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Author(s): Marci Shore

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MARCI SHORE

Abstract

This article explores communism – including its pre-history and aftermath – as a generational history. The structure is diachronic and largely biographical. Attention is paid to the roles of milieu, the Second World War, generational cleavages and a Hegelian sense of time. Nineteen sixty-eight is a turning point, the moment when Marxism as belief was decoupled from communism as practice. The arrival of Soviet tanks in Prague meant a certain kind of end of European Marxism. It also meant the coming of age of a new generation: those born in the post-war years who were to play a large role in the opposition. The anti-communist opposition was organically connected to Marxism itself: the generation(s) of dissidents active in the 1970s and 1980s should be understood as a further chapter in the generational history of communism. Nineteen eight-nine was another moment of sharp generational rupture. The new post-communist generation, Havel's great hope, possessed the virtue of openness. Openness, however, proved a double-edged sword: as eastern Europe opened to the West, it also opened a Pandora's box. Perhaps today the most poignant generational question brought about by 1989 is not who has the right to claim authorship of the revolution, but rather who was old enough to be held responsible for the choices they made under the communist regime. There remains a division between those who have to account for their actions, and those who do not, between those who proved themselves opportunists, or cowards or heroes – and those who have clean hands by virtue of not having been tested.

Once, the Czech philosopher Karel Kosík had been a young Stalinist. Later he became a revisionist hoping for a more humane socialism. By 1975, as he neared the age of fifty, he found himself a dissident. One day the Czechoslovak secret police came to his apartment and confiscated some thousand pages of his manuscripts-in-progress, 'On

Department of History, Yale University, Hall of Graduate Studies, 320 York Street, PO Box 208324, New Haven, CT 06520-8324, USA; marci.shore@yale.edu.

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Praxis' and 'On Truth'. Kosík was distraught. He cared less about what happened to him, and more about what happened to the manuscripts – he had only one copy. At a loss as to what to do, Kosík wrote to Jean-Paul Sartre. In those days, Milan Kundera explained, that was an intellectual's last resort: he could write to Sartre. And when Sartre died a few years later, there was no longer anyone to whom one could send such a letter.[1]

The then seventy-year-old French philosopher was the closest thing Kosík and his circle had to God. Sartre, for his part, had taken a special interest in the history of communism as it was playing itself out in Europe's more easterly parts. On one occasion he told Kosík's colleague, the Czech editor Antonín Liehm, that 'human history should be rewritten from the point of view of generations'.[2] Afterwards Liehm came more and more to believe that this was true. Between 1966 and 1968, while in his early forties, Liehm conducted extended interviews with a good number of his friends and colleagues, including Karel Kosík. Liehm's intention was to collect the stories of his own generation – those, he explained, who had been so enthusiastically *engagé* in the post-war Stalinist years and who, twenty years hence, had made such great efforts to negate the effects of their own prior engagement. The resulting collection of *rozhovory* (literally 'conversations', that special east-central European genre mixing history, literature, and [auto]biography) with Czech and Slovak writers, is entitled *Generace*. In his introduction, Liehm notes that in Czech '*generace*' is both singular and plural: it means both 'a generation' and 'generations'.[3]

In fact members of at least three different chronological generations appear in the book. The ambiguity of the title, though, is not only chronological. For Liehm the plurality within *generace* is both diachronic and synchronic: the same formative experiences can produce different responses. This reflects the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim's formulation: for Mannheim, contemporaneity is a necessary but insufficient criterion of generational membership. His notion of generation is rather one of individuals 'similarly located', endowed with 'a common location in the historical process'. Assuming a generational identity is an active process: it involves encountering 'afresh' an accumulated cultural heritage, coalescing early impressions into a 'natural view' of the world through dialectical confrontations with new experiences. To belong to a generation is to take part in a common destiny; a given generation's 'style', its actualisation (or 'entelechy' in Mannheim's term) develops through this taking part.[4] At issue is not only age, but also milieu – and in east-central Europe, milieu means everything.

[1] See 'The Kosík–Sartre Exchange', *Telos*, 8 (fall 1975), 192–5, published also in A. Heneka et al., eds., *A Besieged Culture* (Stockholm and Vienna: Charter 77 Foundation, 1975), 6–19. See also Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', trans. Edmund White, *New York Review of Books*, 31, 7 (26 April 1984), 33–38 and Ludvík Vaculík, 'My Philosophers', in Vaculík, *A Cup of Coffee with My Interrogator*, trans. George Theiner (London: Readers International, 1987).

[2] Antonín J. Liehm, *The Politics of Culture*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 41. (The reference to Sartre is only in the longer introduction by Liehm to the English edition.)

[3] Antonín J. Liehm, *Generace* (Prague: Československý Spisovatel, 1988), 9.

[4] Karl Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', in Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 276–320.

Prehistory

The history of communism has always been a generational history. Marxism, after all, was a spectre *to come*; from the outset, its precondition was a conception of time as irrepressibly forward-moving.[5] The old world was due to expire; one need not be sentimental. This was Enlightenment philosophy radicalised: Denis Diderot explicitly addressed his famous *Encyclopédie* to future generations, those 'in those interests we have sacrificed ourselves, whom we esteem and whom we love, even though they have not yet been born'.[6] This sense of oneself as merely a stepping stone to the future (contested by Alexander Herzen, who insisted that 'the end of each generation was itself') was common to both the Bolshevik and French revolutions – as was the idea that it would be difficult to make the new world with people already formed by the old.[7] It was a problem for Robespierre that the French revolutionaries had 'raised the temple of liberty with hands still withered by the irons of despotism'.[8] It was a problem, too, for Lenin. The new society had to be built with 'old material', Antonín Zápotocký of the Czechoslovak communist government announced in 1949. That is, Zápotocký cited Lenin, with 'sinful people'.[9]

The history of communism, in fact, was a generational history before it was communism.

Isaiah Berlin tells how it was only in the 1840s that French Enlightenment ideas began to reach Russia. By that time, French Enlightenment had already blended with German Romanticism – and the Russian intelligentsia, 'an astonishingly impressionable society with an unheard-of capacity for absorbing ideas', proved especially susceptible to the latter.[10] In particular, Russian intellectuals took to Hegel entirely too well. Hegel was not only *Erfahrung*, something to be learned, but also *Erlebnis*, something to be lived. 'I even think', Alexander Herzen, born in 1812, writes in his memoirs, 'that a man who has not *lived through* Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Proudhon's *Contradictions of a Political Economy*, who has not passed through

[5] On Marxism as a spectre to come see also Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

[6] Denis Diderot, 'Encyclopédie', in Isaac Kramnick, ed., *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 17–21, quotation at 18.

[7] Quoted in Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed. Henry Harding (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 92.

[8] Quoted in Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1986), 73.

[9] Svaz československých spisovatelů, *Od slov k činům: Sjezd československých spisovatelů 4–6.III.1949* (Prague: Orbis, 1949), 15. It was an idea in some way shared by Zionism as well. In Amos Oz's extraordinary memoir about growing up in Jerusalem in the 1940s and 1950s, his mother's suicide stands as a metonym for the tragedy of her generation: the generation of east European Zionist immigrants who never managed to find their place in the new world. See Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, trans. Nicholas de Lange (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2004).

[10] Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 124. *Russian Thinkers* was the inspiration for Tom Stoppard's theatrical trilogy, *The Coasts of Utopia*.

that furnace and been tempered by it, is not complete, not modern'.[11] In Berlin's narrative, the fatal cultural transfer was not the arrival of Marxism, but rather that of Hegelianism.[12] Only a few recovered. For Hegelianism, Berlin explained, was a 'very dark wood... those who once enter it very seldom come back to tell us what it is that they have seen'.[13]

For Herzen's generation, the teleology of liberalism was itself radical. Henceforth time moved quickly. The generation of Russian radicals who came afterwards was called by Herzen, rather unflatteringly, 'the syphilis of [the] revolutionary passions' of his own.[14] After the liberals came the radical democrat 'enlighteners', after the radical democrats came the populists and after the populists came the Marxists – a good three decades after the 1848 publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, barely noticed amidst Europe's Springtime of Nations. The Marxists shared with their populist predecessors the dilemma of consciousness. That is, it was all very well for the revolutionary intelligentsia – mostly young aristocrats who 'converted' to radicalism, 'superfluous people' (*lishnie liudi*) – to call for the people's liberation.[15] But what if 'the people' had not yet become so conscious of their own oppression? What if they (still) lacked a desire for liberation? Should a revolutionary wait for the masses? (If so, for how long?) Perhaps consciousness could somehow be reified – and then brought to the masses, as a gift. This made the Hungarian writer Anna Lesznai uncomfortable. 'To awaken people's consciousness before their time', Lesznai wrote, 'is like trying to open the bud of a flower with one's fingers'.[16] Lenin disagreed. He was impatient; inexorable forward motion was not enough. He wanted acceleration.[17]

Lenin was born in 1870. Anna Lesznai, together with her friends Karl Mannheim and Georg Lukács, were younger than Lenin by some fifteen to twenty-five years. The intellectuals of this generation, coming of age at the *fin de siècle*, were born of liberalism and absorbed by its crisis.[18] Liberalism, in eastern Europe, all the more

[11] Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982 [1868]), 236 (emphasis in original).

[12] The Russian art historian Boris Groys makes an analogous argument about the later development of Stalinist culture. Bearing responsibility for the socialist realism of which it itself was the first victim, Groys argues, was the avant-garde. In Groys's narrative, the fatal step was not the injection of communist ideology into art, but rather the leap from art as representation to art as transformation. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[13] Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, 74.

[14] Quoted in Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, 104. On Herzen, see also Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812–1855* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

[15] Compare Arendt's idea of 'superfluous people': Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1973). On the history of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia and its engagement with revolutionary ideas, see Franc Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Frances Haskell (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), and Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).

[16] Quoted in Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation 1900–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 219.

[17] V. I. Lenin, *What is to Be Done?* (New York: International Publishers, 1969). Original title: *Chto delat'?*

[18] On the *fin-de-siècle* crisis of liberalism in east-central Europe and the response of a new generation of intellectuals, see Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*; John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical*

so in Russia, was a latecomer. Post-liberalism, in contrast, proved quite precocious, and so was liberalism nearly over almost as soon as it arrived. The crisis was in part a psychological one: liberalism – with its positivist faith in reason, in progress, in science – revealed itself to be emotionally inadequate. A certain something was missing. Lukács and his friends were afflicted with a hypersensitivity to this absence; they suffered from alienation, and longed for wholeness. Mannheim believed that his generation had a particular historical mission; Béla Balázs agreed: theirs was a common fate.[19] Mary Gluck describes an 'extreme estrangement from the world of their parents'.[20] Beyond estrangement, there was also disgust: a loathing of the bourgeoisie and all that it stood for, a passionate rebellion against not only bourgeois liberalism, but also bourgeois morality – sexual and otherwise.[21] Their loathing of the bourgeois, moreover, was less Marxist than it was Rousseauean. For the young Lukács, exploitation of the proletariat was secondary to duplicity: the detested bourgeois was always false, never authentic.[22] Theirs was a revolt, among other things, against inauthenticity. Of the fathers of Lukács et al. Yuri Slezkine writes, '[F]ew generations of patriarchs were as good at raising patricides and gravediggers as first-generation Jewish liberals'.[23] Miklós Sika concurred: this generation 'actually killed the fathers'.[24]

The avant-gardists – futurists, Dadaists, surrealists – who embraced the revolution were just a few years younger than Lukács's circle of modernists. To the futurist linguist Roman Jakobson, born in 1896, it was noteworthy that his generation came of age so very early: 'It was a very unusual epoch . . . when, for various reasons, the youth of the day suddenly became the lawgivers.'[25] Jakobson and his friends took the absolutist impulse of Lukács's generation still further: they broke with representation. In its uncompromising iconoclasm, the avant-garde insisted on liberation from everything: religion, bourgeois morality, family ties, grammar, realism, the referentiality of language. The *menage à trois* (in the literal sense of the phrase) of Georg Lukács, his wife Ljena Grabenko and her musician lover in Heidelberg was followed by a still more intriguing one in Petersburg: Lilia Brik, her husband Osip Brik and the breathtakingly handsome futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky.[26] Their

Portrait of a City and Its Cultures (New York; Grove Press, 1988); and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

[19] Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 75 and 43 (from Béla Balázs's 1915 letter to Lukács).

[20] Ibid., 65.

[21] On this subject I am grateful for conversations with Pavel Barša. See also Boris Kolonitskii, 'Antibourgeois Propaganda and "Anti –Burzhui" Consciousness in 1917', *Russian Review*, 53, 2 (April 1994), 183–96.

[22] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men', in Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 67.

[23] Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 63.

[24] Quoted by Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 203.

[25] Roman Jakobson, *My Futurist Years*, ed. Bengt Jangfeldt, trans. Stephen Rudy (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992), 26.

[26] On Lukács's household see Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation*, 34. On Mayakovsky and the Briks see Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Love is the Heart of Everything: Correspondence between Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik 1915–1930*, ed. Bengt Jangfeldt, trans. Julian Graffy (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986); Lilia

circle came to communism with the 1917 Revolution, and in the 1920s, when no one yet quite knew what communism was – or what it would be. They, too, hated the (nascent) bourgeoisie. 'To be a bourgeois', Mayakovsky wrote, 'does not mean to own capital or squander gold. It means to be the heel of a corpse on the throat of the young.'[27]

In 1920 Jakobson left Lenin's Russia for Masaryk's Czechoslovakia. There he soon found himself inside a circle of Czechoslovak avant-gardists who loved Mayakovsky from afar. The avant-garde writers and artists who joined together in 1920 to form Devětsil were, like the Lukács circle, searching for wholeness. Yet unlike the young Lukács, the Devětsil intellectuals were self-proclaimed collectivists. Upon coming together in December 1920 they announced,

> Our age has been split into two. Behind us are left the old times, condemned to being turned into dust in libraries; before us sparkles a new day . . . these artists are young revolutionaries, and that is why they cannot proceed otherwise than alongside those who are also revolutionaries – that means the workers.[28]

They rebelled against aestheticism and 'art for art's sake' in favour of dissolving the boundary between art and life. Like Mayakovsky, they gave their hearts to the Revolution.

For this generation life after futurism turned out quite badly. In spring 1930 Lilia and Osip Brik were abroad in Berlin when, on 14 April at 6.47 in the evening, the telegram arrived from Moscow: 'this morning Volodia took his own life'.[29] In a 1931 collective eulogy to Aleksandr Blok, Sergei Esenin, Nikolai Gumilyov, Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky, Jakobson wrote, 'It's our generation that has suffered the loss . . . Those who, already fully formed, entered into the years of the Revolution not as unmolded clay, but still not hardened.'[30] Jakobson continued: his generation, which had emerged at such a very young age, had lunged too impetuously into the future, losing a sense not only of the past, but also of the present. 'We knew', Jakobson wrote,

> that the plans of our fathers were already out of harmony with the facts of their lives. We read harsh lines alleging that our fathers had taken the old and musty way of life on a temporary lease. But

Brik and Elsa Triolet, *Lilia Brik–El'za Triole: Neizdannaia perepiska (1921–1970)*, ed. Vasilii Katanian (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 2000); L. F. Katsis, *Vladimir Maiakovskii: Poet v intellektual'nom kontekste epokhi* (Moscow: Rossiiskii Gosudarstevennyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2004); S. E. Strikhneva, ed., *'V tom, chto umiraiu, ne vinite nikogo'?.. Sledstvennoe delo V. V. Maiakovskogo: Dokumenty, vospominaniia sovremennikov* (Moscow: Ellis Lak 2000, 2005); Lilia Brik, *Pristrastnye rasskazy* (Nizhnii Novgorod: Dekom, 2003).

[27] Quoted in Jakobson, 'On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets', in Edward J. Brown, ed., *Major Soviet Writers: Essays in Criticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 13. Original title: 'O pokolenii, rastrativshem svoikh poetov'.

[28] The Devětsil Association of Artists, 'Statement', in Timothy O. Beson and Éva Forgács, eds., *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002), 240–1, quotation at 240. Originally published in *Pražské pondelí*, 6 December 1920.

[29] ' = *segodnia utrom volodia pokontschil soboi lewa fiania* +'. Plinkrugov [?] L. G. i F. to Lilia and Osip Brik, 14 April 1930, Moscow, fond 130, opis' 5, delo 27, Gosudarstvenyi Literaturnyi Muzei, Moscow.

[30] Jakobson, 'On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets', 7.

our fathers still had left some remnant of faith in the idea that that way of life was both comfortable and compulsory for all. Their children had only a single-minded, naked hatred for the ever more threadbare, ever more alien rubbish offered by the established order of things.[31]

His generation – the generation Mayakovsky had declared to be 'the face of our time', the one for whom 'the trumpet of time blows' – would soon be past: 'desolate, orphaned, and lost'.[32]

Those just slightly younger, like Czesław Miłosz, born in 1911, had a different experience. For Miłosz and his friends at the University of Wilno, 'the Hegelian bite' came with the catastrophism of the 1930s, with the threat of Nazism.[33] Opting for communism was a different kind of choice in the 1930s, a different kind of choice after 1933. The coming to power of Nazism was a defining moment not only for young intellectuals who found themselves geographically placed between Germany and Russia. For the French philosopher Raymond Aron, the twilight of Weimar was 'the central moral and political reference for the rest of his life'. Tony Judt invokes Aron to contextualise British historian Eric Hobsbawn's 'enduring fidelity to a single historical moment – Berlin in the last months of the Weimar Republic'.[34] Stephen Kotkin agrees: a large part of the answer to why Hobsbawn throughout his life remained a communist was 'because he was *there*, in 1933 Berlin'.[35]

Communism in practice

In eastern Europe there was a clear difference between those who had opted for communism before the Second World War and those who had been too young. With the exception of those in Czechoslovakia, many who chose to become communists in the 1920s and 1930s spent part of their young adult years in prison. For the inter-war communists prison was a formative experience, often an ersatz university education.[36] In contrast, the generation born in the 1920s – the generation of Milan Kundera, Karel Kosík and Antonín Liehm – came of age only during the Second World War.[37] It was the young men and women of the wartime years, those who came to communism through the anti-Nazi resistance, who were the heroes of Andrzej Wajda's 1954 film *The Generation* (*Pokolenie*). It was they who concluded, as they

[31] Ibid., 31.

[32] Ibid., 32.

[33] 'The Hegelian bite' (*ukąszenie heglowskie*) is Miłosz's term. See Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (New York: Vintage International, 1990).

[34] Tony Judt, 'The Last Romantic', *New York Review of Books*, 50, 18 (20 November 2003). The essay is a review of Eric Hobsbawn's autobiography, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

[35] Stephen Kotkin, 'Left Behind: Is Eric Hobsbawn history?' *New Yorker*, 29 September 2003, 102–6, quotation at 106.

[36] On prison as a sociologically formative experience of a generation, see Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[37] I have written about Milan Kundera's generation in the first two decades of communist rule in Czechoslovakia in more detail elsewhere: Marci Shore, 'Engineering in the Age of Innocence: A Genealogy of Discourse inside the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, 1949–1967', *East European Politics and Societies*, 12, 3 (fall 1998), 397–441.

watched their friends being killed, 'it's worth fighting, it's worth living [*warto bojować, warto żyć*]'. For the Czechs among this cohort, the founding moment of their political consciousness came in September 1938 with Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler: 'the betrayal at Munich'.[38] Bourgeois democracy had sold out Czechoslovakia; seven years later, the Red Army liberated her. This generation of young communists came to communism during the war, through the war, when communism was already Stalinism – and Stalinism was coming to power in eastern Europe. Some came directly from Auschwitz: in the camps, Arnošt Lustig explained, the communists were the best people. Heda Margolius Kovály felt similarly. She and her husband both survived the Holocaust to return to Prague and join the Communist Party. It was in the Nazi camps that she came to so admire the communists:

> they were in fact the best people who were in those camps, they were the only ones who didn't think only of themselves and of the horrors that were confronting them personally, but actually about what kind of world there would be when the war was over. And that gave them such strength and they were such wonderful people, they simply enraptured anyone around them. All of us . . . above all my husband . . . in '45, it was the first thing that we did, when we came back from the camp, we applied for membership of the Party . . . Look, in those camps . . . at that time . . .[39]

Nothing could be more telling than how one acted during the war. 'For the generation which had reached adulthood', the writer Jaroslav Putík, in 1967, explained of himself and his contemporaries such as Kovály, 'these years presented the decisive test. And for me these still remain the decisive criteria: what did you do during the war?'[40] Liberal democracy had failed to protect against fascism. Stalin had defeated Hitler. The war had sliced time in two; in the new world to come, the betrayal at Munich, the Nazi occupation, the gas chambers would never be repeated. At the 1949 Writers' Union congress, the Czechoslovak poet Ivan Skála bade a final farewell: 'To the past: may God be with you [*S bohem, minulostí*].'[41]

Nineteen fifty-two saw the show trial of Rudolf Slánský in Prague. Heda Margolius Kovály's husband, Rudolf Margolius, was one of those hanged. Just months later, Stalin died. After nearly three more years had passed, Nikita Khrushchev gave his 'secret speech' at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. There had been, Khrushchev acknowledged, 'excesses'. In April 1956 the

[38] On this topic see Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), especially ch. 1 ('The Second World War and the East European Revolution'), pages 9–38.

[39] Jan Kavan and Alexandr Kramer (interview with Heda Kovályová-Margoliová), 'Ženy s podobným osudem' (seriál rozhovorů *Studenta* s vdovami po popravených v procesu z roku 1952), *Student*, ročník 4 (20 March 1968), 1, 3, quotation at 1. Her feeling towards those communists she met in Auschwitz did not change after 1989; in the post-communist years she remembered them still as 'the ones who best resisted the oppression', who 'saw their own fate as part of the struggle for the future of humanity'. 'Everyone', she added, 'who survived the camps remembers them with respect.' Heda Margolius Kovály (interviewed by Marci Shore and Eva Věšínová-Kalivodová), 'In a Conversation with *One Eye Open*', trans. Andrea Orzoff, Elizabeth Papazian and Marci Shore, *Jedním Okem/One Eye Open*, special issue, 2 (summer 2002), 2–3. Interview originally conducted in 1997.

[40] Liehm, *Politics of Culture*, 236.

[41] Svaz československých spisovatelů, *Od slov k činům: Sjezd československých spisovatelů 4–6.III.1949* (Prague: Orbis, 1949), 129.

Czechoslovak Writers' Union held a conference. The writers, though, were not ready to apologise. The poet Stanislav Neumann stood up to speak: 'My generation grew up with Stalin's name, and with his name, in 1944, as seventeen year-old boys, we came to the Party. My best friends went to their deaths in Terezín with this name.' He insisted, 'I am not ashamed.'[42]

With time, though, there would be shame. In 1963 the victims of the Stalinist show trials in Prague were rehabilitated. Posthumously. Quietly. At the Writers' Congress held that year the twenty-five-year-old Jiří Gruša turned to his more senior colleagues: 'What kind of people were you, actually,' he asked, 'and what kind of people are you?'[43] (Pavel Kohout was defensive. 'Is it so strange', he answered, 'that my generation, who only listened, believed in the purity of the judges and the sincerity of the confessions?' Gruša, Kohout added, was too young to remember the First Republic, to remember the social inequities, the poverty, the fatal weakness that left the country vulnerable to Hitler.[44])

Gruša was not the only one to ask the question. Certainly Antonín Liehm, one of those to whom the question was addressed, asked it of himself – and his contemporaries. 'My own youth, my own "lyrical age" and poetic activity coincide with the worst period of the Stalinist era', Milan Kundera told Liehm. In Kundera's opinion, no one of their generation could really be satisfied with himself.[45] Liehm, too, remembered those years – which at the time had been very happy ones – with pain:

> [O]ur eyes were blazing, we hardly had time to catch our breath. Most of us were spared the existential skepticism that plagued our generational peers in the West. We felt that we knew how to solve human problems. We stepped from the darkness of Nazism straight into the sunny realm of freedom, friendship, happiness – in short, socialism. We considered anyone who failed to understand this as a reactionary bourgeois; people were neatly divided into good and bad; everything was clear and simple.
>
> But behind those opened gates of paradise sat Stalin.
>
> What happened to us? What sort of generation are we? Where lies our fault, our excuse?[46]

These were the questions Liehm pursued in the interviews collected in *Generace*. His was a generation of guilt. Josef Škvorecký, one of those of Liehm's age who had not opted for Stalin, nevertheless found himself in Liehm's milieu. When in the 1960s Škvorecký began to meet with students twenty years his junior, he 'observed another strange thing: *they* had no guilt feelings at all'.[47]

For Liehm's generation there was atonement as well as guilt, and Putík pointed out that it was 'part of the irony of fate that it was precisely the generation of

[42] Stanislav Neumann, [Contribution to the Second Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers], *Literární Noviny* 5 (16 May 1956), 7.

[43] Jiří Gruša, 'Jací vlastně jsme', *Literární Noviny* 12 (1 June 1963), 10.

[44] Pavel Kohout, 'Čím jsem byl', *Literární Noviny* 13 (21 May 1964), 3–4. See also Liehm, *Politics of Culture*, 49–92.

[45] Liehm, *Politics of Culture*, 142–5, quotation at 145.

[46] Ibid., 48.

[47] Ibid., 179.

the young Stalinists that became the de-Stalinising vanguard'.[48] Putík was among them. So, too, in Poland, was the brilliant Marxist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, born in 1927. At a University of Warsaw lecture in 1966, Kołakowski remembered fondly that rare feeling of national unity that had been in the air a decade earlier, when Khrushchev had acknowledged Stalin's 'excesses' and Władysław Gomułka had come to power. Since then all had been a disappointment. Law remained little more than an instrument of repression – and hence a source of demoralisation. Poland suffered not only from material poverty, low rates of housing construction and high rates of infant morality, but also from 'spiritual pauperisation'. Party representatives were chosen by the principle of 'negative selection', according to which 'fawning, cowardice, absence of initiative, [and] willingness to eavesdrop' were qualifying factors.[49]

For this Kołakowski lost his Party card. He was not alone. In Czechoslovakia, writers and artists who were long-time Party members now demanded a more open socialism – and a more open confrontation with Stalinism. *Generace* reflected this. Yet the space for dialogue was soon dissolved. In 1967, following protests against Party censorship at the July Writers' Union Congress, Liehm was among those expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The periodical he edited, *Literární noviny* (Literary news), was taken from him. That October Liehm sent a long letter to his friends Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet, Parisian fellow-travellers older than Liehm by some three decades. Triolet, the sister of Lilia Brik and the wife of Aragon, had been Mayakovsky's close friend, and one of Jakobson's greatest loves.

> I hadn't imagined [Liehm wrote] that my birthday wishes would so sadly coincide with the last issue of *Literární noviny*... All of this is now in ruins. And that is not the worst. We're cast out, we're slandered, we're the objects of lies as never before. What's left for us?[50]

Yet within a few months, in January 1968, it seemed that Liehm and his friends had triumphed: the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia changed course and embraced reform. Alexander Dubček, the new Party leader, promised 'socialism with a human face [*socialismus s lidskou tváří*]'. The Prague Spring of 1968 was a time of great hope, and the once-young Stalinists-turned-revisionist Marxists were effusive in their support. It was an exceptional moment. That spring in Prague, Kundera wrote, 'things did not go according to the old formula of one group of people (a class, a nation) set against another, but instead people (a generation of men and women) rebelled against their own youth'.[51]

[48] Ibid., 249.

[49] 'Odpis tajne wystąpienie profesora U.W. Leszka Kołakowskiego na zebraniu dyskusyjnym zorganizowanym w dniu 21. 10. 1966 w Instytucie Historycznym UW przez Zarząd ZMS Wydziału Historycznego UW na temat "Kultura polska w ostatnim 10-leciu"', 22 October 1966, Warsaw, K. 103, S V/16, Archiwum Dokumentacji Historycznej PRL-u, Warsaw.

[50] Antonín Liehm to Elsa Triolet and Louis Aragon, 30 October 1967, Prague, Fond de Elsa Triolet et Louis Aragon, Bibiliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Liehm enclosed texts of some of the speeches made at the recent Writers' Union Congress in Prague – speeches that had served as the impetus for Party expulsions.

[51] Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. (from the French) Aaron Asher (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), 18.

On 10 August that year, Liehm sent a second letter to his friends in Paris who had seen the Bolshevik Revolution:

> You can hardly imagine the joy and emotion caused by the arrival of your letter, so unexpected and fortuitous. Yes, we knew that you were with us and it goes without saying that we've thought of you so often these last days. We didn't send the invitation, of course, with the expectation that you would come. Rather we wished publicly to express in this way that during these dramatic weeks it was precisely of you we were thinking, first and foremost, among all of our friends in the literary world. This summer was a test not only for Czechoslovakia, but perhaps even more so for the entire movement, and the lesson that the movement draws for its future could be decisive.[52]

Ten days later Soviet tanks, uninvited, rolled into Prague. The Prague Spring was over for ever. That winter the Czech student Jan Palach went to Wenceslas Square and set himself on fire. His death by self-immolation was a protest – not against the invasion itself, but against his country's resignation. The following year the poet Stanislav Neumann, who had seen his best friends go to their deaths in the Nazi concentration camps with Stalin's name on their lips, took his own life.[53] He was forty-three years old. In his suicide note he wrote,

> I have decided to take my own life, because I see more and more clearly that the ideals which made me support the Party – and for which my closest friends were executed on May 2, 1945 by the Nazis – are not being realised but, on the contrary, are being trampled underfoot by the political methods of today. I could no doubt fight against these methods, but I have no longer the necessary strength and courage. I neither can or wish to oppose the Party. That is why I have chosen this way out. It is true that Mayakovsky called it the way of the intellectualist, but in the end it was the only way for him too.[54]

Throughout Europe this was a time of revolt. In November 1967, a Warsaw theatre director staged Adam Mickiewicz's play *Dziady* (Forefathers' eve); students attended the performances in large numbers, some cheering at those parts protesting against the tyranny of the Russian tsar. In January 1968 Gomułka's communist government forced the play to close. Students protested. The Party responded with brutal repression – and purges of both the universities and its own ranks. Communist authorities claimed that the demonstrations were incited by Zionist conspirators. There followed a strange merger of the ideologies of the far right and the far left; the communist regime began to popularise the theory of a Nazi–Zionist conspiracy.[55] In a March 1968 speech,

[52] Antonín Liehm to Elsa Triolet and Louis Aragon, 10 August 1968, Prague, Fond de Elsa Triolet et Louis Aragon, Bibiliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

[53] On the ill-fated Prague Spring, in English see H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), and Milan Simečka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalisation of Czechoslovakia*, trans. A. G. Brain (London: Verso, 1984).

[54] Quoted in Harry Järv, 'Normalization in the Library System', in A. Heneka et al., eds., *A Besieged Culture: Czechoslovakia Ten Years after Helsinki* (Stockholm: The Charter 77 Foundation, 1985), 25–9, quotation at 28.

[55] On the 'anti-Zionist campaign of March 1968' see Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000); Mieczysław Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1999); Grzegorz Sołtysiak and Józef Stępień, eds., *Marzec '68: Między tragedią a podłością* (Warsaw: Profi, 1998); Stefan Jędrychowski, rozmowa z Grzegorzem Sołtysiakiem, 17 February 1994, kolekcja Jędrychowskiego, K. 143, W/R 5, Archiwum Dokumentacji Historycznej PRL-u, Warsaw; Artur Starewicz, relacja, cz. 7, W-R/26, Archiwum Dokumentacji Historycznej

Gomułka spoke about opening the borders in order that those who 'regard Israel as their homeland' could leave Poland.[56] Some 13,000 people – mostly Polish Jews from the intelligentsia, many lifelong communists – emigrated from Poland.

It is impossible to know, Kovály reflected much later, what 'socialism with a human face' would have been. She believed, though, that had things turned out well under Dubček, many would have been able to reconcile themselves with the past.[57] After the invasion, the chess player Luděk Pachman of Liehm's generation, once an impassioned Stalinist and later an impassioned proponent of the Prague Spring, was arrested and tortured. Following his release he emigrated to West Germany, where, in 1973, he wrote to a Czechoslovak émigré journalist: 'perhaps sometime in historical perspective it will be shown that our defeat in 1968 was necessary and useful'.[58]

In 1968 Marxism as belief was decoupled from communism as practice. The arrival of Soviet tanks in Prague meant, paradoxically, an end of European Marxism. It also meant the coming-of-age of a new generation: those born in the post-war years. The two suicides that followed the Soviet invasion of Prague – those of Jan Palach and Stanislav Neumann – reveal one way in which 1968 was a special moment: it was an encounter between the generation born in the 1920s and the generation born in the 1940s – between former young Stalinists and their now grown children, between those who had made choices during the war, and those who had been born only afterwards. For the first group 1968 was the end; they were largely broken by disillusionment. For the second group 1968 was the beginning; they experienced the formative moment of their consciousness. Ryszarda Zachiariasz was part of this younger group. The daughter of a committed Stalinist who had spent years in inter-war Polish prison, she grew up addressing everyone, excepting those most intimate, as 'comrade'. '*Rewolucja*' – 'revolution' – was the first adult word she learned.[59] Her contemporary Henry Dasko was also the son of a devoted Stalinist; he, too, grew up in post-war Warsaw. Dasko was born after the war, yet for him the war never ended. It was what his parents spoke of every day, it was the game he played with his childhood friends:

> Get a hold of this yelled an older boy named Korlan and squeezed the trigger of his father's pistol, hitting Jawinski just below the eye. Jawinski's scar frightened me ever since. A Russian boy named Vasilkov would bring a Russian revolver to school and wave it around . . . At the age of eight I wrote a letter to Marshal Zhukov suggesting that our building should be plated in armor and machine gun nests placed in its windows, so that we could defend ourselves when the fascists return.[60]

PRL-u, Warsaw. In English see Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), and Dariusz Stola, 'The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland 1967–1968', in András Kovács and E. Andor, eds., *Jewish Studies at the Central European University*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002).

56 Władysław Gomułka, 'Przemówienie na spotkaniu z warszawskim aktywem partyjnym', 19 March 1968, in Gomułka, *Przemówienia 1968* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1969), 74–5.

57 Kovály, 'In a Conversation with *One Eye Open*', 16.

58 Luděk Pachman to Ferdinand Peroutka, 21 April 1973, box 2, Ferdinand Peroutka collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford.

59 Ryszarda Zachariasz, interview, Warsaw, 9 November 1997.

60 Henry Dasko, 'From My Childhood with Stalin to the Skyscrapers of Hong Kong and Beyond', unpublished memoir, 2006.

Opposition

Dasko, then a student, was arrested in 1968. So were Adam Michnik and Jan Gross. When Gross was released after five months in prison, his mother insisted that the family leave Poland.[61] Dasko emigrated as well. Just as the history of communism is a generational history, so, too, is the history of opposition to communism: Michnik, together with other children of Stalinists from his generation, was part of a rather spectacular Oedipal rebellion collectively enacted. For a post-liberal generation of gravediggers had in its turn raised a new generation of patricides.[62]

The zeitgeist had changed. What was already true when Kołakowski gave his 1966 speech at the University of Warsaw became still truer in the years following 1968: the generation of true believers had passed. Rule by opportunists was a post-Stalinist malaise. Now the dominant metaphor became that of the naked emperor – or, still more poignantly, Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor who has only one secret: he does not believe in God. The dissident philosopher Ladislav Hejdanek held that, in comparison with Stalinism, the two decades of so-called 'normalisation' (*normalizace*) that followed 1968 were 'morally much worse'.[63] Other dissidents agreed. Sincerity of ideology 'definitely existed in the first generation... but nothing of it in the next', said Jan Urban.[64] Miroslav Kusý joined the opposition even while remaining a believer; he was the Marxist, while his younger interrogators were 'pragmatic people'; they belonged to a 'second generation [that] was agnostic with no ideals'. One of them had graduated from the law faculty. Why, Kusý asked him, had he joined the secret police? And his interrogator obligingly explained: it was a thousand-crown difference in salary.[65]

These were the years that Jiří Gruša's contemporary, the playwright Václav Havel, called 'post-totalitarian'. Belief and praxis had parted ways. Marxism was dead – 'really-existing socialism' (*reálný socialismus*) lived on. These were the years Louis Aragon described as 'a Biafra of the spirit'; they were years of living 'as if'.[66] No one any longer believed in communism – and no one, including those in power, any longer believed that anyone believed in communism. It was enough, though, that all pretended. In 'The Power of the Powerless', Havel sketched the paradigm of the seemingly innocent greengrocer, the ordinary man who every morning in his shop window hung the sign 'Workers of the World Unite!' The greengrocer did

[61] Anna Bikont, 'Moi chłopi wymordowali moich Żydów', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 February 2008.

[62] 'Poles of Jewish origin' were distinctly over-represented not only among the leadership of the Communist Party of Poland, but also among the leadership of the democratic opposition. On this topic see, for example, Abel Kainer [Stanisław Krajewski], 'Żydzi a Komunizm', *Krytyka*, 15 (1983), 214–47. In English translation: Stanisław Krajewski, 'Jews and Communism', in M. Bernard and H. Szlajfer, eds., *From the Polish Underground: Selections from* Krytyka *1978–1993* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 353–94.

[63] Ladislav Hejdanek, interview, Prague, 2 September 1993.

[64] Jan Urban, interview, Prague, 30 August 1993.

[65] Miroslav Kusý, interview, Bratislava, 27 August 1993.

[66] 'Biafra of the spirit' was an expression subsequently appropriated by many dissident intellectuals. See, for instance, Václav Havel, 'Six Asides about Culture', *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 2, 1 (spring 1990), 43–52.

not believe this message, nonetheless he obliged the regime by hanging the sign. Such a gesture was profoundly in the greengrocer's self-interest: it enabled him to live in peace. If one day he buried his sign beneath a carton of rotten tomatoes, he would face harassment, eventually arrest. That the greengrocer would be persecuted suggested that the hanging of the sign – seemingly meaningless because no one any longer believed in what the sign said – was in fact extremely important to the regime. It so appeared that the greengrocer, seemingly insignificant, nevertheless had the potential to threaten the regime with an action as small as neglecting to display a certain sign in his shop window. If one day all the greengrocers refused to hang their signs, this would be the voice of the child who says what everyone sees and knows: that the emperor is naked. And this would be the beginning of a revolution. Thus in fact the greengrocer was not so powerless after all. Because he was powerful, he was also responsible – and therefore guilty: for it was the greengrocers who allowed the game to go on in the first place.[67] 'Thus', Havel writes,

> the conflict between the aims of life and the aims of the system is not a conflict between two socially defined and separate communities; and only a very generalised view (and even that only approximate) permits us to divide society into the rulers and the ruled. Here, by the way, is one of the most important differences between the post-totalitarian system and classical dictatorships, in which this line of conflict can still be drawn according to social class. In the post-totalitarian system, this line runs *de facto* through each person, for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system.[68]

Stalinism and 'post-totalitarianism' were morally corrupting in very different ways. Jan Urban understood that the greengrocers were in the majority, and that he and his dissident friends were living in a ghetto. Most people in communist Czechoslovakia, Urban believed, were happy – or at least content, in some way comfortable. 'It's very difficult to quarrel with or explain something to people who don't believe in anything', he said, adding, 'Of course the regime was oppressive, of course it was built on humiliation and violation of human rights. But [many people] didn't mind.'[69]

Among intellectuals, though, the death of authentic faith in any kind of Marxism left a palpable void. There was nostalgia for the Habsburg empire, whose failure, Kundera wrote, 'has been the misfortune of the whole of Europe'.[70] A discourse of 'central Europe', human rights and truth moved into the space left by Marxism. Accompanying this allegedly 'anti-political' discourse was at times Catholicism, phenomenology and existentialism, in various combinations. In 'The Power of the Powerless' – perhaps the most important piece of writing published in eastern Europe during the last two decades of communism – Havel insisted that '[i]f the main pillar

[67] Václav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', in Václav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless*, ed. John Keane (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 1985), 24–96 (original title: '*Moc bezmocných*').

[68] Ibid., 37.

[69] Jan Urban, interview, Prague, 30 August 1993.

[70] Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', trans. Edmund White, *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, 33–8. On 'central Europe', see also Czesław Miłosz, 'About Our Europe', in Robert Kostrzewa, ed., *Between East and West: Writings from Kultura*, ed. (New York: Hills & Wang, 1990), 99–108.

of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living in truth.'[71] The moral imperative to 'live in truth' was a Heideggerean variation: it was to resist the pull of *das-Man-selbst* – the conformist self, the 'they-self' – in favour of opting for the anguished but noble *Eigentlichkeit*, authenticity.[72]

'The Power of the Powerless' was dedicated to Jan Patočka. Nineteen seventy-seven was the year of the great Czech phenomenologist's seventieth birthday. It was also the year of his death, during brutal police interrogation. The funeral of Heidegger's former student became a founding moment for the opposition. For the dissident intellectuals, Patočka was more than a good and wise father – he was Socrates, whose legacy they would honour. And they did. The dissidents embraced a non-violent 'anti-politics', explained the philosopher Bohumír Janat of Adam Michnik's generation, because 'violence was a tool used by cowards who refused to carry their own existential burden'.[73] When Havel's letters from prison to his wife Olga were published, Janet Malcolm commented somewhat snidely – although not unjustly – that 'portions of them read more like papers for a Heidegger colloquium than like letters to a spouse'.[74]

1989

In 1989 it was not without some sadness that Miroslav Kusý understood that it was too late for socialism with a human face. The generations of believers had passed, and the next revolution would not be about any kind of socialism at all. Throughout the long decades of the 1970s and 1980s, there were many people who believed that 'it' – communism – would one day come to an end. There were very few, however, who believed that it would come to an end in their lifetime. Zdeněk Novák, a lawyer in a provincial west Bohemian town, said, 'I didn't believe that I would live to see it. Time seemed to have stopped here.'[75] 'We thought that communism was forever', said the Czech political theorist Pavel Barša. This was true despite those in Czechoslovakia who believed in the magical quality of years ending in '8' – 1918, 1938, 1948, 1968 – and who were waiting – *contra spem spero* – for what the next would bring.[76]

In the late 1980s Miloš Vajda was a mediocre physics student in Bratislava who began a film club at Comenius University. American films were generally banned, as were films from the Czech New Wave of the 1960s. But Vajda was amiable and gregarious; he befriended the head of the film archive and in this way managed to show some censored films such as the adaptations of Kundera's novel *The Joke* and James Simon Kunen's *The Strawberry Statement*. When in autumn 1989 demonstrations

[71] Havel, 'Power of the Powerless', 40.

[72] The references are from Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001 [1927]). On the Heideggerean influence on Havel, see also Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

[73] Bohumír Janat, interview, Prague, 22 June 1993.

[74] Janet Malcolm, 'The Trial of Alyosha', in Malcom, *The Purloined Clinic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 162.

[75] Zdeněk Novák, interview, Domažlice, November 1994.

[76] Pavel Barša, interview, New Haven, 10 February 2008.

began in Prague, the Party still controlled the newspapers. Vajda, though, had friends in Prague who brought news in person; and computer-savvy students at the technical faculty bypassed censorship by communicating with Prague via proto-e-mail connections. Soon Vajda found himself, as if inadvertently, in the middle of the revolution. In Bratislava he organised student meetings and was among those who presented a proposal to parliament demanding that the Communist Party relinquish its leading role in the state. The parliament conceded. 'This was very funny', Vajda recalled, 'because we didn't expect this.'[77]

Jan Urban, of a different generation and a different milieu, nonetheless understood that moment similarly: 'It's not that we won – it's that they collapsed. And we just had to step in, because there was no one else around.' It was all improvisation, 'just total chaos, but great fun'.[78] No one knew, though, what would come next. 'I mean', Urban explained, 'we knew what we didn't want. But that was obvious, everybody knew it. The only difference is that we said it.' 'None of us', he said nearly four years after the Velvet Revolution, 'remembered any occasion from the old days when we talked about the future... We didn't have any project, we didn't have any future of our own. We were only reacting to the stupidity of the regime. So there were no expectations. And it was our great mistake – intellectually, at least.'[79] His counterparts in Poland agreed. When questioned in the early 1990s, former Solidarity activist Wiktor Kulerski, born in 1935, said, 'I never thought about the future. I didn't want to think about it. That's how I psychically positioned myself. For I was convinced that my generation, and perhaps the ones that followed, would live out their lives under communism.'[80] Inexorable movement towards the end of History had become a futureless eternity.

After the revolution(s)

The revolutions of 1989 brought not only changes in government, but also changes in space: the border to 'the East' now shifted eastwards. The revolutions, brought, too, changes in time. In the Stalinist years billboards in Czechoslovakia proclaimed 'with the Soviet Union for time eternal! [*Se Sovětským Svazem na věčné časy!*]' Cyclical time had come to an end with the onset of modernity; soon linear time would come to an end as well: the Hegelian telos was drawing near. Paradise was to be for eternity. Yet in contradiction to all official pronouncements, under 'really existing socialism' time seemed barely to move. Even in an economy of scarcity, time was available in excess.[81] Then, in 1989, time suddenly sped up. Exponentially. Much as the Russian intelligentsia of Bakunin's generation leapfrogged from French

[77] Miloš Vajda, interview, Bratislava, 4 August 1993.
[78] Jan Urban, interview, Prague, 30 August 1993.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, also of the Polish opposition, was harsher: 'Freedom simply came for us too soon. We weren't prepared for it.' Teresa Torańska, *My* (Warsaw: Oficyjna Wydawnicza MOST, 1994), 172, 87.
[81] On the timelessness of socialist time in the Soviet Union, see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xv.

Enlightenment to German Romanticism, so the generations of 1989 leapfrogged from telegrams to cellular phones. In an extraordinary case of private wealth employed for social engineering, George Soros, within a few short years, almost singlehandedly created a young anglophone intelligentsia committed to both Western-style liberalism and a European identity.

Jolanta Mickute, a member of the new anglophone intelligentsia whose young adult years coincided with this leapfrogging, describes herself as belonging to the 'transitional' or 'bridging generation', 'with one leg in the Soviet world of our parents . . . and the other in the new orbit of mobile phones, high-speed internet and a set of confusing and crystallising values . . . That is why, without much effort, I understand completely both the Soviet and post-Soviet generations, whilst belonging to neither of them.' For Anna Muller, Mickute's contemporary in Poland, this understanding of the old world makes her feel closer to those in their forties, some dozen years her senior, than to those in their twenties, just several years younger. Mickute understands her generation as possessing a comparative perspective at once exciting and painful. She saw that those just several years older – who were already completing their studies, or who already had begun to establish careers that were suddenly rendered superfluous – did not emerge from the changes as unscathed as herself. '*Iskalechnye sud'boi*', she writes, 'that's how my friends call them.' Broken by fate.[82]

Whether one was about to enter or about to complete university at the moment communism ended mattered very much. 'My generation won the lottery', said the poet Kacper Bartczak in Łódź, born in 1972. In a somewhat ironic coincidence, the dramatic upward (and downward) mobility of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s was revisited. Bartczak's classmates, entering university in the wake of 1989, studied economics, English and German. They found well-paying jobs in multinational businesses – while their parents often remained in small apartments in communist high-rises, struggling to meet a soaring rise in cost of living, increasingly dependent on their children.

Libor Valečka grew up in a village in western Bohemia, not far from the West German border. As an adolescent he was sent to a vocational school, where he was trained to work with machinery. He was eighteen when the revolution came; it freed him from an officially assigned job. Instead he parlayed his charm into a relatively well-paying position at an insurance company. Before the revolution he was unconcerned with politics; he had been a teenager: there was first love, there were sports. After the revolution he was only slightly less unconcerned with politics. (The relative absence of interest in revolutions and politics was not unusual. A seventeen-year-old girl living not far from Valečka explained matter-of-factly in autumn of 1994, 'There was no revolution in our town. Everything happened in Prague.'[83]) He did appreciate, though, that money had now become very important – and that because of this, relations among people had changed. Once, he explained, no one

[82] Jolanta Mickute, personal communication, 16 March 2008.
[83] Lenka Bauderová, untitled and unpublished essay, Domažlice, 1994.

had had very much money, but everyone had had some. Now some people had a lot of money, and some had almost none. 'My parents', he said, 'don't understand why this is so . . . For me, it's not a problem.' On the contrary, he preferred it this way.[84]

The revolutions had their winners and losers; and the 1990s saw abrupt socio-economic stratification.[85] To be elderly, sick or handicapped was to have lost. Suddenly prices were many times higher than they had been, and pensions worth almost nothing. For those who had worked their entire lives under the communist regime, and who had expected to be taken care of in their old age, the revolution was at best unfortunate, at worst a betrayal. The social contract had been broken. For many of those born before the Second World War, the revolution came too late. For some it would have been better had it not come at all.

Instead, power shifted into the hands of those who were young and flexible enough to start over when all the rules changed. When an exclusive Western cosmetics company opened a store in Prague, the management deliberately hired shop assistants with no prior experience. They wanted employees untouched by the communist regime's antisocial attitude towards retail. Job advertisements for businesses, shops and restaurants in Prague specifically asked for young applicants – and sometimes for attractive ones as well.

Miloš Vajda never became a physicist. In July 1992 he did, though, successfully run for parliament on the ticket of Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie Za Demokratické Slovensko), a populist party led by a demagogue named Vladimir Mečiar. In January 1993 there was a 'velvet divorce': Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, and Vajda – who had little political experience but was handsome and cheerful – became newly independent Slovakia's representative to the Council of Europe. In the years that followed the volatile Mečiar was in and out of power, and Vajda lost his seat in parliament. Subsequently he made enough money as a businessman to retire to the countryside around the age of forty.

To be young and unencumbered in the 1990s was to be able to travel, to study abroad, to learn Western languages, to train for a career in a multinational firm. It was to have failed to internalise limitations, to be unburdened by the old rules that could only be disadvantageous in the new world. It was to be undefensively European, to feel that 'Europe' belonged equally to oneself. 'I have this feeling', Anna Muller writes, 'that twenty-five-year-olds perceive Europe as part of their horizon, as their own, as a self-evident element in their lives. For those in our thirties, it's still more a diversion and a kind of ornament in our lives than it is something self-evident.'[86] In fact the 1990s revealed that the opposite of communism was not capitalism, but rather 'Europe'.[87]

[84] Libor Valečka, interview, Domažlice, November 1994.

[85] On this topic, see, for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[86] Anna Muller, personal communication, 12 March 2008.

[87] Tony Judt makes this point in *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

Pandora's box

Jan Urban believed that the dissidents who had been schooled by pushing against the *ancien régime* failed miserably once in power: 'The moment when the dissidents stepped out from their unreal world and through the few miraculous weeks of the Velvet Revolution entered the real world of the normality of political and public life, they were lost. Their old instincts did not work.'[88] In a sense they were already spoiled, already *passé*. Kundera, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, separates people into two kinds: those for whom life is heavy, and those for whom life is light. To have been formed by communism was to have an internal sense of life's heaviness. It was to have an internal sense as well of the limitedness of possibilities. In contrast there are the younger ones, the ones unformed by communism, who feel less fear and more openness, less insecurity and more entitlement. This is the generation in whom Václav Havel placed his hope.[89] Like the French revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks who came before him, Havel, too, was sceptical as to whether the temple of liberty could be raised by hands withered by the irons of despotism. In Auschwitz, Arnošt Lustig watched the smoke that had once been his father drift out of the crematorium's chimney.[90] Of his own generation Lustig said, 'No one who survived the war is normal. It is impossible.'[91] For Havel, this was in some sense true of those who survived communism as well. He believed that they needed to wait for the next generation to come of age. All the others, himself as well, were permanently scarred.

The new post-communist generation, Havel's great hope, possessed the virtue of openness. Openness, however, proved a double-edged sword: as eastern Europe opened to the West, it also opened to itself. As it opened towards the future, it also opened towards the past. The turn was both outwards and inwards – with the latter being the far more wrenching. If the former was the opening of a treasure chest, the latter was the opening of Pandora's box – inside which was everything from pornography to Hannah Arendt. It was a time of revealing secrets; the hell of both the Second World War and Stalinism were revisited. Havel's public apology for the so-called '*divoký odsun*' – the 'wild transfer', a euphemism for the post-war violent expulsion of ethnic Germans from the Sudetenland – turned many Czechs against him. Lustration saw lists of collaborators made public, and thus men and women learned that their best friends – perhaps their children, their parents, their husbands or wives – had been informing on them. It was a time of opening archives, a time of voyeurism. Excerpts from Franz Kafka's love letters to Milena Jesenská were used to decorate a tourist café.[92]

[88] Jan Urban, 'The Powerlessness of the Powerful', November 1992, unpublished English draft.

[89] See, for instance, 'Václav Havel podpořil výzvu k odchodu stranických špiček', *Právo*, 20 November 1999, 2. See also Václav Havel, 'Rewolucjo ducha, przyjdź' (interview with Adam Michnik), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15–16 Nov. 2008, 18–20.

[90] Aleš Haman, *Arnošt Lustig* (Jinočany: Nakladatelství a Vydavatelství H & H, 1995), 11.

[91] The quotation is from the documentary film, *Fighter* (directed by Amir Bar-Lev, 2001), the story of Lustig's friend – and Holocaust survivor from Czechoslovakia – Jan Wiener.

[92] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 236.

When the communists came to power after the war, the centre-left politician and women's activist Milada Horáková was arrested. Stalinist interrogators tortured her; eventually she broke – and gave a false confession of conspiracy on behalf of Western imperialism. In the few days between the conclusion of her show trial and her hanging in June 1950, she wrote letters to her family – to her mother-in-law, her father, her daughter, her husband. The letters were never delivered to those to whom they were addressed – but nor were they destroyed. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, historians dug the letters out of the archives, and so in 1990 Horáková's last words to those whom she most loved were published in Prague.[93]

In Warsaw in the 1990s, belated monuments were erected to the victims of Soviet deportation, to the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising, to Shmuel Zygielbojm, Bundist representative in the Polish government-in-exile. Zygielbojm, on learning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, committed suicide in protest against the Allies' passivity as Polish Jewry perished. In 1992 Russian president Boris Yeltsin turned over to Polish President Lech Wałęsa Soviet documents revealing the truth about the 1940 massacre of thousands of Polish officers in the Katyń woods: the Soviets had done it. The documents were published the same year.[94] In the years that followed, Andrzej Wajda at long last made the film he had wanted to make for decades about Katyń. In one of the film's post-war scenes a young woman who has accepted communist rule tells her sister, who has not, 'There will be no free Poland. Not in our lifetime, not in the lifetimes of our children.' By the time Wajda's *Katyń* opened in 2007, few belonging to the generation of those sisters – the generation old enough to remember the war – were still living. He wanted, Wajda said, to make the film for young people, for young Poles, so that they would know what it means to be 'a society, and not just an accidental crowd'.[95]

When Solidarity won the first free elections in Poland, Bogna Pawlisz was soon to enter university. She described communism as a 'frozen time'. The ideologies and emotions she encountered as a student in the 1990s, she believed, were the same ones that had been frozen some half-century earlier, 'as if that time hadn't been, as if there hadn't been those fifty years'.[96] It was the return of the repressed. The post-revolutionary decade saw the reign of robber-baron capitalism – a wild free market, full of corruption and free of accountability. Flooding across the now-defunct Iron Curtain was all the best and worst of the West – and of the East as well. During normalisation, the Czech Catholic philosopher Václav Benda had spoken of a 'parallel

[93] Milada Horáková, *Dopisy Milady Horákové: Pankrác 24.6–27.6.1950* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1990).

[94] The material first appeared in Wojciech Materski and Ewa Wosik, eds., *Dokumenty ludobójstwa. Dokumenty i materiały archiwalne przekazane Polsce 14 października 1992 r.* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1992). In English, see Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva and Wojciech Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007). See also Stéphane Courtois, et al., eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[95] Anne Applebaum, 'A Movie that Matters', *New York Review of Books*, 14 Feb. 2008.

[96] Bogna Pawlisz, interview, Warsaw, 25 December 1997.

polis' where one could live in truth.[97] Now a new parallel polis formed in Prague: thousands of English-speaking foreigners, mostly twenty-something Americans, at once pretentious and sincere. Self-consciously they tried to recreate Paris's Left Bank of the 1920s: they were all writing novels. They opened English bookstores, vegetarian cafés and American-style laundromats, published English-language newspapers and organised poetry readings.[98] A certain kind of innocence was part of eastern Europe's attraction – but that remained only for a moment. In the 1990s pick-pocketing, prostitution and sundry violent street crimes were on the rise. As Polish teenagers and Mafia-style gangsters in Adidas tracksuits murdered one another with newly imported baseball bats, a billboard campaign presented a picture of a baseball bat and the rhyming slogan '*Służy do grania, nie do zabijania* [this is for playing, not for killing]' – as if the killings had been simply a misunderstanding.

This was the time in the Czech Republic when telephone cards, matchboxes and plastic bags at supermarkets came decorated with pornographic pictures. In 1995, a Prague billboard advertisement for Sony stereos featured a half-naked woman and the slogan '*Muži chtějí ženy, které poslouchají* . . .'. The advertisement – 'Men want women who listen . . .' (ostensibly to Sony stereos) – was a play on words: in Czech the word 'listen' is the same as the word 'obey'. This was also the time when the seventy-year-old Arnošt Lustig – the Holocaust survivor, famous novelist who was among the heroes of the 1967 Writers' Union Congress, and one-time young communist-turned-post-1968 émigré – became the editor of the new Czech *Playboy*.

If pornography was crossing borders, though, so was feminism, and these were years of impassioned discussions among feminist activists and first-generation gender studies scholars about how much feminist consciousness should be imported from the West, and how much should be developed at home.[99] In 1994 Erica Jong's feminist classic of the 1970s, the audaciously sexually explicit *Fear of Flying*, appeared for the first time in Czech translation.[100] In January 1995, a Czech literary newspaper published an interview with Jong's Czech translator, Eva Věšínová. Jong's protagonist Isadora's escape into fantasies of the 'zipless fuck', Věšínová explained, came from the feeling that she was not able to take the whole of her life – not only her sexual life – into her own hands. For Isadora, to 'fly' was to act purely from her own will. Among the many critical reviews Věšínová had noticed only one that grasped the

[97] Václav Benda, 'The Parallel *Polis*', in H. Gordon Skilling and Paul Wilson, eds., *Civic Freedom in Central Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

[98] The American expatriate community is beautifully satirised in the novel by Gary Shteyngart, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (New York: Riverhead, 2003).

[99] On post-communist Poland's harsh anti-abortion laws and on American versus Polish feminism, see Agnieszka Graff, *Świat bez kobiet: Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym* (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2001). Eva Hauserová's *Na koštěti se dá i lítat aneb Nemožné ženy dokážou i nemožné* (Prague: Nakl. LN, 1995) is considered the first Czech book of feminist enlightenment, grappling with the specifically Czech context and the problems of translation from English – in terms of both words and concepts. See the book review by Eva Věšínová, 'Nejen o čarodějnických košťatech', *Jedním Okem/One Eye Open*, 4 (summer 1996), 65–7. See also Suzy Ort, 'East–West Feminism: An Interview with Rita Klímová', *Jedním Okem/One Eye Open* 1, 2 (summer 1993), 59–64.

[100] Erica Jongová, *Strach vzlétnout*, trans Eva Věšínová (Prague: Odeon, 1994).

novel's essence – and this was the one published in *Playboy*. Yet the letters Věšínová received from ordinary readers had been very positive. There were Czech women who appreciated what she had done for them.[101]

At the new Prague Gender Studies Centre, scholars began an oral history project, 'Pamět' zen' (the Memory of Women), about women's lives under communism. Some interviews included grandmothers, mothers and daughters from the same family. The topic of domestic violence gradually entered the public realm.[102] Young punk anarchist feminists, who were still children in 1989, began in 2000 to publish a journal with the English title *Bloody Mary* and the slogan 'only a dead fish flows with the stream'.[103]

Inside Pandora's box was not only the gender question, but also the Jewish question – both part of an emerging, post-communist identity politics that included both feminism and anti-feminism, philosemitism and antisemitism. East European Jewish culture experienced a revival, and it was not only Jews who were enthusiastic participants. A week-long Jewish cultural festival, drawing hundreds of foreign visitors every year, became a highlight of the Krakowian summer. Jewish studies programmes opened at universities. Synagogues were renovated and new museums opened. Yiddish literature was published and republished in Slavic translations. At the very same time Radio Maryja, a Toruń-based radio station founded in 1991, propagates an ultra-nationalist, arch-conservative and antisemitic Catholicism that has earned even the Vatican's explicit disapproval.

In 1998 Poland's eminent literary scholar Michał Głowinski published *The Black Seasons* (Czarne sezony), a beautifully (and gently) written, evocative memoir about his wartime childhood in the Warsaw Ghetto.[104] It was a received as a 'coming out of the closet' book of a prominent Polish intellectual – coming out of the closet as a Polish Jew. Together with the antisemitism that emerged in the 1990s – the antisemitism, Pawlisz was convinced, that had been 'frozen' with the onset of communism – were angst-laden struggles of identity among Poles of (as some learned only after 1989) 'Jewish origin'. In 1997, one of the very first issues of a new Polish–Jewish magazine called *Midrasz* included a half-page advertisement for a 'confidential hotline'. 'Do you have Jewish roots?' the advertisement read, 'Is it a problem? Or a secret?' Perhaps the reader had been afraid to tell friends or colleagues? Children? A

[101] Eva Věšínová, 'Backlash a osudy feminismu' (interview with Nad'a Macurová), *Tvar* 1 (12 January 1995), 12.

[102] See Jana Hradilková, 'Nejen rodinná historie/More Than a Family Saga', part I, trans. Laura Busheikin and Šimon Pellar, *Jedním Okem/One Eye Open*, special issue 1 (spring 1998), 42–83, and part II, trans. Marci Shore and Šimon Pellar, *Jedním Okem/One Eye Open*, special issue 2 (summer 2002), 134–53.

[103] The following year a second, larger-scale endeavour made its debut: the anarcha-feminist group Feministická skupina 8. Března (Feminist Group of the 8 March) together with its journal, *Přímá Cesta* (Direct Path).

[104] The memoir tells both of the author's time in the Warsaw Ghetto and of his years in hiding on the so-called 'Aryan Side'. Michał Głowinski, *Czarne sezony* (Warsaw: OPEN, 1998); in English: Michał Głowinski, *The Black Seasons*, trans. Marci Shore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005).

husband or wife? The organisers of the hotline guaranteed discretion. It was not a joke.

Coming out of the closet in post-communist Poland could be particularly painful. For the Jews remaining in Poland – after some 90 percent of over 3 million were killed in the Holocaust; after trauma, isolation and antisemitism motivated waves of post-war emigration among the survivors – were hardly a representative sample of the pre-war Jewish population. On the contrary, the Jews remaining in Poland after 1989 were by and large the children and grandchildren of devoted communists. The parents of the twenty-something circle of young Jews such as Bogna Pawlisz had been members of the opposition; often they had cast their lot with Solidarity – in rebellion against, and perhaps atonement for, the choices made by their own parents, who had been among the builders of Polish communism.[105]

In the 1980s the grandchildren of these communists 'of Jewish origin' had not infrequently been baptised: for their parents, it was a sign of moral freedom. Yet after 1989 these young people not infrequently spoke of their baptisms as of a rape, as an unforgivable violation. ('Had I lived in a free country', Pawlisz said, 'there would have been no baptism. I would have been a religious Jew. Two years later, in 1984, when I was twelve years old, I would have had a Bat Mitvah. And this is a problem. This is what I resent.'[106]) They revolted against it: some became Orthodox Jews, some Yiddishists, some Hebraists, some Bundists, some Zionists. Sometimes they went to Israel to join the army, sometimes they went to yeshiva in Jerusalem or New York. Sometimes they came back to Poland – and sometimes they did not. Their debates among themselves – the Zionists, the Bundists, the acculturationists – were impassioned; and a remarkable phenomenon of the post-communist years was a certain kind of de-assimilation and re-creation: the re-creation of the ideological battles within the Jewish community of the 1930s among the handful of Polish Jews in their twenties.

In 1968 Jan Gross had been among the students imprisoned in Warsaw. Thirty-two years later, now a historian long living in the United States, Gross published in Polish a small book entitled *Sąsiedzi* (Neighbours), telling the story of the 1941 German-inspired but Polish-enacted massacre of Jews in the small town of Jedwabne. What followed was by far the most wrenching – and most substantive – debate about the Holocaust in post-communist Europe.[107] One of Gross's fiercest attackers among

[105] See Bogna Pawlisz and Michał Bilewicz, 'Słowo wstępne', *Jidełe: żydowskie pismo otwarte* (wydanie specjalne 'Żydzi i komunizm') (spring 2000), 6–7; and Michał Bilewicz et al, 'Dyskusja: Wnuki "żydokomuny"', *Jidełe: żydowskie pismo otwarte* (wydanie specjalne 'Żydzi i komunizm') (spring 2000), 163–74.

[106] Bogna Pawlisz, interview, Warsaw, 25 December 1997.

[107] Jan T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Fundacja pogranicze, 2000). The English version appeared a year later: Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Jan T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada: Trzy eseje na temat wzajemnych relacji między Żydami, Polakami, Niemcami i komunistami w latach 1939–1948* (Cracow: Universitas, 1998); Jan T. Gross, *Wokół Sąsiadów: Polemiki i wyjaśnienia* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2003); Anna Bikont, *My z Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Prószyński i s-ka, 2004); Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne*

right-wing Polish apologists was the historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz. Born in 1962, Chodakiewicz was not only too young to remember the 1930s and the Second World War, but also too young to remember 1968 – and yet, following an elite post-communist education at Columbia University, he reached back and made the language of the Polish far right of the 1930s his own. Surely this means something.

'We know ourselves [only] in so far as we have been tested'

When it did happen, it happened very quickly. The generational question of 1989 has been largely understood as a debate about authorship: how did 1989 come about? Who made the revolutions? Was it the '*konkretny*' activists of the Orange Alternative (Pomaranczowa Alternatywa) in Poland or the older oppositionists of Solidarity?[108] Was it the university students in Prague and Bratislava or the older dissidents clustered around Civic Forum (Občanské fórum) and Public Against Violence (Verejnosť proti násiliu)? Whose revolutions were they?[109] As was Prague in 1968, so, too, was eastern Europe in 1989 made by a confluence of at least two generations.

Historians are at a certain disadvantage when it comes to causality: there is no control study that can be done on real life. Perhaps, in any case, the more interesting

Massacre in Poland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Pawel Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego* I 'Studia' and II 'Dokumenty' (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002); Marci Shore, 'Conversing with Ghosts: Jedwabne, *Żydokomuna*, and Totalitarianism', *Kritika: Explorations of Russian and Eurasian History*, 6, 2 (spring 2005), 345–74. More recently there have been fierce debates about Gross's more recent book, published first in English as *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006), and subsequently in Polish as *Strach. Antysemitzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie* (Kraków: Znak, 2008).

[108] On the '*Konkretny* generation' and the demand for less theory and more practical action, see Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). *Konkretny* (concrete) was actually a re-appropriation of a classic Marxist – and Stalinist – term. See for instance the essay by Arthur Koestler in Richard H. Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 15–75 (especially 45) and Ladislav Štoll, *Třicet let bojů za českou socialistickou poesii* (Prague: Orbis, 1950), 134.

[109] In 1999, former Czech students protested against the kidnapping of what they felt was their revolution. They issued a proclamation, 'Děkujeme, odejděte! (Prohlášení bývalých studentů k desátému výročí 17. listopadu 1989) [We thank you, [now] go away! (Declaration of former students on the tenth anniversary of 17 November 1989)]'. Josef Brož, Igor Chaun, Vlastimil Ježek, Martin Mejstřík, Šimon Pánek, Vráťa Řehák, 'Děkujeme, odejděte!' 17 November 1999, available at www.sdo.jola.cz/prohlas_cz.htm (accessed 15 February 2008). On this topic see Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of 89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Random House, 1990); Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Marcel Tomašek, 'More Than the Symbolic Power of a Student Death: the Role of National Memory in the Regime Change in Czechoslovakia', paper presented at the 7th Annual New School for Social Research Sociology and Historical Studies Joint Conference 'History Matters: Spaces of Violence, Spaces of Memory', New York, April 2004; Deanna Wooley, 'The Anti-generation: Memory, Politics and the Student Movement in the 1989 Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution', dissertation-in-progress at Indiana University; and Milan Otáhal and Miroslav Vaněk, eds., *Sto studenských revolucí* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1999). Historian Milan Otáhal at Prague's Ústav pro soudobé dějiny (Institute for Contemporary History) is among those who credit Czechoslovak students for giving impetus to the Velvet Revolution. Milan Otáhal, interview, Prague, 24 July 1993. The debate about authorship has a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension: that is, did the revolutions happen due to internal or external causes?

aspect of 1989 as a generational revolution is how important one's age in 1989 became in the years that followed. At moments of great historical change, generational cleavages emerge within very short spans of time: whether one was ten or fifteen or twenty in 1939, 1948 and 1968 made an enormous difference – likewise it made an enormous difference whether one was ten or fifteen or twenty in 1989. A few years suddenly mattered very much.[110]

In a verse published in 1957, Poland's Nobel laureate poet Wisława Szymborska wrote, '*tyle wiemy o sobie, na ile nas sprawdzono* [we know ourselves [only] in so far as we have been tested]'.[111] The most poignant generational question brought about by 1989 is not who has the right to claim authorship of the revolution, but rather who was old enough to be held responsible for the choices they made under the communist regime. There remains a division between those who have to account for their actions, and those who do not, between those who proved themselves opportunists, or cowards or heroes – and those who had no chance to do so. The Polish lustration law that was to take effect in March 2007 (before it was overturned by the Constitutional Tribunal at the eleventh hour) exempted all those born before 1 August 1972 – conjuring up a specific day as a mark of generational divide. The youngest generation had clean hands; they had no memories of suffering, of moral compromise, of a closed world – but also no experience of heroism, resistance, martyrdom. Not infrequently they maintain a self-confidence and presumptuousness: *they* would not have made compromises; *they* would not have broken. This is, perhaps, just one more way in which the history of communism – paradoxically enough – could be told as a Freudian history: a history of collective Oedipal revolt, each generation of sons in its succession.

'Yet it's turned out', in 1983 Solidarity activist Teresa Torańska told the then elderly Julia Minc, whose husband had been one of a triumvirate of Stalinist leaders in post-war Poland, 'that almost none of the children of old communists belong to the Party, and the majority of them have emigrated to the West'. It was a family romance not devoid of regret – and much resentment. 'Well and now I'm twenty-five and only now am I learning to be happy', Pawlisz said in 1997. She explained,

> Because when I was a child, it wasn't a time for childhood. It was actually a war. When I was ten years old and they announced martial law, that was a war in my life. And had it not been for martial law perhaps it would have been okay for me to laugh. Things were so bad, that it wasn't okay to laugh. And all the more so for children whose parents were in prison. It's very hard to learn how to laugh. That is, we were always laughing, but it was a terrible laughter. I was raised in a tradition

[110] Liehm and Kundera are among those who discuss this phenomenon. See, for instance, Liehm, *Politics of Culture*, 140. See also Radim Marada, 'Pamět, trauma, generace', *Sociální Studia*, 1–2 (2007), 79–95. Marada, drawing on Mannheim, writes of how cultural trauma sharpens generational divisions. Generations, Marada argues, are relational phenomena, formed by clashing historical interpretations. The end of communism and the uneasy memories left in its wake – like slavery in the United States, Nazism in Germany and the Holocaust throughout Europe – was precisely such a generation-constitutive event.

[111] The line is from Wisława Szymborska's poem 'Minuta ciszy po Ludwice Wawrzyńskiej', published in *Wołanie do Yeti* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957).

in which we had to identify with the situation of our country. That situation was horrible, our country was unhappy. And so it wasn't okay to be happy.[112]

Still, Pawlisz added, life was much better for her than for her parents. And so it was. Nineteen eighty-nine was a generational revolution not (or not only) because young people helped to make it, but rather because it became one of those historical moments at which time separated, and the age one was in 1989 became determinate. The generational separations that have followed are perhaps less political than they are psychological – or existential: there are those who are conscious of being 'from the east', and perhaps not quite good enough for the West, those who do not hold conversations too close to thin walls, who have an internal sense of the limitedness of possibilities, and those who are free of certain complexes; there are those who cry during *Goodbye, Lenin*, and those who do not. Marxism, once it was no longer a spectre *to come*, remained for those who lived it just as haunting a spectre from the past. Presentism is a luxury of the post-communist generation.

Today a generation is growing up with no memory at all of communism. Jiří Ratinger was born in 1991; his younger sister, Marie Ratingerová, was born in 1993. They are multilingual, cosmopolitan teenagers from Prague who have gone to school in England and Spain and travelled in the United States. The distinction between eastern and western Europe is not something they reject – rather they are not aware that such a distinction exists at all. Jiří, sixteen, has an idea that under communism, 'everything belonged to the state – that's the main thing', and that 'it sounds good, but it was proven not so good'. The phrases 'intensification of the class struggle' and 'socialism with a human face' have no meaning. Jiří and Marie have an idea that in 1968 tanks arrived, but are not certain from where. They know that Jan Palach was someone who set himself on fire, but are unsure why, and that Charter 77 was something some people signed, but are unsure what it said.

'Do you know who Stalin was?' his mother asked him.
'A dictator?' Jiří answered after some hesitation.
'And Stalinism?'
'Probably the rule of Stalin . . . I don't know.'[113]

In February 2008 a *New York Times* columnist asked a seventeen-year-old student Ricardo Westendorf in East Berlin about communism. 'Communism? What's that? I think we talked about it in a history lesson, but I was ill.' His classmate Pia von Cossart said that their parents failed to realise that their stories about the old days were boring. Westendorf was more obliging: he promised to look up communism in Wikipedia.[114]

[112] Bogna Pawlisz, interview, Warsaw, 25 December 1997.
[113] Jiří Ratinger and Marie Ratingerová, interview, New Haven, 10 July 2008.
[114] Roger Cohen, 'The Cold War as Ancient History', *New York Times*, 4 February 2008.

Postscript

'Someday', said Heda Margolius Kovály in 1997, 'I'd like to see a public discussion come into being here about those people who truly to the depths of their souls believed that communism was a new opportunity for humanity, who were willing to renounce everything that was theirs alone for a better future for everyone. Today it's only with difficulty that we can conjure up such people in our minds.' Now was not yet the time, she acknowledged. But someday.[115]

[115] Kovály, 'In a Conversation with *One Eye Open*', 9–10.