squads reinforces Scarry's argument about the incontestability of this consciously inflicted pain, and its relationship to the contestability of the regime's claim to legitimate power over society (at least in a world that mouths the ideals of "democracy"). To follow Scarry, the power that employs torture, not to gather information but to substantiate itself, must so overwhelm the victim with physical pain that only its self-description is capable of standing. As Scarry notes at the end of her chapter on torture,

---

[138] "Unspeakable acts," The New York Review of Books, February 27, 1986, p.27.

> Power is cautious. It covers itself. It bases itself in another's pain and prevents all recognition that there is 'another' by looped circles that ensure its own solipsism.[139]

In the case of war, the bodies of soldiers and civilians alike substantiate one side's claim to victory; equally, they substantiate the "losing" side's notions of heroism, martyrdom, and such. Scarry goes to some length to analyze the literature on war to discover some essential link between the act of injuring and the claims made to legitimate it. Again, Scarry discovers a series of "looped circles" whereby the experiencing body is prevented from, as it were, owning its experiences. Instead, notions such as patriotism, just cause, etcetera, not to mention the technical language used to discuss military events, language that frequently animates objects like guns and rockets but de-humanizes or objectifies human participants, displace attention from the suffering of men, women, and children and focus on abstractions, namely the health of the nation-state.

---

[139] p.59.

Scarry goes on to analyze other, less dramatic, ways in which the specifity and reality of the body in pain is removed from our attention or made to seem legitimate because it substantiates a larger power. One instance is found in the texts of Judeo-Christianity; the other is found in Marx's analysis of capitalism. In the former, it is the cultural construct - "the invented Artifact" - of God, Jehovah, born of human beings attempting to give theological sense to their existence. Paradoxically, as the created artifact becomes the Creator he requires those same human bodies to suffer as substantiation of his reality.

> In the Old Testament scenes of hurt, what should be recognizable as simple and unequivocal acts of divine *immorality* (the wilful and repeated infliction of human hurt) are instead perceived as revelations of his *superior morality*: the problem is presented not as the artifact's unreality, unbelievability, but as the people's disobedience; the pain-filled solution is presented...as punishment.[140]

For Marx the invented artifact is the capitalist system of production, which disembodies the labourer and embodies the commodity. In this system, as Scarry puts it,

> men and women stand in the presence of the economic system collectively made to relieve them of the problems of sentience [ie., hunger, homelessness, ill health, material want generally] and must instead undergo increasingly severe bodily alterations to sustain and perpetuate its existence.[141]

As she goes on to say, "the exclusion of the women and men who are the *creators* of made objects from the benefits of those objects is perceived as resulting from their *inferior creativity*."[142]

---

[140] ibid. p.278.

[141] p.276.

[142] p.279.

To reiterate, Scarry's point is that those who hold power also hold firmly to the construction or determination of self-description. In the case of torture this is an imposed self-description; but in the case of the state at war, or of religious beliefs, or of a given socio-economic order the self-description, even where it contradicts or occludes real, physical experience, is often part of the consensual or hegemonic culture. As part of its consolidation, the East Central European Communist Party-states imposed the aesthetic ideology of socialist realism. This was an effort to control the self-descriptions that artists and intellectuals produced in their creative works. That is, it was an effort to both turn attention away from really existing physical, intellectual, and emotional experience, and to develop the hegemony and cult of the Communist Party-state in order to "build socialism." Because it controlled all legal means of creative production, and because it had virtually invaded all social activities through its absorbtion of the existing institutions of civil society into Party-state run or monitored institutions, there was very little opportunity for non-socialist realist - that is, non-endorsed - descriptions of life in totalitarian society to emerge within that society. In these conditions, the writer, artist, or critical intellectual who did not conform in his or her practices or experiences to that permitted expression was compelled to remain silent, and in this silence was isolated.

Isolation and Communion

It is to this reality of isolation, of experience denied expression, that Scarry's argument speaks. The foundation of this argument is a theory of culture that attempts to locate the impulse to *make*, to create, in the experiences of the body. Or rather, she attributes the impulse to create to a desire to overcome the *body's* muteness, its inability to share experience. This is not the place to enter into the dense argument she engages in to substantiate her thesis; it is, however, the place to emphasize certain aspects of it that stand on their own, especially the relation of bodily experience to social world, because it provides a way of understanding both the silence of the opposition in East Central Europe, and the development of civil society within this seeming silence.

When Scarry discusses torture one of her central points is that the victim becomes the substantiation of the regime's fiction of power because all resources of resistance, of mental resistance (physical resistance having long since been obliterated), have been removed from the victim only to be returned as weapons and signs of the regime's fiction. The connection between the world of the imagination, by extension the world of culture or ideology, and the world of physical experience is severed. Meaning is "deconstructed." For Scarry, this is a state anterior to sociality. Repeatedly she points to the fact of the absolute gulf that exists between mute but experiencing bodies. How is it possible, she asks, that the torturer can inflict such tremendous pain on the victim and have no sense of that pain?[143] Pain, Scarry's argument suggests, is perhaps that which most radically dissolves the social world, severing the bonds of understanding and trust between individuals.

---

[143] Scarry, p.12.

> [F]or the person in pain...'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt.'[144]

What the body knows it has no way of communicating.

The project of bringing bodily experience into the realm of communication - that is, of making social the individual and isolated experiences of the body - is of central concern to Scarry. She points to the work of medical researches, Amnesty International, lawyers involved in bodily injury litigation, and artists as being the principle means by which this project is being advanced. At first glance it would appear that of these four areas of work the first three take on a pragmatic cast, representing therapeutic, political or human rights, and legal concerns, with the fourth representing the creative or imaginative concerns. On consideration, however, all these "researches" must be understood as creative and imaginative because they are all involved in the creation of a "language" of the body, whatever the intended purposes of such a language. And, as I will argue, they all participate to some degree in the therapeutic, political, and legal arenas. That is, the work of bringing certain experiences out of their physical isolation is an imaginative enterprise with political and legal consequences, and by virtue of this it becomes a therapeutic exercise.

Perhaps the root image of Scarry's theory is that of the isolated sentient body, standing naked, without the clothes of culture. This is a feeling body, but not yet an expressive body. In her arguments about "making" Scarry posits pain or aversion as a significant motivation for imagining, for beginning the process of the self-extension of the body.[145] This has to do with the "objectlessness" of pain. As she notes,

---

[144] Scarry, p.4.

> All other states, precisely by taking an object, at first invite one only to enter rather than to supplement the natural world. The man 'desiring' can see the rain and knows it is its cessation that he is longing for, so that he can go out and find the berries he is hungry for, before the night comes that he fears. Because of the inevitable bonding of his own interior states with companion objects in the outside world, he easily locates himself in that external world and has no need to invent a world to extend himself out into. The object is an extension of, and expression of, the state: the rain expresses his longing, the berries his hunger, and the night his fear. But nothing expresses his physical pain...[I]t is especially appropriate that the very state in which he is utterly objectless is also of all states the one that, by its aversiveness, makes most pressing the urge to move out and away from the body.[146]

In short, aversive experience generates creative activity, pushes one out of one's body into a self-expressive gesture. This gesture needn't be the creation of objects dwelling on the aversive experience - that is they needn't be art works or therapeutic works per se (although whatever they are they will to some extent embody the concerns of evaluation-expression and therapy); very likely, however, they will have some relation to that experience, as Scarry notes in her discussion of the development of tools as extensions of the body that relieve the body and enable it to do more with greater ease and facility.[147]

Significantly, these self-expressive gestures begin to effect the isolation of our imagined naked body.

---

[145] cf. pp.161-180.

[146] p.162.

[147] cf. pp.173-176.

> Through tools and acts of making, human beings become implicated in each other's sentience...Thus when intentional objects come to include not just the rain, berries, stones, and the night but also bread, bowls, church steeples, and radiators, there comes to be an ongoing interaction at the (once private) centre of human sentience; for not only are the interior facts of sentience projected outward into the artifact in the movement of it making, but conversely those artifacts now enter the interior of other persons as the content of perception and emotion.[148]

Through her creative acts the individual moves out of the isolated experiences of her body into the world of others, into the social world. Although Scarry does not mention it, the act of moving out of the body is made possible by the prior existence of culture, of shared ideas, shared langauge, shared notions of what bread, bowls, church steeples, and radiators are for. This is exactly the problem facing those who are working to give the experiencing body a means of communication: the existent "language" of the body is incapable of adequately bringing the individual's experience of pain into social experience. To the extent that medical researchers, lawyers, Amnesty International workers, and artists are able to begin the process of bridging the gulf that separates the body in pain from the neighbouring body not in pain they are building within the shared world of language that the Soviet theoretician Valentin N. Volosinov argued penetrates and to some extent permits social and cultural life. Culture, social knowledge, what Volosinov calls an "ideological chain,"

> stretches from individual consciousness to individual consciousness, connecting them together. Signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another. And the individual consciousness itself is filled with signs. Consciousness becomes

---

[148] Scarry, p.176.

> consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction.[149]

In terms of Scarry's argument, Volosinov is suggesting that the imagined naked body is purely hypothetical, that every body is to some degree clothed, as it were, with culture, with the "signs" necessary to permit at least a limited degree of social understanding. In the case of severe physical pain, Amnesty International gathers information, eye witness reports or personal testimony, in an existing form of social communication, language, thereby bringing into a larger consciousness the fact of torture. In hospitals and research facilities medical researchers formulate questionnaires using existing language but in various formations to broaden the social understanding of a private experience. The point is that the isolation of the naked body is not absolute, that the ladder out of isolation exists in so far as the individual is able to turn an existing form of social communication to her needs, her experiences. Scarry has recounted how

> to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language [caused by great pain] and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself.[150]

To follow Volosinov, and Scarry on the desocialization of the torture victim, this is not only a rebirth into language; it is a profound rebirth into sociality.

Thus a creative-imaginative act assumes a therapeutic quality, the isolated victim rejoining her sisters and brothers, her world, through the articulation of her experiences. Despite its attempts to resist the appellation "political" the work of Amnesty International is political as it helps lift the personal, bodily experiences of torture into the social realm, challenging repressive regimes with an embodied notion of human rights. Because it works at giving this notion some substance, the articulation of bodily experience against a repressive regime also enters the realm of law.

---

[149] Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, trans. L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1986, p.11.

[150] p.6.

Body and Voice in East Central Europe

The hegemony of the Communist Party-states in East Central Europe, coupled with the doctrine of socialist realism, and underwritten by the coercive measures of the post-Second World War Stalinists, created a situation where lived experiences were increasingly denied avenues of legitimate expression. Conversely, the hegemonic "ideological chain," as it were, was increasingly contradicted by the "process of social interaction." As Vaclav Havel, among others, never tired of telling us in his condemnation of the "life of the lie," the hegemonic-cum-dominant order rapidly became an ideological ball and chain. As stated above, given the active strictures of aesthetic doctrine and cold war security measures, not to mention the passive or voluntary strictures of the hegemonic order, the critical intellectual was silenced, and in his silence isolated.

Given Scarry's arguments concerning aversive situations as the stimulus of imagination, and creative-imaginative work as the means through which an end to isolation is realized, however, we must reconsider this hypothetically isolated East

Central European intellectual. As already noted, by the time of the Communist Party-states' consolidation in the region most if not all vestiges of civil society not already destroyed by the Nazi occupation had been subsumed or penetrated by the Party-state. Nevertheless, the silencing of voices not in conformity with official culture and ideology achieved by the Communist Party-state did not last. Scarry in one passage emphasizes both the centrality and utility of the concepts (or anti-concepts) of body and voice. Their significance lies first, she says, in their being "though not themselves prior to culture and artifice,...perhaps as close to prior as is possible..."

Secondly, "they do not, once made culture ['a richly fictionalized world'] has been entered, cease to be analytically useful, in part because they are at all times immediately recognizable."[151] That is, body and voice form not only an analogous pair to pain and imagining, to radical isolation and full sociality, experience and expression; they are, as it were, their embodiment. Scary sees this pair as indispensable in the understanding of certain situations, such as "when there is some problem in the relation between maker and made thing..."[152]

A look at this relation as it exists in Soviet societies, whether it is in the realm of artistic or intellectual production, or in that of industry proper, indicates such a problem. In the case of production generally, as Konrad and Szelenyi show, the alienation of labour Marx described in early capitalism, not to mention the exclusion from the fruits of their labour that Scarry highlights in Marx, remains substantially the same. That is, the bodies of workers continue to experience the pain of labour and of the working and living conditions that are part of the real life of the global working class; it was, however, no longer the social Darwinism of early capitalism that explained and justified their pain as inferiority, creative or otherwise: in Soviet societies the pain of the working class, like the tribulations of Jehovah's chosen people, was elevated into noble sacrifice. The voice that spoke of this pain transformed it, offered a "mistaken description" of it as heroic, as substantiating the verity of Soviet-style communism.

---

[151] p.182.

[152] ibid.

The distillation of the problem of the relation of maker and made thing into the concepts of body and voice in East Central Europe suggests an interesting duality and tension. Perhaps only in societies that are premised so directly on a materialist (and following Scarry one could even say body-centred) critique or philosophy is it possible to discern such a clear conception of body and voice in culture. That is, ostensibly, the working class forms the body whose experiences inform, and are articulated by *their* intellectuals: the *voice* of the working class is the Communist Party. Of course, this raises the whole problem of the relation of knowledge to experience, the relation of an "enlightened" vanguard to the masses. Without entering into that debate it is enough to say here that material existence, the experience of the body, especially the worker's body, formed one of the foundations of Marx's critique of production and society generally. Scarry's employment of Marx rests essentially on the notion that Marx was reading the body's experience in his observations of early capitalism, that he was, in effect, becoming the voice of that labouring body. In subsequent attempts to realize a society that would alleviate the suffering of this body - in attempts to turn Marx's critique into a political programme - the designated voices for the working class moved from concrete analysis to extrapolation, to policy formulation, but initially and substantively to revolutionary ideology that necessarily - for tactical and strategic reasons - moved away from the immediate and concrete reality of the body. The voice of the working class body, the vanguard Party intelligentsia, interested in the historical project of this class, in the future of this class, developed its own description of it, one that would, in time, become as distant, perhaps as mistaken a description as that offered by the social Darwinists.

Even in a totalitarian society, where the body had lost its voice to the dictates of the Central Committee, however, the body continued to register its own experiences. Scarry's argument on pain and imagining generally states that, given an aversive experience the body will move to eliminate or lessen that experience by whatever means are at hand; failing available means it will engage its creative abilities to develop these means. Lacking the institutions of civil society, institutions that would guarantee or furnish the opportunity for the body to speak its experiences, to attempt to, as Marx did in the nineteenth century, bring them into a social discourse, the body must create its own opportunities. That is, it must find its voice anew. In doing so, the body that has been isolated in its own experiences, hidden or masked behind the self-descriptions of the regime, begins the process of social rebirth. In the shadow of fear that the Communist Party-state's apparatus cast, a shadow only made deeper and darker by the powerful and compelling self-descriptions of the dominant culture (i.e. the hegemonic or consensual reality of those self-descriptions), individuals began to share experiences and in that *sharing* created the preconditions for the civil society Pelczynski argued was non-existent in East Central Europe prior to Solidarity's summer of 1980.

Scarry's work provides a theory of the body in culture, its silence in isolation, and its sociality in assuming a voice. The entering into culture, into the "ideological chain that stretches from individual consciousness to individual consciousness," is in the context of repression - repression that is necessarily political in that it takes power away from the body and subjugates it fully, expropriating and reconstructing its experiences - a reforging of that ideological chain. And, because that reforging is a reforging of political "fictions," it is a fundamentally political act. At this level of activity, of repression and resistance, the concept of the body as a political entity, as the fundamental element of notions concerning human rights, democracy and injustice, freedom and responsibility, is born.

But this is also a profoundly *cultural* act as well, this reforging of the ideological chain. Not only does the body enter into the social world through existing forms of communication, through the "signs" and sign systems that comprise culture; it elaborates and revives, replenishes these forms with its hitherto silenced experiences.

The point here is that at the level of the body entering into the forms of meaning that comprise culture it is impossible to separate the political, the cultural, or the social from the whole that is everyday life. Volosinov refers to language as acquiring life and historically evolving in "concrete verbal communication, ...not in the abstract linguistic system of language forms..."[153] That is, language - and here it stands in as a representative of cultural or communicative forms generally in society - has meaning, develops its meaning "only in the process of social interaction."[154] In the absence of an institutionalized civil society the process of social interaction begins to invest existing cultural forms, expressive forms, with meaning - such as bodily knowledge - that existing institutions cannot or will not give voice to. The abstract principles of Marxism-Leninism and of dialectical materialism that have generated and guided cultural, political, and social institutions in Soviet societies are analogous to those "abstract linguistic systems of language forms" Volosinov criticized: they cannot explain or accommodate concrete experience in the lived social world. Ultimately, as Steven Sampson indicates in his article, "Rumours in Socialist Romania," even the language of everyday life can become a haven for concrete experience and critical expression.[155]

---

[153] p.95.

Habitable Institutions

In East bloc societies of a warmer political climate than that of the former neo-Stalinist Ceaucescu regime, the experiences of the body find a slightly more stable home in the at times burgeoning realm of *samizdat* or underground literature. In 1988, prior to the "revolutions" that would antiquate samizdat, the Hungarian sociologist Elmer Hankis noted that, "The growing body of *samizdat* literature has become, in most East European countries, a genuinely alternative public sphere."[156] That is, in the East bloc, cultural or communicative forms, whether in the rudimentary and ephemeral form of whispered rumours or ribald stories or the less fleeting but still limited form of samizdat (manuscripts reproduced by typing each copy separately, or by duplicating machine), were the means by which a "genuinely alternative public sphere" - a civil society - was pre-institutionalized, as it were. Rumours, gossip, a single typed page, or a dozen copies circulated between friends - these are the germs, the seeds of those institutions that formed a legitimate civil society later, in Poland in 1980, in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany in 1989. Before the legalization of Solidarity, of multi-party elections, and of non-Party mass public rallies there existed what might be called, to borrow a phrase and concept from Agnes Heller, "habitable institutions" in an uninhabitable world.

---

[154] ibid. p.11.

[155] Survey 28:4, 1984.

Heller develops this notion in her discussion of the relationship of Georg Lukacs and Irma Seidler.[157] These two citizens of fin-de-siecle Budapest were attempting to find meaning in a world from which they felt profoundly alienated. Rejecting the bourgeois Jewish society they were born into they looked for redemption in their relationship. Heller refers to this search as one for a habitable institution, an institution that would afford both Lukacs and Seidler the opportunity and ability to speak to one another, to communicate, to bring to light their respective selves, their dreams and desires - in short to bridge the gulf that separates two experiencing bodies. Existing institutions, social and cultural forms, were empty shells for them. Heller's article, and the series of letters of which it is composed and on which it draws, points to the tragedy of this particular search: the failure of Lukacs or Seidler to create their habitable institution; Seidler's suicide; Lukacs' guilt and remorse. Despite the tragic outcome of this attempt the concept of a habitable institution remains a substantive and compelling one. It is perhaps, in some general way, the motivation of any reform or revolutionary project: the de-alienation or redemption of the world. Surely, every gesture made and word spoken to the notion of not living the lie of the Communist Party-state ideology, to living in truth or dignity is in effect a demand for habitable institutions in an uninhabitable world.

---

[156] "The 'second society': Is there an alternative social model emerging in contemporary Hungary?" Social Research 55:1-2, 1988, p.24.

[157] "Georg Lukacs and Irma Seidler," Lukacs Revalued, ed. A.Heller, London: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

Heller's insight is to locate the germinus of such demands in the smallest of social spaces: the personal relationship of lovers. In concert with Volosinov on language, and cultural forms generally, Heller draws our attention to the way meaning is created and developed in concrete social interaction. Her own development on this point is to think of these interactions as potential institutions, to understand the bond between lovers and friends as comprising an elemental institution. These are not the institutions that Pelczynski sees as lacking in pre-1980 Poland, nor are they those that Gramsci would have been referring to in his discussion of ideology, values, and ethics and their articulation and development in civil society; they are, however,the often invisible, surely overlooked, foundations of those larger institutions of education, law, culture, church, etcetera. In East Central Europe we have perhaps one of the few existent examples of how the habitable institutions of everyday life have prefigured the more substantial, more self-announcing institutions of independent trade unionism, democratic parties, and independent cultural groups.

Accenting everyday life and the creation of meaning in and through habitable institutions Heller also socializes and politicizes the notion of culture. First, as the life of the body passes into the conversation of everyday life, into the unremarkable but fundamental and profound relationships that constitute everyday life - the marriage(s), friendships, children and parents that give immediate emotional, physical, and economic substance to life - it enters into the concrete process of social interaction. This process involves relationships that have become institutions: marriage, friendship, parenthood, childhood, employer/employee, and so forth. Putting aside the institutionalised nature of storytelling itself in everyday life, the cultural forms that shape these relationships are interactive, mutually though not identically influenced by the interests and expectations of listeners as well as speakers. It is on this level of everyday conversation that: One, the experiences of the body enter, through the institutions of cultural forms such as language and kinship rituals, the social world; and two, that these experiences assume a communicable hence social form. Putting aside certain other obstacles, Heller emphasizes that Irma Seidler's situation as a *woman* was a principal difficulty in the development of her relationship with Lukacs. That is, although Lukacs may have understood - and been able to communicate with - Seidler's alienation from bourgeois Jewish Budapest society, the fact that she was a woman struggling with her alienation from the conventions of patriarchal society was beyond his understanding. The bodily fact of Irma Seidler's womanhood was denied a voice by both the culture of bourgeois society and Lukcas' anti-capitalist romanticism. Perhaps only with Heller's article has the profundity of Seidler's double alienation been able to express itself and enter the social world, this long after the body in question has turned to dust.

This raises, indirectly, my second point: how Heller politicizes culture through the concept of habitable institutions. Lukacs' anti-capitalist romanticism lacked an active subject let alone a revolutionary subject prior to his turn to Bolshevism. If he had heard the voice of Seidler's body speaking in her letters, perhaps he would have recognized therein the active subject of woman struggling with the fetters of her patrimony and have been able to step out of the extreme self-absorbtion his letters describe. Be that as it may, the point here is that culture, even the culture of everyday life, is about creating habitable institutions and that for such institutions to be habitable they must enable bodies to speak, to express themselves. Where the experiences of the body are denied or ignored or explained away their articulation is the first step towards the idea of self-recognition and self-description that comprises basic human rights. It is within the habitable institution that these rights are both exercised and developed. Again, given the strength of Lukacs' mind, if he and Seidler had been able to speak to one another, had been able to create the habitable institution they both wanted, in different ways, the political issue of women's rights as basic human rights might have occupied Lukacs mind and moved him to an analysis as influential as his History and Class Consciousness. Let us, however, leave wishful thinking alone. Lukacs did not hear Seidler; it was Agnes Heller who heard her voice, who raised these issues; by then their political import had already become part of the larger cultural and social process.

In the case of East Central Europe historical examples abound in cultural forms assuming social and political significance. In an article published during Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution," expatriate Czech writer Josef Skvorecky reflected on the fact that it is the writers who had become political leaders by describing the modern history of the Czech nation. This history, he notes, is tied to the disappearance and reappearance of the Czech language. With the fall of the Protestant Hussites, the Habsburgs and the Catholic Church attempted to eliminate what remained of the former Kingdom of Bohemia. Czech books were burned; the Czech intelligentsia was "either executed or forced into exile." German replaced Czech as the language of learning and by the mid-eighteenth century the Czech language "was little more than part of folklore." Inspired by the ideas of Herder on language and nation, nationalist Czech intellectuals in the nineteenth century reawakened the "soul of the nation." As Skvorecky, commenting on the centrality of writers to today's post-Communist Czechoslovakia, puts it, "They did it through the printed word."[158]

Neither Hungary nor Poland suffered the kind of "linguicide" that the Czech lands did, yet Skvorecky makes another point about literature and its effect on political life that does refer to the concerns of other nations within East Central Europe. The writer in a totalitarian society, he notes, needn't

> produce outspokenly political stuff: the very fact that he put on paper images of life much closer to truth than those offered by censored journalism - not to mention bootlicking ideologists - turned him, in the minds of his readers, into something considerably more important than just

---

[158] p.43.

> a raconteur. A writer, in such societies, became a public figure...[159]

In these cases, literature itself becomes a habitable institution because it provides the space for individuals, as writers, to create their own self-descriptions, to admit their body's experience into the forms of culture, and as readers to have their own experiences affirmed or challenged.

Central to this notion of the habitable institution is the notion of participation, of the institution being *mutually* habitable (as it was not for either Lukacs or Seidler). In this sense it has analogies or parallels with work done in sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking, notably that of Dell Hymes and Richard Bauman, among others.[160] Although this work tends to focus on those aspects of social and cultural life that appear as elevated or otherwise differentiated from the quotidian (ie., their emphasis tends to be on storytelling, stylized speech events, ritual performances, and the like) it does stress the lived or performed rather than static aspect of culture. Even in highly ritualized and schematized situations the performer is aware of the audience, anticipating its mood, its demands and expectations. The work itself, whether story or ritual, stands as the meeting place as it were of performer and audience, shaped to some extent by both, rather than simply imposed by the former. In the case of East Central European samizdat literature, such as the "Padlock Editions" of Czech writer Ludvic Vaculik's feuilletons,[161] the work becomes the institution where friends (and foes) meet to continue the dialogue now stilled, now muted by the state's security apparatus. Vaculik, like his compatriots toiling at menial tasks, or those enjoying the bizarre schizophrenia of Jaruzelski's Poland, or those stretching the limits of tolerance in Kadar's Hungary, was aware of his public role, of his conversation with "the people," even if this "people" was comprised of only the few who received his duplicated articles. Vaculik and his colleagues in samizdat and other unofficial business were generating the dialogue that substantiates any habitable institution, the conversation that leads to the final moment of tolerance, when the inhospitability, the uninhabitability of the existent official institutions is wiped away by the emergent institutions, institutions based in lived, bodily experience.

---

[159] p.43.

[160] cf. Hymes, In Vain I Tried to Tell You, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvannia, 1981; Bauman, "Verbal art as performance," American Anthropologist, 77:2; Bauman and J.Sherzer, ed. Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, London: Cambridge, 1974.

Hegemony and Everyday Life

Hegemony, then, is dependent on the hegemonic culture's ability to give voice and explanation to the experience of the body. Put another way, hegemony is substantial to the extent that the experiences of the body as they are expressed in everyday life do not contradict but are understood to confirm it. The content of hegemony may be said to consist of a society's collective mythology. Thus, the Judaic scriptures are hegemonic amongst practising Jews because they give sense and purpose to the suffering of this people. Likewise, the scriptures of Christianity are hegemonic amongst practising Christians because their tribulations are affirmed and justified in these texts. Furthermore, the hegemony of Judeo-Christian ethics extends far beyond that of practitioners of these faiths because even for ex-Jews and ex-Christians the problem of accounting for bodily experience in the world, while explicable perhaps in terms of science, remains without value - except in terms of the residues of our Judeo-Christian heritage. That is, even in the twentieth century, long after social scientists and philosophers have shown us the rationale, the cultural specificity, and the impossibility of God, notions of value and ethics emanating from the scriptures continue to function as hegemonic, albeit in veiled or unconscious ways. The experiences of the body, those experiences that resist but demand expression, are the site of the struggle for hegemony.

---

[161] A Cup of Coffee With My Interogator, trans. G.Theiner, London: Readers International, 1987.

While it would be interesting to develop the analyses of Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault in this area, gaining some insight into how bodily experience has been "civilized" and "disciplined," respectively, it is enough here to acknowledge (or reiterate) that hegemonic cultures and dominant powers are based in attempts to incorporate (or, conversely, repress) the body through what Scarry has called "fictions." As her comment on the relation of power to self-description suggests, it is not that these fictions are necessarily untrue; rather, it is that, following the work of Heller among others, the multiple experiences or "truths" of a multitude of individual bodies precludes the unity of truth the hegemonic or dominant culture aspires to. In political terms then, and in terms that continue the project of revising Gramsci, the struggle for hegemony that Gramsci saw as central to the war of position in bourgeois societies, is dependent on the opposition's ability to create an account or analysis (or fiction) of everyday life (the life of the body) that not only points up the bankruptcy of the given culture, but also enlists the ideological support of those who live that life. In other words, the struggle is to bring the experiences of everyday life to the level of serious reflection, to consider lived experience as having value, as contributing to general knowledge, to understand everyday life as the revitalizant of official or "learned" culture.

For Gramsci, of course, the conception of everyday life that would eventually attract the "protagonists of civil society" and form the hegemonic culture was that of the Communist Party, guided by the insights of Marx. Needless to say, recent events indicate that not only was the hegemony of the Communist Party short lived in East Central Europe, but Gramsci's own analysis of the dissolution of a historical bloc finds a fitting contemporary example in the Communist Party-state's inability to attract the critical intelligentsia. This "major symptom" of an historical bloc's weakness[162] was evident for at least two decades.

Like a number of revolutionary thinkers, especially those under the influence of Marx and Lenin, Gramsci put too much faith in the ability of one ideology or system to meet and express the needs of "the people," ie. of everyday life. To reiterate: the value of Gramsci's approach as against that of his contemporaries, be they of the economistic-deterministic school, content to let the imminent crisis of capitalism radicalize the working class, or the "maximalists" who advocated a voluntarist, military approach to radicalization, was his understanding that the real success of any revolution lies in its ability to convince the majority of the population of its necessity. The majority had to be on side before even a military victory could be ensured of more than a momentary existence. But this winning over of the majority was not a passive approach, dependent on the crisis of capitalism to do its work; it entailed an *active* engagement on the level of ideas, values and ethics with the existent hegemonic culture. If the ground of this struggle was that ideological chain Volosinov saw as linking individual consciousnesses, then the question was not one of replacing the chain (the military solution), nor of letting economic conditions corrode it, but of hammering at it with new ideas, reforging it in the heat of debate, ideological struggle. Gramsci's folly was in trusting that once reforged by an active, popular Communist Party this chain would be in constant contact with the political and social truths articulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and the intellectual leadership of the international communist movement who followed in their footsteps.

---

[162] cf. Bobbio, p.90.

But again, he was not alone in this folly. The history of communist and socialist movements in this century is replete with cases of committed revolutionaries who, once their revolution has been achieved, find themselves despairing of their involvement in its actualization.[163] Incarcerated well before the darkest period of Stalinism, and living in a fascist state, Antonio Gramsci may be excused his allegiance to the notion of the Communist Party as the legitimate "voice" of the working class. This is not intended to be a retroactive judgement of Gramsci's politics, only an argument concerning the limited nature of any historical bloc, any attempt to achieve hegemony that does not accord the life of the everyday, the experiences of the body, centrality.

---

[163] The list of revolutionaries alienated from their revolutions is too long include here, if such a roster were even possible. Let it be enough to include a few well-known figures like Leon Trotsky, Victor Serge, Imre Nagy, and Milovan Djilas.

Folklore and Politics

This is an interesting problem in Gramsci, given the critique he advances of intellectuals estranged from the "popular element." In a section of the Prison Notebooks Gramsci deals briefly with the problem of the "Passage from Knowing to Understanding and to Feeling and vice versa from Feeling to Understanding and to Knowing."[164] This section, all of three paragraphs, refers to the problem of the relationship of the "popular element" or "people-nation" to the intellectuals. Gramsci characterizes the problem thus: "The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel." The depth of knowing that characterizes *understanding* entails not only knowledge per se of the subject but also a passion for the subject. In Gramsci's analysis

> One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation... [When] feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders and led, and can the shared life be realized which alone is a social force - with the creation of the 'historical bloc.'

That is, Gramsci understands in a profound sense the necessity of developing and maintaining an "organic cohesion" between the popular element and the intellectual element. His politics - dependent as it is on the development of hegemony and the ensemble of relations, social, political, and cultural that entail a consolidated historical bloc - is based, practically, in this "sentimental connection."

---

[164] pp.418-419.

This is not, however, a call for the sentimentalization of the popular element or its culture, the culture of everyday life, what is commonly understood as folklore. And it is here, where he attempts to develop what might be called a quasi-redemptive critique of folklore that Gramsci's programme confronts the reality of scientific socialism; and in that confrontation, stumbles.

The extent of this stumbling is documented by Alberto Maria Cirese in his essay, "Gramsci's observations on folklore."[165] I use the term "stumble" with qualifications. On the one hand, the problems, the "ambivalence" that Cirese brings to light is the consequence of serious deliberation on the subject of leadership, of politics and philosophy that aspires to develop a substantive relationship with the lived experiences of "the people." In this case Gramsci's "stumbling" is productive, forcing a path as it were through the underbrush of accepted traditional notions of culture, philosophy, knowledge, and democratic politics.[166] On the other hand, because Gramsci is fixed, as Cirese makes clear, on the idea of Marxism

> as the only truly 'original and integral conception of the world,' the harbinger of 'an historical epoch,' a conception that is incomparably

---

[165] Cirese in A.S.Sassoon, op.cit., pp.212-252.

[166] cf. Cirese, pp.244-245.

superior to any non-Marxist official conception, however elevated...[167],

because Gramsci cannot admit of the historical "moment" of Marxism itself, he stumbles badly by not subordinating the admittedly powerful and insightful system of Marxism to the experience of everyday life. That is, he does not understand that Marxism must itself be made more open and responsible to the experiences of the people. This latter "stumbling," as it were, finds its most eloquent example in the experiences of East Central Europeans. Before exploring that material, however, the place of folklore or popular culture in Gramsci should be examined.

Cirese's essay emphasizes firstly that, contrary to his contemporaries, and certainly central to his interest in the development of an oppositional culture capable of achieving a hegemonic position in the Italy of his day, Gramsci elevated the culture of the people - folklore, popular culture, the culture of the masses, what have you - as a subject worthy of study. In several passages from the Prison Notebooks Gramsci criticizes those who study folklore as antiquarians, unable to comprehend their subject matter except as relics, frozen in time, disconnected to the larger world and protective lest the modern world smash them to bits.[168] In short, as Cirese puts it, Gramsci was "promoting folklore itself from being a curiosity to being a *conception of the world*."[169] But this promotion, despite the fact that it foreshadows much contemporary work into popular culture and the role popular cultures and sub-cultures play in the formation of knowledge and social identity, as Cirese notes at the end of his article,[170] is fraught with Gramsci's theoretico-political problem of leadership and scientific knowledge. That is, while Cirese finds some positive remarks about folklore in Gramsci, these serve largely only to qualify the many negative characteristics Gramsci relates to the subject.

---

[167] ibid., p.237.

[168] cf. Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp.197, 418-419.

[169] p.215.

This is the second major point of Cirese's essay: despite the "promotion," folklore or popular culture (Gramsci and Cirese use the terms interchangeably) as a *conception of the world* lacks the "quantity of qualitative elements" that Gramsci requires of a *scientific* conception of the world - one that is capable of achieving and maintaining hegemony. The progressive elements of folklore are overshadowed by its numerous, as found by Gramsci and listed by Cirese, negative characteristics. "Elaboration, systematicness and centralization are in fact expressions of hegemony...which is precisely what those classes which are still subaltern lack."[171] What these classes need, according to Gramsci, is contact with Marxism. Those progressive aspects of folklore, as negligible as they may seem, become the foothold for the organizing agent. Thus, in Cirese's conception of Gramsci, Marxism in the form of "workers' parties" functions as the mediator or *agent* which effects the

> transition from the given state of affairs to the new situation and transforms a "progressive" element that is still "folkloric" (still subaltern implicit, fragmentary, etc.) into a definitely "official" (ie. fully hegemonic) "progressive" element.[172]

---

[170] Cirese, p.244; cf. The work done under the general heading of "cultural studies," an example of which is Paul Willis', Learning to Labour, New York: Columbia University, 1977.

[171] Gramsci, p.223.

[172] Cirese, p.230.

The contradictory, fragmentary, dispersed, implicit, unelaborated, and unsystematic nature of the folkloric conception of the world[173] is redeemed by the Marxist agent who mobilizes and organizes the positive qualities of "tenacity," spontaneous adherence and correspondence to "actual conditions of life," and ability to assemble from official bourgeois culture elements that "conform to its way of thinking and feeling"[174] into the new hegemonic order.

As has been noted above, the way towards such a redemptive and revolutionary moment lay in the development of a "sentimental" relationship between the intellectual - the Marxist agent - and the people. However, as Cirese notes,

> In spite of Gramsci's statement to the effect that 'the demands of the cultural contact with the "simple"' must be 'continually felt' (and therefore satisfied)...the only point of interest in the simple is their material force, with which contact is made in political action rather than cultural or scientific research.[175]

That is, the "simple" - those who do not partake of either official culture or Marxism, who in other words do not have a scientific conception of the world - have instrumental or political value. It is Cirese's argument that their world views, their plebian philosophies, their everyday histories[176] are valued in Gramsci to the extent that a superior conception of the world (Marxism) can penetrate and organize them. This attitude is apparent in Gramsci's comments on the work of the Belgian social-democrat,

---

[173] ibid., p.218.

[174] ibid., pp.225-226.

[175] p.233.

[176] cf. Karel Kosik cited in Patrick Wright, On Living In An Old Country, London: Verso, 1985, p.6; Agnes Heller in Wright, pp.14-15.

Henri De Man. His treatment of folklore, although generally excoriated by Gramsci, is praised when it

> demonstrates the need to study and develop...elements of...popular [culture]...in order to transform them, by educating them, into a modern mentality...But this need

he goes on to say, further qualifying De Man's contributions on the subject, "was at least implicit (perhaps even explicitly stated) in the doctrine of [Lenin]."[177]

Obviously Gramsci can't be accused here of romanticizing folklore. As Anne Showstack Sassoon relates in her introduction to Cirese, and as Lynne Lawner's introduction to a selection of Gramsci's letters from prison make clear, Gramsci's experience of rural life in Sardinia, not to mention his impoverished existence as a student in Turin, "had been too painful"[178] for any such romanticism. Gramsci had little faith that with the tools of popular culture the people would be able to rise up out of their subjugation.

As has already been noted, Gramsci was in good company believing as he did that Marxism represented not only the scientific analysis of the present system of injustice, but also a theory of its elimination, Leninism being the means of realizing that theory. The demands of Marxism and Leninism, the demands of an anti-utopian, scientific socialism required that: One, the interests and the needs of the people be heard; and two, these needs and interests be articulated and transformed into a revolutionary platform by an intelligentsia committed intellectually and passionately to the emancipation of the people from the injuries of capitalist society. Although Gramsci had the insight to develop the notion that everyone is a philosopher (because everyone thinks about their world to some degree) into the idea that particular social groups live and breathe their own particular conceptions of the world, and that these various and varied, fragmentary and contradictory conceptions enabled them to create an identity, to exist for themselves in the world,[179] nevertheless, he could not see these decidedly unscientific (except perhaps in the Levi-Straussian sense of a "science of the concrete") conceptions as being able to inform Marxism. More specifically, despite his insights into the importance that folklore or popular culture played in giving sense to everyday life, the goal of an emancipated future blinded him to both the limitations of Marxism as a science and the degree to which the culture of the lifeworld had something to offer to science. The life of the body, as it did manage to find expression in the often (politically) reactionary culture of the people, was largely denied by the political programme of the Marxists, including Gramsci, except as it manifested itself as a set of experiences capable of being turned against the existent regime. That is, not as experiences generating new *understanding* for the intellectual, but as fuel for revolutionary sentiments and actions. These popular experiences and sentiments are appreciated, in short, for their quality as "material forces"[180] to be employed in the coming war of position. This is Cirese's point when he refers to Gramsci's neglect of the "simple" in terms of cultural or scientific research.

---

[177] 1971, p.197.

[178] A.S.Sassoon, "Introduction to A.M.Cirese," Approaches to Gramsci, London: Writers and Readers, 1982, p.212; cf. Lawner, pp.7-13.

---

[179] cf. Selections From the Prison Notebooks, pp.323, 330-331.

[180] cf. Gramsci, ibid., pp.377, 404.

This is not to say that the needs of the body escaped Gramsci's attention. On the contrary. Scarry's analysis argues that Marx's project entailed bringing the bodies of suffering men and women into the social discourse, but especially into the discourse of philosophers and politicians - and thus, into the discourse of official, hegemonic culture. And as Gramsci seemed to see, given his comments on the necessity for a sustained and passionate contact between the intellectual and the people for whom he or she was speaking (and his defense of his own "Bergsonian" activities with the Turin workers' movement[181]), this life of the body required a constant ear, a constant voice. Cirese's essay points out the ambivalence in Gramsci's observations on folklore, on the existent and undeniably vernacular expression of this life of the body; it is, perhaps, in part an ambivalence born of understanding the potential of folklore or popular culture as a voice informing the scientific or rigorous mind, but confronting the demands of earlier voices (i.e. those that informed Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century), meeting the political demand for some kind of immediate remedy for bodily ills voiced decades before. To reconsider some of Cirese's criticisms in this light it is possible to say that there is ample evidence of Gramsci's unromantic sympathy for the folkloric as a form of knowledge, one that intellectuals - and especially revolutionary intellectuals - should acknowledge. Being a politician, concerned with pragmatic as opposed to academic issues, there is also in Gramsci evidence of the need to turn this esoteric and arcane form of knowledge, with its "fanatical granite compactness,"[182] to the immediate project of seizing cultural, then political power.

---

[181] ibid., pp.197-198.

Everyday Life and Bakhtin

Within the former Soviet bloc there has long been an interest in the study of everyday life as a corrective to the science of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism-etcetera. I have referred directly to the work of the expatriate Hungarian Agnes Heller; the Czech philosopher Karel Kosik has also been cited to this end. However, in considering everyday life, the life of the body, or its enculturation in the lifeworld, the folkloric or popular cultural realm, as a space for oppositional dialogue, the dialogue that prefigures an institutionalized civil society, the work of the Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin is significant. This is especially so given the foregoing discussion of Gramsci and his political approach to the subject of folklore.

The problem of undermining a bankrupt official and hegemonic culture is a favourite area for Bakhtin. His references are those historical periods when social and ideological systems have been in great turmoil, when the given becomes questionable. In Gramscian terms these historical periods would be understood as those moments when two historical blocs shared the stage, one descendant, the other ascendent, one hegemonic order declining in the face of an emergent cultural leadership. For Bakhtin, the turmoil of such moments is nowhere more fully expressed than in that relentless examination of everyday life found in the novel. That is, in his work the novel is understood, as Katernia Clark and Michael Holquist put it, as "the most significant force at work in the history of consciousness."[183] Thus his interest in Dostoevsky in a modernizing but in some respects still pre-feudal Russia; in Goethe as a figure bridging the gulf between the Enlightenment and Romanticism; and in Rabelais, looking forward into the Renaissance from the edge of the Middle Ages. It is Bakhtin's treatment of Rabelais that invites comparison with Gramsci because it is in his book on Rabelais[184] that Bakhtin offers a conception of popular culture not so much at odds with Gramsci as it is pointing in another direction. If Gramsci is concerned with the immediate task of employing popular culture in bringing Marxism onto the throne of hegemony, Bakhtin is interested in the ways in which popular culture to some extent always poses a threat to this throne.

---

[182] ibid., p.377.

Bakhtin engages in a long and spiralling argument in Rabelais and His World, the substance of which is difficult to generalize in a few pages. Nevertheless, it is possible to say with some brevity what Bakhtin saw as Rabelais' role in the generation or stimulation of a new historical bloc, a new hegemonic order. For Bakhtin, Rabelais' novel, Gargantua and Pantagruel, succeeds because it is rooted in the images and languages of the people. But it is not simply a representation of these images and language, it is more than a novel playing the material of folklore for the ends of entertainment or exoticism; it employs its carnivalesque, its critical-creative images, what

---

[183] Mikhail Bakhtin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1984, p.276.

[184] Rabelais and His World, trans. H.Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1984.

Cirese might describe in Gramsci as its "progressive" elements, to undermine the hegemony of scholasticism and the existent feudal society.

In some respects Rabelais serves the same function as Gramsci's Marxist agent, organizing and mobilizing the progressive elements of folklore against a repressive official culture. But, so Bakhtin's argument goes, the power of Rabelais' offensive lies in the truth of the folkloric content: the life of the body his images and language conveys is a powerful life, speaking to and for the people Rabelais is writing of. Where Gramsci, in Cirese's account, derides the fragmentary and contradictory nature of folkloric materials Bakhtin discovers a conception of the world that is full and rich, capable of expressing the experiences of everyday life, capable of interrogating, in its own laughing fashion, the shibboleths of the hegemonic order. For Bakhtin it is very much the laughter of the folkloric that permits it to penetrate official ideology and expose it. As he puts it at the end of the Rabelais book,

> We cannot understand cultural and literary life and the struggle of mankind's historic past if we ignore that peculiar folk humour that always existed and was never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes.[185]

While folk humour and laughter generally stand as the predominant "deconstructive" and regenerative elements of the folkloric, another important aspect of the folkloric that Bakhtin sees as oppositional to official culture is its unsystematic nature. For Gramsci this is a limitation; for Bakhtin it is a possibility, because nothing is foreclosed. This is an important considertion, given the experiences of many revolutionaries once the project of Soviet type development was begun, and revolutionary possibilities radically delimited. The life of the body, Bakhtin argues repeatedly in Rabelais, does not allow for closure. There is always another word, and because the world of everyday life, the well-spring of the folkloric, remains closest to this life of the body, it is the place from whence the experiences and truths, the needs and desires of the body will first express themselves. Gramsci discounts much of folklore or popular culture because he has a project at hand that does not admit the time or the possibility of folkloric truth beyond what Marxism allows.

---

[185] p.474.

As Bakhtin concludes in Rabelais and His World, the crowds of everyday life provide the chorus that accompanies "every act of world history." This crowd expresses the life of the body; the chorus is its song, its laughter, its tears. There is a world of experience that resists translation, that resists entry into the world of language and culture. Those elements that do find their voice are found in those pre-institutional institutions, the habitable institutions of everyday life, the images and language, the gestures and vernacular that give substance to the quotidian. Against the scholastics, against dry and disembodied abstraction Rabelais raised these embodied forms. Investing his novel with the material of concrete, lived experience Rabelais became, as Bakthin suggests, the coryphaeus of his time.[186]

But Rabelais was not leading a chorus that looked only on the present. Bakhtin argues that Rabelais was sending up the decaying official culture in order to sing in the new spirit of inquiry and humanism, that which would become the Renaissance.

---

[186] ibid.

Likewise, Gramsci's challenge should have been not to disregard the life of the body as it was expressed in the popular culture, but to celebrate it, to infuse the hard politics of socialism in a fascist world with the substance, the laughter and regenerative power of existent folk culture.

But this is perhaps not an appropriate challenge for a politician. Perhaps it is in the realm of the imagination, in the creative facilities of artists and writers to create, in the absurd, silent, and dark times of dictatorship, within the habitable institutions that can be erected here and there, the laughter of the body that regenerates, that renews the process of reformulation and revolution. In Italy this project had perhaps to wait for the irreverant theatre of Dario Fo and the filmmaking of Felini, Wertmuller, and the Taviani brothers. In East Central Europe the power of poetry was established centuries ago when intellectual life, critical intellectual life, was barred access to the machinery of state power. In the "kingdom of the spirit" the novel, the poem, and the play became the site of social struggle, of conversations and arguments over political and social rights, responsibilities, and actions. In the following chapter I will present the case that the novel became one of the habitable institutions that fostered dialogue where none was allowed, that brought everyday life, the life of the body, back into conversation. A conversation that tumbled the Communist Party off its throne and has since produced a virtual cacophony in the once silent "front room" as it were of the Soviet bloc.

> "...experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness... With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent - not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in a flood of books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under an open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body."
>
> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller"

In many respects the Cold War between East and West reduced all aesthetic distinctions regarding cultural works in the two major blocs to political distinctions. This was especially apparent in the West's reception of the works of so-called "dissidents." Stanislaw Baranczak has referred to this problem in terms of intellectual life generally, where all of an emigre's work is seen through the lens of anti-communism, and where the real complexity and diversity of his life is reduced to a single issue - fighting communism.[187] In his particular case there was some truth to the reduction, a truth he relates to the specific history of the Polish intelligentsia and its acceptance of a political and social responsibility. Having been involved in Solidarity activities in Poland, upon arrival in the West and in the context of the oppression in Poland, as well as the limited nature of the opportunities available to a Polish intellectual in the United States, Baranczak assumed the mantle of the emigre, Solidarity activist and spokesman. Not without some reservations, however, as his desire to return to more academic, less social and political, activities attests. But Baranczak's situation, and the complex he ascribes as peculiar to the Polish intellectual is not, as the preceding chapters have argued, as peculiar as he believes. It is, as it were, a cross that the intelligentsia throughout East Central Europe have at various periods in their history felt compelled to bear.

---

[187] cf. "The Polish intellectual," Salmagundi, No. 70-71.

Whatever the source of this compulsion, and however long it lasts, the consequences for intellectual and cultural work related to such an assumption of responsibility and activism are largely negative. While understanding the importance of his Solidarity work Baranczak bemoans his absence from the study of poetry. And Milan Kundera, on several occasions, has complained of the narrow - that is, simply political - reception of some of his novels.[188] In an interview with Ian McEwan he puts his case - and the case of many writers and artists, former citizens of Soviet societies - against the political reading of work succinctly and bluntly:

> Because it is bad reading. Everything you think is important in the book you've written is ignored. Such a reading sees only one respect: the denunciation of a communist regime. That doesn't mean I like communist regimes; I detest them. But I detest them as a citizen: as a writer I don't say what I say in order to denounce a regime.[189]

---

[188] cf. "Author's preface," The Joke, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1982.

[189] cited in D.Lodge, "From Don Juan to Tristan," Times Literary Supplement, May 25, 1984.

The political reading of a work from the western side of the Iron Curtain then, it would seem, performs the same function as the aesthetic ideology of socialist realism performs on the eastern side: it vulgarizes and simplifies, makes the work a tool in the service of a higher cause, in this case anti-communism rather than communism. That Kundera's novels, not to mention the literary work of those still living in the Soviet bloc - such as Jiri Grusa, Georg Konrad, Vaclav Havel, Ludvic Vaculik, Pavel Kohout, Ivan Klima, Tadeuz Konwicki, to name but a handful - have achieved acclaim in the West can certainly be partly attributed to their status as anti-communist tracts in the libraries of the Cold Warriors.[190] But, as Kundera has emphasized, this is hardly an adequate appreciation, hardly an adequate understanding of these works as literary works. As this chapter argues, it is also hardly an adequate understanding of the place of these works within their society.

Although this chapter focuses on the novel as the repository of resistance and as a form of resistance - as a habitable institution in an otherwise uninhabitable world - and although this chapter does discuss social and consequently political aspects of the novel in the east bloc, it eschews a Cold Warrior reading. To read any novel as a political allegory is - to echo Kundera - to severely delimit its possible meanings, its potential resonance in the lives of readers. This is the focus of the following discussion: the potential resonance of a work in the lives of its readers.

In the context of a discussion on the relationship of political power to the power of self-description Elaine Scarry has said that rather than truth being the criterion for questions of right and wrong the future will present fictions as that criterion. Perhaps that future has arrived. That is, when political powers are very much concerned with their self-description, the image they present and are presented with, when the rightness or wrongness, the legitimacy of their power is very much wrapped up in their image the power of fiction, of the created image, is hard to underestimate. In such a context, again, it would be too simple to reduce all fictions to being about power in a narrow political sense. As my earlier discussion of Scarry argued, the creation of an image other than that sanctioned by the controlling political powers, while entering the fray of cultural politics simply by daring to present itself, also engages in another political activity. But this would be a small "p" politics, an anti-politics as Georg Konrad would describe it[191] because it avoids the well-patrolled, highly regulated territory of official politics and culture. In avoiding this domain -the domain of communist/anti-communist ideology - the "other" image, the "other" narrative avoids the cliched responses of readers. In doing so it begins to deal with material, with experiences and dreams, that have hitherto been unattended to or repressed because they fell outside the permitted realm of descriptive-creative activity. That is, they fell outside that self-descriptive activity deemed acceptable to the maintained health of the existent powers, in the case of the Soviet bloc the health of the Communist Party-state. Thus, when I say I look at the way novels helped build the pre-institutions of civil society, what in retrospect was substantially a social-political activity was then the humble activity of bringing repressed or incommunicable materials into a communicable form, giving them a literary image, a literary life - and hence, a social life.

---

[190] cf. P.Esterhazy, "Investigations in the bath tub," Index on Censorship, October 1988.

---

[191] cf. Antipolitics, trans. R.E.Allen, New York: Haracourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

Again, rather than approaching this problem from a narrowly political angle I attempt to situate the problem of cultural activity generally, and literature specifically, within the context of a "modernized" society. That is, I believe it is unfruitful for us to look expressly for the "enemies" of Soviet-style society amongst the multitude of novels written in the east bloc because we would simply be repeating the work of the literary cold warriors, engaged in reductionist readings, and incapable of grasping the way in which societies long cognizant of the dichotomies and limitation of the cold war mentality might be moved by something other than a cliched political tract. In fact, this public might be moved by a work precisely because it resisted the descriptive cliches of the communist/anti-communist dichotomy. Rather, if we look at the role that cultural forms have played in society, a role far more profound than that of simple propaganda (which is, at base, what Scarry's reference to power controlling the power of self-description is about), we begin to appreciate how a form or genre like the novel could play a significant role in the development of not only an oppositional consciousness but also an oppositional or alternative movement within a totalitarian society.

The Context of Cultural Development

In Chapter Two Agnes Heller's discussion of Irma Seidler and Georg Lukacs is employed to illustrate the problem of building a habitable institution in the alienation they experienced within the milieu of bourgeois Jewish Budapest society. Within that discussion I generalized this feeling of "homelessness," of an inadequacy of existing social and cultural forms to meet the experiences and desires of individuals within East Central Europe to the whole of these societies. The context in Chapter Two was the inadequacy of Soviet institutions and Soviet societies to meet the need for those aspects of social life that would, in other societies, find expression in a fully developed, institutionalized, and independent civil society. But there is also the inadequacy of given cultural forms to enable or allow even the expression of experiences and desires that stand outside the bounds of aesthetic ideology. That is, there is an official fiction, and all stories that disturb, dispute, or deviate from this fiction run the risk of being (perhaps forever) silenced. This is, however, a risk that has often been taken with some success. That is, due to the uneven nature of censorship, due to the increasing dependence of the Party-state on the internalization of censorship, due especially to the ever changing temperature of political and cultural currents, from cold to warm and back to cold again, literary works - and films, the most susceptible to the negative consequences of these changes in current because of the nature of film production - that only a year or a few months before would have been denied official release find their way to the general population. The struggle for habitable institutions is palpable in the realm of social and political relations. The organization of social life is uncontestable; the lines of trespass well marked; the price of transgression, dear. In the realm of cultural life, however, this struggle for habitable institutions is less well-defined, in some respects its palpability more evasive. Although the price of transgression here is also dear (though not as dear as that paid by those who actually take to the streets, such as the "counter-revolutionaries" in Hungary in 1956, or the Gdansk strikers of 1971), what constitutes transgression is nebulous enough to encourage writers and artists to persist in taking risks, to persist in creating their own images in whatever medium or genre they work in. Thus in the USSR Alexander Solzenitsyn's A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich makes its appearance during Khruschev's warm post-Stalinism. And Josef Skvorecky's first novel, The Cowards, hardly a novel enthusiastic about the prospect of a post-World War Two communist society, is published in 1958, well before the thaw of Stalin's winter that led to the Prague Spring. Likewise Kundera's first novel, The Joke. Presented to a Prague publishing house in 1965, the editors professed little hope of its actually reaching a public; nevertheless the novel "did come out two years later - and without a trace of censorship! How was that possible in Communist Czechoslovakia one year before the Prague Spring?"[192]

How indeed? Kundera suggests that in East Central Europe the application of official ideology was not as strict as in the Soviet Union proper. Yet the history of this region is rife with examples of works repressed, writers, artists, and intellectuals unable to practice their talents unfettered by official ideology, official harassment. Kundera states that acceptance of Soviet communism in "Central Europe" was marked by a duality of everyday practice and official policy.

---

[192] The Joke, p.xii.

> Behind the communist facade a gradual liberalization process took place, a process that saw the creation (in spite of the official ideology, which no one could question but no one took seriously) of many outstanding films, plays, and works of literature.[193]

Yet this dualism, as we have argued earlier, was not present in any substantial form in the various cold or Stalinist/neo-Stalinist periods in the region. To recount the earlier argument: whether Kundera wishes to assert that in East Central Europe the "large majority of people spontaneously rejected" what he calls Russian Communism or not,[194] there is a case to be made that the Communist Party-state in its various national incarnations was legitimated by its position of hegemony rather than domination, pure and simple, in the post-war period. To that end one need only refer to his own accounts of the popular appeal of the Communist Party as they are represented in his various novels, but especially in the discussion of the "circles of power" in The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.[195]

The duality Kundera refers to is more a function of cooling and warming political currents, currents affected more by extra-national, geo-political factors than by internal developments. Witness the development of neo-Stalinism in the form of the different national "normalizations" and the Brezhnev Doctrine. It is not my intention here to negate the importance of internal national developments. The arguments in Chapters One and Two are based on the fact that national political and cultural histories have played a large role in the development of both Soviet communism and its alternatives in the region. But to point to a "Central European" aversion to *Russian Communism* as the source of a duality permitting the creation "of many outstanding" cultural works smacks more of Kundera's Russophobia[196] than it addresses the reality of cultural politics, national and international. I would rather situate the impulse to create these outstanding works, first within the context of the cultural politics of official ideology, and then look to the ways in which, within the possibilities afforded by that context, the relative liberalism of the warmer moments or the unofficial realm of samizdat during the longer colder periods, this impulse created a necessary realm of freedom and responsibility, a substantial socio-cultural movement as the basis for civil society.

---

[193] ibid.

[194] ibid.

[195] The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, pp.62-68.

Walter Benjamin and the Context of Habitable Institutions

Given Agnes Heller's discussion of Irma Seidler and Georg Lukacs, it is possible to see how they and their personal struggles represent an aspect of the problem of going beyond alienation. Walter Benjamin also stands as such a representative figure. And if Heller can be credited with developing the notion of the habitable institution as an interpersonal haven with regards to the alienation experienced by individuals such as Seidler and Lukacs, it is perhaps Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Storyteller" who, in the context of his own "homelessness," develops the idea of narrative as a kind of cultural habitable institution.[197]

---

[196] This has surfaced elsewhere, notably in his dismissal of Dostoevsky and the invading Soviet troops of 1968 as characteristic of Russian civilization, based in emotionalism, rational irrationalism. cf."Introduction to a variation," Jacques and His Master, trans. M.H.Heim, New York: Harper and Row, 1985, pp.1-4.; This Russophobia has a history in the West in the reactionary intelligentsia prior to the First World War. In this earlier instance it also occluded a fuller understanding of the social and historical processes behind developments in that most eastern part of Europe. cf. A.Hauser, The Social History of Art, Volume Four, New York: Vintage, n.d., pp.227-229.

Heller introduces us to the problem both of making sense of a world where social forms have lost their relevance, and of making new social forms to meet new situations. But these are also cultural forms, and it is on this reality that the Seidler-Lukacs relationship founders. That is, they attempt to create a new kind of social or interpersonal relationship, but the communicative forms - their cultural history in short - which they employ remain hopelessly trapped in the past. Heller points to Lukacs' fixation on the model of Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen, and how that model served as Lukacs' image of his relations with Seidler. Where Seidler was attempting to image something new, Lukacs was held by an image - and in that image lay both the social and cultural forms and knowledge - of the past. As Heller's essay suggests, Lukacs not only cherished a notion of the past, of a certain distant life when art and society, culture and the world, communicative action and social action, were consonant, but he was also fearful of the present. In this sense it is possible to see both the future dead end of Lukacs' early romantic anti-capitalism, and the ever-present distance between his philosophy and life that was part of his post-romantic communism.

---

[197] Illuminations, ed. H.Arendt, trans. H.Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1971.

The notion of the habitable institution is developed by Heller in sympathy with Seidler and against Lukacs' fear of the present, his escape into the - as it were - uninhabitable institutions of the past. It is an idea that I believe stands as a response to Lukacs' dead ends because it emphasizes both the necessity of a spiritual and emotional shelter in the world and the fact that such shelters cannot fit the past images of such accommodation. That is, where certain historical periods permit the development of rich and sustaining social and cultural institutions - traditions in short - others, by virtue of their instability and/or dynamism require ready-made or short-order institutions, forms and relations built not to last but to serve immediate needs. Where Seidler wanted to live this life, but with the man she loved, Lukacs could not even comprehend what it meant to live this life, except in a hopeless way, even with the woman he loved. He had to mediate the present in all its unfinished, unformed reality with the image of Kierkegaard-Olsen. In an uncharted world this image was his map. As Heller's essay illustrates, however, and as Lukacs' own meditation on Kierkegaard and Olsen testifies,[198] this was not a map of discovery, but only of loss.

Gyorgy Markus says that "*Culture* was the 'single' thought of Lukacs' life" - meaning that Lukacs' life was dominated by the problem, "Is culture possible today?" For Lukacs, culture or the "question of culture was synonymous with the question of *life*, with the 'immanence of meaning in life'." If the problem of finding and creating that "unifying force" that "enriches," "enhances," essentially endows all of life with meaning was the *single* concern of Lukacs[199], then perhaps it is possible to say that Walter Benjamin's single thought was the *redemption* of the world. That is, where Lukacs searched for the totalizing culture, Benjamin searched, among the fragments of a post-totalized world, for the shards of meaning, the bits and pieces of significance that a modernized, traumatized people would use to create not a single unity of culture but a diversity of cultures.

---

[198] "Soren Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen," Soul and Form, trans. A.Bostock, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University, 1974.

There are a number of similarities or parallels in the work of Lukacs and Benjamin. But I would argue that where Lukacs was always searching for ways to create or recover an image of culture-past, Benjamin was trying to create an understanding of the image of culture present and future. This becomes clearer when we consider Lukacs' Theory of the Novel[200] and Benjamin's "The Storyteller."

Theory of the Novel is in many respects a eulogy of a time past when culture and life spoke with one voice, when it was possible to create a narrative and have it coincide with the experience and understanding of life. This is the lost world of the epic, of epic time, a world and time of human greatness manifest in cultural greatness. This is the world Lukacs struggles to discover and create in the present. He searches for "authentic culture": "In an authentic culture, everything becomes symbolic..."[201] and every symbol is understood by the one language, the one experience.

Although in many respects paraphrasing the themes of Theory of the Novel "The

---

[199] "Life and soul: the young Lukacs and the problem of culture," Lukacs Revalued, trans. M.Clark, pp.3-4.

[200] London: Merlin, 1971.

[201] Lukacs, cited in Markus, p.4.

Storyteller" is less a eulogy of this figure, his art, and his world than it is an attempt to understand the social role of narrative, and the different ways in which this role is fulfilled in different social conditions. That is, it is not a question of Benjamin searching for the lost world of the storyteller, of that peculiar and valorized relationship of storyteller-story-public, but of defining its new form. Lukacs does this also, but with a note of despair. The age of grace, of cultural-social identity or homogeneity, of a lifeworld dense with communicable symbolic form has passed. We live, he says, in a fallen world. New forms struggle to meet human cultural needs. They are inadequate, they cannot redeem this "sinful" world. Benjamin may paraphrase some of these themes, but he develops the antithesis of the epic world and the modern world beyond the aporia of despair into a theory of social and cultural survival. The whole of life may not be redeemable, but that is not say that there is no redemption in the world. Again, amongst the ruins of modernity Benjamin finds evidence of individuals and communities giving meaning to their lives.

Lukacs is lost in this modern world. The old forms are empty, and the new are incomplete, incapable of aspiring to the totality of an "authentic culture." Benjamin may also be lost in this world, but he is aware - or at least is motivated by the hope - that life goes on, that out of the chaos of life, out of the disruption of the First World War, human beings are creating the forms they need to survive. He is more willing to touch the pulse of this chaotic life than Lukacs, and is able to understand not only the impulse to order or make sense of this life that is culture's creative aspect; he also understands, at least has a feeling for, the other side of the modern cultural reality: its destructive impulse, out of which the new is born.[202] Although in his life many times at the mercy of the modernized world, Walter Benjamin himself persisted in placing nope in humanity's ability to create the new, but especially a "new" that would shelter it from the destructive elements that assaulted it.

If the home of pre-modern humanity lay in an epic relationship of culture to its world, in "The Storyteller" the modern home of an assailed humanity is in the novel. This is also the case for Lukacs, but as noted it is not a "happy" home. Lukacs continues to anticipate a more adequate novel, one that will achieve a totalized relationship with the world. That is, he looks to the horizon for the modern epic. Benjamin's focus is on the present, on the ways in which the novel does achieve its small but not to be deprecated or diminished work of redemption. To that end Benjamin delimits its redemptive efficacy, as it were.

The novel cannot provide shelter to a community in the same way as the pre-modern epic or storyteller could. The novel's domain is the individual. "The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual..."[203] An individual not isolated socially so much as culturally. That is, an individual who, like Lukacs and Seidler, no longer finds meaning in the forms that surround her, an individual who no longer has access to the treasures of tradition, nor has any interest in what she understands of the treasures that lie about her like so much costume jewellery. For Benjamin the nature of this problem lies in the changed nature of the world, and the inability of traditional forms to speak to - to make sense of - these changed conditions.

---

[202] cf. "The destructive character," One-Way Street, London: New Left Books, 1979.

[203] "The Storyteller," p.87.

Crucial to Benjamin's argument is the problem of experience and its relationship to knowledge. Or, put another way: How do we, in a world where cultural forms cannot meet the demands of changing social, political, and technical realities, communicate and share our experiences of this world? Again, this is a variation on Lukacs' theme of the possibility of culture in the present situation. Benjamin's variation, however, is to pose the question in terms of *possibilities*, rather than the impossibilities, which is the latent content of Lukacs' life's work. The despair of his romantic anti-capitalism is not substantially reduced with the turn to Bolshevism. There is always the distance between life and culture that Heller points to, a distance Ernst Bloch alludes to in his criticism of Lukacs' latent idealism.[204]1‘ As will be argued later, Bloch's criticism reveals the problem of socialist realist aesthetics itself, an aesthetics unable to grasp the unfinished, process-oriented nature of the lifeworld. It is exactly this unfinished and open-ended aspect that attracts Benjamin, especially the problem of reproducing or transmitting knowledge and understanding within it. Again, how does the individual, caught in the whirlwind of change, a wind that has torn her out of traditional social forms by her roots - how does this individual come to understand her place in the world?

In the traditional world - and this is itself a relative concept - the process of orientation was, in relation to the experiences of the modern world, unproblematic. The nature of the oral tradition is that experience and knowledge are passed by word of mouth, over a period of time, often in the form of direct instruction, but also in the form of stories.[205] But this presupposes stable social relations, not to mention a condition proper to both a literate and televisual culture. Richard Hoggart, in a study of oral and literate culture among England's working class makes a strong case for the persistence of an oral culture in the midst of a modern literate society.[206] But, as another study of working class culture suggests, the skills, knowledge, and experience of these oral cultures and sub-cultures are not adequate to the demands of modern society.[207] That is, in the modern world oral cultures may be celebrated as havens of resistance to modernization,[208] but they are often socially repressed and repressive, politically unstable,[209] relatively defenceless against forces outside of their immediate vicinity because they are not conversant, as it were, in the forms that communicate the language of power. That is, their terms of reference are bound up in their locale and in their experiences within that locale. Both Hoggart and Paul Willis analyze a culture of the neighbourhood, the small community as an enclave within a larger, modern city and society. It is very much a "residual" culture, in the sense that Raymond Williams has used the term.[210]

---

[204] The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, trans. J.Zipes and F.Mecklenburg, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1988, p.72.

---

[205] cf. Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy, London: Metheun, 1982, pp.139-149.

[206] cf. The Uses of Literacy, Markham, Ontario: Pelican, 1976.

[207] Paul Willis, Learning to Labour, New York: Columbia University, 1977.

[208] Much of the work coming under the broad rubric of "cultural studies" stands as an example of this kind of approach.

[209] That is, easily "massified," manipulated by political and social interests because of their underdeveloped ability to critically "read" the modern symbols or culture of oppression. This is not a facile retreat to an elitist theory of mass culture; rather, it follows the work of individuals who have committed themselves to developing such a critical acuity, not among "the masses" but among social classes who have been disenfranchised from the culture of modern society. In other words, it is not a faceless crowd that constitutes this class of disenfranchised but embodied, active human beings whose social reality has been modernized but not necessarily their cultural reality. These are the contemporary examples of Benjamin's "tiny, fragile human body," grown poorer in a certain kind of communicable experience, the kind that can form or make sense of the experience of modernization in all its manifestations. Cultural studies and sub-cultural studies inform this argument, but it owes much of its critical humanist or critical-redemptive emphasis to Paulo Freire's pedagogical experience and theory.

These pockets of alternatives and/or oppositions to the dominant or hegemonic culture are bets against its uninhabitability.[211] They afford a "home" for "experiences, meanings and values which...are...lived and practised on the basis of the residue...of some previous social formations."[212] But this home, while a refuge in some limited respect from the modernized world, rarely has the resources out of which to fashion a substantial *resistance* to the modernizing forces. And even where it provides a spiritual centre, a foundation for resistance, the individuals who mobilize that spirit must learn the ways of the world in order to struggle with it - that is, if they really want to do more than stage a martyrdom.[213] Steven Sampson relates how the oral culture of Ceausescu's Romania contained a wealth of social and political criticism (as well as a store of fantastic stories relating to social and political reality).[214] So long as this vernacular of everyday disgruntlement has no means of organizing itself into a coherent critical position, however, so long as there is no creative-critical attempt to develop this disgruntlement beyond the level of oral transmission, of rumour, it falls prey exactly to the limitations Gramsci ascribed to folk culture. Popular criticism remains marginalized, fragmented, incoherent, unformed, incapable of shaping itself into anything beyond a fatalistic acceptance of what is. It is in this context that the differences between Gramsci and Bakhtin become nuanced, less dramatic as posed earlier. Although there is evidence and argument to the contrary,[215] Bakhtin's argument in Rabelais and His World is not so much an over-valuation of the world of the body, the world of the everyday and the folkloric, but a valuation of its experiential richness and conceptual openness *in relation to the dominant ideology of the age.*

---

[210] "Base and superstructure," New Left Review, No.82.

[211] I develop aspects of this argument in an unpublished essay, "Culture as censorship, culture as creation: Towards a description of culture as performance." As the title suggests, culture is understood as both repressive and expressive of individual and collective experience. The issue is not that the ensemble of rituals and codes that comprises culture stands in a dictatorial, authoritarian, or monological relation to lived experience, but that within the compass of the authority of such a set of rituals and codes the individual struggles to find both the existent forms that speak *to* or give meaning to his experience, and others that are malleable enough to speak *for* experiences heretofore not part of the given, traditional, socio-cultural ensemble.

[212] Williams, p.10.

---

[213] The example of Canada's first nations is pertinent here. It is my argument that two factors are organizing and developing native peoples' desire for a new place in this land, a new future. One is undoubtedly the reclamation of their heritage, the revaluation of its strengths, spiritual and otherwise. The other is the achievement of a "literacy" of the way European civilization works. That is, it is in bringing their knowledge of the ways the law and power are exercised into contact with their own traditions that the first nations have been able to gain ground in their resistance to the modernization of their world. As will be argued, this is one of the lessons of Bakhtin's notion of the dialogue of and within cultures.

[214] "Rumours in socialist Romania," Survey, No. 28:4, 1984.

[215] cf. Aron Gurevich's research into Medieval popular culture which brings into question some of the generalizations Bakhtin makes about the distance between official, ecclesiastical culture and that of the "people," as it were. Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception, trans. J.M.Bak and P.A.Hollingsworth, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988.

As I said at the end of Chapter Two, Gramsci and Bakhtin, although working similar territory - the changing of consciousness that would, respectively, determine and forecast the emergence of a new historical bloc - approached this territory with different ends in mind. Gramsci was a politician, a strategist; Bakhtin was a philosopher and literary theorist. The political end of emancipation required the mobilization of whatever supportive materials - the "progressive elements" - existed. Gramsci envisioned this in terms of introducing the science of Marxism as a conceptualizing and politically radicalizing agent. Bakhtin was not interested in radicalization so much as transformation, and in the imagined and existent contact between the materials of the folkloric or everyday life and the forms of a learned or literary culture this transformation was mutual. That is, by turning her attention to the folkloric or popular culture, the intellectual has revealed to herself a culture rich in material, rich in its "otherness," its different ways of dealing with the world and its vicissitudes. Likewise, by opening her culture, her forms and learning, to the popular realm there is the possibility of individuals and whole communities becoming more learned, more able to understand and tackle issues that had hitherto seemed beyond their control. Against Gramsci's one-sided development there is in Bakhtin's conception a mutual development, a slightly more humble attitude concerning the intellectual's relationship to the unlearned, the illiterate, the "simple" - the "other."

When Walter Benjamin refers to the "tiny, fragile human body" at the mercy of innumerable modern forces[216] it is a plea to both remember this being and to recognize his fragility; it is also a warning: the world has changed, if we are to make this world habitable, if we are to understand the changes that have befallen us we have to seize the means of such understanding. And this is not a simple call to read the latest reportage and documentation on the new world order or the new technology; it is a call to seek the *wisdom* of experience that lies outside the realm of the now marginalized and residual, provincial and limited scope of the deteriorated oral tradition and its world. That is, Benjamin saw that with the figurative end of the nineteenth century in World War One[217] there was a need to look to new cultural forms for an understanding of the new century. It is not possible to say that with the end of the nineteenth century the oral tradition suddenly ceased to be an important cultural force, or even to assert that prior to the end of this century it had significance - certainly not among the literate, urban populations. Nevertheless, as both Hoggart and Willis' work, among others, makes clear, the oral tradition is far from extinguished even now, and in pre-World War One Europe, in a Europe still relatively undeveloped - i.e. with still a substantial rural, even peasant population- the world of everyday life and its culture, its traditions, its residual orality[218] was shattered by the First World War and the advent of the twentieth century. Apprenticeship, with its dependence on the oral tradition, in almost any field was confronted by the poverty of its experience in terms of this new world. Certainly apprenticeship for life, the transmission of values and tradition as it was and is practised in the family and other social forms became immediately more problematic. Although the history of youth culture often focuses on the development of a generational *cultural* split after World War Two, is it not perhaps advisable to look to the First World War as one of the first traumatic instances of an older generation's experience being largely irrelevant to its children? As Benjamin says, the currency of not only previous experiences of war but also of economics, of technology, and of morality had been dramatically devalued in the emergence of this new century.[219] The resources of traditional forms, the ability of storytelling as an example, to speak to this new world, the new generation and its experiences in this world, were extremely limited. It was time for something new. This is a point that Benjamin makes repeatedly in his work, in his "single" meditation on the redeemability of the world.

---

[216] "The Storyteller," p.84.

---

[217] cf. Hauser, A. Social History of Art, Volume Four, New York: Vintage, nd., p.226.

[218] cf. M.Lowy on the work and context especially of F.Tonnies, among others, in Georg Lukacs - From Romanticism to Bolshevism, trans. P.Camiller, New Left Books: London, 1979, pp.22-37.

Again, this is not to discount the strength of the oral tradition as a remaining site of resistance, in the forms of personal history, everyday events, local history, a kind of apprenticeship to citizenship. But forces in the world have removed its centre from within the community, and as such it has atomized that community, severed many ties - familial, spiritual, pedagogical, and commercial - that formerly bound small groups together. This is the new world of the individual, in many respects an isolated individual, without recourse to the sort of "counsel" that traditional cultural forms provided, without recourse to the wisdom of tradition. Where can this individual turn for the kind of apprenticeship to life formerly afforded by the storyteller and world? Benjamin prescribes the novel. And, as we shall see, he is not alone in doing so.

---

[219] Benjamin, p.83.

The Novel and Everyday Life

To this point I have characterized the problem of a silenced experiential world in East Central European societies in terms of bringing this world into conversation, or rather into the proto-institutionalized conversation of the novel. The preceding discussion that relates Walter Benjamin and Georg Lukacs to the inadequacies within an oral culture, and the difficultires an oral culture has in dealing with the experiences of the emergent twentieth century is only intensified by the experiences of East and East Central Europeans. Not only did the world of the nineteenth century collapse with the end of the Habsburg, Romanov, Hohenzollern, and Ottoman empires, but this profound liberation from the past was followed in most of the region by decades of political and economic instability, the general brutalization of Nazi occupation, and the subsequent trials and terrors of Soviet style communism. I have already elaborated much of this history and its consequences for the fabric of society generally. My point in referring to it here is simply to emphasize the extent to which not only social forms but cultural forms also were strained, rendered inadequate for the task of comprehending and making comprehensible this new century.

The official answer to the problem, a backhanded answer as it were because neither the problems of modernism and alienation, nor the Bolshevik Party-state as an agent of alienated social and political development, were ever acknowledged, was the development of a literature and culture of the new society. Socialist realism, in short. As stated earlier, this can be understood as the advancement of an official fiction, a fiction of pedagogy, of inspiration, of oppression in the name of building socialism. Thus a kind of literature was developed that, in its various stages, celebrated the worker, the tireless Party-class loyalist, the simple folk coming into the light, etcetera all with an eye to creating a positive self-description of this new society. Again, as I have already pointed out, the problem with the official fiction is that it affords no "home" for the real, embodied experiences of everyday life. It is not that the official fiction categorically excluded such experiences. Rather, it excluded them when those experiences were a contradiction of the official fiction. Thus, the representation of everyday life in Tadeusz Borowski's This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen was permissible because it explored experiences of everyday life under another form of totalitarianism, the society of the Nazi death camps. Likewise, A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich was permitted under Khrushchev because it dealt with the experiences of Stalin's camps, at a time when the conveniently departed Stalin was being made to pay for the past sins of Soviet style communism. Thus there were literary efforts that began the process of cultural re-orientation, of finding one's way to a home, a habitable institution. By and large, however, official literary production was not part of this process. For several reasons.

At the end of Chapter Two I referred to Bakhtin's attraction to Rabelais in terms of Rabelais' ability to bring together the culture of the folkloric and the culture of the intelligentsia in a way that illuminated the terrain of a new social and cultural landscape of the Renaissance. Rabelais is for Bakhtin one of the exemplary figures in the history of the novel because of his success in arranging this union. There are others, but aside from the genius of individuals in managing this task, what Bakhtin always focuses on is the novel, not just as a narrative form but as a cultural force with a field extending beyond the covers of a book. That is, Rabelais' novel is an example of the genre being developed to its full potential, introducing themes and issues that Bakhtin sees as resonating throughout the subsequent history of European thought. The genre itself enabled such a legacy because of its formal relationship to both the history of literature and the material of everyday life.

In a line of argument often paralleling Bakhtin's though not nearly so deep, and certainly more openly polemical, Milan Kundera makes the case for the novel as a kind of science of the lifeworld. The notion of a science of the lifeworld is derived from Kundera's reading of the history of the novel against, or as an answer to, Edmund Husserl's concern that modern science, from its origins in the work of Descartes and Galileo and into its development as the dominant form of knowing in modernity, had neglected the human lifeworld.[220] But Kundera is not only interested in protecting the lifeworld from the neglect and misunderstandings of science; he is also concerned about those "enemies" of the novel, those who would rob greater "Europe" of one its finest accomplishments. These enemies he counts as three: the non-thought of received ideas;

---

[220] The Art of the Novel, cf.pp.3-7. Patrick Wright cites Agnes Heller as making a similar case against science which, "as an abstract and universal form of knowledge, implies no lifeworld..." (cf. On Living In An Old Country, London: Verso, 1985, pp.17-19). Although Kundera might resist what follows for Heller, that it is the experiences of the lifeworld out of which ethics and morality are built, it is precisely because science involves itself principally with mechanical and causal relations, with the bareness of facts and not their context or implication for the lived experiences of individuals and societies that the problem of *values* is so central to the novel. All of this against Kundera's desire to deny an ethical content to the novel (his disavowal of this content is of course understandable, given the onerous responsibility the novel - or narratives that stand outside the history of the novel - is made to bear in Soviet aesthetic ideology and his experiences as a writer in Soviet Czechoslovakia).

kitsch; and the *agelasts*, whom Michael Holquist defines as the "grim ideologues."[221] That is, Kundera is profoundly concerned over the future of the novel, which he believes the world desperately needs in its struggle against forces that threaten to leave humanity with no understanding of itself or its world. In some respects Kundera stands much the same as Lukacs, clinging to a threatened sense of what is so dear to him, an apogee of cultural achievement. Having already been an "eyewitness" to the "death of the novel" in Soviet Czechoslovakia, and writing well before the Velvet Revolution, Kundera was pessimistic about its health in the West, where its three-headed enemy roamed freely.[222]

There is in Kundera a deep bitterness about the place of the novel in both the East and the West. Contrary to his own concern about our ability to laugh and in laughing, to open ourselves up to the unfinished nature of the present and the openendedness of the future, his own laughter sounds brittle, tempered by a sense that, despite his faith in the novel as a cultural even epistemological force, he is fighting a rearguard action. This is one of the reasons why his arguments concerning the novel is limited. His history of the modern European novel begins with Cervantes. With Don Quixote the modern European "passion to know" that animated science through Descartes and Galileo announced itself in literature. The science of the lifeworld begins there. It is as if this science, unlike the efforts of Descartes and Galileo, had no pre-history, no prior development. Kundera's argument serves a polemical function, but it is not sufficient for the concerns he deals with. That is, while Kundera is confident in the novel's ability to answer some need to "remember being" in the face of modernization, he cannot relate this confidence to a longer or deeper human history of inquiry, and of resistance, or even simple persistence in the face of grave danger.

---

[221] Kundera, ibid., cf.pp.159-165; in Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, ed. M.Holquist, trans.C.Emerson and M.Holquist, Austin: University of Texas, 1981, p.58n.

[222] Kundera, cf.pp.13, 19, 164.

As Bakhtin has argued in all of his essays on the novel, however, there is a long pre-history to the novels of Cervantes and Rabelais, evidence of much that both he and Kundera consider essential to the modern novel as existing even in the literature of antiquity. And, as this chapter argues, even though Kundera may have witnessed the "death of the novel" in "normalized" Czechoslovakia, the novel arose from the grave, as it were, to persist in its researches, its commentary, its dialogue with the present and the future.

Kundera is unable to conceptualize the force of the novel as existing outside the covers of a book. This force lies not in the ability to publish freely, as his concerns about the novel in the West indicate. Neither does it lie in any external social or political reality. Rather, it is in the hearts and imaginations of the individuals who have even once been moved by a novel, moved by the passion to know, to confront their own inexplicable and irreducible situation with a work of their own.

> The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living.[223]

---

[223] Benjamin, p.87.

When Bakhtin writes his history of the novel he writes the history of a genre that has always been concerned with the perplexity of the living, always concerned with giving that perplexity shape, even in times when such perplexity was a marginal experience. That is, unlike Lukacs and Benjamin who contrast the crisis in modern culture with an image of a golden or redeemed past in order to understand the novel's individualism, its inability to get along with a totalized culture, Bakhtin's history suggests that the identity between culture and society that Lukacs in particular has created is a fiction. And, prefiguring aspects of Scarry's argument, this is a fiction that occludes the real world of powerful interests, the real world of oppressed and silenced experience. In Bakthin's work the problem of non-identity, of the distance between bodily experience in the world and cultural expression and understanding of that experience has always been historically problematic. Or rather, it has been a recurring problem in human history. As a cultural problem it has existed for as long as there have been experiences and lifeworlds that don't conform to the images and narratives of the hegemonic or dominant culture. Bakhtin's history of the novel is very much a history of the tension between the dominant official culture and the subordinant, unofficial culture. This is an historical cultural tension that reveals itself in the recurrent poverty of official forms. What manifests itself in these moments is the reformative power or the iconoclastic creative-critical force of the novel.

Again, the novel has to be understood as more than a literary form or genre. As Bakhtin notes,

> In an era when the novel reigns supreme, almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized': drama (for example Ibsen,

> Hauptmann, the whole of Naturalist drama), epic poetry (for example, Childe Harold and especially Byron's Don Juan), even lyric poetry (as an extreme example, Heine's lyrical verse).[224]

Arguably, what interests Bakhtin more than a theory of the novel as a literary phenomenon is a theory of *novelization* as a cultural force. This is where Bakhtin's understanding of the novel is deeper than Kundera's, where his polemics are more subtle but also more substantial.

Novelization and the Epic World

We have already catalogued Kundera's enemies of the novel and in that the enemies of "European" civilization. These are the antagonists in his defence of the novel. For Bakhtin these enemies can be reduced to the various manifestations of perhaps a single cultural force. That is, if the novel stands as the genre or force of what Kundera calls the "investigation of human life in the trap the world has become,"[225] then its counterpart would be the force that resists such investigation, that denies the validity both of the investigation and the premise that the world is a trap. Bakhtin has cast his depiction of the novel against the history of formalized narratives. The force of investigation is, as it were, developed theoretically against the example of the force of dogmatic culture - culture removed from the experiences of the lifeworld, culture that claims to be the one voice, the "last word" on the experiences of the lifeworld. It is a dogmatic culture precisely because it has a closed relationship to the present; there is no opportunity or possibility of its being informed by the present. His simplest representation of this struggle of cultural forces is made in the essay, "Epic and novel: toward a methodology for the study of the novel."[226] For Bakhtin, the forces of cultural formalization and closedness, the antitheses of novelization, are exemplified in the epic

---

[224] The Dialogic Imagination, pp.5-6.

[225] cited in Christian Salmon, "Conversation with M.K. on the Art of the Novel," Salmagundi 73, Winter 1987, p.122.

Bakhtin's sense of the epic and the world it aspires to represent is very much the world of the epic as Lukacs described it, and in many ways analogous to Benjamin's communal world of the storyteller. While Bakhtin's theory of the novel is like Benjamin's in many ways a development of themes Lukacs raised in his Theory of the Novel, as a theory of cultural development it is much less sanguine about a past harmony between cultural forms and social life than either Lukacs or Benjamin. The notion of an authentic culture as Lukacs understood it is a foreign element, even a hostile element in Bakhtin's thinking. In the context of Bakhtin's work the very idea that culture and life could have a direct relationship, that a narrative form could speak as the single voice of social experience in the world is coloured in conservative or backward looking utopian, obscurantist tones. The reasons for this lie in the epic's relationship to present experience. For Bakhtin the epic as a literary genre is, basically, the genre of distant experience. Its material, its world, has traditionally been that of a "national heroic past" or an "absolute past"; its sources are not in "personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it" but national tradition, trans-personal or collective experience as viewed through the lens of tradition; and its temporal relation to the present is an "absolute epic distance."[227] What characterizes this genre, the force that stands behind it, is its abstract, distant quality with regards to the present. That is, personal experience of the present cannot stand alongside epic or national experience in an epic or absolute time. The epic depends on a certain distance, a certain acceptance of abstracted and generalized experience for its power as a form.[228] When personal experience comes into contact with the epic the latter loses its power, and is open to question.[229] Bakhtin's argument is that what constitutes the essence of the epic as a cultural force makes it incapable of speaking for and to the present. Or rather, it renders it incapable of speaking to a present in which personal experience is substantially different from the absolute experience as formed within itself. It is at this moment that the epic as a *meaningful* cultural form is impoverished. This can be translated into the problem of the dissolution of an historical bloc: the erosion of the power of an hegemonic culture as another form of explanation and interpretation of experience emerges in popular opposition. In other words, the single voice of the hegemonic culture has lost its legitimacy among its constituents in the face of emergent, newly formed voices.

---

[226] in The Dialogic Imagination.

---

[227] ibid., p.13.

[228] This is precisely the problem of any formulation of a "national" culture or experience: in the abstraction of the generalization the embodied, in-the-world experiences of individuals and cultural minorities are submerged and/or denied. On a cultural-political level this is the phenomenon that Canadians of Japanese and Ukrainian descent have in the past few years attempted to address. On the level of cultural development or consciousness raising - other names for the process of *novelization* - the transformation of experience into literature that Joy Kogawa achieved with Obasan speaks directly to the issues discussed in this chapter. In the non-novelistic form of essays Patrick Wright addresses the problem of national tradition and its relationship to everyday life, especially as it reveals itself in the political agenda of the government and its allies. This thesis is in certain respects conceptually indebted to Wright's book, On Living In An Old Country.

[229] Though it does not give in easily. Again, witness the treatment of ethnic/national/racial minorities within the "Canadian" nation and the resistance, often late but there nevertheless, of these marginalized peoples.

If we cast both Lukacs and Benjamin's theories in these Gramscian terms then both are referring perhaps not so much to a utopian past as to a period when the culture of an historical past functioned as a truly hegemonic culture. That is, even in its epic-ness it still spoke *with some degree of legitimacy* to and of the lived experience of individuals within that society. To risk a tautology: This culture was legitimated as the single voice of the lifeworld by virtue of its position of hegemony. Lukacs' project then, similar to Gramsci's, was to build the hegemonic culture of the revolutionary proletariat, to create an epic culture that legitimately speaks with one voice for the experiences of the working class, in themselves the epic heroes of Marx's philosophy of history. In Lukacs' terms, the project might be described as one of building the "authentic culture" of the authentic subject of the new historical bloc, this authentic culture achieving a depth of hegemony heretofore only experienced in an archaic, epic past.

But hegemony is a relative and unstable condition. And the recurrence of challenges to the formalization of experience in culture, to the epic in the form of novelization that Bakhtin details in his essays on the novel, is exemplary of the impossibility of the kind of relationship or hegemony, the condition of identity or totality that Lukacs struggles to philosophize. In its positive incarnation as hegemonic culture epic culture may speak as the voice, may present the self-description, of the majority. There are, however, always other voices, always experiences that fall outside the understanding of hegemonic culture. Epic culture is in essence incapable of dealing with the real diversity of experiences in the lifeworld. In its negative incarnation, as the simple imposition of a voice and image, it is unwilling to even consider other experiences.

In many respects whether the official culture is hegemonic or simply dominant is irrelevant in terms of the argument over the forces behind the epic and the novel. It is enough that there is a conception and a will to develop a generalized "authentic" culture. Although Bakhtin is said to have turned his one explicit discussion of socialist realism into cigarette papers - "which were then in short supply"[230] - the essays on the novel constitute a sustained and implicit critique of the idea of one society, one voice, one culture. That is, the force that stands behind the epic is discernable as the force standing behind the ideology of socialist realism. That which struggles against this ideology of the monologue - or as Ken Hirschkop has described it, keeping to the "dialogical" analysis of Bakhtin, "a strategy of response toward another discourse, albeit a strategy which aims to 'ignore' or 'marginalize' the opposite discourse"[231] - is the force of novelization. The novel then, functions in such a way as to "answer" the official fiction, to resist the effort to ignore or silence and marginalize the opposite or rather "other" discourse.

---

[230] K.Clark and M.Holquist, Bakthin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1984, p.273.

[231] "A response to the forum on Michael Bakhtin," Bakthin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. G.S.Morson, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986, p.75.

It is in fact the nature of "otherness" that the novel explores, the other that the epic culture has removed from itself, and has distanced itself from. Hirschkop, in response to the neutered interpretation of Bakhtin by many commentators, has emphasized that Bakhtin's literary concepts should be understood in the context of "internal social warfare." In this context his sense of dialogue "includes not only the liberal exchange of views but also questions of cultural oppression and power."[232] That is, the dialogue of novel and epic, of other and hegemonic or dominant, can be a nasty, brutal affair. As Bakhtin's work repeatedly emphasizes, this cultural dialogue is not simply a struggle of literary genres and trends; it is the struggle of experience in the world to articulate itself in language, to be creatively formed in a literary work in such a way that it bursts into the consciousness of the reading public.

The Novel and Social Warfare

Kundera bitterly remembers the "death of the novel" in a Czechoslovakia recently overrun by Warsaw Pact tanks. This death was "inflicted by bans, censorship, and ideological pressure." That is, after the blossoming of the Prague Spring the winter of neo-Stalinism in the form of normalization once again gripped Czechoslovakia and the ideology of socialist realism was applied with renewed fervour. The novel as Kundera understands it was no longer officially published. Existing examples of the genre were disposed of, and writers of novels humiliated or forced into internal or external exile. And what of the "hundreds and thousands of novels published in huge editions and widely read" in the Soviet world? These are novels outside the proud history of the novel: "they are *novels that come after the history of the novel.*"[233] Kundera relates this history as one of perpetual discovery, the relentless "conquest of being" that comes from holding "'the world of life' under a permanent light." Those novels that exist beyond these bounds, that "add nothing to the conquest of being,"[234] are the subject of Bakhtin's critique. They are the contemporary representatives of that culture of formalization, the modern incarnation of the epic. Thus, the officially acceptable novel is in fact a narrative constricted by formulae, ossifying into the epic narrative of really existing socialism.

---

[232] ibid.

The official life of the novel has then been extinguished; the monumental or heroic narrative has taken its place. But this is not to say that novelization as a cultural force has died. And this is where Kundera's reading of events is flawed. For, if the emergence of a rich but repressed literary underground in the years of normalization says anything, it is that the novel was alive and doing well, represented in the work of numerous internally and externally exiled authors.

The Hungarian novelist and screen writer Peter Esterhazy has commented on the contradictions inherent in, and the generally unpleasant reality of being a writer of unofficial stories in the East bloc. Not to mention the burden of social responsibility that Stanislaw Baranczak has described (a burden born of the prestige that literature has in

---

[233] The Art of the Novel, p.14.

[234] ibid., pp.5, 14.

East Central Europe, one that "might be envied from a distance because it indicates a read need and that readers do exist," which Esterhazy immediately qualifies by questioning the credibility of such distant observations) there is the contradiction of the "halo":

> For a writer in the East, a halo drawn round his head by some Wicked Bolshevik Intrigue always comes in handy...On receiving the figures concerning the sales of my books in the West the thought occurred to me that perhaps I should have swapped the fine imposed on me the other day for speeding for confinement in goal...But this is a rather lamentable joke, so I'll take it back.[235]

It is lamentable, both because it humourizes the sometimes cruel reality of the policing of creative life, and because it points to a profound misunderstanding of what it means to be a "citizen of the Eastern part of Europe."[236] In his article Esterhazy refers to a comment attributed to Czeslaw Milosz, one that points to the difference between intellectuals in the East and West as lying in the fact "that the later, as opposed to the former, have never been properly kicked in the arse. According to this aphorism," Esterhazy continues,

> our trump card is that living in a *brutalized culture* we are close to life. But - as Milosz himself is aware - it would be sad if our prestige were based solely upon this mutilated part of the body...[237]

It would be sad because, as in the case of Kundera's The Joke, the culture of the East bloc is misunderstood as entirely organized around the politics of the Cold War. Such a misunderstanding simply sees the struggle in the East as between two absolute forces, represented in two epic narratives - one communist, the other anti-communist/democratic-capitalist. Such a reading lends credibility to Kundera's notion of the death of the novel in both the East[238] and West because it conforms to the either/or of the dogmatic, the "inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to look squarely at the absence of the Supreme Judge."[239] This realm of human relativity, of openendedness, this facing up to the absence of transcendent Truth and Order, is the realm of the novel. And in exploring that realm - in firmly holding the lifeworld under the light of its investigation - the novel does injury to those forms that base themselves on certitude, on transcendant notions of literature, humanity, society, religion.

---

[235] "Investigating the bathtub," Index On Censorship, October 1988, p.24.

[236] ibid., p.23.

[237] p.25.

In referring to Erwin Rhode's Der Griechesche Roman und seine Vorlaufer - the "best book on the history of the ancient novel" - Bakhtin states that it "does not so much recount the history of the novel as it does illustrate the process of disintegration that affected all major genres in antiquity."[240] In short, "the novel gets on poorly with other genres."[241] Where other genres or literary forms have already been structured and formalized "the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted."[242] In this unformalized and uncompletedness lies its strength, its ability to be a science of the lifeworld; in it lies also its ability to affect the shape of genres or cultural forms around it. That is, the novel in its non-formalized, openendedness has a proximity or analogy to lived experience that allows it to be especially receptive to those experiences. On the one hand, the epic is bound into a time and space of absolutes, the experiences of an absolute figure, a national or cultural hero, and develops in the terms and language of a completed realm distant from the uncompleted present. The novel, on the other hand, is developed in a "maximal zone of contact" with the present, with the time and space of the present, with its language (and languages), with its incompleteness.[243] It is in the creative struggle to represent this incomplete nature of everyday life, of the present, that the novel is formed, that its essence is revealed, and the attempts to formalize or make epic are exploded. Through real - that is, not abstracted - contact with the present

---

[238] It is important to emphasize that Kundera's Russophobia and his articulation of the "death of the novel" is itself a manifestation of the author's own dogmatism. Esterhazy's point is that the novel does in fact survive censorship, that despite any obituaries, and despite the visible marks of harassment that a jail term leaves, despite the absence of the halo, writers continue to create novelistic works. In his formulation, made in his emigre office in Paris, France, far from the reality of literary-creative life as it is really experienced in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or the Soviet Union for that matter, Kundera is letting the bitterness of his experience speak as the authoritative voice. He contributes to the misunderstanding Esterhazy refers to.

[239] The Art of the Novel, p.7.

[240] The Dialogic Imagination, p.4.

[241] ibid., p.5.

> every object of artistic representation loses its completedness, its hopelessly finished quality and its immutability that had been so essential to it in the world of the epic 'absolute past,' walled off by an unapproachable boundary from the continuing and unfinished present. Through contact with the present, an object is attracted to the incomplete process of a world-in-the-making, and is stamped with the seal of inconclusiveness.[244]

The onerous task of the aesthetic police of socialist realism is to encourage creative artists to resist this attraction, this temptation to submit to what Kundera calls the novel's "only morality" - the passion to know.[245]

---

[242] ibid., p.3.

[243] ibid., p.11.

[244] ibid., p.30.

The novel does not get along well with other genres - or rather, with the forces of formalization and abstraction - because it brings them into contact with the perplexities of the present, the caustic solution of inconclusiveness. And it does this in the shape of narrative. That is, it treads on the carpet of tradition; it announces itself in the halls of culture; and, like a rude guest, proceeds to flaunt its unfinished, unkempt form and content. Parody, pastiche, an "elevation" of "low" genres - these are ways in which novelization manifests its antipathy towards formalization. Bakhtin notes how historically the struggles between the novel and other genres has been understood as "merely the struggle of literary tendencies and schools." And as much as such struggles do exist, "Behind them one must be sensitive to the deeper and more truly historical struggle of genres, the establishment and growth of a generic skeleton of literature."[246] - But behind these references to an historical struggle of genres, the struggle of novel and epic or rather the forces of novelization and formalization to be more pointed, is another struggle, that which Hirschkop refers to: the social struggle that manifests itself in the struggle over ideology, over the forms and contents of culture. Again, it would be facile to describe this struggle in the familiar ideological terms of the Cold War. Rather, it is a struggle between the kind of thinking characteristic of the Cold War, a thinking that reduces differences to their opposites, to an either/or, and one that can apprehend and appreciate the inconclusiveness of lived experiences.

---

[245] The Art of the Novel, pp.5-6.

[246] The Dialogic Imagination, p.5.

Ken Hirschkop chastises those commentators who see in Bakhtin a theory of dialogue predicated in a respectful liberal exchange of ideas. If we accept Hirschkop's analysis of monologism as itself an aspect of a larger dialogue, but one that wishes to silence response rather than respect it, then we are "led to a very different vision of what Bakhtin means by 'dialogue,' one which includes not only the liberal exchange of views but also questions of cultural oppression and power."[247] Hirschkop's analysis underwrites the argument that Bakhtin's work deals, implicitly if not explicitly, with what he calls the "internal social warfare" of Bakhtin's early career.[248] That is, Bakhtin's theory of novelization, an aspect of his larger work on the dialogic or answer-response character of cultural life, deals with the representation in narratives of "fierce social struggle...in which the dialogical forces of language actively contest the social and political centralization of their culture."[249] While a Cold War reading would understand this as another attack on the oppressiveness of the Soviet system and Soviet culture, Bakhtin's targets, his polemical adversary, were *any* manifestations of reductionist thinking, including those in the Cold War academy who would take up the cudgels for him.[250] Hirschkop makes the case that to cast the novel-epic distinction as absolute is to misinterpret Bakhtin's project, is to take a "discursive tactic determined by the discourse it opposes" as a theoretical position.[251] That is, to raise the relativizing activity of the novel to the level of creed (i.e. to argue for relativism pure and simple) against a notion of the epic or monologic as the representation of ideological dogmatism pure and simple misses the historical context of the specific instances of novelization.

---

[247] Hirschkop, p.75.

[248] ibid.

[249] ibid., p.74.

[250] cf. pp.77-79.

The World as a Novel in Utero

As mentioned at the end of Chapter Two, Bakhtin was very interested in those literary figures who in their work were able to bridge the distance between the declining culture and the emergent. They are celebrated, as the Goethe of Wilhelm Meister is celebrated in Bakhtin's essay on the Bildungsroman, as creating an image of humanity emerging

> *along with the world*...reflect[ing] the historical emergence of the world itself. [Humanity] is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man.[252]

What interests Bakhtin is precisely that period of social and ideological or cultural instability that exists between the fall and rise of hegemonic orders. This interest is at least partially due to the great potential these periods hold for human activity as cultural, social, and political forms and values are up for grabs, up for negotiation, up for redemption or judgement. Thus Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel is so central to Bakhtin - not as an abstracted example of novelization but as an historically situated realization of the novel's potentials. In it the "other" of the Middle Ages is raised to the level of the previously dominant high cultural figures and forms. In a popular work Rabelais creates the image of an emergent ideology, of an emergent sensibility of humanity. It is not that the Renaissance was the reproduction or even the veneration of medieval folk culture; rather, the Renaissance opened its eyes to everyday life, cast off some of the fetters of medieval ideology and began to look at the life of the present with a new seriousness.[253] It is Bakhtin's argument that novels can open our eyes to deeper understandings of the world we live in, and that they do this in their ability to form the inchoate mass of material everyday life presents us with into something revealing, something that makes sense without positing an answer. Hirschkop's argument is with those who see in Bakhtin a legitimation of liberal relativism, and he correctly points out that Bakhtin, although championing the relativization that is essential to the novel's forming of the world, is not a champion of relativism sui generis. That is, the novel or novelization functions in given contexts to reveal the limitations and inadequacy of formalized fictions - it debunks their claims to absoluteness with its "joyful relativity." But this debunking itself points to truths, perhaps predicates for a future absolute fiction, but certainly truths with an historical veracity. In short, novelization is not just the emptying of meaning from old or inadequate or distant forms; it is also the positing of new *meanings*, the redemption of truth, of experience lived but ignored or marginalized.

---

[251] ibid., p.76.

[252] "The *Bildungsroman* and its significance in the history of realism (towards a historical typology of the novel)," Speech Genres, ed. C.Emerson and M.Holquist, trans. V.W.McGee, Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1986, p.23.

---

[253] cf. Agnes Heller, Renaissance Man, trans. R.E.Allen, Schocken: New York, 1981, especially Part 3, pp.147-370.

Kundera has claimed that "The novel is the paradise of individuals. It is the territory where no one possesses the truth... but where everyone has the right to be understood..."[254] Against the kind of narrative that provides us with the absolute experience of the heroic or monumental character the novel gives us both the material of everyday life, and the embodied characters to animate this material - "this trap the world has become" (as Kundera describes it in The Unbearable Lightness of Being). Kundera does not theorize the way in which the novel affords insight or understanding of this trap, beyond emphasizing the fact that within the confines of the novel two or more contradictory truths may be spoken, with equal conviction. And all of this is much to the consternation of those readers who can't abide such relativity and ambiguity. He underlines what might be called the "independence" of novelistic characters and the truths they articulate in his story of how Tolstoy created the character of Anna within Anna Karenina in a way counter to his own designs, his own convictions as laid out in notes made prior to writing the novel. Kundera does not believe that Tolstoy "revised his moral ideas"; rather, "in the course of writing, he was listening to another voice than that of his personal moral conviction. He was listening to what I would like to call the wisdom of the novel."[255]

This wisdom of the novel lies again in its ability to get close to the pulse of the world of lived, bodily experience. In terms of its ability to give characters credibility, it is perhaps its nearness to the language, but especially to the diversity of languages, dialects, and vernaculars with all of their attendant ideological, social, psychological, and historical underpinnings that enables the novel, like no other literary genre, to develop a rich world of characters.

---

[254] The Art of the Novel, p.159.

[255] ibid., p.158.

Bakhtin has dated the emergence of the modern novel with that period in Europe's history when the national vernaculars emerged as legitimate languages, as languages challenging Latin as the language of literature.[256] During this period languages began to come into contact with each other, began to compete in their ability to name the world, describe its being. The poet - or the writer working in a formalized genre - is forced to struggle against this multi-languaged or heteroglot world in order to create the finished, uni-vocal work. The novelist, however, as Bakhtin emphasizes, welcomes this world:

> It is in fact out of this stratification of language, its speech diversity and even language diversity, that he constructs his style...
> The prose writer does not purge words of intentions and tones that are alien to him, he does not destroy the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words, he does not eliminate those language characterizations and speech mannerisms (potential narrator-personalities) glimmering behind the words and forms, each at a distance from the ultimate semantic nucleus of his work, that is, the centre of his own personal intentions.[257]

It is in fact the novelist's openness to the languages, the verbal expressions of experience, that constitute her greatest window onto the life world. Unlike the formalized genres, and certainly unlike the formulaic fictions of the official culture, the work of a novelist depends on her ability to "hold 'the world of life' under a permanent light." Or rather, to hold it close to her ear, to listen for the struggle of ideas and actions, of world views that expresses itself in the language of the life world. Bakhtin has written that the novelist

---

[256] The Dialogic Imagination, p.12.

[257] ibid., p.298.

> does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages - rather, he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master.[258]

That is, the novelist forms the cacophony of the world, the cacophony of thoughts, insults, worldviews, and intentions into a representation of everyday life. It is in its openness to, indeed its embracing of the struggles manifest in the languages of real, embodied individuals in everyday life and - importantly - in its ability to create a representation or formed but open-ended whole of this struggle that Kundera's "wisdom of the novel" can be said to lie. The extent to which this process of creating a verbal image of everyday life involves the development of characters with truths independent of the author, of voices beyond the authorial is the extent to which the rich potential of the novel as a laboratory, a science or investigation of the life world is successful.

Although characters are dependent in their embodiment on the skill of the author - and on the readers' ability to reanimate them - their reality or meaning lies beyond the work. Or rather, it lies in the relationship of the work to the world. That is, they are created and animated from and by materials in the life world. They speak to and for truths, experiences, possibilities that exist in the social realm of which both writer and reader are a part. Given that they become part of the novel, are embodied forces with it, play ing their part in the greater project of bringing the life world into consciousness they embody also the "otherness" that official culture marginalizes and refuses to listen to. That is, although the strategy of marginalization and silencing whereby the monologue attempts to disavow its responsibility - or as Bakhtin would say, its "answerability," its part in the dialogue of culture - although this strategy works on an official level where a distance from lived experience is maintained, on an unofficial level, in the form of privately written, sometimes clandestinely published manuscripts, it is answered, the official called to account, as it were, for its acts of omission and oppression. Thus the fictions of power are answered by the fictions of the powerless, the bodily experience of the silenced formed into the languages of the novel against the monuments to deafness that constitute the works of official culture.

---

[258] ibid., p.299.

The Novel as Social Activity

In his "Storyteller" essay Walter Benjamin makes a case for the distinction between the art of the storyteller and that of the novelist, a difference rooted in their different social and historical contexts, and in their relation to these contexts. Benjamin's schemata, his story-teller/pre-modern versus novel/modern distinction has already been referred to. There is another factor he raises in this essay, another development with which narrative must contend with, and that is the development of what can be called the information society. Benjamin understands the appeal and development of "information" as both "menacing" to storytelling and as being "about a crisis in the novel." That is, information appears as "understandable in itself," is presented as self-explanatory.[259] Kundera makes a similar point when he refers to the "termites of reduction," the amplification and distribution world-wide of a set of stereotypes and simplifications. "This common spirit of the mass media," he asserts,"...is the spirit of our time." Against this stands the novel's "spirit of complexity," its inconclusiveness.[260]

Benjamin describes this spirit in the following passage:

> ...it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it... The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.[261]

Although Benjamin is here referring to storytelling, the spirit he describes belongs equally to Bakhtin and Kundera's conception of the novel. Both narrative genres, although given form to the experiences of the life world, resist the further impulse to explain, to provide the unitary answer to this realm of perplexities. In his early work on the philosophy of language Benjamin remarks that "truth is the death of intention..extinguishing even the purest fire of searching...as though under water."[262] Conversely, given his remarks about information, it is perhaps possible to say that intention is the death of truth, that reducing the complexity of experience to the form of digestible bits of information reduces its truth content in an exponential relationship. That is, the fuller and more complex the information - the more it approximates the complexity of the narrative - the more truthful, the more it approximates the density of truth or truths from which it has been extracted.

---

[259] Illuminations, pp.88-89.

[260] The art of the Novel, pp.17-18.

[261] Illuminations, p.89.

[262] cited in H.Arendt, "Introduction" to Illuminations, p.47.

Benjamin has said that one of the differences between the story and the novel is that the story "contains... something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers."[263] The novel cannot approximate this social role, in his estimation, because the "epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out." The unity of lived experience and cultural form that marks both the pre-modern world and the stories within its context, that profundity or wisdom inherent in such a unity that Benjamin refers to as "counsel woven into the fabric of real life" has degenerated. Sharing the birthplace of the solitary individual - "who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounselled, and cannot counsel others" - the novel carries "the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life." All it can do is "give evidence of the profound perplexity of the living."[264]

The meaning of the novel is for Benjamin a solitary, perhaps tragic meaning. The perplexity of life is revealed, and in some respects ordered by the fate of its characters, a fate that sheds some reflected light on the solitary reader.

---

[263] Illuminations, p.86.

[264] ibid., pp.86, 87.

> The novel is significant... not because it presents someone else's fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it ['the burning interest of the reader'] yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.[265]

And yet, given Bakhtin's critique of the really existing epic, is the meaning of the novel necessarily couched in such tragic terms, such existential isolation? Is not its status as a witness to the "profound perplexity of the living" a sign of its peculiarly modern wisdom: the wisdom of uncertainty, of critique, of weighing various claims to truth against ones own experience, of entering into the struggle of ideas and world views, of possible actions in a world that the epic, the pre-modern wisdom of the story, can never embrace or illuminate?

There may have been an epic past, yet the project of epic present or future carries the stain of totalitarianism, reeks not only of domination, of lies and hypocrisy, but also of the profound re-ordering of life experiences that Aleksander Watt discovered in that greatest modern attempt at epicization, Stalin's Soviet Union.[266] Again, this is the phenomenon that Scarry speaks to when she discusses the relationship of power to its self-description. It is in such a context that the wisdom of the novel does counsel its readers, because it creates the image of a community of silenced, marginalized, repressed individuals. In reading the novels of those who have risked lesser or greater degrees of wrath from the aesthetic police the solitary individuals of everyday life grasp not only the shape of their own lives; they also grasp the thread of unspoken conversations, of conversations not permitted but ready to unravel the curtain of silence that hangs over their atomized lives. In the context of atomized societies the novelistic narrative does have a social usefulness beyond the warming of shivering individuals: it begins the process of building molecules, of creating not only the dialogue of writer and reader, but also, as manuscripts are passed by hand, as reading circles are formed, a dialogue of readers. Here, in the novel, is the formed reflection of life in a difficult time, when to even openly discuss difficulties is to transgress the codes of acceptable behaviour. In such a context the novel assumes the proportions of a thoroughly apolitical - in the conventional, reductive sense of the political - institution or proto-institution in lives of its readers.

---

[265] ibid., p.101.

[266] cf. My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual.

This is a different but related phenomenon to H. Gordon Skilling's *Samizdat* and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe.[267] As the title suggests, Skilling's argument is that the activity of individual or underground publishers in the east bloc was a significant factor in the development of social movements outside the realm of the Communist Party-state structure. His focus is on the publication and distribution of essays and journalism, reports and so forth. The role of novels in this process is not highlighted. Skilling addresses the phenomenon of what Georg Konrad described as the "craving for communication"[268] which haunted the region. But communication assumes different forms, with different qualities and affects. That is, although Skilling's subject is the role that primarily "information" communication played in the development of enclaves of independent social activity, the role of the novel, of creative or artistic communications generally, is left unexplored.

---

[267] London: Macmillan, 1989.

[268] cited in Skilling, p.20.

Again, to paraphrase Benjamin and Kundera, information is reductive, aspiring to a transparency of meaning that denies the complexity of real life, of the truth(s) of that life. In Bakhtin's terms, information thus understood aspires to being the "last world." There is an efficacy, a strategic quality, to this kind of communication. As was noted earlier in the discussion concerning Gramsci and his relationship to folklore and the experiences of everyday life, the politician's ability to remain sensitive to the voices of experience and at the same time to formulate policies and plans of actions is limited. He is, as it were, forced to develop a euphonious future from a cacophonous present. The world of realpolitik does not lend itself to novelistic technique. Skilling's subject, the development of an independent society, perhaps rightly focuses on the role more politically oriented - certainly more politically efficacious - materials played. To discover how a "craving for communication" might initially manifest itself, or how that craving might be shaped into a future-oriented communication, is to inquire into the way experience is formed into the novelistic. That is, the novel, the force of novelization, embodies not only characters who in their independent ways negotiate the "trap the world has become," it also gives a home and an image to a future-orientedness, a hopefulness, an openness to experience that generates the possibility that communion is possible, that the self-descriptions of the marginalized or "other" are valid, true, should be expressed.

In this sense the novel always speaks for a generalized human right to be understood, as Kundera says. This a significant right in every society simply by virtue of the fact that, to paraphrase Kundera, being is forgotten in the hegemonic discourses. In the case of actively repressive societies, in the context of a simply dominant discourse, dominant culture, this right assumes far greater significance because in it lies all that really matters, as Gramsci observed.[269] The right to not only be heard but to be *understood* in that hearing suggests a profound willingness to open oneself up to another's experience, to put aside as much as is humanly possible the interests one has in one's own way of understanding the world.

This is not to say one abandons one's own position. Instead one accepts that there is more to one's own position than can be seen or understood from inside. Bakhtin makes this point in his short essay to the Soviet periodical Novy Mir:

> *Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot ever really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole...; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others.*
> ...A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures.[270]

Although speaking in this instance of dialogic understanding in general, Bakhtin's point is made concerning language, and especially concerning the kind of creative understanding possible via the novel in passages quoted earlier from "Discourse in the Novel." This creative understanding is manifested in the novel's ability to give shape to the struggle of ideas and world views through the inter-illumination of various found languages and vernaculars - through the creative representation of the heterodoxia of the world as expressed in its heteroglossia. That such a representation should speak clearly for a human right to be understood, even when the novel in question is as Kundera describes The Joke a love story and not a political novel, reveals itself in the context of social repression so thorough that even the description of romantic love sends alarm bells ringing.

---

[269] Selections From the Prison Notebooks, cf. pp.110,239,243.

[270] Speech Genres, p.7.

The problem of the *meaning* of novels - of creative works generally - from East Central Europe always confronts the socio-political reality of the Cold War. We have raised this issue several times, and the argument in this chapter has been to look at the force of novelization not so much as an analogue of Cold War struggles but as a fount of possibilities within that context. That is, although I have made a case that the novel had a special place in the development of an independent social consciousness in East Central Europe, this consciousness is not necessarily reducible to the antinomies of the Cold War consciousness, much as the champions of the new world order would like it to be. The example of Vaclav Havel is a case in point. Published by various conservative journals while subject to the censorship of Czechoslovakia's Soviet government[271] he has held to a "third way," some (perhaps mythical) ground between the roads of the vanquished and the victorious. The same could be said for people such as Adam Michnik and Georg Konrad, both of whom publish in Left journals in the West, and whose visions of the future are decidedly not the same as either the Cold Warriors who celebrate their "dissidence" or those at home who condemn it and them, either from the position of an outdated Marxism or from a born-again Hayekism. There are numerous other less luminous examples of individuals and groups whose vision and activities stand them outside the easily understood dichotomies that have paralysed global politics and global understanding since the partition of Europe at Yalta and the end of the Second World War. The examples of the Jazz Section and Padlock Editions in Czechoslovakia; of Freedom and Peace, of numerous and various economic think tanks, and the many permutations of Solidarity in Poland; of unofficial academic research groups and semi-autonomous cultural activities in Hungary - all suggest the diversity hidden behind the awkward moniker of "dissidence." In his mid-1980s essayistic attempt to create an alternative to the Cold War consciousness Konrad suggests that the experiences of East Central Europeans may have a positive consequence: "Here, between haughty lords and humble servants, a self-respecting citizen is maturing in the larva of the state-socialist man."[272] Certainly this is the case as represented by the many exemplary "unofficial" essays from the region, the material on which Skilling's book is based, and which emerged with the notion of an independent society.

---

[271] cf. R.Wright, pp.256-257 for the "presumably willed" identification of Havel with British conservatism.

The extent to which Konrad's hopeful prediction is realized is, arguably, tied to the extent to which the aspirations and experiences of everyday life were transformed in narratives into future-oriented images, into meanings that pointed beyond the present. Again, Bakhtin's attention is always drawn to those novels that bridged the gulf between descendant and emergent epochs, as markers both of the changes occurring and of the consciousness emerging. In these novels

---

[272] Antipolitics, p.132.

> human emergence...is no longer man's own private affair...He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man.[273]

Thus, theoretically, here is the emergence of Konrad's self-respecting citizen.

Ultimately the question of meaning is a large, grand one. In the Novy Mir essay Bakhtin makes reference to the broad nature of the problem in his reference to the idea of "great time":

> Works break through the boundaries of their own time, they live in centuries, that is, in *great time* and frequently (with great works, always) their lives are more intense and fuller than are their lives within their own time.[274]

Such works are created not only out of the materials of the present, but also out of the history of shaping such material, are informed by - in the case of the novel - not only the history of the novel, but by its prehistory as well, by the archaic responses to the established genres. The extent to which it has absorbed the past, renewed this past in its treatment of the present is the extent to which a work lives beyond its present. The last lines in Bakhtin's "Methodology for the Human Sciences" serves as a suggestive endnote to this idea:

---

[273] Speech Genres, p.23.

[274] ibid., p.4.

> There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) - they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future developments of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments in the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed from (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of *great time.*[275]

How will the novels of East Central Europe's so-called dissident artists fare in the realm of great time? It is absurd to even consider answering such a question with any real intention of discovering an answer. Living in the wake of 1989 it is perhaps all that we can do to reflect on their meaning, their possible significance within the bounds of an obvious context of earlier political-aesthetic repression. Again, this is not to reduce a complex and playful novel like Jiri Grusa's The Questionnaire to a compact act of political-aesthetic rebellion. It is, however, also not to accept - at least not at face value - Milan Kundera's claim that The Joke is simply a love story. If we accept the notion of culture as giving meaning to lived experience, and with both Lukacs and Benjamin the added dimension that in a state of social change the act of making sense is a struggle with resistant materials - i.e. that to create culture, communicable forms, habitable institutions, is a difficult matter in days when the patterns of everyday life are regularly disrupted - then every creative act, every act oriented towards some even minimal attempt to give shape and communicability to the lived experience of anomie is a deeply social act as well. If anomie, or the radical disorientation that affects individuals within a changing social reality, is a manifestation of the threat that exists to society - the realization of molecular changes in the consistency of social relations in the atoms of its constituents - then culture is that entity, force, or space that resists anomie: it serves to orient, to re-orient in its ongoing reproductions and transformations. Arnold Hauser has described the relationship in these terms:

---

[275] ibid., p.170.

> Culture serves to protect society. Spiritual creations, traditions, conventions, and institutions are but ways and means of social organization. Religion, philosophy, science, and art all have their place in the struggle to preserve society.[276]

This is a subdued, nuanced version of Scarry's idea that creative acts are born of pain. We extend our mute selves into communicable forms in order to bring that which stands outside culture into the realm of social discourse,[277] into a realm of forms that give meaning to the insensible. Thus Jehovah, as one example, is a creation of a people desirous of an explanation, a meaning for their suffering.

The ever recurring retreats to spiritualism that have marked human history notwithstanding, modernity - certainly post-Renaissance European modernity - has increasingly sought its meaning in human creativity, in social activity, rather than in transcendant or divine activity. The malaise of late-20th century intellectual life - or rather, this life in what we until recently have known as the West - stands perhaps as an example of the end of such a search, with its deep pessimism over the human project, the soullessness of a modernism gone sour, etcetera. Intellectual life in the recently reconciled East, however, represented another possibility. However much one wants to understand Esterhazy's uneasiness with the special role of East Central European artists and intellectuals, Milosz's distinction between intellectual life in the East and West in the years after World War Two harbours a profound truth-content. Being "kicked in the arse" does not necessarily have to refer to the boot of the oppressor and the arse of the artist; it may have as much to do with the boot of the incomprehensibility of lived experience and the arse of a society attempting to make sense of this experience.

---

[276] The Philosophy of Art History, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1985, p.6.

[277] cf. Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.

Michael Ignatieff has written of the "myth of citizenship" that prevails in liberal democratic societies. Behind the official or hegemonic figure of the mythic citizen of these "free societies" lies a conflict between what Ignatieff describes as the politically active citizenship derived from Aristotle, and the politically passive but economically active citizenship of free market ideology.[278] In many respects it is the latter definition of citizenship that is practised in the liberal democracies. Choices of consumption are by and large the choices that dominate everyday reflection and activity. As numerous commentaries on contemporary political practice, especially electioneering, indicate, the content of politics has succumbed to the pressure of packaging and marketing.

Ignatieff's essay is a plea for the rejuvenation of the Aristotelian heritage. How one realizes such a rejuvenation in an affluent society is a considerable problem. Recent history suggests that it is only in times of crisis that the culture of consumerism is confronted with a surplus demand for meaning in life. That is, in the social crisis of the late 1950s and 1960s political activism emerged as a culture among ethnic and racial minorities, and among youths generally, in North America. This was culture in opposition to the hegemony of WASPish consumerist culture. The relative absence of any culture of opposition or alternative in recent decades indicates not so much the addressing of the issues and activism of earlier decades as it does the absorbtion, the re-orientation, the accommodation of most elements of the oppositional culture. It should be noted that it marks also the renewed repression of many minority issues. That is, if in the 1960s the hegemonic culture began to open its ears to the long muted, recently vocal really lived experiences of blacks, Native Americans, hispanics, etcetera those ears gradually closed as it became apparent that to seriously undertake the responsibility of *understanding* these voices would entail serious reconsideration of not only the claim to legitimacy of the hegemonic culture, but also the legitimacy of a given socio-economic organization. Milosz's comments can be seen to turn on this problem. Intellectuals in the West reside in that materially comfortable, but spiritually and intellectually impoverished realm that Gramsci saw Italian intellectuals inhabiting at the beginning of the 20th century. This is not to say that dire straits and repression necessarily creates the conditions of vital intellectual and artistic life. But where intellectuals and artists in the West struggle against the vicissitudes of late 20th century consumer culture with their own consumerized products, when life has been reduced to the choice of consumer articles, the East Central European artist and intellectual struggled simply to bring understanding to everyday life. Perhaps the underlying idea in this contrast is that in the

---

[278] "The myth of citizenship," Queen's Quarterly 94:4 (1987), cf. pp.966-985.

West, in their rejection or distance from the everyday life of consumer culture, where the notion of the "masses" is elevated into a most contradictory idealization, intellectual and artistic activity has lost its ability to really speak to the problem of culture: How to "protect society" from the forces of atomization and/or repression. East Central European creative-critical activity, on the other hand, was rooted in the real life of really existing socialism. Simply by virtue of that fact, of its immanence, its inherent immanent critique embodied in the direct confrontation of lived experience (that becomes social knowledge - cultural fact - exponentially reaffirmed in its many readings) with the official fiction, simply by virtue of this creative representation it stands on a threshold between the past and the future. Again, Bakhtin's enthusiasm for Rabelais is in part due to his ability to raise the culture of everyday life against that of the agelasts:

> While destroying the official conception of his time and of contemporary events, Rabelais did not seek, of course, to submit them to scholarly analysis. He did not speak in the conceptual language but in the tongue of popular comic images. While breaking up false seriousness, false historic pathos, he prepared the soil for a new seriousness and for a new historic pathos.[279]

We return again to the problem of emergence, one tied up with that of great time. The humour of many East Central European novels, from The Questionnaire, with its parody of the official seriousness of the questionnaire and its Byzantine inquiry into origin, the caustic tone of Kundera's The Joke, to the pathetic absurdity of Konrad's heroes in The Caseworker and The Loser is a humour built of the images of everyday life and its contradictions. There is no resolution to these contradictions, no attempt to formulate what is to be done, or what shape a new seriousness will take. There is, however, as Konrad suggests, the larva of a new image of humanity, one cognizant of the trials and richness of everyday life, one not willing to sell itself for the promise of a utopian future, perhaps willing to sacrifice itself for a more human present. The emergence of a new historical bloc seems a fantasy in the West; in the East it was such a fantasy only two years ago. To quote an anacdoteby Adam Michnik that illustrates the distance travelled between the beginning and the end of 1989 in Poland:

---

[279] Rabelais and His World, p.439.

> A French friend said to me two years ago that there were two ways for Poland to emerge from its appalling crisis. The first would be through common sense: a miracle would happen and angels would descend to free Poland from communism. The second would be through a miracle: the Poles - including both the Communists and the opposition - would come to an understanding with one another. This miracle - something that seemed to me utterly impossible - actually occurred in my country.[280]

What emerges from the novel may be an image of the future, may be Konrad's larva of a future humanity; but this emergence, the consciousness of this emergence - the ability to grasp this aspect of the novel's meaning - may not be realized or recognized in its time. Konrad may speculate, with others, about what sort of society or humanity stands on the threshold of post-communist East Central Europe. And the novels of the region may give us a sense of the kinds of issues and concerns this future will preoccupy itself with. But the novel's truth is not so easily grasped, so quickly reduced.

To tie the occurrence of Michnik's miracle, or the equally miraculous disintegration of communism within most parts of East Central Europe, to the forces of the novel is to make rather grand claims for a literary genre. To suggest that such miracles are born and given credibility in literature is, however, quite within the realm of possibility. Again, to reduce the East Central European novel, and the force of novelization in other forms of creative activity generally, to its social work, as it were, would be to radically delimit its significance. To suggest that within the body of a novel characters embody certain realities, certain existing worldviews, and that in their conflict, their conversations, their development, their "investigation of the trap the world had become" they enable us to look past the limits of their, and our, own understanding and onto a terra nova - to that extent the novel acts as a stimulus to both social understanding and to imagination, the anticipation of a future. Clark and Holquist emphasize that for Bakhtin "The novel became not only the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time' but the most significant force at work in the history of consciousness..."[281] Able to "remember" the lifeworld, to reanimate the material of everyday life in the shape of characters brought to life in their chronotopic and linguistic proximity to everyday life, the novel created its own time-space for readers to engage themselves in. The *meaning* of a novel, Bakhtin has said, lies in its ability to realize itself in the tripartite relationship of author, work, and reader to each other's time-space, each other's cultural and historical context. That is, from within her context the author creates a literary image of the lifeworld, creates another context, another time-space or chronotopic configuration. This created work does not exist in isolation, but stands, wanting to be realized, reanimated by the reader, who, from his chronotope or context attempts to realize both the chronotope of the work, and that of the author as it is tied into the work. That is, it is in this tripartite relationship that the potential for meaning, for furthering the understanding of being in the world lies: "The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative."[282] Central to this argument, and the argument of this chapter, is that the novel is meant to be read, that it presupposes, anticipates communion, a society of readers. In Bakhtin's words, it is an "utterance [having] both an author... and an addressee, it belongs to a person and is addressed to another person."[283] One commentator has remarked that "Beyond the chronotope there is a hungering for another consciousness."[284] That is, in creating a literary image the author engages in the work of building or attempting to build a society, however limited, of readers with whom to share her work, with whom to engage in the dialogue of individuals attempting to make sense of their experiences in the world. The novel works to protect if not an existing society than the dream of a society. In the context of East Central Europe on the eve of 1989 this was the dream of a miracle.

---

[280] "The two faces of Europe," The New York Review of Books, July 19, 1990, p.7.

---

[281] Bakhtin, p.276.

Given the fact of political and aesthetic repression in East Central Europe during the years of Soviet style communism any novelistic work was implicated simply by context in social activity. On the level of the struggle of literary forms, styles, and genres - a seemingly innocuous level given social and political realities - the novel confronted the aesthetic ideology of socialist realism: the epic in its contemporary incarnation. In this context even a love story would transgress the limits of politics and become a symbol of Cold War struggles. This would be one of its meanings. Esterhazy has said that in such an environment "A Hungarian book, provided it's a good book, will always in some way be an advocate of freedom - whether it wishes to be or not."[285] Kundera's novel The Joke cannot resist its context, cannot resist that fact that in the context, especially of the summer of 1968, it spoke meaningfully (though with different emphasis) to both camps of the Cold War. It can only be hoped that it lives as a created work beyond this meaning, as the experiences and the memory of this chronotope fade. It can only be hoped that, in *great time*, the experiences and dreams of characters embodied in the fictions of East Central European novels prior to 1989 emerge as the "new seriousness," the new possibilities to replace both the dead ends of regional rivalries kept on ice by Soviet domination and those of consumer culture. Konrad's self-respecting citizen - perhaps the dream image of a rejuvenated Aristotelian citizen, certainly a problematic dream image given Andras Bozoki's analysis of contemporary developments in Hungary[286] - stands on the threshold of economic misery, nationalist xenophobia, and President Bush's new world order. Whether this is the time-space for her emergence can only be guessed at. That she stands as an imaginary figure, populating the consciousness of both novelists, essayists, and readers is evident not only in the material of literature, but also in the figure of those individuals who undertook the difficult and risky business of bringing silenced experience, marginalized voices into social discourse. In many respects, given the shortness of our depth of perception, our nearness to recent history, it is possible to venture that in the chronotope of East Central Europe the novel and the force of novelization was fundamentally a force for human rights: Not human rights in the limited sense of rights to self-determination, rights to publish, or any of the other rights generally associated with liberal democratic societies. It was, and remains a more fundamental right: To be heard, and in that hearing to be understood. As I said with reference to the silencing of minority voices in the West, once these silenced and repressed voiced are heard with understanding the legitimacy of the hegemonic culture is open to question, its fictions revealed as lying and defensive. This is simply to reiterate Gramsci's point about the real foundations of a regime, its critical foundations for support and existence lying in its ability to claim legitimacy from its constituents. If the novel did nothing else in East Central Europe it raised the voice of everyday life against the monologue of the Communist Party-state, raised the created work of novelization against the epic fiction of power, and in that activity created a consciousness of not only the self-evident brutality or wrongness of the regime, but also began the conversation about its future, the future of the various peoples living the lie of communism. In this sense it is possible to say that the Soviet bloc, and specifically that part of it that has historically and culturally been considered as East Central Europe, was the historical chronotope in which the novel - and other genres or forms subjected to the force of novelization - assumed a social significance, a meaning, as the articulation of concrete human rights. In this social and historical context, the force of novelization, simply in realizing itself in the terms

---

[282] Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, p.250.

[283] Speech Genres, p.95.

[284] Jerry Zaslove, lecture on Bakhtin, July 25, 1988.

---

[285] "Investigating the bathtub," pp.23-24.

[286] "Critical movements and ideologies in Hungary," Sudoesteuropa. Zeitschrift fur Gegenwartsforschung 37, 1988, pp.381-383.

Bakhtin and Kundera describe it, became a significant force in the development of consciousness. It became a herald, not of an "immanent totality or utopia," as Istvan Deak describes Lukacs' appreciation of Dostoevsky,[287] but of an emergent historical bloc, a new set of possibilities to be explored. The developments of 1989, the various "Velvet Revolutions," are in this respect the homecoming festivals for this aspect of the East Central European novel's utopianism. The utopianism imagined in the conversation of everyday life with its epic antagonist.

---

[287] "The convert," The New York Review of Books, n.d.

CONCLUSION

There is a long history of relating cultural activity to social activity, one that reaches at least into the pre-history of the French Revolution and the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In this century the identification of a revolutionary cultural avant garde with that of a revolutionary political avant garde marks perhaps both the high and the low points of this way of looking at the relationship of art to life. Not only have we witnessed the confluence of constructivism and its fellow travellers with Bolshevism in the reshaping of twentieth century culture and politics; we have also witnessed the abject future of artistic vanguardism in the aesthetic ideologies of the so-called revolutionary societies. That a certain naive romanticism prevailed - or rather re-emerged - in the popularity among Western students for the cultural politics of Maoism is an indication of several things: One is the desire for redemption that the twentieth century engenders among the younger generation, a redemption seemingly only possible through radical rejections and transformations. Another is the generalized notion of intellectuals, in this case of youthful intellectuals, men and women, newly confronting the non-middle class, non-First World reality of life on this planet as lived by the vast majority, that the politics and representation of truth and justice can go hand in hand to redeem this world. That is, there is an intellectual vanity that assumes that a politics of redemption and a culture of redemption are not only inseparable, but perhaps bound together in some direct, mechanical fashion. Thus the early Lukacs' early "conversion" from romantic anti-capitalism to Bolshevism. Thus the New Left's vulnerability to Stalinism in the name of Maoism.[288] The argument of this thesis, while locating itself within the general area of the relationship of culture to politics, is in its approach both a deference to the idea that art and life are related and a denial that they speak with the same voice, regardless of art's "progressive" claims.

In her presentation to a conference marking the 70th anniversary of the "End of the Empires" of Central Europe the art historian Joan Weinstein made a case for the obvious by detailing the distance between so-called politically committed vanguard art and the social (ir)responsibility of many of its creators.[289] To be sure, there are examples of artists committed to both cultural and political vanguardism. Mayakovsky is one. Brecht another. Yet their abject status, the unwelcome station they came to occupy in the nominal "homelands" of their ideals signals both their naivete and the cynicism - or is it simply the "realism"? - of their political hosts. Again, to make the case that revolutionary art has all but the most circumstantial or temporary relationship to revolutionary politics is to open oneself up to the temptation of aesthetic authoritarianism, the reduction of art making's utopian morality of discovery to the tactical immorality of "reforging souls" in the process of building state socialism. Rather than posit a direct relationship between art and life, or literature and social movements in this case, this thesis has argued that within a given social and historical context - East Central Europe after the Second World War - and in the terms of Gramsci's social history of political development, it is possible to see the germinus of the "miracles" of 1989 not so much in any specific cultural movement as in what has been referred to as the force of novelization. That is, in order to analyze that phenomenon of descendant and emergent historical blocs it is important to analyze the forces that developed the consciousness of everyday life and of change. I have simply attempted to give Bakhtin's notion of emergence, the notion of epochal transformation, a context and a social-political vocabulary. Within this context, and in a vocabulary that in many respects echoes his concerns for the social historiography of changes in consciousness, his case for the novel is realized, not as an agent for a particular ideology or interest so much as an agent for further understanding, for the impulse to expand understanding, the impulse to renew the dialogue between art and life or culture and life that threatens to crystallize into a monologue under given social-aesthetic configurations. If the novel as a cultural force can be said to have political allegiance it is to the party of those not represented by the hegemonic or dominant culture. That is why political and ideological sympathies for the Communist Party may prevent a writer in the Soviet bloc from realizing more than the epic shadow of a novel, but in Latin America such sympathies may in fact fuel the novel's fire. In the one instance the writer is distanced from an appreciation of the truth content, the revelatory potential, of everyday life by the abstract formulae and the supremacy of official political and aesthetic ideology. In the other, because the Communist Party for tactical reasons has not abandoned the lifeworld of the oppressed but in fact wishes to mobilize its "progressive elements," the writer's openness to this world is relatively unencumbered by proscriptive ideology.

---

[288] cf. Murray Bookchin's address to the Students for a Democratic Society in 1969, "Listen, Marxist!" Post-Scarcity Anarchism, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986.

[289] "Revolution and art in 1918, especially in Germany," lecture and slide presentation at the conference, "1918-1988: The end of the empires in Central Europe, seventy years after," University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., November 4-5, 1988.

In a discussion concerning art and its relationship to everyday life the Czech philosopher Karel Kosik suggests that, "One of the main principles of modern art, poetry and drama, of painting and film-making is...the 'forcing' of the everyday, the destruction of the pseudo concrete."[290] That is, modern art, or culture that has been novelized, has transgressed the bounds of its canons, is engaged in a revelatory exercise. Against that which *appears* to be beyond the compass of the actions of everyday life, against that which has become familiar, in darker terms has been "normalized," novelized culture reveals the scaffolding behind the constructed, the fictive aspect of this appearance. More than that, however - for that would simply be the deconstruction of consciousness - , novelization reveals the potentiality of everyday life, the possibility of creating a more human, less "normalized," less alienated future. If, as Kosik argues, "The everyday appears as the night of indifference, of the mechanical and the instinctive, ie. as the world of familiarity..." *then at the same time*, "the everyday is a world whose dimensions and potentialities an individual can control and calculate with his abilities and resources."[291] And it is in the vessels of novelized culture that such abilities and resources are called upon, albeit in the realm of consciousness rather than action.

This is a critical point, and it brings us back to the distance between consciousness and action, between any revelation that art might bring to consciousness and the action such revelation may engender. To follow Gramsci, but not only Gramsci, the future of socialism as a project of human emancipation was dependent on its ability to become the conscious project of the majority of the population, ie. the majority of the working class. Socialism, but especially Marxism, had to achieve a position of hegemony. For Gramsci, especially in the context of Italian Fascism, the task of developing this class consciousness, this hegemonic position, was the critical task for the PCI. The war of position was, in his estimation, the important war, the only war the Communists could hope to win given the military-political situation. In a similarly beleaguered situation any theorist of oppositional activity in East Central Europe prior to the autumn of 1989 would have argued that only through the slow process of building a consciousness first of hope, and then of opportunities and alternatives, a consciousness that would at one and the same time rob the dominant power and ideology of its remaining claims to legitimacy and create the consciousness of an emergent historical bloc, could the given situation be challenged. There were such theorists, notably Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik, and Georg Konrad, among others. But the ground work for their ideas was laid, arguably, by the novelization of Soviet culture, the "forcing" of everyday life that turned socialist realist works into empty vessels. Not that they weren't recognized as such by the public which everyday lived the reality of their contradiction. But only in the art of creatively forming this life experience, of bringing the perplexity of life into a shaped whole without answers but rich in images and possibilities, rich in its explorations of the trap the world had become for the silenced subjects of the Communist Party-state, did these materials move beyond the closed circle of a censored public, censored oral culture.

---

[290] Dialectics of the Concrete, trans. K.Kovanda and J.Schmidt, Dordrecht, Holland: D.Reidel Publishing Co., 1976, p.49.

[291] p.43.

It could be said that in the "forcing" of everyday life, in the forming of this material into its whole but inconclusive representation, lies the utopian content of the novel. There is a future beyond the novel. It embodies Bakhtin's notion of the impossibility of a first or final word; it gives shape to the quality of process, the developmental or transformational nature of life; it liberates consciousness from the opium of totality and conclusivity, of a final solution in any form. Thus the antipathy which closed systems visit on the novel. Thus the antipathy of Khoumeni towards Salman Rushdie's carnivalization of Islamic tenets in The Satanic Verses. It is, as has already been argued, and as Gramsci posited, critical for a regime to protect the bases of its hegemony, those cultural foundations on which rests its political legitimacy, its claim to the throne. When those foundations have been undermined, have been novelized, subject to parody, ridicule, subjected to contact with the creatively formed material of everyday life they are most profoundly under attack. Not that such an attack constitutes the kind of systematic and ideological programme of the kind Gramsci theorized. As I have attempted to show, that kind of single-mindedness belongs not to the realm of novelized culture. Rather, it is an unleashing of possibilities, a release of the unsystematic, the fantastic, the unscientific *as much as* the critical-systematic, scientific, and realistic that constitutes the novel's engagement with official culture. What matters is that the hollowness of a dead culture be revealed. In the wake of such a revelation come any number of competing attempts to make sense of the past, present, and future. Just such a tumult of ideas and acrimony lurked behind the momentarily united crowds joyously celebrating the end of the Soviet empire in East Central Europe in 1989. The struggle for a more fully human future is far from over in this part of the world.

Novelization offers no answers. It only opens the door of possibility. It cannot speak for any movement, unless that movement wishes to represent itself as defending the truth content of everyday life, the importance of remembering being. Such a platform hardly seems possible. Even where politicians attempt to grasp and mobilize such a truth content, as in the case of Antonio Gramsci, it escapes them, because the distance between aesthetic understanding and political understanding is unbridgeable, because until politics and society radically decentralize themselves the realization of hegemony will always be at the expense of a minority, a fiction that cannot express the silenced experiences of those who stand at the margins. Again, if truth extinguishes intention, intention in its way extinguishes the truth it wishes to possess. If the truth content of East Central European novels assisted in the development of a future-oriented consciousness that formed itself socially in a multitude of mainly small "movements" or enclaves arranged in some way against or outside the intended search for truth in actually existing socialism, then this truth content, as much as it has had its homecoming in the 1989 Velvet Revolutions is threatened with extinguishment by the noisy clamour of social and political forces unleashed as a result of such a novelization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books, Essays, and Articles

Arendt, Hannah. "Introduction," W.Benjamin, Illuminations, ed. H.Arendt, trans. H.Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1971.

Ash, Timothy Garton. The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, Kent, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. Art and Answerability, ed. M.Holquist, trans. V.Liapunov, Austin: University of Texas, 1990.

____________. Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, ed. C.Emerson and M.Holquist, trans. V.McGee, Austin: University of Texas, 1986.

____________. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans. C.Emerson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984.

____________. Rabelais and His World, trans. H.Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1984.

____________. The Dialogic Imagination, ed. M.Holquist, trans. C.Emerson and M.Holquist, Austin: University of Texas, 1981.

Barthes, Roland. Image-Music-Text, trans. S.Heath, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bauman, Richard and Sherzer, Joel. ed. Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, London: Cambridge, 1974.

Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations, trans. H.Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

__________. One-Way Street, London: New Left Books, 1979.

Bernstein, Michael Andre. "When the carnival turns bitter: preliminary reflections upon the abject hero", Bakhtin, Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. G.S.Morson, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986.

Bloch, Ernst. The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, trans. J.Zipes and F.Mecklenburg, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988.

Bobbio, Norberto. "Gramsci and the concept of civil society", Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Bocock, Roger. Hegemony, London: Tavistock, 1986.

Bookchin, Murray. Post-Scarcity Anarchism, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986.

Brod, Max. Franz Kafka: A Biography, New York: Schocken Books, 1960.

Borowski, Tadeusz. This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen: and Other Stories, trans. B.Vedder, London: Cape, 1967.

Burke, Peter. Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1978.

Cassirer, Ernst. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume One: Language, trans. R.Manheim, New Haven: Yale University, 1955.

Chatman, Seymour. Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1978.

Cirese, Alberto Maria. "Gramsci's observations on folklore", Approaches to Gramsci, ed. A.Showstack Sassoon, London: Readers and Writers, 1982.

Clark, Katerina and Holquist, Michael. Mikhail Bakhtin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1984.

Clastres, Pierre. Society Against the State, trans. R.Hurley and A.Stein, New York: Zone Books, 1987.

Daly, Herman E. and Cobb, John B., Jr. For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future, Boston: Beacon, 1989.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor M. Notes From Underground and The Double, trans. J.Coulson, Hammondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972.

Darnton, Robert. The Great Cat Massacre, New York: Vintage, 1985.

Dery, Tibor. The Portugese Princess and Other Stories, trans. K.Szasz, London: Calder and Boyars, 1966.

Dobrowolski, K. "Peasant Traditional Culture," Peasants and Peasant Societies, ed. T.Shanin, Hammondsworth, England: Penguin, 1979.

Elias, Nobert. "Violence and civilization: the state monopoly," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Emerson, Caryl. "Outer word and inner speech," Bakhtin, Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. G.S.Morson, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986.

Erlich, Victor. Russian Formalism, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.

Geertz, Clifford. Local Knowledge. Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Gombrowicz, Witold. Ferrydurke, trans. E.Mosbacher, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1986.

Gramsci, Antonio. Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. and trans. Q.Hoare and G.N.Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971.

__________. Letters From Prison, ed. and trans. L.Lawner, New York:Harper Colophon, 1975.

Grusa, Jiri. The Questionnaire, trans. P.Kussi, London: Blond and Briggs, 1982.

Gurevich, Aron I. Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception, trans. J.M.Bak and P.A.Hollingsworth, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988.

Haraszti, Miklos. The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism, trans. K.Landesmann, S.Landesmann, and S.Wasserman, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

Hasek, Jaroslav. The Good Soldier Svejk, trans. C.Parrott, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1983.

Hauser, Arnold. The Philosophy of Art History, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1985.

_________. The Social History of Art, Volume Four, trans. S.Godman, New York: Vintage, n.d.

Havel, Vaclav. "Anti-political politics," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Heller, Agnes. "On formal democracy," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

_________. The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1985.

________. Everyday Life, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

________. "Georg Lukacs and Irma Seidler," Lukacs Revalued, ed. A.Heller, London: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

Hirschkop, Ken. "A response to the forum on Mikhail Bakhtin," Bakhtin, Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. G.S.Morson, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986.

Hoggart, Richard. The Uses of Literacy, Markham, Ontario: Pelican, 1976.

Hymes, Dell. In Vain I Tried To Tell You, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 1981.

Janick, A. and Toulmin, S. Wittgenstein's Vienna, New York: Touchstone, 1973.

Jacoby, Russell. Dialectic of Defeat, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University, 1981.

Kis, Danilo. A Tomb for Boris Davidovich, trans. D.Mikic-Mitchell, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1980.

Klima, Ivan. My Merry Mornings, trans. G.Theiner, London: Readers International, 1986.

Konrad, Georg. Antipolitics, trans. R.E.Allen, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

________. The Loser, trans. I.Sanders, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.

________. The Caseworker, trans. P.Aston, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Konrad, Georg and Szelenyi, Istvan. The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power, trans. A.Arato and R.E.Allen, Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1979.

Kosik, Karel. Dialectics of the Concrete, trans. K.Kovanda and J.Schmidt, Dordrecht, Holland: D.Reidel Publishing Co., 1976.

Kracauer, Siegfried. History: The Last Things Before the Last, New York: Oxford University, 1969.

Kundera, Milan. The Art of the Novel, trans. L.Asher, New York: Grove Press, 1988.

________. Jacques and His Master, trans. M.H.Heim, New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

_________. The Unbearable Lightness of Being, trans. M.H.Heim, New York: Harper Colophon, 1985.

_________. The Joke, trans. M.H.Heim, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1983.

_________. The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, trans. M.H.Heim, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1981.

Kuzmics, Helmut. "The civilizing process," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Lawner, Lynne. "Introduction," A.Gramsci, Letters From Prison, ed. and trans. L.Lawner, New York: Harper Colophon, 1975.

Lengyel, Jozsef. The Bridgebuilders, trans. J.Hazi, Budapest: Corvina, 1971.

Liehm, Antonin J. The Politics of Culture, trans. P.Kuss, New York: Grove Press, 1971.

Liehm, Mira and Liehm, Antonin J. The Most Important Art, Berkeley: University of California, 1977.

Lowy, Michael. Georg Lukacs - From Romanticism to Bolshevism, trans. P.Camiller, London: New Left Books, 1979.

Lukacs, Georg. Theory of the Novel, trans. A.Bostock, London: Merlin, 1978.

_________. Soul and Form, trans. A.Bostock, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University, 1974.

Lunn, Eugene. Marxism and Modernism, Los Angeles: University of California, 1984.

Michnik, Adam. Letters From Prison and Other Essays, trans. M.Latynski, Berkeley: University of California, 1985.

Milosz, Czeslaw. The History of Polish Literature, Berkeley: University of California, 1983.

__________. Emperor of the Earth, Berkeley: University of California, 1981.

__________. The Captive Mind, trans. J.Zielonko, New York: Vintage Books, 1981.

Morson, Gary Saul. "Dialogue, monologue, and the social: a reply to Ken Hirschkop," Bakhtin, Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. G.S.Morson, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986.

__________. "Who speaks for Bakhtin?" Bakhtin, Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. G.S.Morson, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986.

Musil, Robert. The Man Without Qualities, Volume One, trans. E.Wilkins and E.Kaiser, London: Picador, 1979.

Okey, Robin. Eastern Europe 1740-1980, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982.

Ong, Walter J. Orality and Literacy, London: Metheun, 1982.

Peacock, J.L. "Society as narrative," Forms of Symbolic Action, ed. R.F.Spencer, Seattle: University of Washington, 1969.

Pelczynski, Zbigniew A. "Solidarity and 'The rebirth of civil society' in Poland, 1976-81," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Propp, Vladimir. Morphology of the Folktale, trans. L.Scott, Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1975.

Radin, Paul. The Trickster, New York: Schocken Books, 1976.

Rupnik, Jacques. "Totalitarianism revisited," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Sassoon, Anne Showstack. "Introduction to A.M.Cirese," Approaches to Gramsci, ed. A.S.Sassoon, London: Writers and Readers, 1982.

Scarry, Elaine. The Body in Pain, New York: Oxford University, 1985.

Schorske, Carl E. Fin-De-Siecle Vienna, New York: Vintage, 1981.

Schulz, Bruno. Sanitorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass, trans. C.Wieniewska, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1979.

Skilling, H.Gordon. Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe, London: Macmillan, 1989.

Skvorecky, Josef. Miss Silver's Past, trans. P.Kussi, London: Picador, 1976.

__________. The Cowards, trans. J.Nemocova, Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1972.

Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon. The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1986.

Szucs, Jeno. "Three historical regions of Europe," Civil Society and the State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Titunik, I.R. "The formal method and the sociological method (M.M.Baxtin, P.N.Medvedev, V.N.Volosinov) in Russian theory and study of literature," Appendix II in V.N. Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, trans. L.Matejeka and I.R.Titunik, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1986.

Vakulik, Ludvik. A Cup of Coffee With My Interogator, trans. G.Theiner, London: Readers International, 1987.

Vajda, Mihaly. "East-Central European perspectives," Civil Society and State, ed. J.Keane, London: Verso, 1988.

Volosinov, Valentin N. Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, trans. L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1986.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. The Modern World-System 1, New York: Academic Press, 1974.

Watt, Aleksander. My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual, ed. and trans. R.Lourie, New York: W.W.Norton, 1990.

Willis, Paul. Learning to Labour, New York: Columbia University, 1977.

Wolin, Richard. Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption, New York: Columbia University, 1982.

Wright, Patrick. On Living In An Old Country, London: Verso, 1985.

Periodicals and Lectures

Andreski, S. "Constrained coercion," Times Literary Supplement, May 4, 1984.

Arato, Andrew. "Empire vs. civil society: Poland 1981-82," Telos 50 (Winter 1981-82).

_________. "Civil society against the state: Poland 1980-81," Telos 47 (Spring 1981).

Ascherson, Neal. "The Borderlands," Granta 30, Winter 1990.

Ash, Timothy Garton. "Eastern Europe: apres le deluge, nous," The New York Review of Books, August 16, 1990.

____________. "East Germany: the solution," The New York Review of Books, March 29, 1990.

____________. "Eastern Europe: the year of truth," The New York Review of Books, February 14, 1990.

____________. "What's left, who's right?", The Spectator, February 3, 1990.

____________. "The revolution of the Magic Lantern," The New York Review of Books, January 18, 1990.

____________. "The German revolution", The New York Review of Books, December 21, 1989.

____________. "One (forgetful) Europe", Harper's Magazine, September 1989.

____________. "The opposition", The New York Review of Books, October 13, 1988.

____________. "Does Central Europe exist?", The New York Review of Books, October 9, 1986.

____________. "The life of death," The New York Review of Books, December 19, 1985.

____________. "Poland: the uses of adversity", The New York Review of Books, June 27, 1985.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "Toward the aesthetics of the word," Dispositio (Documents), IV, 11-12.

Baranczak, Stanislaw. "The Polish intellectual," Salmagundi No.70-71, Spring-Summer 1986.

Bauman, Richard. "Verbal art as performance", American Anthropologist, No. 77:2.

Bayley, John. "In God's playground," The New York Review of Books, July 19, 1990.

________. "God and the Devil", The New York Review of Books, December 21, 1989

Bedient, Calvin. "On Milan Kundera", Salmugundi, No. 73.

Berger, John. "Keeping a rendevouz," Brick, (#?, photo. from JZ)

Bialostosky, Dan. "Bakhtin versus Chatman on Narrative: the habilitation of the hero", Revue de l'Universite d'Ottawa, No. 53:1.

Bielecki, C. "Good times will return," Index On Censorship, October 1986.

Blair, Erica. "The existential revolution: interview with Vaclav Havel," New Socialist, February 1987.

________. "Doing without utopias: an interview with Vaclav Havel," Times Literary Supplement, January 23, 1987.

________. "Conversations in a Czech bathroom," New Socialist, January 1987.

Bojtar, Endre. "Eastern or Central Europe?", Cross Currents, No. 7.

Borodin, L. "Partings," Index On Censorship, July-August, 1987.

Bozoki, Andras. "Critical movements and ideologies in Hungary," Sudoesteuropa. Zeitschrift fur Gegenwartsforschung 37, 1988.

Brumberg, A. "A new deal in Poland?" The New York Review of Books, January 15, 1987.

_______. "Coercive utopia", Times Literary Supplement, October 3, 1986.

Campeneau, Pavel. "The comfort of despair," Social Research, 57:3 (Fall 1990).

__________. "Transition in Eastern Europe," Social Research, 57:3 (Fall 1990).

Chaddock, G.R. "Sounding an alarm on Poland," The Christian Science Monitor, November 27, 1989.

Davies, Ioan. "In the land of Kadar the King," Canadian Forum, May 1986.

Deak, Istvan. "The convert," The New York Review of Books, n.d.

________. "Hungary: the new twist," The New York Review of Books, August 18, 1988.

Donath, Ferenc. "1956 and self-management," Telos 53.

Dubet, R., Touraine, A., Wieviorka, M. "A social movement: Solidarity," Telos 53.

Edmundson, M. "Prophet of a new postmodernism. The greater challenge of Salman Rushdie," Harper's Magazine, December 1989.

Elgrably, Jordan. "Conversations with Milan Kundera," Salmagundi 73 (Winter 1987).

Esterhazy, Peter. "Investigating the bath tub," Index on Censorship, October, 1988.

Fuentes, Carlos. "Words apart," The Guardian, February 24, 1989.

Gegenstimmen 6. "The end of Nomenclature? A conversation with Henryk Szlajfer," Telos 53, trans. D.J.Parent.

Gellner, E. "Between loyalty and truth," Times Literary Supplement, October 3, 1986.

Gifford, H. "Radicals," The New York Review of Books, January 17, 1991.

Goldfarb, Jeffrey C. "Post-totalitarian politics: Ideology ends again," Social Research, 57:3 (Fall 1990).

Golubovic, Zagorka. "Why 'dictatorship over needs' is not socialism?" Praxis International, n.d.

Gonzales, Moishe. "Exorcising *perestroika*," Telos, 81 (Fall 1989).

Halpern, J.M. and Kideckel, D.A. "Anthropology of Eastern Europe," Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 12, 1983.

Hankiss, Elemer. "The 'second society': Is there an alternative social model emerging in contemporary Hungary?" Social Research 55:1-2, 1988.

Havel, Vaclav. "The art of the impossible," The Spectator, January 27, 1990.

_________. "When you visit Prague," letter to Francios Mitterand reprinted in Harper's Magazine, May 1989.

Hegedus, Andreas. "Hungary in '56," Telos 53.

Heilbroner, Robert. "Rethinking the past, rehoping the future," Social Research, 57:3 (Fall 1990).

Heller, Agnes. "Enlightenment against fundamentalism: the example of Lessing," New German Critique 23.

Hittle, A. and Malakoff, D. "Eastern Europe's severe ecological crisis," Utne Reader, January/February 1989.

Ignatieff, Michael. "The old country," The New York Review of Books, February 14, 1990.

___________. "The myth of citizenship," Queen's Quarterly 94:4, 1987.

Jancar, D. "The partisan birch tree," Index On Censorship, October 1988.

Johnson, D.B. and Johnson, S.G. "The return of 'our' Nabokov," Index On Censorship, April 1987.

Juzwenko, A. "The right to historical truth, Index On Censorship, October 1988.

Kapic, J. "Solidarity Fund in hot water," Index On Censorship, July-August 1987.

Kaplan, Robert D. "History's cauldron," The Atlantic Monthly, June 1991.

Karnoouh, Claude. "National unity in Central Europe: the state, peasant folklore and mono-ethnism," Telos 53.

Katznelson, Ira. "Does the end of totalitarianism signify the end of ideology?" Social Research, 57:3 (Fall 1990).

Kettler, David. "The romance of modernism," (photocopy from JZ)...

Klima, Ivan. "Judge on trail," Index On Censorship, October 1986.

Kohout, Pavel. "Double trouble," Index On Censorship, April 1987.

Kolakowski, Leszek. "War amongst the Lemurs," Index On Censorship, October 1987.

Konrad, Georg. "To cave explorers from the West: Some words of advice from Hungary," Dissent, Fall 1988.

Kosik, Karel. "Hasek and Kafka," Telos 23.

Kovanda, K. "Review article: A.Liehm, The Politics of Culture and P.Kohout, Diary of a Counter-revolutionary," Telos 14.

Kracauer, Siegfried. "The mass ornament," New German Critique 5, 1975.

Krivova, I. "The Moscow peace seminar: Historic moment?" Index On Censorship, October, 1987.

Kundera, Milan. "One Europe, under criticism," Harper's Magazine, January 1990.

Kustarev, A. "The uses of glasnost," Index On Censorship, June 1987.

Kyncl, K. "Vladimov's dog," Index On Censorship, August 1987.

Laba, Martin. "Gramsci and popular culture," unpublished lecture, Simon Fraser University, November, 1987.

Laird, Sally. "Soviet literature - what has changed?" Index On Censorship, July-August 1987.

________. "Truth and News in Moscow," Index On Censorship, March 1987.

Lodge, David. "From Don Juan to Tristan," Times Literary Supplement, May 25, 1984.

Lukes, Steven. "Socialism and capitalism, left and right," Social Research, 57:3 (Fall 1990).

Magala, Slawamir. "Movementization of social change," unpublished manuscript, n.d..

__________. "The power brokers, or: The pace of dismantling," unpublished manuscript, January 1990.

Malcuzynski, M-P. "Mikhail Bakhtin and contemporary narrative theory," Revue de l'Universite de Ottawa 53:1, 1983.

Mason, R.B. "Face to face: Prisoner of speech," Canadian Forum, September, 1989.

Meilanov, V. "Who'd like to speak?" Index On Censorship, October 1988.

Mueller, Martin. Review article of Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain, Tri-Quarterly, 66 (1986).

Michnik, Adam. "My vote against Walesa," The New York Review of Books, December 20, 1990.

________. "The two faces of Europe," The New York Review of Books, July 19, 1990.

________. "Gorbachev - as seen from Warsaw," East European Reporter, Vol.2:3.

________. "Our goal must not be revenge," Telos 53.

Mortimer, E., Roberts, Sir F., Kolakowski, L., and Polonsky, A. "Yalta and the fate of Poland," The New York Review of Books, May 29, 1986.

Morton, B. and Landy, J. "Independent activists challenge the status quo in Eastern Europe," Utne Reader, January-February 1989.

Mlynarski, W. "The prince stamped his foot," Index On Censorship, June 1987.

Nowakowski, M. "Portrait of the artist," Index On Censorship, October 1986.

Orlos, K. "Big and little Loga," Index On Censorship, June 1987.

Pelc, J. "Fraternal assistance - twenty years on," Index On Censorship, June 1987.

Polony, C. "Film, culture, politics: A view from Hungary. Interview with Gyorgy Szomjas," Left Curve 11.

Pomerantsev, I. "Raw meat: we've had enough," Index On Censorship, May 1987.

Pulzer, P. "City of Blood," London Review of Books, November 9, 1989.

Rosenberg, K. "Now playing at Goskino," Index On Censorship, October 1988.

Rubinshtein, N. "*Glasnost* bestseller," Index On Censorship, October 1988.

________. "Who's afraid of *glasnost*?" Index On Censorship, June 1987.

Ruml, J. "Ten years of Charter 77," Index On Censorship, January 1987.

Salmon, Christian. "Conversation with M.K. on the Art of the Novel," Salmagundi 73, Winter 1987.

Salutin, Rick. "The radioactive Baedeker: Poland through a cloud," This Magazine, December 1986 - January 1987.

Sampson, Steven. "Rumours in socialist Romania," Survey 28:4, 1984.

Sanders, Ivan. "The other Europeans," The Nation, September 19, 1987.

Schorske, Carl E. "Revolt in Vienna," The New York Review of Books, May 29, 1986.

Shukman, Ann. "Between marxism and formalism: the stylistics of Mikhail Bakhtin," Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook, Vol. 2, ed. E.Shaffer, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980.

Singer, Peter. "Unspeakable acts," The New York Review of Books, February 27, 1986.

Skilling, H.Gordon. "Parallel polis, or an independent society in Central and Eastern Europe: An inquiry," Social Research 55:1-2, 1988.

Skvorecky, Josef, Steiner, George, Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, et al. "The state of Europe: Christmas Eve, 1989," Granta 30, Winter 1990.

Skvorecky, Josef. "The theatre of cruelty," The New York Review of Books, August 16, 1990.

__________. "Czech writers: politicians in spite of themselves," The New York Times Book Review, December 10, 1989.

__________. "A sour note from Prague," The Globe and Mail, March 14, 1987.

__________. "Failed saxaphonist," Granta 14, Winter 1986.(?)

Sorokin, V. "Start of the season," Index On Censorship, October 1986.

Swift, Graham. "Looking for Jiri Wolf," Granta 30, Winter 1990.

Thibaud, Paul. "The extent of the defeat," Telos 53.

Torocsik, Mihaly. "Hungary 1956 - 25 years later," Telos 53.

Vakulik, Ludvik. "Happy Easter," Index On Censorship, June 1987.

Vincenz, S. "Is Conrad anti-Russian?" Cross Currents 7, 1988.

Vladimov, G. "My friend, Leonid Borodin," Index On Censorship, July-August 1987.

Volkov, O. "It's hard to be optimistic," Index On Censorship, February 1987.

Voslensky, M.S. "Officially there is no censorship...," Index On Censorship, April 1986.

Weinstein, Joan. "Revolution and art in 1918, especially in Germany," lecture and slide presentation at the conference, "1918-1988: The end of the empires in Central Europe, seventy years after," University of British Columbia, Vancovuer, B.C., November 4-5, 1988.

Williams, Raymond. "Base and superstructure," New Left Review 82.

Zaslove, Jerry. "Time stands still: the exported image of East-Central Europe - a reply to Philip Longworth's 'East-Central Europe as an historical concept'," unpublished manuscript, 1989.

__________. unpublished lecture on Bakhtin, Lukacs, and the novel, Simon Fraser University, Summer 1988.