

IN SEARCH OF EUROPE

**IDEAS OF EUROPE FROM A CENTRAL EUROPEAN
PERSPECTIVE, 1918-PRESENT**

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Brief Summary

In Search of Europe: The Idea of Europe from a Central European Perspective, 1918-present

This dissertation focuses on the idea of Europe from a Central European perspective. In a field fixated on Western ideas relegating Central and Eastern Europe to the status of catching-up periphery, it aims to map Central European narratives of and for Europe as a whole. I claim that the peculiar history of Central Europe has led to the specific way of seeing and understanding Europe, its history and its future. During the last quarter of a century this ‘Central European Idealism’, as I call it, has generated important contributions to the debates on pan-European self-perception and the continent’s future trajectory. In my view, however, it is impossible to make sense of these assertions without resorting to the history of the idea of Europe in Central Europe’s tumultuous twentieth century.

Understanding Central Europe as a modern self-perception of the peoples concerned, an area of intensive communication and subject to similar historical experiences, the first part of my examination, therefore, seeks to identify trends and traditions in thinking about Europe in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia during the short twentieth century. Differentiating between a historical and a philosophical

model, it offers a glimpse into the overall intellectual history of Central Europe treating important systems of thought that indeed do not always explicitly contain the term Europe. Yet, as I show, Europe was and remained one of the central themes of reflection and self-consciousness of Central European intellectuals, even at times their gaze turned East.

In the second part of my thesis, I focus on three Central European intellectuals whose lives span the second half of the twentieth century and who have become vocal contributors to debates on Europe since the 1990s: the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, the writer Imre Kertész, and the philosopher Slavoj Žižek. They have their intellectual roots in three Central European perspectives on Europe discussed in the first chapter. Bauman belonged to the Polish group of Marxist humanists trying to change the communist political system from within. Kertész is a Holocaust survivor. His experiences in the concentration camps and in communist Hungary are key when formulating ideas of Europe. Žižek was part of the ‘antipolical’ scene: the New Left in Slovenia. Aiming my attention at the interdependence between their works and life, I analyse Europe as lived experience. I hold that biography serves as a source of explanation, reflection, and criticism when formulating concepts of Europe. It offers insights into ideas of Europe from a Central European perspective that other approaches cannot generate.

Through this approach I am able to show how the experience of both fascism/Nazism and communism has led to a specific interpretation of Europe that builds on the concepts of modernity, the value of European civilisation, humanism, and the Enlightenment tradition. Indeed, these notions are central to Western European ideas

of Europe, but lost much of their attractiveness in the wake of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. My research demonstrates that in Central Europe an innovative and original view of Europe has been formulated, shaped by a specific understanding and interpretation of modernity and the Enlightenment, notably its ideals of freedom, individuality, and democracy. This is what I call 'Central European Idealism'.

To Justus

companion and collaborator

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Introduction

In Search of Europe

Above all we must love Europe; our Europe, sonorous with the roaring laughter of Rabelais, luminous with the smile of Erasmus, sparkling with the wit of Voltaire; in whose mental skies shine the fiery eyes of Dante, the clear eyes of Shakespeare, the serene eyes of Goethe, the tormented eyes of Dostoyevsky; this Europe to whom La Gioconda for ever smiles, where Moses and David spring to perennial life from Michelangelo's marble, and Bach's genius rises spontaneous to be caught in this intellectual geometry; (...) this Europe where Newton and Leibniz measure the infinitesimal, and the Cathedrals, as Musset once wrote, pray on their knees in their robes of stone; where rivers, silver threads, link together strings of cities, jewels wrought in the crystal of space by the chisel of time [...] this Europe must be born.¹

¹ De Madariaga *Portrait of Europe* pp. 2/3

Introduction:

There are few topics that have a longer tradition in historiography, are subject to wider debate, can boast about more contributors from the international academic and intellectual scene contributing to the discussion, and yet remain so ambiguous, complex, and hard to define as the idea of Europe. Among historians, writers, philosophers, and politicians there is wide agreement that there exists something like an idea of Europe (in contrast to European identity), yet what it is exactly differs from author to author. Europe does not possess an inalienable or easily definable core or essence. It is understood as a cultural as well as a political realm, but the two do not necessarily coincide. It is an invention, related to the historical experiences we share. Europe is a historical construct.² The social, political or historical context of a time changes the way Europe is understood. In the words of the Danish political scientist Ole Wæver: “The idea of Europe is elusive, susceptible to change and strongly conditioned by historical contingency.”³ The idea of Europe can take on various ideological contents. It is sensitive to the culture of a society (its dominant ideas, religion, history, customs, art, norms and values, law, and political culture). And the subjective position of an author, his⁴ identity and profession as well as his ideological background and political views and aims highly influence the gist of Europe. Indeed, often these levels – the political, the spiritual or cultural, and the personal – are closely

² See also: Rietbergen *Europe. A Cultural History* p. xvii

³ Wæver ‘Europe since 1945’ p. 205

⁴ The idea of Europe is a very male-dominated discourse. Only towards the end of the twentieth century women, such as Luisa Passerini, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine or Margaret Shennan, start to contribute to this debate.

related and reinforce each other.⁵ The way these various levels interact with each other results in a vast array of different narratives and discourses dealing with the idea of Europe.

This study takes as its topic the idea of Europe from a Central European perspective. For a long time, research on the idea of Europe has been dominated by a decidedly Western perspective. This has, however, changed in recent years. Following the deconstruction of established (Western) mental maps, imagined borders, and perceived East-West divisions in Europe, i.e. by Larry Wolff in *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994) and by Maria Todorova in her seminal work *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), emphasis has shifted to Central and Eastern European views of the West and discourses on Europe. Recent publications like *Europe in the Eastern Bloc. Imaginations and Discourses (1945-1991)* edited by José Faraldo, Paulina Gulińska-Jurgiel and Christian Domnitz (2008), *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* edited by György Péteri (2010), and Katalin Miklóssy and Pekka Korhonen's *The East and the Idea of Europe* (2010) testify to this new interest to complement the Western views with their Central and Eastern European counterparts, thereby nuancing the East-West dichotomy.⁶ Analysing both official and non-official/dissident discourses in the countries east of the Iron Curtain, these studies focus on symbolic geography, mental mapping, centre-periphery discourses and the

⁵ See also: Reijen and Rensen 'Introduction: European Encounters' p. 24

⁶ In addition to these trends in intellectual history, political historians and political scientists have, in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain, integrated Eastern Europe into their accounts of European history, international relations, and economic development. The focus is on classical political science and international relations themes as well as memory studies. Recent examples are: Mink and Neumayer *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe* (London, 2013); Sabic and Drulák *Regional and International Relations of Central Europe* (London, 2012); Hayoz, Jesień, Koleva *Twenty Years After the Collapse of Communism* (Bern, 2011); Ramet *Central and Southeast European Politics since 1989* (Cambridge, 2010)

power relations inherent to these concepts. Similar issues are pursued by the established but still flourishing literature on the question of Central Europe as a region.

My research will build on and contribute to this growing literature on the intellectual efforts by Central Europeans of coming to terms with the imagined community of Europe. While taking into account the debates on Central Europe as a region and on the borders of and belonging to Europe, the focus squarely rests on Central European conceptions for Europe as a whole. I contend that it is possible to track a specific idea of Europe developed in Central Europe that adds a new dimension to existing, Western-dominated ideas of Europe – as expressed both in current historical analysis and in the political discourse concerning the future properties and ambitions of Europe. This idea of – and for – Europe has been strongly shaped by the Central European experiences of the twentieth century. It has, however, also been subdued by the political realities of the second half of that century. Only since the turn of the century, I argue, has it surfaced in the writings of prominent Central European intellectuals trying to influence the direction Europe as a whole is going.

Considering this pattern, the following inquiry is divided into two parts. The first part aims to map Central European narratives of Europe and trends in thinking about it from 1918 to the early 1990s. In light of the dynamics between politics and the intellectual culture in Central Europe, this analysis establishes the transformations of the discourse on Europe during the twentieth century. It stresses the history of the idea of Europe within a welter of political, social and cultural processes. Thus surveying the main themes over the span of eight decades, it seeks to identify certain traditions

that survived the gruelling disruptions of those decades and, therefore, are specific to the Central European discourse. In addition, it will assess the impact of these political, social, and cultural upheavals on the Central European idea of Europe. For the second part, the exposition will change gears and focus on three individual Central European thinkers who have contributed to the ongoing discussion about Europe in a fundamental way in the last two decades. Drawing on the assumption that ideas and biography are closely connected, three chapters will expound these thinkers one after another presenting their – partly tragic – individual and professional life stories, their exposure to and participation in the major intellectual debates of the second half of the twentieth century, and the relation of these experiences to their ideas of Europe. While acknowledging the idiosyncratic character of their respective contributions on Europe in detail and highlighting important differences among them, I claim that collectively they constitute a specific and recognisably Central European way of thinking about Europe.

The three thinkers I have selected are the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (b. 1925), the Hungarian writer Imre Kertész (b. 1929), and the Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949). They hail from different countries, from diverse backgrounds and distinct generations; they worked and gained fame in separate professions and differ in style and ideological outlook. Nevertheless, they do share important traditions and experiences that inform their view of Europe. For them Europe is a lived experience in the context of Central European history and culture with its specific social, political, and cultural conditions of life, and, most notably, the dual legacy and shared experience of both fascism/Nazism and communism. Exploring these communalities, my research demonstrates that in Central Europe an

innovative and original view of Europe has been formulated, shaped by a specific understanding and interpretation of modernity and the Enlightenment.

In sum, my thesis addresses formulations of Europe as an idea, a utopian project, a mission, and an identity, thus exploring the many meanings the idea of Europe can adopt. It, furthermore, grapples with the ruptures and discontinuities of the discourse, changes in meaning of East, West, and Centre, and the role of debates on modernity, Christianity, and civilisation as well as totalitarianism, nationalism, and democracy. It analyses works of participants and agents who engage in this debate: intellectuals understood as figures who discuss issues and ideas that have wider societal, cultural, and political implications, participate in public debates and so address a wider public than experts or specialists who stick to their field of expertise. It seeks to answer questions like how did these intellectuals think about Europe; what role did their rootedness in the context of Central Europe and their personal experiences play; in what context and on which occasion did they speak about Europe; and what aim did they have? I explore how Central Europe affected their individual, collective, regional and European identities and views of European society. Examining the idea of Europe from a Central European perspective with a special emphasis on the lives and works of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek, my research aims at offering an alternative to the politicised, socio-economic idea of Europe and to the dominating French and German perspectives in thinking about Europe.

The Modern Idea of Europe

The roots of the modern idea of Europe might be said to date back to the early modern centuries, when Europe reached a politically and economically pre-eminent position in the world. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the notion of Europe underwent a transformation: first in ideas, collective mentalities, and outlooks, then through the coming into being of a self-conscious bourgeoisie, the development of science and technology, and the powerful views of the thinkers of the Enlightenment about the state, society, and economy.⁷ These changes in European society stimulated a new debate about Europe's characteristics, values, norms, and ideas. Influenced by the Enlightenment culture, civilisation and progress started to dominate the intellectual debate.⁸ Between 1789 and the 1820/30s, the distinctive, modern, and self-reflective idea of Europe as a historical entity possessing a meaning of its own emerged. The concept of Europe received historical credence:⁹ it became used in a much more conscious way, was given a historical translation and also served political ends. Europe no longer was a primarily geographical concept, but took on the meaning of a civilisation.¹⁰ Public intellectuals, political thinkers, and cultural critics

⁷ Pim den Boer lists several key writings of the age of the Enlightenment, which had major influence on the further thinking about the idea of Europe. He points out: *De l'esprit des lois* by Montesquieu, published in 1748; *Le siècle de Louis XIV* and *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* by Voltaire, which appeared in 1751 and 1756 respectively; and Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* from 1776 (cf. Den Boer 'Europe to 1914' pp. 58-62). To these writers, Europe was a well-balanced political system of sovereign states that possessed an unparalleled degree of freedom, wealth, and civilisation.

⁸ cf. Heffernan *The Meaning of Europe* p. 24; Delanty *Inventing Europe* p. 71. For an excellent analysis of the Enlightenment thinking about Europe see also Olaf Asbach's article on the invention of modern Europe in the French Enlightenment. Asbach 'Die Erfindung des modernen Europa' pp. 55-94

⁹ See: Asbach 'Die Erfindung des modernen Europa' p. 55; Den Boer 'Europe to 1914' p. 68; Gruner 'Europa-Vorstellungen und Europa-Pläne' p. 11 & p. 14

¹⁰ See for an informative analysis of both the geographic and 'civilisational' concept of Europe: Pocock 'Some Europes in Their History' pp. 55-71

started to formulate various, often idealistic visions of Europe that would still find their echo far into the twentieth century. Their search for the spiritual, cultural, and political roots of a common European history led to a rather uncritical canon on the idea of Europe.¹¹ The major concepts defining Europe in the wake of the Enlightenment were sometimes consonant and sometimes antithetical: the Christendom narrative, the civilisation versus barbarism debate, and the ideas of individuality, freedom, equality, and democracy.

Yet, in the wake of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, many historians and philosophers started reconsidering ruling narratives of Europe. Sceptical towards the thesis of the ‘uniqueness of the West’, they began to critically review the ideas rooted in the Enlightenment and sometimes denounced them as fabricated grand narratives to be deconstructed.¹² Europe had become a problem to itself. The belief in historical progress, rationality, the role of technology and man’s power over nature was severely damaged and so the European continental belief in the cultural, intellectual and philosophical pillars on which the idea of Europe had rested during the past 150 years. The early *Kulturkritik* as for example put forward by Nietzsche, Freud, Spengler, Valéry, Horkheimer and Adorno was now superseded by a more nuanced way of thinking about modern ideology and rationality (Habermas) and by a straight critique of the ‘grand narratives’ of modernity as put forward by the postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers in France (Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques

¹¹ Examples are Barraclough *European Unity in Thought and Action* (Oxford, 1963); Curcio *Europa. Storia di un’idea*. (Firenze, 1958); Duroselle *L’idée de l’Europe dans l’histoire* (Paris, 1965); Fischer *Oriens-Occidens-Europa* (Wiesbaden, 1957); Gollwitzer *Europabild und Europagedanke* (München, 1951); Hay *Europe. The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh, 1957); and Rougemont *Vingt-huit siècles d’Europe* (Paris, 1961)

¹² See, for example: Mazower *Dark Continent* (London, 1998); Delanty *Inventing Europe* (Basingstoke and London, 1995); Davies *Europe. A History* (London, 1997); and Heffernan *The Meaning of Europe* (London, 1998)

Derrida, Michel Foucault).¹³ In addition, instead of contemplating ‘Europe’ authors started scrutinising the ‘idea of Europe’. In these histories, themes such as defining Europe by its other, Euro- and ethnocentrism, and multiculturalism became central topics.¹⁴ Those writing about the idea of Europe now regarded the superiority of Western civilisation as an exceedingly problematic narrative. General histories of Europe put more emphasis on the downside of Europe and became more critical in assessing Europe’s meaning in the world.

Historians Pim den Boer, Gerard Delanty, Norman Davies, Michael Heffernan, Peter Rietbergen, and Peter Bugge all published on the history of the idea of Europe from the 1990s onwards taking up these complicated issues. They critically reflected on European history, paid attention to the ‘outside’ world (the Orient, Islam, China – but also: Central and Eastern Europe,), and spelt out their own position (as historians). Reacting to the criticism of existing historiography, they used or developed ‘new’ methodologies for the research on Europe. The use of language and the history of ambiguous notions such as Europe, the West, Occident, *Abendland*, and modernity were now analysed as well as the history of mentalities or *lieux des mémoires*. Peter Rietbergen wrote a cultural history of Europe critically reflecting on and defending the choices he made; Michael Heffernan took geography and geopolitical constellations as

¹³ Jürgen Habermas defended modernity and formulated his vision of the Enlightenment as an unfinished project, emphasising the value of communicative rationality or reason and the consequent possibility of emancipation within a universal moral framework. In France, modernity was harshly criticised. Denouncing the ‘grand narratives’ and celebrating the end of ideology and politics, mostly reducing everything to culture, French philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault developed their postmodern and poststructuralist philosophical theories. See also: McCormick *Confronting Mass Democracy and Industrial Technology* (Durham and London, 2002); Welsch *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (Berlin, 1993)

¹⁴ Titles to be mentioned here are: Buruma and Margalit ‘Occidentalism’ pp. 4-7; Herzfeld ‘The European Self’ pp. 139-170; Mikkeli *Europe as an Idea and an Identity* (Basingstoke and London, 1998); Nederveen Pieterse ‘Unpacking the West’ pp. 129-149; Neumann *Uses of the Other* (Manchester, 1999); Said *Orientalism* (New York, 1979); Said *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1994); and Strâth *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other* (Bruxelles, 2000)

his point of departure in his “*historical geography* of the idea of Europe”;¹⁵ Delanty based his analysis on discourses of power; Pim den Boer characterised his history of the idea of Europe as “an archaeological excavation of the concept of Europe as used in the past”;¹⁶ and in his vast and mainly chronological historical treatise of Europe, Norman Davies attempted to avoid and counteract the bias of ‘Eurocentrism’ and ‘Western civilization’.¹⁷ With regards to content, additionally, a fusion between perception of Europe and projects for Europe can be observed in the literature.¹⁸ Political ideas of Europe are not only discussed as such, but also linked to processes of European integration, the European Union becoming an ever more important topic and sometimes indeed a substitute for Europe, its politics, culture, and economy.

However, even though narratives of Europe have changed, it is still Western Europe that mainly defines the purported nature of Europe. While experiences of communism and Central Europe’s history between 1945 and 1989 have been included in general histories of Europe during the last two decades, the underlying idea of Europe remains fundamentally Western European.¹⁹ Ideas of Europe originating from Central and Eastern Europe are only touched upon lightly. In many discussions on Europe, the West is the benchmark against which all other ideas or experiences are measured. In a way, the deconstruction of the narrative of European civilisation has conserved this focus rather than suspending it. De-centering Europe by incorporating the non-European world, focusing on political and economic exploitative practises instead of

¹⁵ Heffernan *The Meaning of Europe* p. 6

¹⁶ Den Boer ‘Europe to 1914’ p. 14

¹⁷ Davies *Europe* p. viii. The subtitle of his book tellingly is ‘a’ and not ‘the’ history.

¹⁸ cf. Waever ‘Europe since 1945’ p. 209

¹⁹ Examples are Davies *Europe. A History* (London, 1997); Wilson and Van der Dussen *The History of the Idea of Europe* (London and New York, 1993); Mazower *The Dark Continent* (London, 1998); and, to a certain extent, Delanty *Inventing Europe* (Basingstoke and London, 1995)

the export of civilisation or concentrating on the dark sides of modernity as it emerged out of Enlightenment thought – all these operations take as their basis a hegemonic notion of Europe comprising Anglo-French Enlightenment, capitalism, modernity, and colonialism. To phrase the problem in the terms of centre and periphery: reversing the interpretation of the ‘centre’ and revaluing the non-European periphery did not fundamentally change the geopolitical and cultural place of Central and Eastern Europe, that is neither the one nor the other.

Ultimately, the dominance of the Western European construction of Europe has been conserved and reinforced by the power constellations of the second half of the twentieth century. Following American leadership, Western Europe participated in the West’s domination of world politics and economy while pursuing (Western) European integration at the same time. Both aspects greatly influenced the cultural mindset of the people and their conception of the world. This did not stop in 1989, but was perpetuated with the steps of European integration. Following Pekka Korhonen in his article ‘Naming Europe with the East’, “[t]he EU has monopolized the use of the name Europe, especially since 1992, when it stated in Article 49 of the Maastricht Treaty that any European country can enter the EU, provided that it follows the principles laid down by the EU, especially the Copenhagen criteria formulated in 1993.”²⁰ In so doing, it gave Europe a Western content, for all countries that wished to become EU-member states had to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and live up to the standards decided upon by Western European countries.

²⁰ Korhonen ‘Naming Europe with the East’ p. 13

While most of the content of the Copenhagen criteria such as democracy, rule of law or protection of human rights enjoys widespread appreciation in Central Europe, the Western habit and method of setting standards for the East exhibits a problematic heritage that is difficult to overcome. Again this goes back to the Enlightenment, when thinkers such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Denis Diderot did not only prepare the grounds for defining Europe as a “civilization of states, commerce, and manners,” but also invented the dichotomy of Eastern Europe versus Western Europe.²¹ In his wonderful and lucid book *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Larry Wolff has described how the Renaissance North-South divide of Europe was replaced by an East-West divide.²² Out of self-interest and self-promotion, the Enlightenment thinkers divided Europe into an eastern and a western half. From then on, the West was conceived as being superior to the East – the East over time taking on different meanings, sometimes referring to Eastern Europe, sometimes meaning the Soviet Union, to communism and state-socialism, and also denoting Central Asia.²³

This view of Western superiority excluded Eastern Europe from meaningfully contributing to the development of Europe as a whole. Instead, it was considered to following the Western model or catching up with the Western standards. This conception is influential to this day.²⁴ Indeed, it actually gained pertinence in the years immediately after 1989. When mostly peaceful revolutions in Poland, Hungary, East-Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania overthrew the communist regimes and the Soviet Union collapsed, the political dichotomy that divided Europe into an

²¹ Pocock ‘Some Europes in Their History’ 65

²² cf. Wolff *Inventing Eastern Europe* p. 5

²³ See also: Miklóssy and Korhonen *Europe in the Eastern Bloc* p. ix

²⁴ cf. Wolff *Inventing Eastern Europe* p. 3

eastern and a western part lost its basis of existence. This did not, however, immediately change the narrative of West and East. Rather, the policies of rapprochement with and ultimately ascension to the European Union perpetuated a centuries-old lopsided relationship. In the minds of the people, especially in Western Europe, the 'East-West' dichotomy remained salient and the idea of Europe coupled to the West. Yet, in a Europe that has changed so dramatically after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, it is time to include the experiences and views of the Central and Eastern Europeans, when considering the nature, meaning, and future of Europe. Analysing the idea of Europe from a Central European perspective from 1918 to present, the concepts of Europe, modernity and Enlightenment will be central to my thesis.

The Modern Idea of Europe & the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Bauman, Kertész and Žižek

The self-understanding of the modern culture founded on the scientific world-view and the political ideals of individual rights protection, a modern civil society, and democratic institutions, remains for many “a problem”, in other words, a false promise, and ideological distortion, an expression of ontological forgetfulness, the will to power, or ethno-centrism, or a class or gender or race or culture bound strategy, all much more than the expression of a universally compelling, philosophically defensible, human aspiration.²⁵

The analysis of the modern idea of Europe from a Central European perspective brings about an examination of the possibility of a continuation of the Enlightenment project. Since World War II and the Holocaust, the old Hegelian idea that historical progress derives its impulses from the positive processing of negative experiences has become problematic. The premises of the belief in progress can no longer be united with the real experience of the Holocaust. The ‘enlightened’ belief that a truly universal and peaceful society can be achieved on the basis of the rational skills of the individual has been shattered ever since. The Holocaust has become a permanent trauma of European society. Yet, Zygmunt Bauman, Imre Kertész and Slavoj Žižek still believe in the possibility of critical humanist politics, hermeneutic *Bildung*, and the continuation of the project of the Enlightenment.

Rooted in the tradition of Continental thought, Bauman, Kertész and Žižek reflect on, interact with, and are critical of the major philosophical or cultural traditions in Germany and France. Kertész translated the works of many important thinkers of the German intellectual tradition, including Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche,

²⁵ Pippin *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* p. xiii

Arthur Schnitzler, Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard, Joseph Roth, and more into Hungarian. In his diaries, one can find quotes of these thinkers as well as reflections on Albert Camus, Thomas Mann, Immanuel Kant and Goethe.²⁶ He intensively deals with themes such as humanism, *Bildung*, existentialism, irrationalism, and aesthetics. Furthermore, in his literature, Kertész asks what is left of the European philosophical and cultural tradition after Auschwitz and of its values freedom, individuality, and democracy. Bauman, also, reflects on these values in relation to European society. He has been associated with the University of Leeds since 1971, yet he came of age as an intellectual in Poland under communist rule and belonged to the group of Marxist humanists who sought to reform Polish socialist society from within. His Polish as well as his Jewish background are crucial in shaping his ideas.²⁷ In his works, Bauman defends universalist, moral, and humanistic values. He is critical of the positivistic strand of sociology, and

is not bothered too much by the boundaries between politics, social science and cultural history; social-psychological analysis and existential reflections intermingle; he switches back and forth between literary and logical expositions; he changes the lenses from hermeneutical to systematical, analytical and back; finally, his moral philosophy searches for indeterminacy beyond all definitions. All these combinations match his conception of sociology.²⁸

Žižek is a philosopher and critical theorist, whose ideas are based on German idealism, Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis.²⁹ According to the philosopher, “Lacan’s thought is the heir to the Enlightenment, but represents a seismic shift forwards.”³⁰ As part of a group of Slovenian Lacanians based at the Institute of

²⁶ See: Frühling ‘„Qui êtes-vous Imre Kertész?”’ p. 224

²⁷ See: Tester and Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* p. 15

²⁸ Nijhoff ‘The Right to Inconsistency’ p. 95

²⁹ See: Zweerde ‘The many faces of Slavoj Žižek’s Radicalism’ p. 251

³⁰ Kay Žižek p. 1

Philosophy in Ljubljana, who all have a background in Continental philosophy (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Marx), Žižek works within a group dealing with European transcendental metaphysics and derives his inspiration from there. In his books, he offers a radical critique of liberal-capitalist economic and liberal-democratic politics.

Discussing Europe and its Enlightenment values of freedom, individuality, and democracy, Bauman, Kertész and Žižek plead for political renewal, ethical rejuvenation, and the reinvention of the individual or subject. Their common ideal can be read as an existentialist statement. These three Central European intellectuals do not take Europe for granted, but hold that we (as Europeans) have to shape Europe ourselves. They defend it as something special, as something that has to be cherished in an atmosphere of growing nationalism on the one hand, and a globalizing, market-driven world on the other. Hence, in their works, all three intellectuals are not only critical of communist society, but also of the neoliberal, capitalist Western European society. They point out the problems Central Europeans have with its language and functioning. They address differences between East and West, but emphasise the need to build a common European future. In contrast to the discourse of the Central European intellectuals in the 1980s, Central Europe as such is not a topic in this discourse. Central Europe instead serves as a source of reflection and inspiration for their theories on Europe and critique of the Western modern and postmodern discourses on Europe.

The fact that – as we will see – all three of them address the core values of the European Enlightenment as ideals so important to Europe is no coincidence; freedom,

individuality, and democracy are crucial topics in relation to their experiences of dictatorship, unfreedom, and collectivism. For Kertész and Bauman, an important point of departure in their thinking about Europe and its future is the Holocaust. For Žižek, who is of a later generation and more radical than Bauman and Kertész, it is communist society. Their views and solutions differ, accordingly, but all assert that without ethical politics and historical consciousness it is impossible to open up the road to a common European future. Reflecting upon the modern images of Europe and European civilisation, the three Central European intellectuals do not differentiate between Western and Eastern Europe, but refer to Europe as a whole: a Europe that has to learn the lessons from the past, reflect on its divided history, and decide what it wants and what role it aims to play in the world. It is this perspective that will be central to the second part of my research.

Ideas of Europe from a Central European Perspective: Methodology

Ideas of Europe and the self-understanding of the Central Europeans in relation to the West as well as the East are closely related and often reflect the political, geographic, and economic ideas or interests of a time. Using the concept of ‘symbolic geography’, historian László Kontler notes that geography can become a way to organise the world. In his *Introduction: Reflections on Symbolic Geography* (1999) he argues that symbolic geography can be created through “subjective or emotional as well as objective or structural factors; symbolic geography might also be shaped by scholarly inquiry as well as by political considerations of those both within and without the different units of such symbolic maps. Symbolic geography might, in turn, also assume the character of an ideology or a political programme.”³¹ Ideas of Europe as well as ideas of Central Europe are the product of discourses, ruptures, negotiations, and the drawing of borders. ‘Symbolic geography’ or ‘mental mapping’ deeply shape debates on (Central) Europe.³² Discussing ideas of Europe from a Central European perspective, therefore, it is crucial to situate these ideas in their historical, societal, and cultural context and to reflect on the position of its propagators – historians, philosophers, political thinkers, etc.–, the place of their country in the region (Central Europe) and in the wider context (Europe).

Central Europe, then, is defined as an interdependent cultural, political, and historical space within which ideas of Europe have been formulated. In interpreting the Central European ideas of Europe, I follow the argument of Maciej Janowski, Constantin

³¹ Kontler ‘Introduction: Reflections on Symbolic Geography’ p. 9

³² See: Péteri ‘Introduction. The Oblique Coordinate Systems of Modern Identity’ pp. 2-4

Iordachi, and Balász Trenscényi in their article ‘Why bother about historical regions? Debates over Central Europe in Hungary, Poland and Romania’ (2005). These historical scholars maintain that the notion of ‘Central Europe’ can serve as an analytical tool for historical research.³³ Analysing the Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian literature on the Central European region in the twentieth century, they argue that “the Central European paradigm” is crucial to the people’s self-understanding.³⁴ Central Europe is more than just a political project; it also serves as a “genuine model of interpretation.”³⁵ Consequently, the authors of the article assert that without trying to define the exact shape of the historical region, and thus retaining the complexities of the units of analysis, the Central European regional space can serve as a legitimate framework of interpretation. Kontler argues along similar lines. To him,

[t]he notion of Central Europe and the perceptions of the nations and lands usually associated with it as Central European remains useful if we regard it – instead of as a statement of fact, a heuristic device – as part of the modern self-reflection of the peoples concerned. Even the historian needs to reckon with collective memory as a force that to some extent shapes the very history he or she is to investigate professionally.³⁶

Constructing Central Europe as a modern self-perception of the peoples concerned, an area of intensive communication, and subject to similar historical experiences, my analysis will include Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia. “These are societies that for most of their modern history have undergone a remarkably similar experience of subjection and subordination,” which became part of the cultural

³³ cf. Janowski, Iordachi, Trenscényi ‘Why bother about historical regions’ p. 56. See also: Iordachi ‘The Quest for Central Europe’ p. 56

³⁴ Janowski, Iordachi, Trenscényi ‘Why bother about historical regions’ p. 7

³⁵ Ibid. p. 56

³⁶ Kontler ‘Introduction: Reflections on Symbolic Geography’ p. 12

memory of the region.³⁷ During the period under investigation here – 1918-present –, the region “constituted an area of intensive communication and interaction.”³⁸ Hence, the political, literary, and scholarly discussions on Europe in these countries provide a fruitful base for exploring of ideas of Europe from a Central European perspective. Analysing ideas of Europe in these Central European countries, we will see that their political, geographical, economic, and cultural place in Europe, their cultural networks and exchanges, their interconnectedness, and the political and intellectual dialogues between these countries, all contribute to a region-specific discourse on Europe.

This complex Central European discourse on Europe will be approached from an interdisciplinary angle. In its methodological approach, this research will borrow from the history of ideas, the history and sociology of intellectuals, biography, and political theory. In the first chapter, where I deal with Central European discussions on the character of Europe between 1918 and the early 1990s, the emphasis is on the history of ideas in which texts take central position. Exploring the main trends in thought and focusing on the meaning attached to the idea of Europe by Central European (dissident) thinkers, the hermeneutically informed approach to the history of ideas, as initially introduced by Hans-Georg Gadamer, is crucial to my project. Reading the meaning out of a text through an (dialogical) encounter with history offers a possibility of analysing different complex texts – including works of literature as Dominick LaCapra argues.³⁹ It enables the researcher to interpret the message intellectuals communicate. In addition, it is impossible analyse ideas in total

³⁷ Kumar 1989 p. 4

³⁸ Ther ‘Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks’ p. 218

³⁹ See: LaCapra *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca and London, 1990); LaCapra and Kaplan *Modern European Intellectual History* (Ithaca and London, 1987)

separation from the conditions that made them possible in the first place. A text needs to be examined within its political, historical or economic context.⁴⁰ To combine that insight with the hermeneutically informed approach that analyses and interprets texts, LaCapra's observation that the historian reconstructs the past "on the basis of 'textualised' remainders of the past"⁴¹ needs to be taken seriously. Context, be it social or individual life, economic structures or political realities, in that sense is also text and it is to the historian to interpret that text. This is a subjective practice that is not devoid of political aspects. Yet, it is not purely subjective; there are historical facts that can give the researcher a direction. So, interpretation entails a critical engagement with the past, present and future, with the continuities and discontinuities in time. Moreover, LaCapra's idea of the 'worklike' approach to text "that (...) makes a difference (...) [and] engages the reader in re-creative dialogue with the text and the problem it raises" is particularly useful.⁴² Through a critical and transformative reading of texts, deconstructing and reconstructing the given, one can interpret texts in a meaningful way.

Contextualised hermeneutics will also be one of the basic methodological departure points in reading the texts of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek. Here, the ideas and discourses introduced in the first chapter will serve as a fruitful background in seeking to understand the meaning these intellectuals try to convey in their writings. Yet, hermeneutics does not suffice to generate a holistic interpretation of these thinkers and their ideas of Europe. In addition, an understanding of the position of intellectuals in

⁴⁰ Additionally, the Cambridge School highlighted another layer to this research, theorising that the author's intentions, the so-called 'speech-acts' (Skinner), had to be accounted for.

⁴¹ LaCapra *Rethinking Intellectual History* p. 27

⁴² Ibid. p. 30

Central European society and of their agency is required. On this matter, the social history of intellectuals offers helpful guidance. Rather than concentrating on ideas, social and political actors are at its core, the work they do and the roles they play in society. Hence, I study the published texts of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek as “registers of experience.”⁴³ Reflecting on how these authors are situated in the social, political and intellectual background I will try to understand how they developed their ideas and why they put them into the textual forms that we can analyse hermeneutically.

Social histories of intellectuals often aim at analysing groups and schools of thought reflecting on the significance of issues such as friendship, rivalry, networks, generations, gender and power relations in the history of ideas.⁴⁴ In contrast to this meso-level of research, I turn to the micro-level and will focus on the three intellectuals as individuals putting a large emphasis on biography. The chapters will expound their biographies, personal experiences, and rootedness in the context of Central Europe in conjunction with the ideas and formulations of Europe as expressed in their writings. Thereby I seek to expose both the connection of biography and ideas and how these two elements in combination led to a certain understanding of Europe. I build on the political scientist and historian Robert Rotberg’s appraisal of biography, in which he states:

⁴³ Wickberg ‘Intellectual History vs. the Social History of Intellectuals’ p. 384

⁴⁴ In France, there is a strong tradition in the social history of intellectuals. Pierre Bourdieu is one of the main propagators of this social history of intellectuals of which his book *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, 1988) is a fine example and as an introduction: Bourdieu ‘The intellectual field: A world apart’ pp. 140-149. But also, Christophe Charle’s *Naissance des “intellectuels”, 1880-1900* (Paris, 1990) is a characteristic work built on this approach. In Germany, a different approach was developed, called *constellation analysis*. With reference to intellectual creativity, e.g. written documents, correspondence or diaries, historians wish to reconstruct face-to-face contacts and possible conversations of small creative groups of people. That is, in order to understand ideas and their change or development, these historians examine intellectually creative networks and aim to find out how persons within such a network interacted, how they communicated, who belonged to such a network, in what way social dynamics affected such a network and the position of intellectuals within that network. See: Mulsow ‘Zum Methodenprofil der Konstellationsforschung’ pp. 74-97

Biographers, as historians, are able to discover motivation, and to place their subjects fully in the context of their political, social, and economic times. They have often been responsible for recovering the force of forgotten human agency – for rescuing critical and overlooked human efforts in the surge of historical changes. Without biographies (and biographers) of all kinds, especially those that are sensitive and responsible, the historical enterprise would be far less informed, and far less complete.⁴⁵

This also holds true for intellectuals as “[b]iography becomes intellectual history in that we have to know all of the influences, across many dimensions, on an individual’s life and work”⁴⁶

My contention is that examining the separate, single biographies of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek offers insights into ideas of Europe from a Central European perspective that other approaches cannot generate. The biographic approach makes it possible to pull together elements of experience and thought that may be overlooked in a discourse analysis as those often focus on explicit articulations. This is especially relevant for the subject at hand as ideas of Europe were partly suppressed, ideologically distorted or simply not at the centre of discussion in post-war Central Europe. This shows in the writings of the three selected intellectuals where the term ‘Europe’ does not feature prominently during the early decades of the Cold War. Still, I argue, it is impossible to understand their ideas of Europe without retracing their early implicit pronouncements on the subject. In addition, following the biographies of selected individuals offers the benefit of an in depth analysis over the long term – from the years of the Holocaust to the contemporary construction of the European Union – and the possibility of comparative analysis across several countries. Both features would be difficult to achieve in a single project when choosing whole groups of thinkers.

⁴⁵ Rotberg ‘Biography and Historiography’ p. 324

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 307

Focusing on biographies is, in a word, studying Europe as lived experience. I hold that biography serves as a source of explanation, reflection, and criticism when formulating ideas of Europe. What distinguishes these Central European political thinkers from their 'Western' counterparts is that during an important period of their life they lived in a part of Europe in which until 1989 every aspect of society (including its citizens) was under state control. The fascist and communist ideologies, being concrete experiences rather than abstract political ideas, deeply affected Central European social, political, and cultural life.⁴⁷ These experiences contribute to the distinctiveness of the region and its discourse on Europe. They became part of the cultural memory of the region at large and of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek in particular. Accordingly, I seek to understand how, if at all, this experience has affected or shaped Bauman's, Kertész's and Žižek's ideas of Europe, its cultural identity and values. I am interested in how Bauman, Kertész and Žižek are shaped by their surroundings and relationship to certain social groups and in how these experiences subsequently affect their thinking.⁴⁸ I detect breaks and continuities in life and writing, so looking for the trajectory of ideas. Finally, I examine how the social and national environment, how the relationship between society and the individual, and how historical or crucial events in the life of the individual (and here the family plays a role as well) influence the writings of these intellectuals.⁴⁹ Ultimately, this approach allows for bringing together three intellectuals that at first glance have little in common but their lives in

⁴⁷ See also: Kosik *La Crise des temps modernes* p. 113

⁴⁸ See also: Eckel 'Historiography, Biography, and Experience' pp. 86 and pp. 88/9; Rotberg 'Biography and Historiography' p. 307

⁴⁹ This follows the developments in debates on the use of biography in historical research as described by Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf in *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science* (London, 2000) as well as by Berghahn and Lässig in *Biography Between Structure and Agency* (New York and Oxford, 2008).

the Central European region. With regards to Europe, however, an individual examination of the interrelationship between life and work as well as the themes they deem important shows striking communalities in the development of their ideas and their content.

Male, White, Eurocentric?

Some of us who were writing about the European idea were, I suspect, doing more than that. We were not only assuming a kind of historical inevitability in the notion but trying positively to encourage the process. There was a Hegelian >spirit of Europe< and we either analysed its elements or blew wind into its sails, but we did not question that in the end it would prevail.⁵⁰

Regarding the postcolonial and postmodernist critiques of the literature on the idea of Europe one might wonder whether the above selection of intellectuals and topic does not fall into the traps of the 'old' idealistic discourses on and narratives of Europe dictated by a male perspective. Yet, it differs from the master narrative in the sense that the main characters of this exploration in ideas of Europe come from a region that was not included into previous research and writings on Europe. It seeks to avoid a binary thinking in 'East', 'Asia', and/or 'Orient' or even 'Byzantium' as opposed to 'West', 'Europe', and 'Occident'. It tries to keep away from such constructions in which Europe equals civilisation, modernity, and progress and the 'East' (in whatever definition) is barbaric, traditional, and backward. Besides, it aims to deconstruct

⁵⁰ Hay 'Europe revisited' p. 3

existing debates on Central Europe and the question of belonging to Europe that build on such narratives. The focus is on a Central European narrative that tries to think Europe as a whole, with Bauman, Kertész and Žižek as emblematic figures in that debate. My analysis centres on Europe from within Europe, exploring European experiences and European identities. Bauman, Kertész and Žižek are not only Polish, Hungarian or Slovenian, but also Jewish and Christian, cosmopolitan and European, and yes, male. This study, however, is on a realm of ideas that does not emphasise debates of body and soul but discourses of Europe that are not necessarily gender specific.

Moreover, studying Europe as lived experience means that European history and European values are at the core of this inquiry. Europe is the historical and personal context in which Bauman, Kertész and Žižek formulated their ideas. Modernity, Enlightenment and the values of freedom, individuality, and democracy play a crucial role in these intellectuals' narratives of Europe; yet, in the sense that this is a heritage upon which the current European society is built and which characterises its nature – not in the sense that its products spread over the world and became universal values. Regarding Europe's history of the twentieth century, this heritage is far from unproblematic. Indeed, in the eyes of these three intellectuals who lived this history and encountered its cruelty – and thus have a right to speak one might say –, it needs to be and is evaluated accordingly. Herein Kertész can be said to be fully entrenched in the European context and to have never transcended that context. As a writer he certainly has the artistic freedom not to deal with such academic questions posed by the postmodernist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial thinkers. Yet, Bauman and Žižek, coming from a sociological and philosophical background, take up these

questions (also relating to gender) and devote space to it when reflecting upon their own position. They are well aware of the European context of their writings. Nevertheless, their works can be read as a conscious and chosen affirmation of Europe. That is, they do not think in terms of being superior compared to other, (non-)Europeans, but in terms of becoming European themselves and continuing a project they consider to be valuable. All three are conscious of the criticism to European society and its values, they subscribe to that criticism, but also emphasise the value of the European Enlightenment and aim at reformulating, restating, rejuvenating and altering it in a way that is not moralistic towards others, but makes oneself aware of problems and calling upon responsibility of the individuals.

It remains a different question whether the views and ideas of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek are viable and whether they can be effective in reality? Will they mean something when implemented in our daily lives? Moreover, are their ideas powerful enough to change the views of current policy makers? My exploration into ideas of Europe from a Central European perspective will not directly answer these questions. Yet, with Bauman, Kertész and Žižek it will emphasise the necessity of Europe to come to terms with itself, to build Europe's future upon its past, and to keep working on it. This includes a willingness to understand and think about Europe as an integrative whole and include the experiences of Europe's twentieth century (including its fascist and communist past) in its historical consciousness or historical awareness.

Chapter I

The Idea of Europe from a Central European Perspective 1918-1990

Dass Europa in der Gleichrangigkeit seiner großen und kleinen Völker leben kann und muss, das ist das Europäische an Europa.¹

Introduction:

Thinking about Europe in Central Europe has continually been characterised by certain specificities that both constitute it as a shared regional discourse and differentiate it from other European regions. In large parts of the continent debates on Europe can be characterised as binary, oscillating between the notions of the nation and of Europe.² In contrast, in Central Europe those debates have for the most part

¹ Zernack 'Problem der nationalen Identität' p. 178

² In modern ideas of Europe, that is, those ideas formulated from the Enlightenment onwards, one can observe a construction of the idea of Europe as a cosmopolitan, universalist, civilisationist, and Christian idea as opposed to the construction of the idea of the nation state (as 'imagined community') and rising nationalism. Depending on the political situation of the time and societal developments, the one or the other idea is dominant and provided with historical credence. See: Bugge 'The nation supreme' pp. 83-149; Chebel d'Appollonia 'European Nationalism and European Union' pp. 171-190;

been triangular incorporating the region as additional pivotal concept. Thus, generally speaking, in Central Europe there is a twofold debate throughout the twentieth century, focusing on the one hand on Central Europe as a region and on the other hand, on its belonging to and shaping of Europe as a whole.

Both of these debates share certain features revolving around a set of common questions: the relationship of individual nations to larger surrounding entities; the geographical delineations of both Europe and of Central Europe potentially excluding some 'other' that is not deemed to fit in; and the defining elements of either a pan-European or a regional history and identity. Consequently, both debates are often deeply intermingled. There are, however, certain differences between the purely regional and the pan-European discourses. Not every pondering of Central Europe has a direct rapport to the overall idea of Europe. Most notably, this is true for some of the political projects of transnational cooperation or even federal unification of Central Europe or some of its parts that sprang up in the interwar period. Most of these projects say something about how the Central European political and intellectual elites perceived their political position as a nation (within the wider European context), who were their main enemies, and how they thought best to protect themselves. That is, due to their huge diversity and their occasional reminiscences of past imperial glories, the regional and supra-national plans of political cooperation provide a better insight in the constitution of the respective countries than in narratives of Europe.

Nevertheless, they deserve mentioning as they do shed light on one of the central themes of the historic discourse: the question of belonging to (Central) Europe. Being

Delanty *Inventing Europe* pp. 65-83; Gollwitzer *Europabild und Europagedanke* pp. 337-342; Heffernan *The Meaning of Europe* pp. 1-8; Wintle 'Cultural Identity in Europe' pp. 9-32

an integral and formative part of Europe was never seriously questioned in Western Europe. This was very different east of the German lands. A large part of the Central European discourse on Europe can therefore be understood as a means of declaring and proving its belonging to a European whole. This kind of argument has a certain defensive flavour to it. Since the end of World War I and the formation of the Central European nation states, however, a more confident assertion of the part played by these peoples in shaping Europe developed, which subsequently showed itself in an enhanced discourse on the idea of Europe. It is this discourse that constitutes the core of this chapter.

The Historical Model and the Philosophical Model

Central European arguments about the character of Europe and its cultural as well as geographic extent can be classified as pertaining to two models: the historical and the philosophical model. These models are especially developed for the purpose of this survey chapter, in order to organise and systematise the various discourses on Europe over the span of eight decades. Transcending national boundaries they can be found all over Central Europe while representing a specific Central European feature. In the existing literature, other choices are made. This is not only true for the general publications on the idea of Europe that choose a mainly ‘Western’ perspective.³ It also applies to the burgeoning literature on the idea of Europe from a Central European perspective. These studies do not deal with their subject idea of Europe in the twentieth century at large. Rather, they focus on particular time frames, on individual

³ On these see Introduction, pp. 9/10

countries, on groups of intellectuals or on specific discursive formations.⁴ Consequently they use a host of different research strategies adapted to the theme of research. My own research has benefitted enormously from the results and insights of these studies and I follow the broad chronological arrangement of many of them. For the purpose of a one-chapter survey, however, a more analytical take is necessary to come to terms with the sheer variety of Central Europeans' thinking about Europe in the twentieth century. Bearing in mind the impossibility of representing every single actor, group of intellectuals or debate on Europe in fine-grained detail I have chosen to develop a different model to analyse all those narratives and discourses from a history of ideas perspective in one chapter.

In the first model, the essence and unity of Europe are asserted and explained in terms of history. In Central Europe, historical arguments often draw on the Christian, or rather Catholic, imprint on the region as well as its partaking in European cultural

⁴ Here, I briefly summarise recent publications taking as its subject the idea of Europe from a Central European perspective. Carlos Reijnen's book *Op de Drempel. De Tsjechen en Europa in de twintigste Eeuw* (*On the threshold of Europe. The Czechs and Europe in the twentieth century*, Kampen 2005) is an intellectual history, focusing on the most important intellectual and political perceptions of and projects for Europe in one country examining debates on the Czech nation, its place in Central Europe and subsequently its relationship to Europe. Christian Domnitz' *Hinwendung nach Europa. Neuorientierung und Öffentlichkeitswandel im Staatssozialismus 1975-1989* (*Steering towards Europe. Reorientation and change of public opinion in state socialism 1975-1989*, Bochum, forthcoming) studies the idea of Europe in political publications in public spheres of communication (both official and underground) over the period of 14 years in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic. Iver B. Neumann's *Uses of the Other. "the East" in European identity formation* (Manchester, 1999) focuses on collective identity formation of the European self and the 'Other' at multiple levels from a political scientist point of view using insights from anthropology, social theory, and philosophy. *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* by György Péteri (Pittsburgh, 2010) uses mental mapping as a tool for understanding European 'East'- 'West' divisions and narratives. Barbara J. Falk's *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe. Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest, 2003) is a history of ideas exploring the specific group of dissident intellectuals as political thinkers in the 1945-1989 period and Jaff Schatz's *The Generation. The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley, 1991) is a history of a Jewish generation born around 1910. Then, the literature that can be described as a social history of intellectuals of and in the Central European region deserves mentioning. *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* edited by András Bozóki (Budapest, 1999) is a key example. All these approaches have their advantages and attractive sides, yet did not fit my aim of giving an overview of the most important discourses on Europe in the Central European region as they emerged in the twentieth century.

experiences such as the Renaissance to demonstrate the region's belonging to Europe. Thus, history can be used to prove a long established inclusion into Europe as well as excluding areas and peoples that are presumed not to have participated in these defining phenomena. Moreover, the historical model claims a strong kind of causality and professed objectivity: Europe is the result of historical development and the question what and who belongs to it can be sufficiently determined by historical inquiry. This historic determination is contrasted by the second, the philosophical model. Here, Europe is defined not by history but by values, i.e. human rights, individuality, freedom, and democracy. This model, too, has a historical component with its strong emphasis on the Enlightenment and, sometimes, on the Christian origins of those values. However, it is universalist in outlook and does not preclude peoples from partaking in the Enlightenment values merely because they did not partake in the historic 'event' of the Enlightenment. A voluntaristic attitude, then, is central to the philosophical model. Everyone who chooses to be European can be European. At the same time, it is just as easy as in the historical model to exclude geographic areas or even social groups and political parties in a given society from being European because they allegedly do not adhere to those European values.

Those two models are by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there are many intellectuals in the region using both types of reasoning when talking about Europe. Still, it is useful to differentiate between the two. This research strategy enables to follow the common threads in the often diverse assertions on Europe across the whole region. Furthermore, it reveals the common discursive framework that survived the social and political ruptures of the twentieth century and that can be shown to inform thinking about Europe in the region to this day. In addition, these two

models serve as a tool to ascertain the ebbs and flows in the discourse on Europe over time. Often, the proportional relationship between them and the absence or resurgence of one of them signals the state of the general discourse. Therefore, together with the sheer quantity of statements referring to Europe the ratio of the two models helps at identifying the respective zeitgeist in thinking about Europe and in delineating different phases through the century.

In addition to their opposition concerning historic determination vs. voluntaristic choice, the two models differ in other ways. Identifying those intrinsic differences a priori is important to analysing the entire discourse as well as the individual statements that make it up. A main difference that needs to be kept in mind concerns the degree of explicitness in addressing Europe. In the historic model, on the one hand, the belonging of the region or a single country to Europe is and needs to be tackled head-on. Sometimes, as we will see, the word used may not be Europe but, say, Christianity or Western Christianity. This is, however, usually just a stand-in for the notion of Europe. On the other hand, the philosophical model does work without the explicit reference. While the values that are prioritised are often connected to the notion of Europe this is no discursive necessity. So, these values can be emphasised even if a direct allusion to Europe is not possible or desirable.

Both models share the above-mentioned sense of aspiration and catching-up to some ideal that lies outside the region, i.e. in Western Europe. ‘Europeanness’ developed somewhere else and Central Europe seems to have little to contribute to this notion. In fact, however, adherents to both modes of talking about Europe seriously tried and try

to prove the opposite and show the distinct contribution of (East) Central Europe and its belonging to Europe as a whole.

Outlining the chapter

This chapter takes the end of World War I as the starting point of analysis. Of course, earlier discussions about Europe and the Central European region exist that influenced post-World War I debates.⁵ However, the close association of thinking about the nation, the region, and the whole of Europe justifies to differentiate between those earlier debates and those developing in the wake of the Great War. As Philipp Ther, a specialist of East-Central European history, argues: “the period when an order of nation states structured the entire map of Central and Eastern Europe began, in fact, only in 1918.”⁶ The peace treaties established Czechoslovakia as an independent state, decreed the return of Poland on the European map, dictated Hungary’s loss of two-thirds of its territory, and pronounced the foundation of the Yugoslav state. Only the downfall of the multinational empires at the end of World War I led to a system of nation states, which in turn provoked a wave of thinking about their respective relationships with the region and Europe as a whole. The war and the ensuing peace fundamentally changed the political and cultural dynamics in this region.

⁵ See, for example, the texts collected in *Option Europa*, Bd. III by Borodziej et al. (Göttingen, 2005), which discusses German, Polish and Hungarian plans for Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. See also: Okey ‘Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind the Definitions’ pp. 106-120

⁶ Ther ‘Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks’ p. 214

The chapter deliberately spans the interwar years, World War II, and the whole of the Communist era until its demise around 1990.⁷ Evidently, Central Europe experienced colossal upheavals and disruptions, including war, mass murder, and different totalitarian regimes. All these impacted on the thinking of Europe, as will become clear throughout the chapter. In treating these three quarters of a century in a joint narrative, the chapter aims at identifying the underlying structure and the commonalities of the discourse on Europe that persisted throughout. As mentioned, these relate to the definition and location of the region itself, to its place in Europe, and to its overall contribution to ‘Europeanness’.

While ideas of Europe circulating in Central Europe in the interwar period have been studied extensively, this is not the case for the time after World War II. The only exceptions are the well-known discussions of Kundera *cum suis* during the early 1980s and 1990s. Yet, we will see in the second part of the chapter that ideas of Europe did not disappear with the Communists controlling political, social, economic, and cultural life in the region. Still, Europe’s divided history and the influence of Russia gave the Central European region a more pronounced Eastern European character after 1945/8. In studying the historical as well as the philosophical model regarding discussions of Europe, the chapter will explore uses of the ‘Other’ and the

⁷ There will be no separate sub-chapter discussing ideas of Europe in the Central European region during World War II, as, first, prominent representatives of a Central European discourse on Europe have been active in the interwar period already and make themselves heard as well after 1945. Second, from 1939 to 1945, one can hardly speak of Central European debates on Europe outside a German dictated narrative of “Europe as freedom” cleansed of its foreign (Jewish) elements and serving as a defensive bulwark against “Bolshevism and the threats from the awakening inferior races” (Bugge ‘The nation supreme’ p. 125 & p. 127). Depending on the political constitution of the various countries and the strength of the National-Socialist or fascist groups within the political system, these ideas were advocated or not. They, therefore, contribute little to a better understanding of the idea of Europe from Central European perspective.

role both Russia and the West played in Central European debates on Europe.⁸ Moreover, to understand the collective experience of communism and its consequences for the political, cultural, and social life in Central Europe, it is crucial to examine the legacy of 'real socialism' and its impact on the formulation of ideas of Europe.⁹ The chapter will close with the early 1990s, since in 1993 the European Council declared in Copenhagen that "the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe which so desire shall become members of the European Union."¹⁰ As a result, Europe as an idea was, for some time, crowded out by debates on access to and applications for membership of the European Union.¹¹

Thus, structuring the chapter around the philosophical and historical models narrating Europe, the aim of the chapter is to provide an overview of the thinking and discussions about Europe in Central Europe from 1918 to 1993, to put them into context, and finally, to single out the trends and concepts that dominate Central European ideas of Europe. Relating to the modern, Enlightened idea of Europe, when it received historical credence and a political translation, special emphasis will be on the concepts of modernity, universality, and freedom.

⁸ For an excellent study on uses of the 'Eastern Other' in European identity formation, see Iver B. Neumann's *Uses of the other* (Manchester, 1999). Other studies in this direction are Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford, 1994), Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford & New York, 2009) and to a certain extent also Michael Kennedy's *Envisioning Eastern Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1994), which deals with a region searching its identity after the disappearance of socialism as society's guiding ideology or utopia.

⁹ 'Real socialism' is described as socialism as it actually existed in Eastern Europe and does not refer to the ideal of socialism that can be found in various theoretical treatises on socialism. See: Ramet *Eastern Europe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1998); Tucker *Stalinism* (New York, 1977); and Verdery *What was socialism, and what comes next?* (Princeton, 1996).

¹⁰ Dinan *Europe Recast* p. 273

¹¹ See: Vidmar-Horvat and Gerard 'Mitteleuropa and the European Heritage' pp. 203-218. It does not mean, of course, ideas of Europe were no longer formulated. Central European ideas of Europe from the end of the 1990s onwards will be the subject of the next chapters.

I.I Nation, Region, Europe: The Interwar Period

Central Europe as a Political Project

The interwar period was a first heyday of thinking about (East) Central Europe as a region. Following the dissolution of the multinational empires and the creation of relatively small nation states this intellectual burst answered to the perceived need to situate the new states and their nations in a larger regional and intellectual context. In practice, a lot of this thinking took the form of federal, regional or even pan-European political projects. Their advocates, however, steered clear of the tainted German concept of *Mitteleuropa* that had been advocated during World War I and continued to overshadow every transnational proposal in the eyes of nationalists.

The best known of these proposals is the *Paneuropa* programme of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi. The Austrian politician, philosopher and count argued for the creation of a *Pan-European Union*, which was supposed to become the basis of a mass movement. Coudenhove-Kalergi's wish was to ultimately create a United States of Europe. He pleaded for the creation of a 'European nation' on the basis of an 'abendländische Kultureinheit' kept together by European patriotism and democracy. This should prevent a new war, keep Russia out of Europe, and facilitate the political and economic recovery.¹²

¹² Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 76

Paneuropa found both acclaim and rejection among the intellectuals of Central Europa. In Poland, Coudenhove-Kalergi initially had followers from all political orientations.¹³ Resistance, however, grew when he proposed to cede the Free City of Danzig to Germany in 1927. Just a year before, the Hungarian branch of *Paneuropa* had been founded incorporating intellectuals like composer Béla Bartók, writer Zsigmond Móricz, chief-reporter of the German-language newspaper *Pester Lloyd* József Vészi, economist Elemér Hantos, philosopher György Lukács¹⁴ and several politicians.¹⁵ In lectures, essays and their own journal *Páneurópai Értesítő* (Paneuropean Gazette) they criticized the foreign and home affairs of their government, propagating the *Paneuropa* idea in the succession states of the Habsburg Empire and in the Balkan countries, and trying to enhance cooperation between Hungary and its neighbouring states.¹⁶ The Hungarian government, however, did not feel attracted to the idea.¹⁷

In Czechoslovakia, Coudenhove-Kalergi, who had become a citizen of this new state as a consequence of the peace treaty of St. Germain, pinned his hopes for political support on the new president, the philosopher Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Masaryk

¹³ To the Polish Paneuropa section belonged intellectuals and politicians representing a wide political and cultural spectrum. Among them were Mieczysław Niedziałkowski, a socialist, Stanisław Thugutt and Marian Dąbrowski, who were representatives of the agrarian parties, and from the moderate right came the priest Zygmunt Kaczynski. Also Cellist Bronisław Huberman and lawyer Alexander Lednicki, who was the chair of the Polish Paneuropa-section, belonged to this group of 'Paneuropeans'. See also: Zloch 'Polnische Europapläne' pp. 171/72

¹⁴ According to the critical Marxist philosopher György Lukács, the 'Paneuropean Union' should lead to cooperation and solidarity between the European nations. This way Europe could be saved from economic and political particularism and consequently from its downfall. See: Lukács *Életem és kortársaim*, Part 1, p. 242f. See also: Tuli 'Die Paneuropäische Sektion in Ungarn' p. 54

¹⁵ cf. Kiss 'A Páneuropa-szekció Magyarországon.'

URL: <http://www.valosagonline.hu/index.php?oldal=cikk&cazon=63&lap=1> (last access: 16 February 2011)

¹⁶ cf. Tuli 'Die Paneuropäische Sektion in Ungarn' p. 49

¹⁷ cf. Romsics 'Regionalismus und Europagedanke' p. 161; Tuli 'Die Paneuropäische Sektion in Ungarn' p. 51

declined to become involved personally but supplied money and a diplomatic passport for Coudenhove-Kalergi. Moreover, his foreign minister and fellow party member Edvard Beneš became honorary president of the Czechoslovak *Paneuropa*-section.¹⁸ Coudenhove-Kalergi admired Masaryk for his position as philosopher king and as a thinker of Europe in his own right.¹⁹ In the wake of World War I, Masaryk had developed a programme for Europe, which he called *The New Europe*.²⁰ Masaryk understood Europe as a normative idea and as synonymous to culture and civilisation.²¹ In his analysis, World War I presented a watershed. Medieval theocracy represented by the ‘antidemocratic’, ‘clerical’, and ‘antinational’ empires of Germany, Austria, Turkey, and Russia had been defeated by modern democracy.²² In Masaryk’s view, the modern and progressive ‘national principle’ was very important in creating a democratic Europe, which was the legitimation and home of the nation. His new Europe “consisted of an elongated zone of small nation states between Germany and Russia,” which were bound by a common fate.²³

Their ultimate goal of a peaceful, democratic, and united Europe may have been the same, but Masaryk and Coudenhove-Kalergi were separated by age, ancestry, and nationality. By connecting national independence with normative European values of freedom and democracy, the Czech philosopher held a view characteristic for liberal Central Europeans east of the German lands. Their interests lay in preserving both democracy and the hard-won nation state and not to jeopardize them for far-fetched Europeanism. For them, transnational cooperation was first and foremost supposed to

¹⁸ See: Ziegerhofer-Prettenthaler ‘Europäische Christdemokraten und die Paneuropa-Bewegung’ p. 582

¹⁹ See: Ziegerhofer-Prettenthaler *Botschafter Europas* p. 79

²⁰ cf. Bugge ‘The nation supreme’ pp. 92/3

²¹ cf. Masaryk *Nová Evropa* pp. 90/1

²² cf. Masaryk *Nová Evropa* p. 77

²³ Bugge ‘The nation supreme’ p. 94

safeguard the small nation states against the former imperial powers in east and west. Masaryk and Coudenhove-Kalergi did agree in keeping Russia out of their new Europe. The former, however, was naturally wary towards Germany and supported Beneš's French-backed 'Little Entente' comprising Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia aimed at containing revisionist policies; in contrast, the latter envisioned a close cooperation between the former war enemies and between Germany and the new states of Central Europe. Inevitably, conservative and fascist groups criticised *Paneuropa* for being a code name for German imperialism, instead emphasising their Slavic roots.²⁴ Besides, the Catholics, a small but not insignificant group, were sceptical towards *Paneuropa*. In their view, fascism and communism could be better contested with religion, with the values of Christendom embedded in a national culture.²⁵ And last but not least, Coudenhove-Kalergi's *Paneuropa* idea was challenged by the socialists. Their view of Europe was a different one. That is, apart from the fact that they assigned Russia an important role in a (European) federation, they thought this federation should be the result of the discrepancy between the interests and convictions of the working class and the old class.²⁶

While the adherents of *Paneuropa* were thus generally Western-oriented liberals, it is striking that political thinkers of different ideological outlook proposed intensive regional cooperation or even federalisation, including a wider European perspective in their concepts. The recurrent theme of these proposals was the perceived necessity of the small states of Central Europe to cooperate, federalism becoming a means of survival. In this vein, the Slovak agrarianist Milan Hodža, prime minister of

²⁴ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 81

²⁵ cf. Chudoba 'Hra s Panevropa' p. 153

²⁶ cf. Navrátil, in: Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 83

Czechoslovakia from 1933 to 1938, pleaded for the creation of a Central European federation without Germany, which “is a worthy effort of an All-European cultural mission.”²⁷ In Poland, Marshal Piłsudski favoured a federalist approach and later supported the so-called Intermarium idea: a federation stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. His ideal was to promote the strength of the region with a leading role of the Polish *Rzeczpospolita*. Yet, despite many diplomatic activities, federation plans, i.e. a French proposal of a Slavic bloc (including Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia) as well as the Polish idea of a North-East-federation (consisting of Poland, Hungary, and Romania), failed. After the peace treaty of Riga (1921) between Russia and Poland and due to the tense relationship between Poland and Lithuania, the concept of Intermarium was not as current anymore.²⁸

In Hungary, too, transnational ideas for Central Europe were formulated on all sides of the political spectrum. Here, the so-called Turanists demanded that Hungarian national unity should even be expanded far beyond the borders of pre-war Hungary. In this form of Hungarian imperialism developed just before World War I, the Asian roots of ‘Hungarianness’ and the close affinity of the Hungarian language with the Central-Asian languages were emphasised.²⁹ On the other hand, the liberal progressive thinker, sociologist, and politician Oszkár Jászi let go of liberal nationalist ideas and started developing the idea of Danubian patriotism.³⁰ Henceforth, he emphasised ideas of democracy, federalism, and regionalism. He sought for ways to recreate a federal and democratic Central European region and advanced the idea of an integration of

²⁷ Hodža *Federation in Central Europe* p. 171. See also: Trencsényi ‘Transcending Modernity’ p. 131

²⁸ cf. Borodziej, Brzostek, Górny ‘Polnische Europa-Pläne’ p. 92

²⁹ See: Romsics ‘Regionalismus und Europa-Gedanke’ pp. 149/50

³⁰ See also: Hanák *Jászi Oszkár dunai patriotizmusa* (The Danubian Patriotism of Oszkár Jászi)

those European states with a similar political, economic, and cultural foundation or system. The future of Europe, freedom, and peace could only be guaranteed if it would organise itself anew in a United States of Europe.³¹

Next, taking a moderate position towards the wish to revise Trianon, writer Dezső Szabó became a strong critic of German imperialism, imbuing “a peculiar neo-Romantic organicist peasantism, with strong anti-urban overtones colored by anti-Semitism.”³² He pleaded for the creation of a confederation of the Eastern European states [sic!], addressing the commonalities of the countries located between Germany and Russia and their dependence of these two big powers.³³ He argued that all countries in this region were economically backward and had only little urban development, a large agrarian sector and a strong aristocracy. Hence, the Eastern European countries shared a political interest to cooperate on an economic, military, political, and cultural level in order to secure the independence, freedom, and prosperity of the various countries.³⁴ In his text *Magyarság és Európa* (Hungarianhood/Hungarianess and Europe), Hungarian writer László Németh, who was a representative of the Hungarian populists in the 1930s, argued along similar lines and also spoke about the danger of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union for the new states in Central Europe.³⁵ He asserted that (voluntary) cooperation in Central

³¹ cf. Jászi ‘A Monarchia jövője’ (The future of the Monarchy) p. 48; Jászi ‘Political Organisation’

³² Trencsényi ‘Transcending Modernity’ pp. 138/39

³³ cf. Szábo ‘Magyarország helye Európában’ (Hungary’s Place in Europe) p. 285. Szábo does not use the term Central or East Central Europe. In his texts, Hungary part of Eastern Europe, which – next to Germany - does exclude Russia, however.

³⁴ cf. Szábo ‘Magyarország helye Európában’ p. 291

³⁵ Much of the political and intellectual debate in Hungary was between populists (Szabó, Németh) and urbanists (Jászi). The first group representing a more nationalist perspective in which they emphasized society as an organically grown entity. The urbanists as a group found its origins in the city. It was dominated by liberal and Jewish intellectuals, advocating a modern, cosmopolitan and universalist worldview. This much to the regret of the Hungarian Catholic Church, conservatives and anti-liberal groups.

Europe on a socio-economic as well political or ideological level could help these small states defend and direct themselves.³⁶

Regional cooperation and federalisation were central components of the Central European discourse on Europe and transnationalism in the 1920s. They were, however, diverse in several respects. Formulated from very different ideological backgrounds they could be based on normative ideas like liberal democracy, on the shared socio-economic situation of the new nation states or on past imperial glories as in some of the Hungarian and Polish proposals. The central unifying element was the perception of vulnerability of the small nations states between Germany and Russia. Along with a certain optimism of the 1920s this was the ultimate cause of the transnational thinking. While the menace of German and Russian/Soviet power persisted or rather grew in the 1930s, the intellectual optimism waned and plans of federalisation lost currency. Even before, those concepts probably never had a chance of implementation in the world of realpolitik. Nationalist forces or problems in these countries were too big to realise a “Central European community sharing a common destiny as well as common interests.”³⁷ Still, the outside threat to all the newly formed nation states did lead to a surge in thinking about regional identity.

³⁶ See: Trencsényi ‘Transcending Modernity’ p. 136

³⁷ Hanák ‘Warum sind die Donau-Föderationspläne nicht gelungen?’ p. 147

Defining Europe: Discussions of Identity and Belonging

Turning the attention to the cultural sphere, one can perceive that this surge also impacted on the idea of Europe itself. Europe became a crucial concept when discussing identity and belonging. In search for legitimacy, the Central European intellectuals emphasised their strong cultural affinity to Europe and their historical and religious traditions that fit within the broader European cultural framework. Across the political spectrum thinkers deemed it important to prove their peoples' belonging to Europe. The themes that were referred to in relation to Europe showed a remarkable similarity to ideas of Europe as discussed in the West: they included the values of freedom, democracy, humanism, and Christianity. Europe was understood as a civilisation and culture – and sometimes the difference between these two led to lively debates. Moreover, the Central European wish to be part of this European culture, to enter modernity, shaped their politics and attempts to build a democracy according to a Western European model.

The argument of belonging is presented in both the historic and the philosophical model outlined above. Especially among the liberal, Western-oriented intellectuals these are closely intermingled. A case in point and a good starting point for every discussion of Central European ideas of Europe is – again – Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. For the Czech philosopher and politician, Europe was determined both by values and by history. Both could not be separated from one another. Emphasising his liberal-democrat stance, Masaryk understood history as a road from theocracy to democracy. In this story democracy, i.e. freedom, equality, and fraternity, would “abolish a

relationship of subjection and rule.”³⁸ This teleological view of the world and its concomitant understanding of belonging to Europe can already be found in his *Zur russischen Geschichts- und Religionsphilosophie* (1913). In this work he asserted that Russia presented the child phase of Europe; Russia is what Europe was.³⁹ Thus, Russia had not yet travelled the historic road of Europe and had therefore missed out on the European achievements. Conversely, Czech culture and history were, according to Masaryk, shaped by the democratic and humanistic values of the Hussites⁴⁰ and the Czech Brethren, thus typifying his own culture closer to ‘grown up’ European than to Russian culture.⁴¹ To Masaryk, Europe was both a normative idea and the result of historical development, which opened up the possibility for the Czech nation (as well as, eventually, Russia) to become part of the Enlightened modern Europe.

This combination of history and values is closely mirrored in Poland. Many texts on Europe published during the interwar period emphasise Poland’s special place in the region, its will to freedom, peace, and tolerance,⁴² and its being part of the Latin and European culture, i.e. the German, Italian, and French culture, yet having an independent status as well.⁴³ Stanisław Kutrzeba, Polish historian and politician, argued that despite the partition of Poland, one can detect a certain continuity in its cultural tradition. Poland’s culture might be younger than western culture, Kutrzeba

³⁸ Masaryk ‘Constructive Sociological History’ p. 302

³⁹ cf. Masaryk *Zur russischen Geschichts- und Religionsphilosophie* pp. 7/8

⁴⁰ Jan Hus (c. 1369-1415) was a reform-minded Prague priest and key actor in the pre-Martin Luther reformation, whom the Roman Catholic Church burned for heresy in 1415. For the Czech nationalists he had become a hero and symbol against the Roman-Catholic rule of the Habsburgs. He was one of the figures symbolizing the close ties between Czech and Western European culture (cf. Miller ‘The Czech Republic’ p. 213ff.; Walters *The other Europe* p. 124).

⁴¹ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 42

⁴² See: Chołoniewski ‘Geist der Geschichte Polens’ pp. 148/9

⁴³ See: Kutrzeba ‘Die Eigenart der polnischen Kultur’ p. 150; Parandowski ‘Polen liegt am Mittelmeer’ pp. 173/74

asserted, yet it is characterised by a degree of moral purity, force, energy, and vitality that is higher than in older cultures.⁴⁴ And also to the so-called ‘urbanists’ from Hungary among which a young and aspiring generation of writers, i.e. Sándor Márai, László Cs. Szábo, and the already older Zoltán Szász, the relationship between Hungary and Europe was evaluated positively. In their views, the Hungarians were assimilating more and more to European bourgeois culture and its modern Enlightened civic values of freedom and human dignity.⁴⁵

The positive connection of European history and Enlightenment values was, however, not shared universally. Most notably, Catholic political thinkers disentangled the two. When demonstrating their belonging to Europe they relied heavily on the historic argument. In Poland, as a result of the Russo-Polish war, this took the form of a revival of the old *Antemurale Christianitatis* discourse.⁴⁶ In this discourse, focusing more on the West than the East, Poland was said to have a special role in protecting or promoting *abendländische* (western or occidental) civilisation. In newly formed Yugoslavia, a similar concept of occidental civilisation became prominent. Having been part of the Habsburg Empire, Croats and Slovenes had a sense of sharing a ‘Western’ culture: “The former subjects of the late “Central European” Habsburg Empire considered themselves [to be] more advanced, in terms of all such cultural and socio-economic criteria, than the “Balkan” Serbs to the south, by whom they were politically dominated to their lasting ire.”⁴⁷ As in Poland, the Catholic Church –

⁴⁴ cf. Kutrzeba ‘Die Eigenart der polnischen Kultur’ p. 153

⁴⁵ As will become clear discussing the position of the intellectual countermovement of the ‘populists’ they are involved in strong debates with the populists over Hungary’s relation to Europe, issues of the need of further assimilation to European values, and the value of Hungarian folkloristic and cultural populist traditions. See: Lackó ‘Populism in Hungary’ p. 114

⁴⁶ cf. Borodziej, Brzostek, Górny ‘Polnische Europa-Pläne’ p. 91

⁴⁷ Rothschild *East Central Europe* p. 209

especially in Slovenia – played an important role in keeping up ties to Central and Western European culture, though the Catholic Church would publically support the Yugoslav case. That is, within Slovenia the Catholics would cherish their Central European, Catholic roots, but towards the outside world they maintained a Yugoslav, Serb-flavoured orientation: First, because they were afraid of the Germans and the Italians; and secondly, because they could not repent their breakaway from the Habsburg monarchy.⁴⁸ Yet, with the idea of Yugoslavism becoming increasingly discredited, Bogo Grafenauer, a social-Christian historian, in 1939 explicitly addressed the belonging of Slovenia to Central Europe. He emphasised the Central European character of the Slovene way of life and culture. He called for more autonomy of the Slovenes within the Yugoslavian state in order to do justice to its place as a civilisation between Central Europe and the Balkans.⁴⁹ In addition, towards and during World War II, more authoritarian Catholics championed an independent Slovenia within an anti-Nazi, Catholic corporative Central Europe.⁵⁰ Likewise, in Czechoslovakia, the Catholic intellectual Rudolf Ina Malý had in 1935 supported Italian fascism arguing “only the European rule of the Latin nations can guarantee us a free future.”⁵¹

All these Catholic thinkers equated the European and the Christian-Catholic heritage and stressed the long-standing Central European participation in and building of that heritage. They were often critical of Enlightenment values instead of embracing them as the essence of Europe as the liberals did. In distancing themselves from modern

⁴⁸ cf. Prunk ‘Die Zugehörigkeit Sloveniens zum mitteleuropäischen Kulturkreis’ p.81

⁴⁹ cf. Grafenauer *Slovensko narodno vprašanje* (The Slovene national question) pp. 155-170

⁵⁰ See also: Prunk ‘Die Zugehörigkeit Sloveniens zum mitteleuropäischen Kulturkreis’ p. 81

⁵¹ Malý *Kříž nad Evropu* (Cross over Europe) p. 245

civilisation they were joined by critics from other backgrounds. In Poland, the national-democrat Roman Dmowski criticised liberal cosmopolitanism, addressing the downsides of European modernisation and predicted the downfall of liberal Europe.⁵² His message was that Poland should loosen itself from its international embedment to prevent going down with the rest of Europe. To the Czech socialist and structuralist philosopher Josef Ludvík Fischer the crisis in European society stemmed from the Enlightenment that had led to a mechanisation of the world and an atomisation of the individuals.⁵³ In his *Über die Zukunft der europäischen Kultur* (1929), he asserted that Europe should find a new ideological basis that could substitute individualism and the traditional liberal democracy and create a new balance. In his view, society should become a true *Gemeinschaft* (as opposed to the capitalist *Gesellschaft*), in which people could intimately live together and realise their individual and spiritual potential.⁵⁴ Fischer was critical of both the USA and Soviet Russia, which he considered to be an example of state-capitalism and not of socialism.⁵⁵ True to the historic mode of argument he asserted that Russia never had been Europe.⁵⁶ Other Czech socialists thought different and looked eastward hopefully. In Hungary, these anti-modern, anti-cosmopolitan and anti-Enlightenment views were particularly strong amongst ‘populists’ stressing the idea and value of the peasant Romanticist, organically grown Hungarian nation. It was anti-Western and anti-Jewish in its outlook and sought a ‘third road’ between communism and capitalism. It sought to build a traditionalist, collectivist and rural society and attracted many from the left-

⁵² cf. Dmowski ‘Die Nachkriegswelt und Polen’ pp. 156/57

⁵³ cf. Fischer ‘Über die Zukunft’ p. 33. Here one can detect parallels to the critique of Nietzsche, Weber, and Marx to modern society.

⁵⁴ cf. Fischer ‘Über die Zukunft’ p. 107; p. 117

⁵⁵ cf. Fischer ‘Zrcaldo doby’ p. 159; Fischer ‘Über die Zukunft’ p. 79

⁵⁶ cf. Fischer ‘Über die Zukunft’ p. 84

oriented intellectual circles as well as “the rightist-nationalist circles of the bourgeoisie” and “groups of folklorist intellectuals.”⁵⁷ In the words of László Németh, they understood themselves as “the people of the East.”⁵⁸ It was an “Eastern type ‘people’s spirit’” that should be adopted by the Hungarians instead of a Western liberal or fascist character.⁵⁹ Yet, over the years, part of the populist movement became attracted to the opportunities offered by the extreme and fascist right and the more moderate left-wingers were slowly disappearing into the background. Some of their discourses changed, adopting national-socialist narratives, becoming anti-intellectual, and opposing any form of democratic *Rechtsstaat*. The populists would, however, keep their focus on Hungary and its historical and spiritual origins.

Halecki, Bibó, Kocbek

Having started this overview of the intellectual idea of Europe in the interwar period with a philosopher who became paradigmatic of his times having developed his ideas before World War I, it seems fitting to close with three thinkers who represent a bridge from the interwar into the Communist years. All three can be understood as summing up important strands of Central European thought on Europe of the interwar period and at the same time advancing their own visions that were to have a slow but long-term impact. Deliberating the question of Europe as a whole and of Central Europe as a region they surpass the frame of Central European political cooperation. These three are the Polish historian and European idealist Oskar Halecki (1891-1973),

⁵⁷ Lackó ‘Populism in Hungary’ p. 117. The main and most influential intellectuals and writers of the populist movement were László Németh, Gyula Illyés, Dezső Szabó, Géza Féja and Péter Veres.

⁵⁸ Németh in: Lackó ‘Populism in Hungary’ p. 119

⁵⁹ Lackó ‘Populism in Hungary’ p. 119

the Hungarian lawyer, politician and political theorist István Bibó (1911-1979), and the Slovenian, Christian socialist writer Edvard Kocbek (1904-1981).

In the characteristic liberal way of the interwar period the authors combine a passionate adherence to a normatively defined Europe with a historical argument about Central Europe's place in this entity. Moreover, they try to transcend the defensive character of this discourse of belonging by showing how and what Central Europe had contributed and could still contribute to the notion of Europe. Admittedly, it has to be noted that Bibó's texts were published mostly posthumously and Halecki had left Central Europe for the United States at the start of World War II. Kocbek remained in Slovenia, became "a communist fellow traveller, closely associated with the liberation movement in the Second World War but always maintaining distance and dissidence."⁶⁰ Ultimately, however, he too was isolated by the communist regime and not allowed to publish anymore until 1963, when a period of liberalisation set in. This testifies to the changing political and discursive landscape in Central Europe during the war and its aftermath. At the same time, actual as well as inner exile became means of preserving ideas and concepts that were to be temporarily banned from open discourse.

As a historian, Oskar Halecki naturally relied on history as his main source of argument. Certainly, he defined Europe in normative terms, after World War II merging it with the notion of the "Atlantic community," which to him was "not a geographical expression but a spiritual conception."⁶¹ The peoples of East-Central Europe partook in this through their "unlimited devotion to the ideal of freedom and

⁶⁰ Gow & Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 80

⁶¹ Halecki 'The Historical Role of Central-Eastern Europe' p. 18

independence in democratic states of their own.”⁶² A central project of his professional life, nevertheless, was to put Central Europe on the mental map of international historiography and to show the deep and inner bond of its nations to Western Europe. It was “the course of history [that had] inseparably connected them with western Europe.”⁶³

For Halecki, two divisions were central for his understanding of Europe, both based on religion. First, he defined Christian Europe in delimiting it from non-Christian Asia. Then, secondly, he established the main division inside Europe as between the Christian-Latin West and a Christian-Byzantine East. Both were integral parts of Europe, but markedly different.⁶⁴ In the Eastern part the roots of civilisation did not go deep enough – under Soviet rule, this part of Europe became ever more Eastern, he asserted in 1923.⁶⁵ West of the intra-Christian divide Halecki denied any significant divisions in Europe. This stance prompted his debate with Jaroslav Bidlo who also played an important role in forming Central European ideas of Europe. Just as Halecki, the Czech historian differentiated between one part shaped by the Eastern Slavic Church and one part shaped by the Slavs of the Western, that is, Catholic Church.⁶⁶ Influenced by the Slavophiles, however, Bidlo put a strong emphasis a common Slavic history and argued that the two types of culture that marked the separation of Eastern Europe in an Eastern and a Western part had been crucial to the history of Europe. This view was to return in many Czech, but also Polish intellectual debates when redefining their position towards Russia after 1945. Halecki strongly

⁶² Ibid. p. 17

⁶³ Ibid. p. 18

⁶⁴ See also: Morawiec ‘Oskar Halecki’ 227.

⁶⁵ cf. Halecki ‘L’histoire de l’Europe Orientale’ p. 94

⁶⁶ See: Bidlo ‘Ce que l’histoire de l’Orient européen’ pp. 11-73

disagreed with this Slavonic version of history, mainly because of the divide Bidlo implied between Slavic and non-Slavic Europe, between a European East and a European West.⁶⁷ For the Polish historian, the tension between Europe and Asia rather than the tension between Slavic and non-Slavic, or between Western and Eastern Europe was constitutive of European civilisation.

During and after World War II, Halecki further developed his theme trying to increase the awareness of 'East-Central Europe' as an independent region. In his famous book *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (1950) he did not speak about Eastern and Western Europe, but asserted that Europe was divided into three historical regions: Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe. He proceeded by dividing Central Europe in two more parts: one which he called West-Central Europe, referring to Germany (and probably Austria), and another part he named East-Central Europe, which encompassed the lands between Germany and Russia, but had close affinities with the West.⁶⁸ In addition, he proposed a new periodisation of European history that he used for demarcating Europe. Here, he defined the beginning and end of historical periods claiming that they were constitutive for all of Europe; and went on to exclude regions, where he could not find these self-defined breaks, i.e. in Russia.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ For a more extensive description of the debate on (Eastern) Europe between various historians present at the mentioned conference, see: Lemberg 'Mitteleuropa und Osteuropa' pp. 213-220

⁶⁸ It may come as no surprise regarding Halecki's Polish roots and the Polish tradition in thinking about Europe that this East-Central Europe "resembled the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the early modern period, as well as the group of states, which fell under Soviet hegemony in 1945 according to the decisions of Yalta" (Troebst 'Halecki Revisited' p. 57).

⁶⁹ Halecki *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, Chapters VIII 'The Chronological Divisions: (a) The Middle Ages and the Renaissance' pp. 145-161 and IX 'The Chronological Divisions: Modern and Contemporary History' pp. 165-182

In Halecki's view, Europe as such could be typified as a unity in diversity, a diversity to which East-Central Europe made an important historical contribution. What typified Europe was its structure as a history of Christian nations.⁷⁰ Despite the common Greek, Roman, and Christian heritage, however, countries and regions developed differently, which contributed to a dynamic that ensured European progress and continuous development.

Halecki's notion 'East-Central-Europe' gave a new impulse to debates on the region, after *Mitteleuropa* had lost its credentials. For many decades, Halecki tried to make East-Central Europe visible as a distinct region culturally bound to Western Europe albeit with slightly changing emphasis. In the early 1920s, he had criticised the Western monopoly on the notion of civilisation, highlighting the East-Central-European achievements. With the dawn of the Cold War, Europe was divided into two camps: the democratic, civilised West on the one hand, and the totalitarian or authoritarian, barbarian East on the other.⁷¹ Western Europe, thus, was in a different, normatively better position than Eastern Europe and the Polish historian did his best to show that the part of Europe he came from and to which he gave the name East-Central Europe, was part of the Western European sphere of influence, of Western civilisation. This reasoning that would return during the 1970s, and which later intellectuals such as Milan Kundera, Václav Havel, Czesław Miłosz, Danilo Kiš, and Györgi Konrád, to name just a few, would follow in their creation of Central Europe as a region. The invention of a third region in *The Limits and Divisions of European*

⁷⁰ cf. Zernack *Osteuropa* p. 67

⁷¹ cf. Neumann *Uses of the other* p. 103

History had the purpose of saving East-Central Europe from being put in the drawer of the barbaric, totalitarian East.

The Hungarian political theorist and democratic politician István Bibó also created a third region in his writings on Europe, calling them the “‘freedom loving’ small nations of Eastern Europe.”⁷² In many ways his thoughts resemble those of Halecki. As a political thinker, however, he put more emphasis on the normative definition of Europe. To him, freedom was the unique feature and achievement of European civilisation and stood at the basis of the other crucial characteristic of Europe, notably democracy. What constituted the difference between West and East was the degree to which the ideal of freedom was part of political culture (freedom of thought, press, civil rights, religious freedom, etc.).

Where Halecki constantly tried to show the ‘Westernness’ of East-Central Europe, Bibó took a more (self-)critical look asking why the eastern part of the continent had not travelled the same path as the West. In *The Distress of the Eastern European Small States* (*A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága*) of 1946 he sought a historical explanation and maybe even legitimisation of the current situation. Bibó pointed to the failure of the liberation movements of 1848-49 in East-Central Europe and their substitution by nationalist movements in the nineteenth century. These nationalist movements did not connect the liberation of individuals to the nationalist interests, making nationalism an anti-democratic ideology.⁷³ This, in turn, damaged the social and political progress of the small nations of Eastern Europe; it stopped them on their road to freedom and democracy.

⁷² Bibó *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination* p. 37

⁷³ cf. Bibó *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination* p. 42

Bibó, who was imprisoned for his active role in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and later chose an inner exile, stayed true to this theme in his later, unpublished writings. In the 1970s he returned to the common and diverging history of Europe addressing the role of Antiquity for the social organisation patterns of Europe, the role of Christianity during the Middle Ages in fighting barbarism and enhancing liberty, and finally, the separation of powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁴ This would ultimately lead to diverging developments in various regions of Europe, which Bibó defined as Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe. Explaining totalitarian movements, which he understood as the negation of European development, Bibó addressed the impact of the French Revolution, and the legacy of revolutionary violence in particular, on social and political change in Europe as a whole.⁷⁵ To him, nineteenth-century nationalism had caused the two world wars and led to the death of Europe. At the end of his life and still living in communist Hungary, which showed no sign of change let alone revolution, Europe – the normative concept – for Bibó was no more. Yet, with Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs taking up on Bibó's thinking in *The three historical regions of Europe: an outline* (1983), Bibó would remain important for Central European intellectuals discussing Europe and Central Europe's place in Europe.

The writer and poet Edvard Kocbek wrote about Central Europe as an exceptional place located between East and West that encompassed at least fifteen nations and could be characterised by its ethnic and cultural plurality.⁷⁶ Yet, similar to Bibó's pessimistic evaluation of how Central Europe acted upon this plurality, he proceeded

⁷⁴ cf. Bibó *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination* p. 427

⁷⁵ cf. Dénes 'Personal Liberty and Political Freedom' p. 89

⁷⁶ See: Kocbek 'Srednja Evropa.' ('Central Europe.') pp. 89-92

that Central Europe's biggest mishap was that it could not defend or stand up for this great value as a region. Instead, it was a playground for the big empires or nations and a centre of tension. He claimed that it was the region where "in the historically conditioned process, all essential technical and human problems occur[ed] and where since long, the battle for the deepest human values [was] being fought."⁷⁷ Germany, notably the positive-vital influence of German romanticism shaped the area and its culture. However, ethnic nationalism did so too and this worked out negatively for the region.⁷⁸ He, hence, pleaded for a greater federal cooperation between the Central European states that would safeguard the various national traditions, but strengthen the region's political and economic position. Europe should become a federation, safeguarding the future existence of large and small people/nations.⁷⁹

In his writings, Kocbek defended freedom of mind as well as human and humanistic values and the need for people to love and tolerate each other and live together in harmony but without losing one's own distinctiveness.⁸⁰ Before the outbreak of the war, Kocbek had written about Europe in his own literary journal *Dejanje* (Act) that "as a star of large and small peoples, of large and small fatherlands and not of totalitarian states, the new Europe should be built focusing on the individual."⁸¹ Years later, he would still think about how smaller nations could work together without

⁷⁷ Original: "v zgodovinsko pogojenem procesu zaobseženi vsi bistveni tehnični in človeški problemi in kjer se že dolgo časa bije borba za najgloblje človeške vrednote" (Kocbek 'Srednja Evropa').

⁷⁸ cf. Vodopivec 'Mitteleuropa' pp. 30/1

⁷⁹ Kocbek 'Mali in veliki narodi' (Large and small people/nations) in: Detela and Kersche *Edvard Kocbek* p. 22

⁸⁰ Virk 'Umwertung von Geschichte' p. 336. Having studied in France for a year, he was influenced by the Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier who "had developed a brand of radical Christian socialism that he called "Personalism," which rejected the idealist notion that men's activities were no more than a reflection of the spirit, and accepted that religion did not hold all the answers to the social problems of the modern world" (Kocbek *Nothing is lost* pp. 1/2).

⁸¹ Kocbek in: Detela and Kersche *Edvard Kocbek* p. 9

loosing their national distinctiveness. Moreover, “[w]hatever his desire for social justice and his links with the communist movement, Kocbek like most other Slovenes was concerned with Slovenian culture and identity and saw the alliance with other South Slavs in rather pragmatic terms.”⁸² He tried to find an answer to the question how Slovenia could protect its national cultural traditions, its singularity, and identity against the assimilation pressure of bigger nations, and what cooperation between other nations in the region could bring. Kocbek’s work and visions and his desire to build a more humane and solidly united world would gain meaning once more in the development of a humane, all-European politics during the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁸³

Just as their respective lifetimes the European ideas of Oskar Halecki, István Bibó and Edvard Kocbek span the middle of the twentieth century, from the hopeful interwar years through the war to communist dictatorship. All three equate Europe with freedom, democracy, and diversity. Thus, European values are not only the ideal for the Central European nations, but their small nation states contribute to something that is quintessentially European. All three authors extensively use historical arguments to justify Central Europe’s belonging to the somewhat idealised Western civilisation. This marks them out as typical thinkers of the interwar period when this argument was at its peak. They all, however, have to deal with the realities of a post-war Europe that is moving in a very different direction than they had hoped. Halecki reacted by reinforcing his historical claim of autonomous but still Western development of Central Europe reducing the bleak present to a fleeting mistake of history. Bibó, a

⁸² Gow and Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 81

⁸³ cf. Datela and Kersche *Edvard Kocbek* p. 22. See also: Kocbek *Nothing is lost* p. 11

generation younger than the Polish historian, seems less sure of the validity of the historical argument. Although he uses it extensively, he does acknowledge that something went wrong at some point. For him, this wrong turn could be located in the nineteenth century. Still, as Europe was basically a normative project, a return was always possible, even if Bibó himself lost faith in this after decades of communist rule. Kocbek, in turn, kept focusing on how national identity and culture and international political cooperation could be combined, remaining true to his Catholic roots, the universalist, tolerant spirit, and humanist thought.

It was precisely the belief in the existence of a third Europe between east and west, of its belonging to Western civilisation, and of the possibility of reversing the course of history and rejoining this civilisation that became the legacy of Bibó, Halecki and Kocbek. For sure, those who were to take up these themes in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s framed them differently. They did, however, consciously and unconsciously attach themselves to the interwar discourse on Europe transposed to the postwar-era by Halecki, Bibó, Kocbek and others.

I.II The years of hope and despair, 1945-1968

A Plurality of Views, 1945-1948

In some ways the discourse on Europe in the first years after 1945 resembled the one after World War I. Initially, Europe was discussed through federation plans. In the seemingly open situation of the immediate post-war era ideas from the 1920s were revitalised and new federation plans contrived. Among the surviving Central European elites it is easy to detect a wish to continue the pre-war discourses on Europe. At the same time, owing to Europe's ruined position as a political, economic, and cultural power in the world, the destructions of the war, the wrecked European self-image, and the climate of crisis, intensive debates on Europe, its future, and foundations emerged directly after World War II transcending the interwar discourse.

From 1945 to 1948, the political scene in Central Europe was diverse and the Western Allies had strong hopes that the sovereignty of the Central European states would be guaranteed. Amongst the agrarian or peasant parties, the national conservatives, national democrats, liberals, and social democrats in the region, there were many advocates of parliamentary (anticommunist) democracy. At this time, Central European thinkers from various political directions developed ideas of Europe and there was room for a certain plurality in method and in interpretation. It was in these early years, in which the communists would gradually take over, suppress other parties, and seize control imposing an all-encompassing political, social, economic, and cultural system on Central Europe, that many Central European intellectuals were still relatively free to address the topic of Europe. During the Stalinist period, Europe

would disappear from any public discussions, scholarly debates or intellectual writings in and from the region.

Federal programmes were particularly popular amongst Central European non-communist politicians, for the devastating war had impaired the credibility of the nation state and of nationalism. At the time, national interests were not given up at all but were supposed to be safeguarded in federal structures.⁸⁴ Just as in the 1920s, some of the proposals were based on past imperial glories, though in the veiled form of federalism. Hungarians in exile proposed a St. Stephen's Union, or alternatively a Danube federation, which was something the Slovenes advocated too. Others revitalized the Polish *Intermarum*. Though still Polish oriented, this time also non-Polish, Central European emigrants in Brussels, Paris, London, and Rome participated in the discussions joining their forces in the 'Central European Federal Club'.⁸⁵

Yet, not only Central European emigrants discussed federalisation plans for the region. Mihály Károlyi, for example, who had led a liberal, national-democratic government directly after World War I, returned to Hungary after long years of absence. Ideas circulated to make him head of a ministry dealing with the creation of a confederation of the Danube countries. But this regional foreign ministry did not materialise.⁸⁶ Instead Károlyi founded the weekly paper 'Köztársaság' (The Republic)

⁸⁴ See: Wierer *Föderalismus im Donauraum* pp. 198-203. For many Polish politicians in exile, for example, it was important to defend its borders (predominantly the Oder-Neisse line between Poland and Germany) and they were of the opinion that federation plans should serve this goal. In discussions about federation projects, the Czechoslovaks too stood for its borders as decided in 1918, and the Hungarians still sought to re-establish its pre-Trianon lands.

⁸⁵ cf. Valkenier 'Eastern European Federation' p. 354. Interesting here are the texts 'Zwischen den Meeren' and 'Intermarium' by Alfred Lampe, both to be found in Loew's *Polen denkt Europa* pp. 191-193; pp. 194-198. See also: Laptos 'Visionen des gemeinsamen Europas' pp. 317-339

⁸⁶ *Köztársaság* (*The Republic*) 27 June 1946; Jemnitz 'A Magyarországi szociáldemokrata part külpolitikai irányvonalának alakulásához 1945-1948' ('The Hungarian Social Democratic Party's foreign policy orientation between 1945-1948')

to propagate the idea of an economic and political federation with Romania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria.⁸⁷ Other plans were cooperation projects between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and with Austria. Furthermore, there were federation plans formulated in Yugoslavia during the immediate post-war years. Already in 1944, the (Slovene) Yugoslav communist Eduard Kardelj started planning the foundation of a Bulgarian-Yugoslav state, which was followed by the signing of a treaty for preparing a Customs Union between the two countries in 1947.

Plans for broader cooperation, encompassing the Balkan states, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, were developed much to the dislike of Moscow. The Soviets argued that these plans were artificial and problematic, and that these countries needed their national independence.⁸⁸ Hence, with the communists slowly taking over in all Central European countries, federation plans disappeared into the background.⁸⁹ It is a striking feature of those federation plans that they were mainly aimed at strengthening the region against Western, chiefly German imperialism. There was little sign of concern about Moscow's growing influence and its possible totalising tendency. Many hoped to take up the thread where they thought it was lost and strove for further integration of their region into a wider European whole. In fact, the Soviets blocked both regional cooperation and any collaboration with the West. From 1948 onwards, the region would obtain a more 'Eastern' character, i.e. East-West divisions (politically, culturally, and economically) would widen.

⁸⁷ cf. Gyarmati 'Föderationsbestrebungen' p. 374

⁸⁸ cf. Wierer *Föderalismus im Donauraum* p. 186

⁸⁹ José M. Faraldo has written a noteworthy essay on the communist ideas of Europe in the period 1944-1948, explaining the relation between communist thought and national discourses. See: Faraldo 'Die Hüterin der europäischen Zivilisation' pp. 91-109

Beyond the sphere of political federation plans the contemporaries had to come to grips with the crisis of Europe as evidenced by war and Holocaust. For a long time, Germany had been perceived as a political threat to the Central European nation states. Still, Germany had also been an integral part of European civilisation strongly impacting on the cultural life of Central Europe. The breakdown and betrayal of civilisation by the Germans called into question the whole idea of European civilisation. In the years after the war, Central Europeans took different paths of coping with the ensuing incertitude and, thus, redefining Europe. While the communists preached the total break with the past and portrayed their ideology as the replacement of the old notion of Europe, for liberals it was more difficult to come to terms with the situation. This became especially true when the early hopes for a resurrection of national autonomy and liberal democracy were crushed by the Soviet-led communist take-over, leaving alignment or real or inner exile as options. The problem of European civilisation was particularly acute for the surviving Jews of Central Europe. Except for emigration to Israel, their options of intellectually coping with the situation were similar to those of non-Jews as we will see in detail in the case studies of Zygmunt Bauman and Imre Kertész.

A case in point for this challenge to non-Jewish liberals is the Hungarian writer Sandor Márai. Born in Kassa in 1900, which became Košice in Czechoslovakia in 1918, Márai saw himself as a true bourgeois, who had lost much of his base of existence in Hungary after the liberal-democratic government of Mihály Károlyi failed and the communist Béla Kun came to power. He, therefore, sought to go abroad in search of bourgeois values returning after almost ten years of exile. In Budapest, he then enjoyed great popularity as a writer and journalist. Yet, political developments of

the late interwar years made him retreat from public life. After the end of World War II, he hoped that time finally had come for a bourgeois society.⁹⁰ This hope soon disappeared. In 1948, Márai decided to leave Hungary; he would never see his country again.

The Hungarian author wrote about the loss of a European era, about the devastations of the two world wars, the destruction of European civilisation, its humanist and Christian roots, and the arrogance of a world that refused to draw lessons from the past. In *Embers* (1942), he orchestrated the arrival of silence, creating an atmosphere in which there was nothing left from the past but a few dying candles.⁹¹ Yet, the writer did not only intend to build monuments for a lost civilisation. In his earlier works, he tried to create culture anew, to build it on the ruins of a world that had been destructed by the war. He sought to find a universe that had been lost and aimed at passing the heritage of the Enlightened souls,⁹² the tradition in which Goethe and Schiller stood, the spiritual-moral, Christian-humanist Europe to a new generation.⁹³ He aimed at continuing a civilisation that was characterised by individual responsibility and cultivation of a personality. To him, it was the task of a writer to convey the existence

⁹⁰ cf. Márai *Land, land!* pp. 101-104. *Land, land!... or Föld, föld!...* in Hungarian (translated in English as *Memoir of Hungary, 1944-1948*) is a memoir of Márai's last years in Hungary between 1944 and 1948. The book was published only in the 1970s while he was in exile already. Nevertheless, regarding the continuity the book shows with his earlier works that were published in Hungary until the 1940s (notably his *Egy polgár vallomásai* of 1934 - translated in German as *Bekenntnisse eines Bürgers* and in English *Confessions of a Citizen*), I consider it a genuine source of the liberal-democratic views of the time. In 1942, still, he had "joined the ranks of those pledging themselves to St. Stephen's idea of the state in *Röpirat a nemzetnevelés ügyében* (Pamphlet on the Issue of Nation-building, 1942)" striving to "maintain some semblance of independent thinking" (Szegedy-Maszák 'Age of Bourgeois Society' p. 239).

⁹¹ The Hungarian title was "A gyertyák csonkig égnek", meaning "The candles burn down to the stump."

⁹² cf. Cluny 'Veni, vidi, vici...' p. 78

⁹³ cf. Márai *Land, land!* p. 82

of an *other* world to the public saving this world of values from extinction.⁹⁴ Yet, World War II gave the Christian-humanist, liberal Europe, Márai's Europe, its death sentence. According to Márai, everything was as destroyed, desolate, and unworthy after World War II as it had been after World War I. There was no hope for improvement; humanism, humanity and its values no longer existed in society. European humanism was destroyed.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, despite the catastrophe and the spiritual, moral, and cultural crisis of the *Abendland*, Márai still felt that he had to stay true to humanism, to his bourgeois roots, as the bourgeoisie was "the best human phenomenon that modern, Western civilisation produced."⁹⁶ Still in Hungary, he criticised Western Europe for not having been able to hold onto the humanist spirit. On the continent, he argued, where the Renaissance and the Reformation manifested themselves for the first time, where the human being and not the System ruled, in Switzerland, Italy, and France, there was no human component, there was no self-critique or moral reflection.⁹⁷ This, according to him, could be found in Central Europe.

In Hungary, however, "the thread of continuity in bourgeois culture had been severed."⁹⁸ The changing politics, the communists taking control of society, his ever more limited freedom: in the end, Márai had to make a choice between two evils, a choice that to him was irrevocable as long as the Communists ruled. That is, either he would stay in Hungary where he understood the language and where others understood him, yet, where his freedom was threatened; or he would leave for the

⁹⁴ cf. Márai *Bekenntnisse eines Bürgers* p. 419

⁹⁵ cf. Márai *Land, land!* p. 214

⁹⁶ Márai *Land, land!* pp. 102/3

⁹⁷ cf. Márai *Land, land!* p. 223

⁹⁸ Szegedy-Maszák 'Age of Bourgeois Society' p. 248

West, where Culture had disappeared, but freedom reigned. He chose the latter, arguing: “The value of every human being, of every people can be measured by the price he is prepared to pay for freedom.”⁹⁹ In his case, freedom meant giving up his homeland, his language, and his readership. Yet, freedom and human dignity were Márai’s highest values and they could no longer be found in Hungary. In 1948, he took the train to freedom and never returned to his country of birth. True Europe? It was a cultural community that meant everything to Márai and that was synonymous to life. Nevertheless, after 1945 and particularly after 1948, European reality had changed. It was no more than a memory of an extinguishing civilisation.¹⁰⁰

For Central European Christians and above all the Catholics who addressed Europe as a Christian unity, the spiritual situation was not as bleak as that of the liberals although their political situation was at least as precarious. They were, at least, able to keep faith in their traditional historical interpretation of Europe emphasising the religious (Christian) roots of Europe. Both Nazism and communism could be denounced as non-Christian aberrations from the European path. They did, however, soon encounter difficulties in openly discussing Europe as the Communists sought to decrease its influence.¹⁰¹ Symbolic for the communist fight against the Church and the Church’s resistance to communism is the Catholic primate of Hungary, Cardinal József Mindszenty. He was arrested in December 1948 and sentenced for life in 1949 in one of the show trials of the time. During the Hungarian Revolt of 1956, he was set

⁹⁹ Márai. In: Zeltner *Ein Leben in Bildern* p. 146, my translation

¹⁰⁰ cf. Márai *Land, land!* p. 237

¹⁰¹ In ‘Europas Platz im sozialistischen Polen’ José M. Faraldo points out the various journals and news papers, in which the Catholics, i.e. Jerzy Turowicz, discussed their Christian visions of Europe: *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Weekly Standard), *Tygodnik Warszawski* (Warsaw Weekly), and *Odnova* (Regeneration) (cf. Faraldo e.a. ‘Europas Platz’ p. 200). For other articles addressing the Central European discussions on Christian Europe, see also: Domnitz ‘Europäische Vorstellungswelten’ pp. 73-75; and Kieniewicz ‘The Eastern Frontier’ pp. 83-90

free, but sought asylum in the American Embassy when the Red Army bloodily crushed the revolution. He would stay there until 1971.

A similar battle between the Church and the Communist state raged in Slovenia. Here, many Catholics were forced to emigrate settling in Argentina. One of them was Milan Komar who is also known as Emilio Komar. He emigrated in 1948 and settled in Buenos Aires. He can be said to be the main anti-Communist, (neo-)Catholic ideologist of emigration. As a philosopher, he was a specialist in the German Enlightenment thinkers, Christian Wolff and Immanuel Kant, and the German idealist philosopher, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel.¹⁰² Firmly rooted in this cultural tradition, he took up themes of Catholic universalism and defended a united, Christian Europe. He always insisted on the importance of personal life, ethics, metaphysical roots of moral goodness, the crisis of values in contemporary society, a lack of awareness of sin and moral relativism, and freedom.¹⁰³ These themes are central themes of the Catholic or Christian discourse on Europe and can also be found in works of Christian intellectuals who stayed at home. A return of this discourse can be observed during the 1970s, most notably in Poland.

The rising force of Central Europe were, of course, the communists. The notion of Europe was not on their priority list, to put it mildly. The Polish sociologist Józef Chłasiński criticised the Marxist view of Europe because the Marxists only think in technological-scientific categories and do not discuss Europe in any other but in

¹⁰² See for more information: <http://www.sabiduriacristiana.com.ar/>, last access 20 September 2011.

¹⁰³ Guadalupe Caldani de Ojea Quintana 'In Memoriam, Emilio Komar (1921-2006)', URL: <http://www.sabiduriacristiana.com.ar/>, last access 20 September 2011.

geographical terms.¹⁰⁴ This was an accurate observation. The Communist parties of Central Europe generally used Europe as an empty slogan. Often it popped up to counter the starting Western European unification process and the claims of Western and exiled intellectuals equating Europe with Western civilisation. Attempts at creating a genuinely communist positive ideology of Europe were rare and unsuccessful. In 1947, the Polish economist Jerzy Tepicht argued in the party's Central Committee to use the notion of Europe with its history and culture of revolution, class struggle, and general progress as a tool against America that lacked this history and culture. He was, however, instantly reprimanded by a colleague that it would be unwise to use the term Europe in this way, as in Poland the wish to be European was usually not directed against America but against the East.¹⁰⁵ Tepicht's attempt to use history – particularly the revolutions of 1848 – as the basis of a communist notion of Europe was an exception. In Central Europe, the historical mode of claiming belonging to Europe kept on residing with the conservatives and liberals.¹⁰⁶

There was, however, another sense in which Europe could be used by and made to conform with communism. This corresponded to the philosophical model of defining Europe. Here, communism with its promise of modernisation became the true bearer of European values. Jerzy Tepicht pronounced this view when he stipulated that the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution was to be used to represent the USSR

¹⁰⁴ cf. Chałasiński 'Polen liegt in Europa' p. 212

¹⁰⁵ See: Faraldo 'Die Hüterin der europäischen Zivilisation' p. 108

¹⁰⁶ This is not to say that the Communists did not use history, especially revolutions, as a tool of identity formation. They did this, however, mostly in the national context and without creating a history of an ever-progressive Europe. This would have been difficult to argue for Russia.

as the “guardian of the best traditions of European civilization and humanism.”¹⁰⁷

This reasoning consciously turned the prevailing view upside down: here, the real Europe lay in the East and brought culture and modernity to Central Europe. At the time, the belief that communism would bring modernisation to Central Europe and consequently ‘europeanise’ the region was not confined to communists alone.¹⁰⁸ Liberalism and capitalism had modernised Western Europe. Industrialisation, economic progress, and a representative, legitimate, and modern political organisation had brought prosperity and wealth to the West. Central and Eastern Europe stayed behind.¹⁰⁹ World War II, however, had severely damaged Europe’s reputation as the home base of human dignity, civilisation, individual freedom, and democracy. The ideology, then, that in the twentieth century attracted so many people, who hoped it would improve their lives and economic, political, and social position, was communism.¹¹⁰

As we have seen in the case of the Polish Central Committee, there was one problem to this solution: terminology. While it was no problem to challenge the Western European claim to values such as freedom and democracy on the grounds of Marxist ideology, it was a hard sell to actually call the USSR the real Europe. This is one of the reasons why this argument was seldom put forward in explicit form. In contrast to

¹⁰⁷ Tepicht in: Faraldo ‘Die Hüterin der europäischen Zivilisation’ p. 108, my translation

¹⁰⁸ A book, which has to be referred to in this context, is François Furet’s astonishing and beautifully written book on communism and the attraction it had as a modernisation ideology, the origins of which can be found in the French Revolution: *Le passé d’une illusion. Essai sur l’idée communiste au XXe siècle* (1995).

¹⁰⁹ See the book by Iván T. Berend *Central and Eastern Europe, 1944-1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (1995).

¹¹⁰ See also: Lee Congdon’s *Seeing Red*. In his treatise on Hungarian émigré intellectuals, Congdon demonstrates that whereas most intellectuals were clearly condemning Nazism and Hitler Germany, they held different opinions towards communism and Stalin’s USSR. “Communism, they recognized, raised and provided an answer to a question that went to the heart of what it means to be human. (...) As a, perhaps *the*, secular religion of the twentieth century, communism therefore stirred emotions as much as it prompted thought and action” (Congdon *Seeing Red* p. 7).

the historic model of defining Europe, the philosophical model was able to function without the explicit reference to the term Europe. This was the case in the communist concept of Europe of the after-war era. Instead of trying to change the ingrained meaning of the term Europe they reduced it to a geographical expression and substituted its substance by modernisation and progress.

While the Soviets were surprisingly absent from the federation plans, on the cultural and intellectual level it was obvious that the relationship between Central Europe and Russia had to be newly gauged. This adjustment most notably took place in Czechoslovakia and also shows an interesting use of Europe and its cultural inheritance. 'East' and 'West,' 'Europe' and 'Russia' became watchwords in the post-war intellectual debate. Politically and intellectually, Czechoslovakia sought to be a bridge between East and West.¹¹¹ The socialist and communist oriented intellectuals argued that much of the country's interwar policies and political and philosophical interpretations had taken Western models as their example, but the (Slavic) East was a definitive part of Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak identity as well. They argued that the choice was no longer between East *or* West, but had to combine the two. Moreover, civilisation had travelled East. After Western civilisation had lost much of its credence following World War II, the Soviet Union and Marxist ideology were the true inheritors of Antiquity and the French Revolution.¹¹² They represented a bigger Europe. In addition, the Czechoslovak liberal-democratic intellectuals, even if oriented towards the West, did not dare to fully ignore the East.¹¹³ Trying to convey a

¹¹¹ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 194

¹¹² Ibid. pp. 203/4

¹¹³ See: Ibid. p. 210. An example of this hesitancy to fully commit themselves to a future oriented towards Europe is a debate about the future of Czechoslovakia taking place in 1948 in the democratic

message of intellectual unity, socialism, democracy, and humanism were perceived as three pillars on which the Czechoslovak state was supposed to be built.¹¹⁴ In 1948, however, with the Communists seizing power, the West including the values and philosophical currents it represented disappeared from the public and intellectual debate.

In sum, the first years after the war still witnessed a certain plurality of views. Europe was discussed in various ways, mostly influenced by a specific political or spiritual worldview. Some of those expressions followed the paths treaded during the interwar period. This is especially true for the various plans for political cooperation on a (Central) European level. They came to nothing as Stalin did not allow for cooperation, integration, or federalisation projects as they were developing in Western Europe. He propagated a national discourse and emphasised the importance of the national traditions of the respective countries. In the intellectual sphere it were the hard-pressed Catholics who could most easily maintain their traditional historical argument defining Europe mainly as Christian heritage. Bourgeois liberal thinkers, on the other hand, had to grapple with the breakdown of European civilisation they had idealised. They kept on defending these ideas placing the Central European countries in a Western European cultural sphere of influence, albeit with mounting

newspaper *Lidová demokracie*. 'Československá kultura mezi Západem a Východem.' (Czechoslovak Culture between East and West'). *Lidová Demokracie* 4:1 (1948); 4:3 (1948), pp. 11-15

¹¹⁴ See: Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 211. *Kulturní jednota a její program (Cultural Unity and its Programme)* by Jan Blahoslav Kozák, Ladislav Štoll, and František Kovárna (1947) is a programme in which several points of view towards the cultural and political future of Czechoslovakia are expressed: socialist, social-democratic, and humanist. Illustrative, too, are the critical writings of Václav Černý who would later also sympathise with the *Charta '77* movement: Černý, Václav. 'Mezi Východem a Západem.' ('Between East and West'). *Kritický měsíčník (Critical Monthly)*, 6:3-5 (1945); Černý, Václav. *Skutečnost svoboda: Kulturněpolitické stati a polemiky z let 1945–1948 (The fact of freedom. Cultural political treatises and discussion in the years 1945-1948)*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1995.

disappointment of the West and growing pessimism about their own predicament. Their hope of reconstructing European civilisation out of the particular situation of their region soon vanished in the political homogenisation of Central Europe under Communist control.

This did not mean, however, that Western Europe held a monopoly on the notion of Europe – even though over the years Western Europe became the ‘desired’ Europe for many Central Europeans. On the contrary, the Communists developed an – often unexpressed – counter-model that could claim plausibility far beyond party circles. To the Communists, Europe was a (geographical) fact. The socialist community represented a kind of ‘Ersatz-Europa’; it represented a Europe that after World War II had to be re-established, a Europe that stood for peace and security. It was the ‘European socialist countries’, which defended the ‘true’ European culture against cultural aggression of the Americans and against faulty western capitalism. In all countries, the Church resisted longest to this perception of Europe, but finally had to give in to the Communists.¹¹⁵ When the Iron Curtain tightened and the division of the continent into East and West solidified, the notion of Europe slowly vanished into the background.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See: Wandycz *The Price of Freedom* pp. 248-250

¹¹⁶ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 235; Reijnen ‘For a True Europe’ p. 111

Stalin's Rule over the Central European Mind, 1948-1956

During the ensuing Stalinist period (1948-1956), all thinking was “subjected to crude manipulation.”¹¹⁷ The language used by intellectuals, scholars, politicians, and the media changed and so did “the place and role of culture.”¹¹⁸ The Soviets were in control of what was said (about Europe, but not only) and what not, what became known to the wider public and what not (for example, with regards to the political developments and cooperation plans of the Western European nations). Moreover, “Western modernism, diagnosed as a symptom of capitalist cultural dissolution, played a vital role in advancing the socialist realist cause.”¹¹⁹ To strengthen the legitimacy of the new leaders and promote internal cohesion within the Soviet bloc, the Communists used a strong anti-imperialist, anti-cosmopolitan, anti-German, and anti-European propaganda.¹²⁰ They sought to rule out all pluralism, cosmopolitanism, and independent thinking. But the Communists also found the support of many intellectuals, especially Jewish intellectuals who wanted to put World War II and the Holocaust behind them and support the good cause of a new modern organisation of society.¹²¹ Communism held the promise of creating a new and better modern society and to be radically different from the German occupiers. Intellectuals supportive of the communist idea and promise accepted a certain rigidity of the system. That is, in

¹¹⁷ Valkenier ‘Official Marxist Historiography’ p. 663

¹¹⁸ Valuch ‘Cultural and Social History of Hungary’ p. 249

¹¹⁹ Castillo ‘East as True West’ p. 94

¹²⁰ cf. Ahonen *After the Expulsion* p. 7. One could also read Mihály Szegedy-Maszák interesting article on bourgeois intellectual life in Hungary from 1920 to 1948. He states that in Hungary “[t]he desire to call to account those in the Arrow-Cross movement who had actively aided the Germans during the occupation turned into a political witch-hunt in order to root out all those who were unwilling to cooperate with the Communists” (Szegedy-Maszák ‘The Aged of Bourgeois Society’ p. 241). Anti-German propaganda served the goal of winning skeptics of communism for their course. And many bourgeois, liberal-democratic intellectuals did so or were purged. See also: Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* pp. 244/45

¹²¹ See, for example: Schatz *The Generation* pp. 211-242

order to reach an objective, standardised, and scientific worldview, everything had to be explained in terms of class struggle or class determination and from a materialist outlook.¹²²

This strict and hard rule following the Soviet model had consequences for the thinking about Europe. Europe as a topic remained present in people's minds and still formed an important background to political or cultural discourses developed during that time, yet it was now mostly phrased in terms of 'East' and 'West' – without the reference to 'Europe'.¹²³ When the 'West' claimed a monopoly on the idea of Europe, the Central European intellectuals supportive of communism started countering their arguments. They claimed the Eastern region to be representative of the idea of Europe. Whole branches in academia (i.e. ethnographers, linguists, historians) sought to prove "the proto-Soviet origins of the modern West"; they aimed at incorporating "the West as a Soviet cultural protectorate."¹²⁴ True Europe? That was the Soviet Union.¹²⁵

Debates on Western European cultural traditions and Western European values slowly disappeared from the public scene. The West as such became a far-away land, difficult to reach: "Against the backdrop of Stalinist show trials, intellectual censorship, and sealed-off borders, Czechs and Slovaks during the 1950s watched as the "West" was transformed from the once familiar to the imagined."¹²⁶ And not only the Czechs and

¹²² See: Satterwhite *Varieties of Humanist Marxism* p. 137: Marxist-Leninism "stressed that man was conditioned – indeed, determined – by the social and historical forces arising from the mode of production and the production-relations."

¹²³ cf. Reijnen 'For a True Europe' p. 113

¹²⁴ Castillo 'East as True West' p. 99

¹²⁵ Nejedlý 'O Europě' ('About Europe') p. 69. See also: Reijnen 'For a True Europe' p. 116. Other intellectuals taking part in the Czech discourse on East and West and on socialism were the literary critic Václav Černý, the Lutheran theologian Josef Lukl Hromádka, and the more radical socialist thinker, Ladislav Štoll.

¹²⁶ Bren 'Mirror, mirror, on the Wall' p. 172

Slovaks watched, also the Hungarians and the Poles. Subjective autonomy, intellectual freedom, and democratic principles were no longer to be found in the Soviet satellite states.¹²⁷ The communist leaders tried to reduce the influence of the intellectuals through incorporating them into their system. Intellectuals either had to embrace communism, or sit at home like a glasshouse plant. Moreover, many of the intellectuals (writers, artists, scholars, etc.) who did not follow the official line of the Communist Party, the Marxist-Leninist ideology, lost their jobs or had to fear imprisonment. The dissidents or deviationists were made invisible by the state. Ideas of Europe and federal plans were discredited or denounced as corrupt American imperialism.¹²⁸ Instead, the nation became the preferred subject of examination. Consequently, critical accounts of the Soviet controlled region in relation to Europe can mainly be found in texts of Central Europeans who left their country of birth during this period.

A classic example describing the developments or changes in the social and intellectual sphere under Stalinist rule, including the intellectual fascination for Marxist-Leninism, is *The Captive Mind* (1953) by the Nobel Prize winning Polish author Czesław Miłosz. Working in the diplomatic service – he served as a cultural-attaché of the People’s Republic of Poland in the United States first and from 1950 in Paris –, he became increasingly critical of the communist regime. In 1951, he broke with the Polish government and sought political asylum in France, where he would

¹²⁷ See remark by the Polish-born philosopher Leszek Kołakowski in Vladimir Tismaneanu’s *Reinventing Politics. Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (1992): “The object of a totalitarian system is to destroy all forms of communal life that are not imposed by the state and closely controlled by it, so that individuals are isolated from one another and become mere instruments in the hands of the state” (Kołakowski in: Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* p. 29). See also: Valuch ‘A Cultural and Social History of Hungary’ pp. 249-251 & pp. 292/93

¹²⁸ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* pp. 250/51

stay until his emigration to the United States in 1960. In Miłosz's own words his book sought to illustrate "the vulnerability of the twentieth-century mind to seduction by socio-political doctrines and its readiness to accept totalitarian terror for the sake of a hypothetical future."¹²⁹ Modeled on his own friends, Miłosz depicted four types of intellectuals who became dependant on the communist state without necessarily becoming members of the Communist Party. They supported the official ideology either out of real conviction or – in his Jewish example – because of hate of Nazism and capitalism or out of plain pragmatism. In reference to Europe, Miłosz interestingly mixed new vocabularies of the interwar and post-war eras. The new notions of 'East' and 'West' featured prominently. At the same time, he depicted Central and Eastern Europe as a region that was now "flooded by the New Belief of the East"¹³⁰ – an East that is never called European. It is a phraseology that reflects the geo-political situation of the time, but is more critical and more Europe-oriented than the 'East/West' language used by communist intellectuals.¹³¹

Socialism with a Human Face, 1956-1968

The year 1956 marked a significant break in the Soviet block. Khrushchev's famous speech denouncing the crimes of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, caused excitement in Central Europe.¹³² In Poland, this culminated in mass protests of the workers and many debates among

¹²⁹ Miłosz *The Captive Mind* p. vii

¹³⁰ Miłosz *De geknechte geest* pp. 15/6

¹³¹ See also: Kecskemeti 'Coercion from within' p. 275. Besides, at the time, the French communists did not like Miłosz's critical tone at all. It did not fit the image they had of communism.

¹³² cf. Seton-Watson *The "Sick Heart" of Modern Europe* p. 57. See also: Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* pp. 58-61

and publications of the intelligentsia expressing their dissatisfaction with the communist regime. Following the lead of Poland, citizens of Budapest and subsequently of other Hungarian cities revolted against the communist regime, which would ultimately lead to what we know now as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. At its peak, Imre Nagy, who was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary, expressed Hungary's wish to leave the Warsaw pact and become a neutral country. He appealed to the United Nations for help that never materialised, and in the end, the Soviet Army bloodily crushed the revolution.¹³³

Yet, despite the ensuing persecutions, many intellectuals started debating new ideas, ignoring the Marxist-Leninist ideological standards and requirements. They could do so retaining their basic belief in communism, because Nikita Khrushchev "aimed to distinguish itself from its Stalinist predecessor (...), promising [in 1961] that the 1960s would usher in the era of communism – meaning mass political activism, international respect, and the fulfillment of dreams of abundance for all."¹³⁴ This did not mean, however, that Europe became a topic of intellectual concern: "There was no knowledge, no books, no information, no radio [on Europe]. The thinking remained abstract and was based on philosophical treatises."¹³⁵ Moreover, many intellectuals still believed in the communist system as a valuable and honest alternative to the Western model. Until 1968, one can therefore speak of a renaissance of Marxism in the form of Marxist humanism or redemptive Marxism.

¹³³ For a well-written and informative reconstruction of the events of 1956 in Hungary, see: Dalos *1956*

¹³⁴ Gorusch 'From Iron Curtain to Silver Screen' p. 155

¹³⁵ Interview with Ágnes Heller by the author on 21 Oct. 2011 in Jena.

At the same time, international cooperation increased as the robust communist nationalism of the 1950s softened to some extent. Guests from the Warsaw Pact states as well as the West were invited to international conferences.¹³⁶ Especially in Czechoslovakia intellectuals started to reflexively and critically analyse the role of Czech culture in an international context and to open up Czech literary and cultural science, Slavic studies, etc. to the outside world.¹³⁷ Historians sought to incorporate a national history in an international context. The medievalist František Graus advocated less provincialism and more openness for “deepening of the European and worldwide orientation of our science.”¹³⁸ Magazines like *Svetova literatura* (World Literature), established in 1956, and *Literární noviny* (Literary Newspapers) would offer a platform for broader, though mostly left-wing discussions on Europe.

The position Jaroslav Bidlo had propagated in his debate with Halecki at a conference in Brussels in 1923, emphasising the existence of two separate worlds, i.e. the Roman-German world with its Catholic Church on the one hand and the Greek-Slavic world with its Orthodox Church on the other, was now criticised by a new generation of specialists in Slavic history.¹³⁹ In line with Graus’ wish to be less provincial and more open to the world, they sought to integrate Slavic history in a broader European history. In an article entitled ‘Eastern Europe in European History’, Milan Šmerda was able to incorporate the relevant literature that had been published in the West, including the emigré Oskar Halecki. He noted that the current ‘politicised’ or

¹³⁶ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 256. See also: Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* p. 91

¹³⁷ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 259

¹³⁸ Graus ‘Světové dějiny a úkoly československé historiografie’ (World History and the Tasks of Czechoslovak Historiography), quoted in: Hadler ‘Drachen und Drachentöter’ p. 162, my translation

¹³⁹ See the book *Slavistika a slovanství* (Slavic Studies and Slavism), edited by Milan Kudělka (1968). Especially Macůrek’s chapter ‘Slavistika a historická věda’ (Slavic Studies and Historical Science) pp. 9-44 is important here.

‘ideologised’ notions ‘East’ and ‘West’ did not have any connection to historically relevant divisions, be it geopolitical, political, economic or cultural.¹⁴⁰ Europe was not a given space, but a struggle between ‘European’ and ‘non-European’ elements. And this struggle took place on the margins of Europe, so implicitly characterising the Soviet Union as non-European.¹⁴¹ Other contributions to the volume *Slavistika a slovanství* (1968) would look into the possibilities of the notion of ‘Eastern Europe’, criticising the provincialism of Czech Slavic sciences for concentrating mainly on Czechoslovakia. In relation to the 1950s, these examples show the degree of intellectual opening of the following decade. On the whole, however, references to Europe remained rare and tentative. There was no marked resurgence of the theme as can be witnessed in the most important intellectual endeavour of those years, Marxist humanism.

Independent from each other, yet sharing a broadly similar historical background and context, various groups of intellectuals in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia developed comparable revisionist theories. All wished to transcend existing socialism, hence developing a humanist critique of Stalinism.¹⁴² The first apex of Marxist humanism developed in Poland. Here, the so-called ‘Warsaw Salon’ consisting of intellectual historians moved away from the (strict) use of the Marxist-Leninist methodology. Members of this ‘Salon’ were the philosophers Leszek Kołakowski and Bronisław Baczko, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, and sociologist

¹⁴⁰ Milan Šmerda, in: Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 258

¹⁴¹ cf. Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* p. 58

¹⁴² cf. Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* p. 176. ‘Marxist humanism,’ ‘Marxist revisionism,’ ‘critical theory’ or ‘critical Marxism,’ even ‘creative Marxism’ are various notions used to describe the same neo-Marxist movement or critique of classic Marxism. The Frankfurt School (Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas) is the Western counterpart of this movement and its members – although by then many resided in the USA – participated in the Central European debates.

and historian of ideas Jerzy Szacki.¹⁴³ “Their critique of the ruling elite was rooted not in nostalgia for the old regime but rather in the belief that the true values of socialism had been forgotten by communist bureaucrats interested only in the perpetuation and expansion of their power.”¹⁴⁴ Their aim was to change the system from within. They all rejected the dogmatic theory of dialectical Marxism and tried to transform historical materialism into some kind of hermeneutics. In the years that followed, these intellectuals consequently criticised any attempt to represent a single and unique objective truth. Instead, the relation of man to the world around him, his activity and ability to transform reality, the universality of man, morality of choice, and finally the question of freedom became key issues.

Developments in other Central European countries were more modest; yet, in all countries the intellectuals gained more freedoms and started thinking along similar lines to the arguments used by their Polish colleagues. In Czechoslovakia, conservative communists led the country during many years and took only small steps towards relaxation and reform. Only from 1963 onwards, Czechoslovak media enjoyed more freedom, censorship was eased, and concessions towards journalists, historians, economists, and philosophers were granted.¹⁴⁵ Two Marxist humanist philosophers, Karel Kosík and Ivan Sviták, took the lead in rethinking the ruling

¹⁴³ cf. Górný ‘From the splendid past’ p. 110

¹⁴⁴ Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* p. 63

¹⁴⁵ See also: Crampton *Eastern Europe* pp. 319-325. 1963 was the year that the Novotný regime was openly challenged for the first time. Moreover, “[t]he event that most undermined belief in the Communist Party and in the system as a whole as it was then constituted was the series of revelations in 1963 that the Slánsky trials [a 1952 show trial in which Rudolf Slánsky and 13 other leading communists were accused of conspiring against the state, M.E.] were not what they had been represented to be. In the legal profession, these revelations about the trials prompted a rethinking of the problem of the nature and role of law in a socialist society, whereas demands were heard from the philosophers for more room in which to carry on their activity” (Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* p. 132).

ideology and both were active in public debates on the new direction of arts and culture.¹⁴⁶ In 1956/57, they had started debating their views on the new role and content of philosophy and culture in the Czech newspaper *Literární noviny*, only to be abruptly silenced by conservative communists.¹⁴⁷ Still, both revisionist Marxists were allowed to publish.

Despite the break with the Soviet Union, the intellectual and cultural functioning of society in Yugoslavia could be described as Stalinist well into the 1950s.¹⁴⁸ From then on, the pressure of state control and censorship was eased and until the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Yugoslav intellectuals enjoyed relative freedom. The liberal movement within the socialist party had become stronger, leading to “the Reform” in 1965, which provided a legal framework for “market socialism.”¹⁴⁹ Gathered around the journal *Praxis*, which was set up in 1964, Yugoslav intellectuals such as Gajo Petrović, Svetozar Stojanović, Predrag Vranicki, and Mihailo Marković developed Marxist humanist theories, though they did not form a school and did not formulate a coherent doctrine. There was no institutional research centre. They acted as a kind of artistic group, understood themselves as avant-garde, and communicated with the wider public through manifestos and their journal. In their thinking, they would

¹⁴⁶ See also: Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* p. 136

¹⁴⁷ Bažant, Bažantova, Starn *The Czech Reader* p. 340

¹⁴⁸ See: Wachtel *Making a Nation* p. 146. “[T]he Communists attempted to enforce (and more or less succeeded until about 1953) a highly centralized and rigid cultural model. (...) [L]iterature was expected to reflect either the experience of the war years or the reality of the socialist country that was being created.” Writers were considered to be engineers of the human souls.

¹⁴⁹ Crampton *Eastern Europe* p. 309. Edvard Kardelj was deeply convinced that in reforming the system, federal Yugoslavia was evolving towards a true socialist state. “Yugoslavia should make a decisive step forward from a centralized, nation-making state to a federation of sovereign nation-states. It was only then that both the interwar concept of Yugoslavism and the Soviet model of the centralized state could be defeated in reality” (Jović *Yugoslavia* p. 63). The future of Socialism could be best preserved through the equality among the Yugoslav nations. To the political leader, the other socialist or communist nations, which he considered to be statist and centralist, were examples of how not to fulfill the socialist revolution. They were actually a danger to that revolution, more so even than “the imperialist forces” of the Western world (Jović *Yugoslavia* p. 67).

override the Stalinist system and search for a new, legitimate theoretical socialist model, criticising the political, bureaucratic system and Marxist-Leninism. This “critique of dialectical and historical materialism was encouraged in Yugoslavia only to the extent that the thrust of the criticism was directed against the Soviets,” and as such it was accepted earlier than in other Central European countries, but would also be censured from 1975.¹⁵⁰

In Hungary, too, party control was relaxed during the early 1960s and in later years, more reforms would follow. The Kádár regime “offered not to infringe on private lives, ease back on its repression and deliver a gradual improvement in living conditions in return for the populace’s surrendering of the right to political expression, [and] gradually won tacit acceptance from essentially all the country’s intellectuals.”¹⁵¹ In this context, the so-called ‘Budapest School’ developed, a group of philosophers associated with György Lukács. They started thinking about an (theoretical) alternative to Stalinism and existing socialism. Similar to their neighbours, this group of scholars “found such alternative in the philosophy of Marxist humanism.”¹⁵² Among them were thinkers such as Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, Mihály Vajda, György Márkus, Mária Márkus, and András Hegedűs. Seeking to overcome strict historical determinism and transcend the existing social and economic system, these philosophers, and especially Ágnes Heller, would emphasise free human activity and “the free development of all the capacities and senses of the human being, the free and many-sided activity of every individual.”¹⁵³ They pleaded

¹⁵⁰ Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* p. 178

¹⁵¹ Valuch ‘A Cultural and Social History of Hungary’ p. 296

¹⁵² Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* p. 74

¹⁵³ Heller, in: Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* p. 85

for a genuine reform of the system and a renewal of socialist democracy. Their influence would ultimately reach far beyond the Hungarian national borders.

In an interview, Ágnes Heller, additionally, said that contacts between the intellectuals were established after 1956. “Resisting intellectuals of all Central European countries – the Poles, the Hungarians, the Bulgarians, the Czechoslovaks, the Yugoslavs, and the East Germans – met in their homes, at conferences, during visits to other Central European countries. These meetings enhanced an intellectual exchange of views.”¹⁵⁴ According to Heller, the opposition was not directly political; it had an artistic character. Only during the Korčula Summer School meetings, which took place from the mid-1960s and were of formative importance, dissident protests became political, though of a mainly theoretical character.¹⁵⁵ These direct international contacts with the Praxis group or the ‘Warsaw Salon’ were impossible to maintain after 1968. Nevertheless, there were more sources available, sometimes legally, sometimes as Samizdat, underground literature.¹⁵⁶ “Before that, under Rákosi,” the Hungarian philosopher stated, “there was no access to either Marxist early writing, or

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Ágnes Heller by the author on 21 Oct. 2011 in Jena.

¹⁵⁵ The summer schools in Korčula were organised by the Yugoslav *Praxis* group. Many critical philosophers of the political left from both East and West (i.e. Jürgen Habermas, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm) attended these Summer Schools. Korčula, which was the only institution where these intellectuals could discuss their ideas freely within a European context and where international contacts were established, aimed to provide a platform to exchange views between thinkers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. For all participants, these meetings were of great importance and very productive. See also: Qilin ‘On Budapest School Aesthetics’ p. 108; Gruenwald *The Yugoslav Search for Man* p. 64

¹⁵⁶ Friederike Kind-Kovács’s work *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (2014) on *Tamizdat* and *Samizdat* literature and literary networks gives an excellent insight into the role the Central European intellectuals played after 1956 in making the intellectual activities of ‘the Other Europe’ known to a Western public, but also to a wider Eastern public by being smuggled back into the Soviet-ruled countries. *Tamizdat* refers to literature ‘published-over-there’, that is, published in the West or in exile. *Samizdat* means literature that was self-published and uncensored, thus, non-official. It refers to banned or government-suppressed literature or secret printing press. During the Soviet period it was published, distributed, and disseminated in the underground. See also: Kind-Kovács ‘An “Other Europe”’ pp. 267-299

philosophical literature after Ludwig Feuerbach. But after 1956, Lukács was sent books from his German publisher and we could read more widely.”¹⁵⁷

The 1956-1968 period, therefore, was one of the last occasions at which a considerable amount of intellectuals would seek to formulate a legitimate Eastern European socialist-democratic alternative to the Western liberal-capitalist model. Many of these thinkers would have a big impact on Western leftist thinking and Marxist theory. Nevertheless, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the renewed persecutions of Jewish intellectuals in Poland, revisionist philosophers could no longer work or publish in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Many professors, students, and dissenting intellectuals, just like most of the Jews who remained in Poland after 1945 were either forced to leave the country, or imprisoned or discriminated otherwise. Kołakowski, Bauman and Baczko, who were denounced by the government as incorrigible revisionists, had to leave the country.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, there was no possibility to meet any of these thinkers in international summer schools or conferences anymore. The humanist Marxists’ belief in the system’s ability to reform was shattered. After György Lukács’ death in 1971, additionally, the position of Heller, Fehér, Markús, etc. became increasingly problematic and the members of the Budapest School were persecuted for their work, which ultimately forced them into exile.¹⁵⁹ The Yugoslav journal *Praxis* was closed in 1975.

None of the Marxist revisionists in Central Europe, however, had understood themselves as dissidents; they were communists or socialists and also voiced their

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Ágnes Heller by the author on 21 Oct. 2011 in Jena.

¹⁵⁸ cf. Walicki ‘Intellectual Elites’ p. 295

¹⁵⁹ cf. Valuch ‘A Cultural and Social History of Hungary’ p. 302. See also: Falk *The Dilemmas of Dissidence* pp. 122-124

critique of Stalinism from the communist point of view. They sought to establish a philosophical re-foundation of Marxism and provide a response to the problems of socialist reality. This response had a mainly theoretical character and served the goal of opening up a utopian space and a way out of historical determination. They restrained from a larger public and political engagement. In the eloquent words of Adam Michnik:

The revisionist concept was based on a specific intraparty perspective. It was never formulated into a political program. It assumed that the system of power could be humanized and democratized and that the official Marxist doctrine was capable of assimilating contemporary arts and social sciences. The revisionists wanted to act within the framework of the communist party and Marxist doctrine. They wanted to transform “from within” the doctrine and the party in the direction of reform and common sense.¹⁶⁰

Europe was no theme in this most important intellectual movement in Central Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. Since the 1950s, explicitly talking about Europe in any meaningful way had been crowded out by the official doctrine and had become an exercise of non-communist exiles. In addition, over time the divide into East and West became so ingrained that it was difficult to imagine a world without it. Basically, the notion of Europe had moved so far away that it was not a problem for the Marxist humanists who worried about totally different issues. Their silence on Europe was not caused by neglect, however; rather, it can be attributed to choice. In effect, the Marxist humanists picked up and continued the post-war communist usage of the notion of Europe. That is, they defined it in philosophical terms as societal progress and prosperity.

¹⁶⁰ Michnik *Letters from Prison* p. 135

For them, Marxism still held the key for a new, alternative Europe. Surely, they did not believe anymore that the real-existing Soviet Union was the ‘new Europe’ but they kept faith in the promise of communism. As with the party ideologues of the post-war years this normative vision of Europe could go without explicit mentioning of the term. It was both voluntaristic and entirely oriented towards the future. Everyone could take part in this new version of Europe that would finally redeem the promises of the Enlightenment without succumbing to its dark sides. History, evolution, and the question of former belonging to the entity ‘Europe’ did not play any role in this scheme of thought.

This was to change fundamentally, when the basic belief in the future and redemptive power of communism evaporated after 1968. With it, ‘Ersatz-Europe’ vanished and the gaze of Central European intellectuals again settled on the actual Europe that was thought to be located on the other side of the great divide, albeit yet again in an imagined form.

I.III The Return of Europe, 1968-1990

With the announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine, the consequent loss of state sovereignty and a stricter control of society by the communist authorities a new period of repression and loss of freedom set in. The repercussions of the Prague Spring could be felt all over Central and Eastern Europe. Whereas the communist party leaders had

been relatively lenient towards intellectuals criticising the system and seeking alternatives until the end of the 1960s, this changed in the 1970s. During the 1970s and early 1980s, dissenting intellectuals were arrested or threatened to be arrested being charged with leading oppositional activities or not following the Party line in their writings.¹⁶¹ This was not only the case in Czechoslovakia but in the whole region. In Hungary, counter-reforms and an uncompromising position towards dissenting intellectuals, notably the Budapest School, typified the 1970s.¹⁶² In Poland, 1968 saw the purge of dissenting intellectuals, notably of Jews who were forced out of public life and into exile. Even Yugoslavia experienced an ‘authoritarian turn’ in the years 1971–72, when the reformist leaderships of Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia were removed from office and a period of ideological repression began.¹⁶³

From the late 1970s onwards, however, most communist regimes loosened their grip on economic and intellectual life opening up spaces for critical thought and action that did not challenge the regime directly, thus allowing for the possibility of accommodation. In this environment, ‘Charter 77’, a manifesto by Czechoslovak critical intellectuals, became hugely successful rallying the support of more than 1300 intellectuals. Instead of seeking to overthrow the government or to change its policies, the movement “saw itself as a ‘moral challenge’ to the cynicism of officials, to the

¹⁶¹ When I talk about dissenting intellectuals in this chapter or the opposition groups or movements of the 1970s and 1980s (boundaries between the two have become fluid in this period), I follow the definition of Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs as put forward in their *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe*. They define dissidence as: “All discourses and activities critical of the regime that constituted, or wished to constitute, an autonomous sphere of public, political and cultural communication outside the official institutions of the party state and which in so doing openly denied the claim of the regime to full control of public life.” They further view *Samizdat* as the systematic site of dissidence. See: Pollack & Wielgohs ‘Introduction’ p. xiii

¹⁶² See: Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* pp. 74-76

¹⁶³ cf. Gow and Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 58

apathy of the public, and to the empty materialism of both.”¹⁶⁴ It asked for civil rights and established contacts with the West during the 1980s. From the late 1970s, Hungary changed its economic policies and allowed for private initiative¹⁶⁵ as well as granting its intellectuals more freedom than enjoyed elsewhere in the region.¹⁶⁶ In return, Hungarian intellectuals were not allowed to criticise or question the regime and its policies and could not partake in any decision-making. In Yugoslavia, it was Tito’s death in 1980 that heralded the diminishing control of society by the communists. In contrast to the other countries, in Poland an open battle erupted between repressive and opposition forces. Here, new forms of thinking and of protesting reached a climax when Solidarity (*Solidarność*) took to the streets in 1980. The Polish trade union was founded with dissenting intellectuals closely involved and constituted a broad anti-communist movement that fought for more freedom and self-government. Yet, the counter-pressure on the intellectuals increased.¹⁶⁷ The communist government tried to repress the Solidarity movement and the flourishing intellectual life by adopting Martial Law in December 1981. In the long run, however, it had little effect. Despite the repression of the 1970s, then, the post-1968 period taken as a whole is characterised by a steady erosion of the Marxist analysis, an increasing plurality of

¹⁶⁴ Crampton *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* p. 348

¹⁶⁵ The New Economic Mechanism (NEM) had been a reform plan already approved in 1966 and implemented in 1968. But at the time it did not produce the desired results. In the late 1970s, the NEM was revived and applied with greater vigour. cf. Crampton *Eastern Europe* p. 317; p. 350

¹⁶⁶ cf. Wandycz *The Price of Freedom* p. 259

¹⁶⁷ See also: Ash *We, the People*, notably his chapter on the Polish intellectual and cultural life, pp. 106-119

views, and a growing number of Samizdat publications.¹⁶⁸ In a concealed way society liberalised.

It is in this climate of renewed repression and renewed reform, that discussions on Central Europe as well as ideas of Europe – though in the beginning only implicitly – return to the surface. Marxist ideology had lost much of its standing and the Soviet Union no longer represented a credible alternative to Western Europe, which for many became the only road to modernisation, welfare, and prosperity. In the 1970s, Central Europe was characterised by low living standards and by an economy that lagged behind. People were unsatisfied, requesting a policy change to improve the economic situation and social conditions, in practice demanding higher income and cheaper food prices. Yet, the economic arguments were joined by broader themes. Central notions of the interwar period returned in intellectual and academic debates, i.e. democracy, freedom, and individuality. In addition, Central European intellectuals took up the relatively new concept of human rights. A major factor for this was the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 by the USSR, in which it conceded each country of the Soviet Bloc the right to national sovereignty and promised to allow experimentation with the local implementation of human and civil rights, free movement of people and ideas, and cooperation and exchange in the field of culture.¹⁶⁹ In return, the West

¹⁶⁸ “Der Marxismus [bietet] nicht mehr den theoretischen Rahmen für die Reform der retardierenden ostmitteleuropäischen Gesellschaften” (Herterich and Semler *Dazwischen. Ostmitteleuropäische Reflexionen* p. 9).

¹⁶⁹ cf. Tökés *Opposition in Eastern Europe* p. xxi. In her article ‘From Communism to Democracy: the Concept of Europe in Cracow’s Press in the Years 1975-1995’, Joanna Bar states that the Helsinki Final Act “an important dividing line in the history of the twentieth century Europe, especially for the inhabitants of the eastern half of the continent” (Bar ‘From Communism to Democracy’ p. 221). Friederike Kind-Kovács relates the increased contacts between intellectuals from East and West, the growth of underground literature, and making literature from the East known to readers in the West to the Helsinki Accords, Central and Eastern European intellectuals, consequently, making their case known and seeking support from the West (cf. Kind-Kovács ‘An “Other Europe” through Literature’ pp. 267-299). And Christian Domnitz argues that Helsinki became a point of fixation for reflections on

(Western Europe, the United States, and Canada) would recognise the post-war territorial and societal status quo and the Soviet Union's political hegemony over Eastern Europe. Yet, the proceedings of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the process of détente and the final renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine in the mid-1980s opened up a space for intellectuals in Central Europe to claim their rights and set up initiatives and interest groups, i.e. peace and civil rights movements, religious communities, or lobbying groups for certain nationalities or minorities.¹⁷⁰ Referring to the Helsinki Act, these groups and movements created new discourses on freedom and human and civil rights in the region. Furthermore, Central European intellectuals (again) started to interpret individual freedom and democracy as characteristic traits of *European* development. Both became associated with European identity.

Antipolitics and the Human Rights Issue

Before considering the visions and uses of Europe more closely, it is important to outline the characteristic 'anti-political' opposition that developed in Central Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. It is this peculiar form of politics that constituted the basis of talking about Europe and deeply affected the role the notion of Europe was to play in the political and cultural discourse. The new opposition is closely connected to a generation of intellectuals who were born after 1940 and who in their youth still had

the political condition of Europe. It not only encouraged debate on human rights, but also produced visions of overcoming the East-West division, even though in the beginning the interests and ideas of the authorities might have been different ones (Domnitz 'Europäische Vorstellungen im Ostblock' p. 68).

¹⁷⁰ cf. Schlotter *Die KSZE im Ost-West-Konflikt* p. 185

taken Marxism seriously, but to whom the Prague Spring of 1968 and the subsequent loss of belief “that communism could be reformed from within”¹⁷¹ had been a key experience. They were not afraid of imprisonment and started retreating from Marxist ideology and the Marxist idea.¹⁷² Moreover, “[i]n contrast to earlier non-conformism which had been motivated by a desire to make socialist society more efficient or to bring it in line with avowed communist ideals, the new non-conformism was marked by a deep disenchantment with both existing socialism and the socialist project as such.”¹⁷³ Many intellectuals of this generation who became leaders of the opposition movements wanted to pluralise knowledge and got involved in underground publication or started lecturing in the so-called ‘underground’ or ‘flying universities’, teaching a generation of students for whom the Marxist ideology was nothing but a hollow phrase.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, the post-1968 opposition differed from its predecessor(s) in advocating not so much political, but rather social change: a so-called ‘self-limiting’ revolution.¹⁷⁵ On the one hand, this was less threatening to the political leadership.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, politics had lost its credibility in that it was not able to provide higher living standards and a flourishing economy. Change in the social situation of the population was not to be expected from that direction. Hence, those critical of the political authorities sought new ways to organise change in society: a change that was coming from below, from society itself. In the 1980s, these oppositional activities would be

¹⁷¹ Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* p. 104

¹⁷² cf. Krasnodębski ‘Generationswandel und kollektives Gedächtnis in Polen’ p. 148

¹⁷³ Bernik ‘From Imaged to Actually Existing Democracy’ p. 109

¹⁷⁴ See also: Rupnik ‘Dissent in Poland, 1968-78’ p. 95; Skilling *Samizdat and an Independent Society* p. 179; Falk *Dilemmas of Dissidence* p. 42, p. 92, p. 129

¹⁷⁵ See for an analysis of the rise of Solidarity and the ‘self-limiting revolution’: Staniszkis *Poland’s Self-Limiting Revolution* 1984

¹⁷⁶ cf. Falk *The Dilemmas of Dissidence* p. 36

described as ‘parallel society’, ‘civil society’ or ‘antipolitics’, as coined by György Konrád.¹⁷⁷

Konrád wanted independence, autonomy, and bourgeois civil liberties to become ruling values in society and sought for ways to get these. Even if one could not change the one-party rule and the membership to the Warsaw Pact, he argued, there should be ways to organise society differently. Here he proposed the strategy of ‘antipolitics’. Society should distance itself and function independently from the authorities; it should be able to constitute unity in diversity; and it should find a road back to Europe. The Hungarian author stressed the need to create and democratise independent institutions and critical individuals growing out and taking part in civil society. He put a strong emphasis on the participatory and obligatory nature of civil society. Citizens had to be engaged and active to create a true democracy, which would then not only change the societal and political sphere, but would also affect the economic and cultural ones.¹⁷⁸ Or in the words of political scientist Barbara Falk: “[A]ntipolitics is not only the primacy of local over central, individual over collective, but democracy over its alternatives, and politics over economics.”¹⁷⁹ In the 1970s and 1980s, civil society was resurrected.

¹⁷⁷ Konrád ‘Letter from Budapest.’ Antipolitics should not be confused with being apolitical. All criticism of the ruling elite and demands for freedom, rule of law, and human and civil rights were political issues. Antipolitics did not mean any politics at all. It meant a different kind of politics: a politics that consciously did not challenge the regime, but developed separately from it, in a separate sphere, as if there was no communist, authoritarian regime controlling society. “Antipolitics is the political activity of those who don’t want to be politicians and who refuse to share in power. Antipolitics is the emergence of independent forums that can be appealed to against political power; it is a counterpower that cannot take power and does not wish to. Power it has already, here and now, by reason of its moral and cultural weight” (Konrád *Antipolitics* pp. 230/31).

¹⁷⁸ See: Konrád *Antipolitics* p. 139

¹⁷⁹ Falk *Dilemmas of Dissidence* p. 306

Despite some differences in their composition regarding social background and ideological orientation, these ‘antipolitical’ opposition groups developed almost simultaneously in the Central European countries and set themselves similar objectives. Initially, this happened without coordination. Only from the end of the 1970s, representatives of opposition groups were able to meet, discuss and counsel each other and to support embattled colleagues in other countries, e.g. by open letters. During the 1980s, networks of communication became more and more intense. Through Samizdat-networks many intellectuals were able to read each other’s work, publish together, and get acquainted with ideas circulating in the neighbouring countries. Furthermore, at this time of détente, increasing contacts with the West, the Eurocommunists included, were established and intensified.¹⁸⁰

A prime example for the functioning of opposition in Central Europe during this period is Charter 77. Inspired by the Helsinki Final Act, it was founded in January 1977 and soon managed to open up a cultural, social, and indeed political public space independent from the party state. The constitutive document of Charter 77 had 241 signatories, mostly Czechs, and the numbers were steadily increasing up to a total of over 1300 by 1987.¹⁸¹ The basis of Charter 77 was the merger of different post-1968 dissenting groups¹⁸² into one opposition organized around the human rights issue, which became the “common denominator of all oppositional striving”.¹⁸³ Well-known spokesmen of the movement were Jan Patočka, Václav Havel and Jiří Hájek, but

¹⁸⁰ See: Skilling *Samizdat and Independent Society* p. 58; Falk *Dilemmas of Dissidence* p. 128; Schöpflin ‘Opposition and Para-Opposition’ pp. 160/61; Kind-Kovács ‘An “Other Europe” through Literature’ pp. 267-299

¹⁸¹ See: Skilling *Samizdat and an Independent Society* pp. 44/5

¹⁸² Differentiated by: Kusin ‘Challenge to Normalcy’ pp. 37/8

¹⁸³ Kusin ‘Challenge to Normalcy’ p. 51

many more would follow.¹⁸⁴ Charter 77 issued documents explaining or dealing with human rights, addressing violations of international agreements, supporting political prisoners, etc.¹⁸⁵ It had “a strong moral charge”¹⁸⁶ and further engaged in publishing non-conformist literature through Samizdat-networks and organising discussions. Its members from academia who were not allowed to teach in university anymore taught their students at home. Over time, public life became more politicised and new, young groups were founded that were no longer ‘just’ pressing for social change, human rights, and personal freedom. Joining their forces in the Civic Forum, these opposition groups would finally enforce the collapse of the communist regime.

In Poland, it was the trade union and social movement Solidarity that became “the center of (...) emerging civil society”¹⁸⁷ simultaneously defending national sovereignty and individual civil rights. In Solidarity several movements that had developed during the previous years joined ranks. It thus comprised workers, intellectuals, students, and peasants, and incorporated members from all different strands of life, for example Catholics and secularist left intellectuals.¹⁸⁸ As mentioned above, Solidarity transcended the ostensive apolitical stance of other Central European opposition movements. Where it first wanted social change and defended human rights, the Polish opposition would become increasingly political and started

¹⁸⁴ Names of people active within or close to Charter 77: Catholic thinker Václav Benda, the Protestant philosopher Ladislav Hejdánek, the Slovakian thinker, novelist, and former reform-communist Miroslav Kusý, Philosopher Milan Šimečka and novelist Ludvík Vaculík.

¹⁸⁵ A more extensive list of issued documents and their topics can be found in: Skilling *Samizdat and an Independent Society* pp. 47/8

¹⁸⁶ Kusin ‘Challenge to Normalcy’ p. 55

¹⁸⁷ Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* p. 128

¹⁸⁸ cf. Rupnik ‘Dissent in Poland, 1968-78’ pp. 87-91. In the years that followed the Martial Law of 1980, Solidarity had to go underground, but the Church was able to maintain its independence and take over oppositional activities, consequently increasing its authority and bringing religion back to public discussion. See also: Sonntag ‘Poland’ p. 18

addressing issues such as the Soviet dominance in the region and socioeconomic problems.¹⁸⁹ It would change the relation between state and society for good, restoring pluralism and ultimately opening up the way to free elections.

In contrast to Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary was a late-comer. Major peace and human rights groups were not founded until the 1980s. In addition, the cooperation between opposition orientations did not work as well as in the mentioned cases. The traditional Hungarian political and dissident schools of thought, the liberal-democratic ‘urbanists’ and nationally oriented ‘populists’, could not establish a common opposition to the regime.¹⁹⁰

After the disappearance of the dissident *Praxis* group in Yugoslavia, finally, political opposition in Slovenia developed along a political, nationalist oriented, philosophical line, comprising the so-called Heideggerians who founded their journal *Nova revija*. This group was conservative and non-Marxist, included many Catholic intellectuals and would fight for Slovenian independence. They were joined by a young cultural scene, called the New Left recruiting members from punk, youth, and peace movements as well as the feminist and ecological scene. They lived and propagated ‘classic’ antipolitical positions. Both groups found each other in the late 1980s in the defense of the human rights issue.

One point is central to all these oppositional movements in Central Europe: they no longer sought to directly provoke political change. Those who had come of age in

¹⁸⁹ cf. Rupnik ‘Dissent in Poland, 1968-78’ p. 97

¹⁹⁰ cf. Szabó ‘Hungary’ p. 65. After 1968, the writers György Dalos and Miklós Haraszti next to the philosophers Ágnes Heller, János Kis and György Bence were part of the urbanist opposition, whereas the “writers Sándor Csoóri and Isván Csurka and historians József Antall, Csaba Kiss, György Szabad, and Lajos Für” represented the populist dissidents.

1968 did not aim for a revolution, nor did they want to reform the system from within. They wanted social change. Hence, they put the regime under pressure to follow the law, its own constitution, and international treaties signed by the political leaders. The civil and human rights issue lent itself perfectly to this aim. In addition, no longer focusing on politics, the public sphere became de-ideologised, valued openness, and was a home to all kind of different, yet peacefully coexisting interest or opposition groups. Society pluralised and become more open. Samizdat-literature flourished and contacts with the West were established and/or intensified. Moreover, despite the process of pluralisation of society, the human rights issue also provided a common ground to the various political and non-political groups in the individual countries (liberal democrats, national conservatives, reform socialists, cultural activists, new social movements, etc.) strengthening their position and forcing the ruling elite to give in to their demands.¹⁹¹ That is, the focus on human rights “crosscut(...) ideological divisions among the dissidents and it offer[ed] a basis for a broad ‘national front’ into which all democratic forces of Eastern Europe [could] be integrated and from which socialists just [could] not isolate themselves.”¹⁹² Society changed and consequentially the political system did.

The Different Uses of Europe

In this context, the notion of Europe returned to the fore. Stronger than ever Europe became an ideal and was propagated in the works of many dissident historians, philosophers, and writers. Their thinking mostly followed the philosophical model of

¹⁹¹ See also: Wielgohs and Pollack ‘Comparative Perspectives on Dissent’ p. 232

¹⁹² Szelényi ‘Socialist Opposition in Eastern Europe’ p. 201

defining Europe. Yet, one can discern two ways in which this philosophical model was employed. One way can be dubbed idealist, the advocates of which re-substituted the post-war communist ideal of an ‘Ersatz-Europe’ by the classic liberal notion of a Europe defined by Enlightenment values. Although their ideal, too, can be designated as an ideological fantasy, they had an existing entity and reality to pin it to: Europe as it developed West of the Iron Curtain. Consequently, these idealists started to talk about Europe explicitly again – others, however, did not. Here, the concept of ‘antipolitics’ is important for understanding the role of the notion of Europe during those years as it informed a large part of oppositional thinking and practice of those years. Concerning Europe, those trying to implement the concept of ‘antipolitics’ refrained from indulging in abstract speculation or from formulating broad counter-models to the existing society. Instead, they deliberately concentrated on accomplishing small-scale concessions from the state resulting in tangible improvements for the population. For these – what can be called – pragmatists, focusing on European civilisation as the longed for Other was not deemed to be helpful. So, in their discourse Europe as an ideal remained implicit. The term Europe, if used, was coupled to institutions like the CSCE and to ostensibly non-ideological subjects like peace (in Europe). In their final objective the pragmatists for whom Europe served as a background did not differ from the idealists who put Europe on the forefront. They did, however, crucially differ in terms of strategy – and this impacted strongly on the use of the notion of Europe. While both the idealists and the pragmatists used central themes connected to the philosophical notion of Europe such as democracy, individuality, and freedom, it is crucial to recognise that these themes served different functions in the different discourses. The pragmatists used them to

define human rights and peace, which constituted the central notions they were fighting for *inside* the system. For the idealists, they rather represented a distant ideal of the perfect society.

The prevalence of the philosophical model, however, does not mean that the historical model fell into oblivion. On the contrary, this form of thinking about Europe that had been dormant during the 1950s and 1960s slowly re-emerged, albeit in a modified form compared to its interwar heyday. The most important and best-known aspect of this re-emergence was the return of Central Europe as a region epitomised in Milan Kundera's 'Un occident kidnappé' (1983). This discourse connected the old argument that Central Europe historically and organically belonged to 'Europe' defined as modern and Western with an idealistic charging of this notion of (Western) Europe. In addition, 'Central Europe' joined intellectuals from both the pragmatic and the idealistic camp, making an urgent appeal to the West to recognise the region as an independent and autonomous, yet European area.

The pragmatists' narrative of Europe developed on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act, which they used to demand changes in society advancing the issues of human rights and peace. Whereas the official side explained human rights as stipulated in Helsinki in terms of binding social rights for the opposition movements, human rights were unconditionally linked to inalienable personal freedom.¹⁹³ This was the opposition's basic departure point for demanding changes in society as well as establishing closer ties to the West and developing ideas of Europe.¹⁹⁴ With their focus on and

¹⁹³ See also: Domnitz *Hinwendung nach Europa* p. 153

¹⁹⁴ Social democrat and spokesman of Charter 77 Jiří Hájek defended human rights and socialism as not being incompatible. Actually the socialism was in a better position to "assure both economic and social,

understanding of human rights they challenged the legitimacy of the authorities. After the signing of the Helsinki Final Act governments had to explain themselves not only at CSCE-meetings, but also in the official press at home. But Charter 77, the Polish Workers' Defence Committee KOR (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*), the Slovenian New Left and later the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, and some of the Hungarian intellectuals refrained from drawing or formulating any political or ideological programme that would mean playing the game of the ruling elite.¹⁹⁵ Building strategic alliances and preferring a pragmatic position instead, they related moral standards to universal human rights, demanding more freedom in the personal, religious, economic, and social sphere. They wanted the permission to freely express and organise themselves, to create a society in which public life could flourish.¹⁹⁶ Here, the West and especially Western Europe, which they understood as the true warden of these ideals, was extremely important. It could help protect these rights and force the various communist regimes to respect the law.

The second theme in relation to Europe that was heralded by the pragmatic opposition was peace. Against the military power and control of both the United States and the Soviet Union over Europe, they sought to advocate the ideal of peace, non-violence,

and civil and political rights, than capitalism" (Skilling *Samizdat* p. 143). However, the current socialist system, real existing system failed to do so. He, hence, called for a change in the existing system, democratise and reform it. With help of the Helsinki Final Act and the further CSCE-meetings relations between East and West could change and peaceful coexistence would be possible.

¹⁹⁵ As symptomatic for this position, one could quote Václav Havel who argued that autonomous art could function as an alternative to the totalitarian system. "The counterpart of oppressive political power is not an alternative political idea, but an autonomous, free humanity of man and with it necessarily also art – precisely as art – as one of the most important expressions of this autonomous humanity" (Havel 'Six Asides about Culture' p. 133).

¹⁹⁶ See: Falk *Dilemmas of Dissidence* p. 252; For language used and groups active in the 1970s and 1980s, see also: Bozóki 'The Rhetoric of Action', notably pp. 264-268

and reunification of Europe.¹⁹⁷ They requested a demilitarisation of society, withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe, and a retreat of foreign powers.¹⁹⁸ The strategy to achieve this was, according to György Konrád, ‘antipolitics’: “Antipolitics is the ethos of civil society, and civil society is the antithesis of military society.”¹⁹⁹ Charter 77 was especially active in this field, seeking to draw international attention and to actively participate in international debates and meetings. In the early 1980s, documents were published in which they focused on peace, investing it with meaning: peace was a fundamental right; without peace there could be no freedom; if the relationship between state and citizen was a peaceful one, this would also enhance a peaceful relationship to the outer world; justice and dignity could only exist if linked to peace.²⁰⁰ In addition, they linked peace to environmental issues as well as to economic prosperity.²⁰¹ Peace was the road to a life in freedom and without fear. It

¹⁹⁷ Michnik’s *Letters from Prison* is an example of this position. In addition, Catholic publishers in all Central European countries would promoted similar views and in the 1980s, Charter 77 published several documents on these issues. And in Slovenia many students involved in the peace movements chose the streets, made posters and tried to make the public opinion more sensitive for their demands and wishes. See also: Konrád ‘Europas Ernüchterung’ pp. 200-208

¹⁹⁸ See also: Skilling *Samizdat and Independent Society* p. 64

¹⁹⁹ Konrád *Antipolitics* p. 92

²⁰⁰ This can be found in several Charter documents of the 1980s, i.e. documents number 13 (1982), 29 (1982), and 20 (1983). See: Kavan and Tomin *Voices from Prague*. Important here too is Václav Havel’s article ‘Anatomie einer Zurückhaltung’ (1987), which basically repeats all these points. In his critique, he deals with the difference between what peace means in the West (and what the peace movements thus ask for) and what it means in the East, between what peace means in a free and in an unfree society. From the official, Soviet point of view, peace means full support of the regime, defending their system against the imperialistic West and its weapons. If one takes a different point of view this is highly dangerous. So, one cannot blame the Central Europeans (sic!) for being sceptic. In the East, one has to be careful with his demands. Havel argues that one should probably take up the task to the search for truth and act politically outside of politics. He, consequently, adds that the demands in which the piece movements in both East and West could agree and in which they should work together fighting for the same cause, are the ethic, value based demands, respect for human rights and human dignity, the reunification of Europe, and finally peace should lead to a free society, with free citizens (otherwise there is no peace). See: Havel ‘Anatomie einer Zurückhaltung’ pp. 34-64

²⁰¹ In debates on pluralism, democracy, and human rights the question that was always present was in which society (the socialist or liberal-democratic, yet capitalist society) one would have a better life. Here, of course, life quality and material standard of life were defining benchmarks, yet these could not always be measured through economic parameters. See: Niedermüller ‘Kultur, Transfer und Politik’ pp. 159-178

could endorse open dialogue and would promote pluralism. Moral values instead of military power would lead society.

This moralisation of politics was a central feature of the oppositional discourse. Truth and dignity of the individual stood at the top of the agenda of people like Václav Havel, Lech Wałęsa and Adam Michnik: “The new politics involve[d] the defanaticization of the public realm, the affirmation of the right to be different and of the right to civil disobedience.”²⁰² Human rights and human dignity serving as a binding anchor, they sought to create a civil ‘parallel’ society and linked this directly to the idea of Europe and its defining value of individual freedom.²⁰³ Refraining from charting a thoroughly thought-out model of society, they stressed individual moral choice as the mode of betterment. This independence and personal responsibility is exemplified by Havel’s phrase ‘to live in truth’ and let go of ideology. He encouraged the people to fight for a better life “here and now” and advocated the “rehabilitation of old values such as trust, openness, solidarity and love.”²⁰⁴ For the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, one of the first spokesmen and most respectable personalities of Charter 77, this was no political institution in the sense of challenging the authorities and seeking to overthrow the regime: “its basis is strictly personal and moral” and its task or obligation is “to resist injustice.”²⁰⁵ This was, of course, an attempt to come to

²⁰² Tismaneanu *Reinventing Politics* p. 131. See also: Rupnik ‘Dissent in Poland, 1968-78’ p. 91

²⁰³ See: Geremek ‘Frieden und Menschenrechte’ pp. 65-69. In another article, the historian and leading member of the Solidarity movement, Geremek additionally argued civil society followed European traditions: liberal and socialist. It offered a space to develop, shape and formulate public opinion. In this society all human beings were treated as free and equal citizens. See: Geremek ‘Civil Society Then pp. 3-12. Jakub Trojan, Christian thinker and politician, related the crisis in Europe to the failure of the European churches to protect the people and provide them with the tools to give meaning to their lives. He now argued that morality and truth were to play a role in society and politics again: one had to return to the spiritual foundations of politics, so Europe could become more human again. See: Trojan ‘In Defence of Politics’ pp. 52-74

²⁰⁴ Havel ‘Power of the Powerless’ p. 88; pp. 92/3

²⁰⁵ Patočka ‘Two Charta 77 Texts’ p. 342

terms with the dire situation in Central Europe, his own commitment to the cause of Charter 77 being “an attempt to accept in freedom the responsibility for the good – to act as a responsible citizen of a democracy in a country that is anything but democratic.”²⁰⁶

At the same time, this still pragmatic stance had a European dimension. It answered to the crisis and collapse of European civilisation in the twentieth century. Already in the 1930s, Patočka had deliberated the spiritual crisis of modern European culture calling for individual engagement to overcome it: “We cannot depend on the teleological idea of European culture; rather, we need to engage ourselves actively in realizing those ideal goods about which we have convinced ourselves that we can live only with them and for them.”²⁰⁷ The war and the years under communism, where he had been banned from teaching at university most of the time, had, of course, not abated his pessimism concerning European culture. In his *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History* (1975),²⁰⁸ he constructed a historical argument about the emergence of Europe when values like freedom, truth, courage, and justice started organising society. It was at this time – the Middle Ages being its heyday – that life was given meaning. However, with the introduction of modern science a crisis set in and the events of the twentieth century eventually made Europe – East and West – collapse.²⁰⁹ Still, he did not lose all hope, arguing that having nothing to lose anymore entailed the possibility to live in

²⁰⁶ Kohák *Jan Patočka* p. 130

²⁰⁷ Patočka ‘Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of Europe’ p. 155

²⁰⁸ In English only the last six essays of this privately circulated book were published in *Telos*: Patočka, ‘Wars of the Twentieth Century’ pp. 116-126

²⁰⁹ One can draw parallels here to the cultural pessimistic works of Paul Valéry (‘The Crisis of the Mind’, 1919), the anti-modernist critique in analysing Europe of Oswald Spengler (*Decline of the West*, 1926) and partly the (post-)World War II critique of the Enlightenment of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944).

absolute freedom and solidarity with each other.²¹⁰ In an essay on *Europe and the post-European era*, Patočka related this condition to the future of Europe in post-European history – after the disasters of the twentieth century it was still possible to create something new.²¹¹

In several ways, Jan Patočka epitomises the return of Europe in the 1970s. Picking up the thread of the interwar debate, to which he had himself contributed as a young man, he revived the historic mode of thinking about Europe albeit in a seriously altered version. For him, Europe no longer resembled an indefinite success story, and he did not use history just to prove his country's belonging to it. This was no coincidence. For the most part, the straightforward narrative of belonging advocated in the interwar years and passed on to the post-war years by authors like Oskar Halecki had lost its automatic plausibility after World War II and decades of European partition. In contrast, for Patočka the history of modernity and of the twentieth century in particular showed the decline of the essence of Europeanness. But all was not lost. Since Europe was, in the end, a normative construct, it could be resurrected. This was, however, not possible by devising a master plan for the perfect society, but only by continuous efforts of all European individuals. Having witnessed the catastrophes of the twentieth century and experienced Nazi and communist dictatorships, Central Europeans were especially capable of bringing about this revival.

Most of the younger Central European intellectuals, however, usually belonging to the idealist camp, did not share Patočka's conviction that Europe was dead and required complete rebuilding. Although some criticised the West for betraying its own values,

²¹⁰ cf. Patočka 'Wars of the Twentieth Century' p. 125

²¹¹ See: Patočka 'Evropa a doba poevropská' (Europe and the post-European era) pp. 80-148

most constructed a positive ideal assigning a moral and cultural identity to Europe in which their nations and the region would eventually fit in. Thus, the more frequent criticism targeted the West's monopolising of the idea of Europe and its losing sight of the Eastern brethren. This Europe was by no means an accurate representation of the reality of (Western) Europe, about which Central Europeans at that time did not know a lot anyway. Rather, this Central European narrative was highly normative and very idealistic. It was connected to values such as freedom, democracy, and individuality, often joined by truth, dignity, and humanity. Like their Western European counterparts of the early post-war period,²¹² intellectuals produced writings in which Europe was shaped according to the wishes and ideals of the author. In their texts a hope was always present that the way Europe is narrated might in the end become real. They reflected the dreams of many Central European intellectuals writing in the 1970s and 1980s: The future was Europe.

Still, despite these idealistic hopes, the nagging question of belonging remained an issue. Unsurprisingly, from the 1970s onwards one can frequently find recourse to the historic arguments proving that the own nation had for a long time been part of Europe. This argument, however, did not work as easily as in the first half of the twentieth century as can be shown in the Polish case. In 1979, the Polish Independence Movement (*Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe*) distributed some material collected under the title 'Poland and Europe', mainly written by Zdzisław Najder. In terms of belonging, the author differentiated politics from culture. In

²¹² Examples of historians contributing to this idealistic literature in Western Europe are: Beloff *Europe and the Europeans*, 1957; Chabod *Der Europagedanke: von Alexander dem Großen bis Zar Alexander I.*, 1963; Curcio *Europa. Storia di un'idea*, 1958; Duroselle *L'idée de l'Europe dans l'histoire*, 1965; Hay *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, 1957; Gollwitzer *Europabild und Europagedanke: Beiträge zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, 1951

political terms, Poland was not part of Europe. Culturally, it clearly was and this had political repercussions. While emphasising the role of the nation, Najder simultaneously argued that a nation could not stand on its own. Poland, consequently, had the choice between Russia and Europe. And here Europe was definitely the better choice. Poland had to make Europe remember that during the time of parliamentarism, tolerance, civil freedoms, and individual dignity, Poland was part of Europe, provided its own input to European cultural development, and served as a bridge passing on values from the West to the East. So, if Poland wanted to both keep its national identity and fully become a member of Europe it had to improve its European consciousness.²¹³

Najder, thus, mixed historic and voluntaristic arguments. In contrast to Russia, Poland was part of Europe. That is important as this cultural belonging opened the country a way back to political belonging. Still, the return was a matter of choice and of willingness to change oneself. Decades of estrangement from Europe, as the new generation of Europhile intellectuals viewed it, could not be ignored. Rather, they had to be tackled head on.

Subsequently, in Poland, a host of articles debated the relationship between Poland and Europe in those years. While they all advocated the recovery of Polish sovereignty, many authors agreed that a nation could not stand on its own in the modern world. Consequently, participation within Europe was the better alternative to

²¹³ See: Polish Independence Movement 'Polen und Europa' pp. 250-259. Two other texts that enthusiastically deal with Europe from a cultural point of view and argue that Poland has to do everything to become part of that Europe again are: J.W. (pseudonym of Jan Waszkiewicz) 'Polen in Europa' pp. 272-276; Bocheński 'Der Traum von Europa' pp. 277-281

trying to build a relationship with Russia.²¹⁴ A vocal proponent of this view was the liberal-conservative historian Marcin Król, founder of the underground journal *Res Publica* (1978, legalised in 1987). His article 'Europe und Us' (*Europa y mi*, 1979) is highly critical of the option of national self-management or -organisation, in the sense of not being part of a bigger whole, i.e. Europe. Król settles scores with earlier nationalist views and with the belief that Poland could be a leader in transporting European values to the East, notably Russia.²¹⁵ Yet, Król's turn towards the West was by no means unequivocal. He was critical of liberalist economic theories as they were value-blind in his eyes. He was not interested in a solution in which Poland would join the European political community, in Poland becoming part of something else. Instead, he advanced a normative view of Europe: a Europe that is an ideal, that represents values of the individual, his/her rights, his/her freedom, and his/her peace; it stands for the written, the idea, and spiritual traditions and instructs the political and cultural horizon.²¹⁶ This is the sense in which Poland should become European.

Ten years later, Król would return to the subject in an article on Europe as norm and Poland's place in Europe in reaction to recent developments and discussions. During the 1980s the Polish, Europe-minded opposition had increasingly returned to traditional narratives emphasising the nation's belonging to Western Christian

²¹⁴ See an article by Aleksander Hall, 'Europa, ale jaka?' (Europe, but what kind?), who links the rebuilding of European unity to the autonomy and independence of the Polish nation, which is otherwise going to suffer a spiritual death. Jacek Kuroń, however, warns for making the nation the absolute condition for Europe, because of their complex relationship. He refers to the more pluralist and international ideas of Europe and the federalisation ideas (i.e. *Intermarum*) of the Interbellum: See: Kuroń, 'List otwarty do zespołu redakcyjnego „Pismo Młodych Bratniak”' (Open letter to the redaction "Bratniak") pp.16-31. See also: Domnitz *Hinwendung nach Europa* p. 239

²¹⁵ In the early twentieth century, one of the most important defenders of this point of view was Roman Dmowski (*Piast* tradition), see: p. 49. But in the works of the Polish historians Andrzej Walicki and Jerzy Jedlicki one can read that these views also existed during the nineteenth century and can be summarised with the word 'Sarmatism'. This road of thinking emphasises Poland's relationship with and place in the East and knew many variances.

²¹⁶ cf. Król 'Europa und wir' pp. 262/63

civilisation and the continuity of the Polish fight for freedom against the big neighbouring powers.²¹⁷ However, the orientation had shifted dramatically: away from imperialistic Germany to Russia or the Soviet Union which now served as the main enemy. This was reinforced by the growing authority of the Catholic Church after the appointment of a Polish pope in 1979. The *antemurale christianitatis* narrative was revived opening up the nation towards the West and closing it towards the East, emphasising the differences with the Orthodox Christian Church.²¹⁸ This did not come without emphasis of the role of the nation and of national identity. Poland once again was said to have the historical mission in protecting the European Christian heritage against the barbarous East. Here, Król who favoured the orientation towards Western values intervened. In his 1989 article, he was pessimistic about the possibilities of joining Europe: the normative Europe. In his opinion, Polish intellectuals were too far away from recent developments in European thinking, ideas, and traditions; they dwelt in the past. The Polish historian, thus, doubted whether Poland would be able to bridge the civilisational gap and become part of the real Europe, of a Europe of the norm. Król and other intellectuals doubted that it was as easy to shake off the consequences of recent history as some proponents of Polish sovereignty and Europeanisation suggested. To just declare to be European was not enough. However,

²¹⁷ Examples of authors that heartily defend Poland's belonging to Europe (sometimes also in order to safeguard or rebuild its own identity) are the moralist and non-conformist Leftist Jan Józef Lipski and the Catholic democratic jurist Tadeusz Mazowiecki (b. 1927). See: Lipski 'Liegt Polen in Europa?' (1986); Mazowiecki 'Europa – von dieser und jener Seite betrachtet' (1987). See also: Tatur 'Zur Dialektik der 'civil society' in Polen' 239

²¹⁸ Here one can refer to KIK (*Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej* – Club of Catholic Intelligentsia) that discussed questions about the division of Europe, Poland, and Central Europe, and critically debated questions of freedom, unfreedom and civil society. Moreover, debates led by the Church reached a wide public (Christians and non-Christians) and as an institution it so served as a vehicle to promote and debate ideas of Europe and create a public European consciousness. Another early example to mention here is the sociologist and essayist Jan Strzelecki (1919-1988), who belonged to the democratic left and was an advocate of ethical socialism. He combined Europe, humanity, and Christian values and the Church as a counterforce to the communist regime. See: Strzelecki 'An der Quelle einer Begegnung' pp. 93-101

he was not fully without hope: the Church, the universities, and the newly developing civil society might open up a road to this Europe.²¹⁹

Czechoslovak and Hungarian intellectuals formulated similar constructions of Europe, also reviving narratives from earlier periods, though adding a contemporary note to it. Again, the idealistic element was strong in their writings on Europe and one can almost describe them as utopian. In addition, the Slovenian opposition group gathered around the journal *Nova Revija* took up on the theme of Europe. To members of the *Nova revija* group, the question of the nation's independence and sovereignty was closely linked to a feeling of belonging to Europe and in fact, to a feeling of belonging to Central Europe – and they were seen as part of Central Europe by other Central European intellectuals dealing with similar questions.²²⁰ The *Nova Revija* group wanted more individual freedoms and democracy, defining “their ‘mission’ within the framework of the notion of civil society.”²²¹ Rediscovering their neighbours and the Central European or Alpe-Adria discourses of earlier periods, they sought to loosen themselves from the Yugoslav federal state by constructing and claiming different identities.²²² At the same time, they regarded “political democratization in Slovenia [as] inseparably linked to the solution of the Slovenian ‘national question’ – that is, to a redefinition of the position of Slovenia in the Yugoslav federal state and in a changing Europe.”²²³ For them, Slovenian independence would open up the road to

²¹⁹ cf. Król ‘Nicht in der europäischen Norm’ pp. 296/97; See also: Staniszkis ‘Polens Einsamkeit in Europa’ pp. 70-74. In her article, the Polish sociologist shows how difficult it is to change modes of thinking and to honestly be able to do that if one is indoctrinated for forty years.

²²⁰ i.e. Mihály Vajda in his article ‘East-Central Europe’s “de-Europeanisation” from 1984.

²²¹ Bernik ‘From Imagined to Actually Existing Democracy’ p. 107

²²² In contrast, the single-issue movements in Slovenia were active on a more national scale, seeking to change national culture and attitudes. Consequently, they were less interested and less involved in debates on Europe.

²²³ Bernik ‘From Imagined to Actually Existing Democracy’ p. 109

Europe.²²⁴ In Hungary, the role and position of the nation led to heated debates between the urbanists and the populists. The urbanists argued that “Hungarian society should follow the European (West-European) road of industrial development and that it should look westwards for its models.”²²⁵ The populists, conversely, heralded the nation, valorised rural and village life, and opined that Hungary or Hungarian society itself should serve as a source of inspiration for reform and development (organic growth) of society.²²⁶ For them, Europe only played a small role, if any at all. Hence, it was predominantly urbanists participating in any debates on Europe: In their writings they combined the quest for national sovereignty with Hungary’s belonging to Europe. Following Patočka, many Czechs intellectuals resorted to T. G. Masaryk’s ideas of democracy, his wish for self-determination of the small countries, and his conviction that Bohemia was at the heart of Europe.²²⁷ In ‘Masaryk’s Vision’, as Ladislav Hejdánek’s entitled an article, Czechoslovakia and Central Europe contributed to the whole of Europe. Hejdánek criticised Western Europe for its very limited idea of what Europe is: the West. He argued that it is in the East, especially in Central Europe, that one can find original and passionate ideas on Europe’s future and the West should take note of this region.²²⁸ Here the true Europe could be found. In ‘We, the Central European East Europeans’ (1987), the Slovak philosopher Miroslav Kusý added to this debate that in order to play a role in shaping ideas of Europe together with Western Europeans it is crucial for the East Europeans to first build their

²²⁴ cf. Bernik ‘Slovenia’ p. 88

²²⁵ Schöpflin ‘Opposition and Para-Opposition’ p. 155

²²⁶ See: Falk *Dilemmas of Dissidence* p. 125

²²⁷ See pp. 40/1 and 46/7 for an extensive discussion of Masaryk and his ideas of Europe. Patočka had discussed Masaryk’s philosophical ideas more than his political contributions during the interwar period.

²²⁸ See: Hejdánek ‘Masaryks Vision’ pp. 91/2

own East European identity, to feel part of a bigger whole and not retreat to their own national identity, as this will weaken their position.²²⁹

Central Europe – A Construct with a Mission

With their interventions, Hejdánek and Kusý also reacted to the new hot topic of the 1980s: the return of a redefined and reconfigured Central Europe. In contrast to the interwar and immediate post-war period, this was no longer connected to political federalisation debates. Still, it had retained or rather regained its central position in the self-concept of Central Europeans. Building on the work of earlier thinkers and combining this with their own (normative) quest for (Western) European recognition as a separate region that is (culturally) closer to Europe than to Russia, a new generation of intellectuals aimed at putting Central Europe back on the mental map of the Europeans and inventing a new narrative or meaning for itself.

Here, this discourse is treated separately from the above-mentioned general return of Europe. It surely does not contradict the general revival, but for several reasons forms a clearly definable sub-discourse. First, despite some precursors in the 1970s, it was the most important discourse of the latter part of the two decades under consideration, thus in a way following on the initial return of Europe. In fact, it even has a starting date being jump-started by Milan Kundera's article 'Un occident kidnappé' in 1983. Secondly, more than the general discourse, it focused on the notion of the region

²²⁹ cf. Kusý 'Wir, die mitteleuropäischen Osteuropäer' p. 193. Like Kusý and like many of his Polish colleagues, the writer Ludvík Vaculík emphasises the fact that a nationality does not have any meaning just for itself. It receives meaning within a certain context: in this case the European. And here cultural arguments play a role: Europe is plural, open, relative and based on contradictions, full of abstract and practical ideas. Everyone is defined not only through him/herself, but also through his/her other. See: Vaculík 'Mein Europa' pp. 163-171

itself. While others pondered the essence of European civilisation, its demise in the horrors of the twentieth century, the possibility of its resurrection, and their own nation's ties to Western Europe, Kundera homed in on Central Europe as a specific region closely tied to West by culture. The ensuing debate did, of course, contain all general questions about Europe; they were, however, approached via the question of the region. Thirdly, Central Europe took the character of an invocation and an appeal. In its initial form, it was directed outward: at the West. In contrast, the pragmatists and idealists mainly looked inwards, scrutinising their own society and looking for its European potential. Kundera's image of a kidnapping, on the other hand, left little room for reflection and self-critique. The return of Central Europe, finally, reconstituted the characteristic triangular form of thinking about Europe in the region that had to some extent been suppressed during the preceding decades. Due to political relaxation, ever more freedoms granted to or won by the Central European intellectual scene, and intensified contacts with Western European intellectuals, the Cold War discourse of a Europe divided in an Eastern and a Western part gave way to a discourse that reflected the growing influence of Central Europe's civil society and thus allowed for a third region, Central Europe, to (re-)emerge.

In addition, *prima facie* it looks like the return to the forefront of the historic model of thinking about Europe. This is backed up both by the fact that historians preceded Kundera in re-introducing Central Europe as a region and by his own allusions to history using some of the classic *topoi* of the historical model, e.g. the Hungarian Renaissance or Jan Hus and his revolution.²³⁰ In contrast to earlier arguments, for Kundera this is only a sideshow. As a non-historian, it is not his aim to prove the

²³⁰ Kundera 'The tragedy of Central Europe' p. 35

region's belonging to Europe in historical terms. He simply states it as a fact – just as he states that Russia is an “*other civilization*”²³¹ – backing it up only by a laconic historical narrative that would be meaningless without the preceding discourse. In effect, his definition of Europe as a culture is rooted in the present. It is from this perspective that the Czech writer can turn the argument of belonging upside down when claiming that European “culture has already bowed out” in Paris while it still lives on in Prague.²³² In taking Central Europe's belonging to Europe for granted and even claiming the ownership of real Europeanness for his region, Kundera leaves aside the defensive position inherent to the historical model and only picks up its tradition of specifying the region's contribution to Europe in recent history. Following interwar models, this comes down to the argument of diversity based on the plurality of small states; or, in Kundera's words: “the greatest variety within the smallest space” representing “a condensed version of Europe itself in all its cultural diversity.”²³³ To that he added cosmopolitanism, and in particular Jewish cosmopolitanism, as the major Central European input to overall European culture.

Kundera was the most radical and, by far, the most effective, but he was not the first to again start referring to both Central Europe as a region and the variety of small states as its main cultural asset. Already in the 1970s Central European historians increasingly used the region as a frame of reference in their research.²³⁴ Most notably,

²³¹ Ibid. p. 34

²³² Ibid. p. 37

²³³ Ibid. p. 33

²³⁴ This can be exemplified on the basis of the *Études Historiques Hongroises* (Hungarian Historical Studies), an official showcase of Hungarian historiography on the occasion of the quinquennial International Congress of Historical Sciences. From 1975 onwards Marxist-Leninist methodology receded and research topics changed. Europe, the region, and the historical traditions connected to it, returned in articles by Jenő Szűcz, Péter Hanák, Jozsef Galántai, Sandor Balogh, and György Ránki. This change in historical research did not only take place in Hungary but in most Central European

historians began anew to associate with the work and ideas of István Bibó, who had written extensively on Europe, democracy, and the ‘freedom-loving’ small nations of Eastern Europe. Jenő Szűcs probably was the most prominent one.²³⁵ Writing a *longue durée* history of Europe from the Middle Ages to the present, he sought to explain the origins of backwardness avoiding any Marxist or nationalist explanatory models. He presented a picture in which a Europe as a purely geographical notion became a Europe of three regions with distinct characteristics. The two poles of Western Europe and Eastern Europe and a region in between: East-Central Europe.²³⁶ Of these regions both Eastern and Western Europe developed independent economic and political systems and models. East-Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech lands), however, did not manage to develop its own stable and uninterrupted system. Instead, at some times it was influenced more by Western Europe and sometimes more by Eastern Europe, which shaped its hybrid identity and resulted in a peculiar relationship between state and society.

Szűcs’s description was historical, but it had a clear political aim. First, he aspired to show that the region he was talking about, Bibó’s freedom-loving small countries, was different from Russia, and second, he formulated arguments (though only implicitly) to tell his Western European readers²³⁷: Yes, we might not be exactly like you, but we are related. We are European and you should support our wish to become an independent region again, as this wish is based on the positive values organising your

countries. Independent historiography was possible again. Topics could be discussed that before had been taboo. For Polish historiography, see: Jaworski ‘Kollektives Erinnern und nationale Identität’ pp. 33-52

²³⁵ For more information on Hungarian historiography and on Jénő Szűcs as a historian, his works, methods, and influence, see: Trencsényi and Apor ‘Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past’

²³⁶ See: Szűcs ‘The Three Historical Regions of Europe’ pp. 132-135

²³⁷ The text was published in English in 1983 and in French in 1985.

society as well – freedom, democracy, and political sovereignty. Citing Bibó at the end of his text, the Hungarian historian asserted the region should finally realise its inherent democratic aspirations and liberate itself through revolution in order to return to its own road of development. There had been enough opportunities in history, but due to its hybrid structure the region always failed to reach this goal and become a democracy. One such missed opportunity had been in 1945, when Eastern European structures took over and pushed aside “Western techniques of freedom.”²³⁸

In contrast to Kundera, the professional historian Szűcs presented a nuanced historical narrative. Here, the place of East-Central Europe in Europe was neither constant nor unambiguous. Only the existence of a distinct region between East and West was a historical certainty. This in itself was an important statement, not only countering the pervasive political partition of Europe into East and West but also the prevailing materialist historiographical distinction between core (Western Europe) and periphery (Eastern Europe). It was Szűcs’s achievement to revitalise the historical argument for the perennial existence of Central Europe without levelling its inner contradictions. History showed what Central Europe was not, but it could not determine what it was going to be. Inserting a normative argument, Szűcs, of course, made clear his own preferences for the future direction.

Therefore, Szűcs and Kundera represent two very different, yet in essence similar versions of coming to terms with the Central European predicament. The key lay first in recognising the existence of the region, acting in a way to revitalise it and then to try to approach the West. This made immediate sense to many Central European

²³⁸ Szűcs ‘The Three Historical Regions of Europe’ 180

intellectuals who were of the opinion that they would have to find a Central European answer to the current crisis. Not only because they claimed that the respective nations were incapable of doing it alone, but also because they viewed the West (both Western Europe and the United States) with genuine skepticism. Western capitalism, in particular, was looked at with suspicion. In addition, the intellectuals supposed that the West would not act in favour of a reunification of Europe if it was not morally forced to do so.²³⁹ Many Central Europeans believed that the status quo of a divided Europe was rather convenient for both the Soviet Union and the United States. Furthermore, they said, Western Europe got used to the fact that it represented Europe.²⁴⁰ Hence, for many, Central Europe served as a solution to overcome the status quo and to fight for a reunification of Europe, for more freedom and dignity, for an improved economic system, and for an improved standard of life. A closer cooperation between the several countries, economic reform, and the creation of a feeling of belonging, a Central European identity, would strengthen the position of all Central Europeans.²⁴¹

²³⁹ See for a similar view the Hungarian philosopher Mihály Vajda who claims that Western Europe no longer views East-Central Europe as part of Europe. Hence, the East-Central Europeans need to make them aware of the fact that freedom, individuality, and democracy are values that are dear to the East-Central Europeans and that they too are Europeans even though the totalitarian regime tried to de-Europeanise them (cf. Vajda 'Ostmitteleuropas "Enteuropäisierung"' pp. 118-120). The already mentioned text 'Liegt Polen in Europe?' by Jan József Lipski is another example.

²⁴⁰ See for instance: Šimečka 'Revolution nach siebzig Jahren?' pp. 177/78. The official press and authorities used similar arguments for its propaganda. It discredited the Western economic system, its imperialism, its anti-communism, and disinterest for its neighbour. For a detailed description of this position, see: Reijnen *Op de Drempel van Europa* pp. 285-294; Domnitz *Hinwendung nach Europa* pp. 105-119

²⁴¹ See: Kis 'Glasnost, Perestrojka und der Banker' pp. 194-199. The Hungarian literary historian, Csaba G. Kiss (b. 1945), makes a bit of a different point searching for what Central European actually means, but at the end of his text 'In Between' (1987), he addresses two points saying that first, it is necessary for the region to find its own identity, so it can play the role of a binding force between East and West and secondly, that one should overcome state nationalism and cooperate so strengthening the East-Central European region. Here the unity of language and culture to be open and tolerant are extremely important. See: Kiss 'Dazwischen' pp. 113-115. Worth mentioning here too is an article by the Hungarian intellectual György Dalos, who sought a 'Third Way' between capitalism and socialism,

The notion of Central Europe, therefore, had a function and was given a content to serve that function. To be sure, many Central European intellectuals had problems with Kundera's statements and especially his anti-Russian stance.²⁴² However, the general message that Central Europe was a separate region between East and West with its own cultural and historical traditions and that it had a role to play within a wider European context was not necessarily disputed.²⁴³ In fact, there was a boom in texts taking up this message and soon one could find variations on the theme of Central Europe in literature, arts, history, and in politically informed essays. It became a narrative of its own branching out in a number of sub-discourses. In all of these, an important notion took hold: what made the region unique was its double experience of both Nazism and communism. Like no other European region, it had suffered the totalitarian repression of both ideologies being located between Germany and Russia. The general idea was that the region now had to stand up for itself, the idea of a really existing shared culture becoming its leading principle.

Since books and articles reflecting on the 1980s debate on Central Europe are numerous, it suffices here to quickly summarise the main trends in thinking.²⁴⁴ One

and hoped that socialism would democratise and that the current crisis would be solved within a European framework. On questions of Central European identity, he argued: "Eine demokratische Staatlichkeit kann weder das westliche noch das östliche Modell nachahmen. [Die] Länder sollten sich selbst ähnlich werden und ihrer historischen Identität näherkommen." (Dalos 'Befreit die Sowjetunion von ihren Satelliten' p. 3).

²⁴² The Czechs Václav Havel and Ladislav Hejzán, the Hungarians Mihály Vajda and Jenő Szűcs, or the Pole Jan Józef Lipski are examples here.

²⁴³ Presenting "the Central European identity as an alternative to the Sovietized past" (Rupnik 'Central Europe or Mitteleuropa' p. 250), intellectuals such as György Konrád, Czesław Miłosz, Adam Michnik or Václav Havel stressed the existence of a shared cultural tradition between the various countries of Central Europe, simultaneously highlighting the region's shared values with the free and democratic West.

²⁴⁴ Examples of insightful studies and interesting articles are: Ash *The Uses of Adversity*, 1989; *European Review of History*, Vol. 6, Issue 1 (Spring 1999); Judt 'The Rediscovery of Central Europe' pp. 23-54; Schöpflin and Wood *In Search of Central Europe*, 1989; Rupnik 'Central Europe or

can distinguish four key narratives: (1) On a socio-political level, Central Europe was understood as neither East nor West. It did not share the collectivistic or individualistic trends characterising both regions, but, according to representatives of this discourse, developed a value system of its own. This interpretation of Central Europe might be utopian, as many admitted, but “in the least possible degree.”²⁴⁵ Members of Budapest School, notably Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, and Mihály Vajda, advocated this conception.²⁴⁶ (2) Historians like Jenő Szűcs or Bronisław Geremek constructed a long-term historical model of events or developments influencing the region’s political, cultural, and socio-economic identity. The region was said to have developed its individual dynamics.²⁴⁷ (3) Members of the intellectual opposition, such as György Konrád or Václav Havel, linked their ideas on antipolitics or civil society with the narrative on Central Europe. They challenged the political status quo by emphasising universal values, connecting their ideas to those of the Enlightenment and thus to Western Europe, yet without giving up their regional or national independence and right to self-determination.²⁴⁸ Finally (4), the more nationalistic

Mitteuropa?’ pp. 249-278; Rupnik *The Other Europe*, 1989; Schmidt *Die Wiedergeburt der Mitte Europas*, 2001; Snel *Fictionalized Autobiography and the Idea of Central Europe*, 2003

²⁴⁵ Heller ‘The Great Republic’ p. 187

²⁴⁶ Vajda *Russischer Sozialismus in Mitteleuropa*, 1991; Vajda ‘Who excluded Russia from Europe?’ pp. 168-175; Fehér ‘On Making Central Europe’ 412-447; Fehér ‘Eastern Europe’s Long Revolution against Yalta’ pp. 1-34

²⁴⁷ The medievalist Bronisław Geremek’s book *The Common Roots of Europe* (1995) is a late example of his views, but most of his previous historical books pointed towards this direction already. Also he was politically involved in changing Polish society in the 1980s serving as one of the main advisors to Lech Wałęsa and the Solidarity Movement. See: Geremek ‘Die Civil Society gegen den Kommunismus’ pp. 264-273; Ibid. ‘Between Hope and Despair’ pp. 91-109; Ibid. ‘Dwa Narody’ (Two Nations) pp. 5-11

²⁴⁸ Havel states that the Central Europeans do not want to be anyone’s satellite, nor do they want to float in a space void of air (cf. Havel ‘Die Suche nach einem neuen europäischen Zuhause’ p. 85). Central Europe is not a buffer zone; it is an independent region with a function in Europe. In another essay titled ‘Politik und Gewissen’ (Politics and Conscience) of 1984, Havel stresses Central Europe’s chance to finally be someone who brings along something valuable: spiritual and moral impulses, peace initiatives, creative potential, the ethos of freshly gained freedom and the inspiration for courageous and quick solutions. Other examples of similar views are: Šimečka ‘Noch eine Zivilisation? Eine andere Zivilisation?’ pp. 65-72; Dalos ‘Befreit die UdSSR von ihren Satelliten’ pp. 1-11; Konrád ‘Mein Traum

thinkers used the Central European discourse to accentuate the different roots and origins of the respective countries compared to Russia and to Western Europe. They did not seek to become part of Western Europe, rather aimed at national independence, autonomy, and self-determination within a broader European framework.²⁴⁹

Conclusion: Europe in the Central European Narrative

During the twentieth century, Central European debates on Europe closely followed and reflected the overall intellectual climate of the region. Times of new beginnings usually corresponded with a flourishing of plans for regional cooperation and

von Europa' pp. 175-193; Ibid.. 'Is the Dream of Central Europe still Alive?' pp. 109-121. In Konrád's writings one can also recognise the influences of the Budapest School, as he also claims Central Europe is a space with its own independent political culture that does neither fit the Eastern nor the Western model. He, additionally, seeks to blend in historical arguments close to Bibó and in his Szűcs to strengthen his argument. Besides, Adam Michnik shares the emphasis on cultural values of this Central European discourse, yet without mentioning Central Europe explicitly. See the several essays in the volume with collected essays of Michnik titled *Der Lange Abschied vom Kommunismus*, i.e.: 'Ethik und Politik' pp. 197-203 and 'Osteuropäische Gedanken' pp. 105-119. See also: Beylin, Bielinski, Michnik 'Polska leży w Europie' (Poland lies in Europe) pp. 1-2

²⁴⁹ The Hungarian populists Gyúla Illyés and Sándor Csoóri were representatives of this narrative, as were the national conservative circles in Poland, of which Jan Waszkiewicz, a mathematician from Wrocław, was a representative the already mentioned Aleksander Hall, and Jan Walc, an author who published his works using the underground channels. In Czechoslovakia, many signatories of the Charta 77, among which the historian and philosopher Jaroslav Krejčí, and in Slovenia the *Nova revija* group propagated this national narrative, although in a somewhat different sense: the nation was strongly planted within a (Central) European context as the group's wish was to leave the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. An example for this national discourse in thinking about Central Europe is Waszkiewicz 'Polen in Europa' pp. 272-276. Slovenian nationalist, Central European-minded intellectuals, amongst whom the poet Veno Taufer was a prominent figure, wanted to disassociate themselves from Yugoslavia. Central Europe was the instrument that served the goal: Central Europe was a counter-model to "Yugoslav unitarianism and revived Stalinist tendencies" (Juvan and Taufer 'Veno Taufer' p. 377). Yet, simultaneously they insisted on Slovenia as a democratic and sovereign nation.

deliberations on Europe and the region's or the individual countries' place in it. Changing political and intellectual circumstances generated diverse configurations of ideas of Europe. Consequently, the preceding survey of the idea of Europe offers a glimpse into the overall intellectual history of Central Europe treating important systems of thought that do not even explicitly contain the term Europe. This is no coincidence as the idea of Europe has so many meanings and repercussions. Throughout the twentieth century, it constituted one of the central themes of reflection and self-perception of Central European intellectuals even though this did not come to the fore at all times being overshadowed by more explicit political and ideological dispositions. Still, throughout the century, the intellectuals' understanding of and relating to Europe express their – or: each individual's – overall worldview and vice versa. Examining the idea of Europe, therefore, cannot be limited to the use of the term – and examining the intellectual history of Central Europe cannot pass over the idea of Europe.

This chapter has used a two-fold approach in analysing the developing ideas of Europe chronologically as well as analytically by differentiating between a historical and a philosophical model of thinking about Europe. The balance of the two models serves as a fine indicator of the state of the discourse on Europe at respective times. In this respect, three major periods can be identified. The first one, ranging from World War I to the early years after World War II is characterised by the prominence of the historical model as well as the close association of the two models in the dominant liberal discourse. After the states of Central Europe had gained independence anew or for the first time, much attention centred on the question of their relationship to the region and to Europe as a whole. Proving their participation in and contribution to

European history offered an appealing way to legitimate their existence to intellectuals of all spectrums. In addition, the liberals mixed the historic argument with a normative notion of Europe based on Enlightenment ideas. However, this formative connection of the two models broke down after the catastrophe of World War II. The solidifying of the East-West division of Europe seriously deflated the persuasiveness of the historical model. Its inherent anti-Russian stance led to strong repression by the communist authorities so that it was mainly preserved by emigrants or inner exiles. Europe as an explicit concept receded to the background. This was caused not only through coercion extirpating the 'westernising' historical model but also through a reinterpretation of the philosophical model. Marxism and later Marxist humanism offered an attractive and credible alternative to the normative concept of Europe and could basically replace it two decades.

The moral breakdown of communist rule and the loss of legitimacy of its ideology led to a resurgence in thinking about Europe. This time the philosophical concept of an idealised Europe took centre stage. Europe regained its position in the Central European imaginary as the token of freedom, democracy, and modernity. This development did also entail a return of the historical model targeted at disproving the East-West dichotomy, rupturing the bond to Soviet Russia and re-aligning the region with Western Europe. Still, the twentieth century had left its mark on the possibilities of this argument. Simply positing the belonging to (Western) Europe by alluding to bygone times had lost credibility. Instead, more nuanced approaches emerged, constructing Central Europe as a region in between and also looking for the wrong turns taken in history. In addition, some authors arguing historically stressed the need for intellectual struggle to regain the European mindset the region had once possessed.

The revolutions of 1989 impacted profoundly on the idea of Europe. Suddenly, Europe could no longer be perceived as a normative fantasy. Instead, it turned out to be an onerous reality including the bureaucratic intricacies of the European Community and its demands for economic, political, and social adjustments. The focus of Central European engagement with Europe changed dramatically as politicians and economists sought to thoroughly comply to these exigencies in order to secure the accession to 'Europe' as quickly as possible. Intellectual concepts like Kundera's location of real 'Europeanness' in Central Europe gave way to a familiar discourse of backwardness and the need for catching up. On the other hand, the historical argument regained prevalence. Swiftly, the division of Europe was declared a historical lapse and the historic unity of Europe (east of Russia) was emphasised both in Central and in Western Europe. Still, in the climate of the 'end of history' prevailing in the early 1990s, the (re-)incorporation of Central Europe was based on embracing everything Western, not on the contribution of Central Europe to Europe in history or in the present.

In the Central European intellectual scene disappointment and disillusionment with the 'real' Europe have slowly taken root: the Europe they had imagined did not become real or was forgotten immediately. Their solutions for a reorganisation of European society were not taken into account at all by a Western dominated European politics. Besides, the combination of liberal-democracy, capitalism, and rising nationalism caused problems in the region and in Europe, for which politics did not find adequate solutions. Hence, from the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, Central European intellectuals started returning to the idea of Europe once more. Having been crowded out during the 1990s by seemingly more pressing matters, normative ideas of

Europe re-emerged. By definition they concern Europe as a whole. Consequently, their proponents shun the historical model of thinking about Europe, which had been so much centred on proving the belonging of the region to Europe. With this question (politically) settled, Central European intellectuals could aim higher drawing on the rich – and specific – tradition of normative thinking about Europe.

In the following chapters, three emblematic Central European intellectuals following the philosophical model in thinking about Europe will be singled out: the political thinkers Zygmunt Bauman, Imre Kertész and Slavoj Žižek. Bauman belonged to the group of enthusiastic intellectuals defending the communist idea of modernity after World War II and he became a prominent member of the Polish group of Marxist humanists trying to change the communist political system from within. Kertész is a Holocaust survivor, who upon his return to Budapest briefly embraced communism but soon chose an inner exile and became a maverick. His experiences in the concentration camps as well as his life in communist Hungary are key when formulating ideas of Europe. Žižek is an atypical and idiosyncratic thinker who grew out of a third group portrayed in this chapter: those intellectuals taking a ‘Konrádian’ antipolitical stance. In Slovenia, he was a member of the New Left, defending human rights, emancipation, and personal or cultural freedom. Being of a younger generation, however, which neither witnessed the Holocaust nor was affected by the excesses of Stalinism, he is more radical than Bauman and Kertész and ultimately does not shy away from violence: a position which also characterised radicals as they could be found in the interwar period. From the late 1990s, Bauman, Kertész and Žižek actively start speaking about Europe. They take an ‘all-European’ perspective, yet in relation to their experiences as Central Europeans. They connect their experiences during

World War II and communism with the Enlightenment values democracy, freedom, and individuality and defend them as Europe's most important heritage. In the maelstrom of eternal debates about a European constitution or the future of the Euro, it is these thinkers who have their roots in the twentieth century Central European context and perspectives of formulating ideas of Europe, that now defend the normative heart of Europe and seek to come up with alternative models of conceiving Europe and its role in the world.

Chapter II

Europe of ‘Me’, ‘You’ and ‘the Other’ Zygmunt Bauman and the Idea of Europe

A European, no doubt, I was, had never stopped being – born in Europe, living in Europe, working in Europe, thinking European, feeling European; and what is more, there is thus far no European passport office with the authority to issue or to refuse a ‘European passport’, and so to confer or to deny our right to call ourselves Europeans.¹

Introduction:

Asking about the idea of Europe in Zygmunt Bauman’s work is not an easy task. Though the Polish born sociologist has written an almost uncountable number of books and even more articles – before retiring from the University of Leeds in 1990, he basically published one book a year, after his retirement it became two books a year –, Bauman (b. 1925) has not written a comprehensive body of work. Apart from a critical trilogy on modernity, which appeared between 1987 and 1991 and probably counts as his most famous and widely read work – it comprises the titles *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Modernity and*

¹ Bauman *Identity* p. 10

Ambivalence (1991) –, almost every book is concerned with a different theme or topic.² Europe features in the title of very few articles and only one of his monographs: *Europe. An Unfinished Adventure*, published in 2004. What is more, the numerous overviews and interpretations of Bauman's work that appeared after his retirement from university usually carry titles such as *Culture, Modernity and Revolution. Essays in Honour of Zygmunt Bauman* (Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe, 1996), *Zygmunt Bauman. Prophet of Postmodernity* (Dennis Smith, 1999), *Bauman Before Postmodernity* and *Bauman Beyond Postmodernity* (Keith Tester and Michael Hviid Jacobsen, 2005 and 2007 respectively), or *Bauman's Challenge. Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Mark Davis and Keith Tester, 2010). In addition, next to having published several (introductory) works on Bauman, Peter Beilharz, an Australian sociologist, edited a four-volume, extremely rich and illuminating collection entitled *Zygmunt Bauman* (2002), gathering all articles, interviews, background information, and interpretations dealing with the Polish sociologist from the late 1980s onwards. Going through these interpretations, there are few that reflect on Europe as a theme let alone make it the key subject of their research. Sociologists who write these interpretations of his work either studied with Bauman, got to know him as a colleague or have a close affinity with his work. They

² See also: Tester & Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* pp. 19/20. In his book *Zygmunt Bauman: Dialectic of Modernity* (2000), the Australian sociologist and interpreter of Bauman's work, Peter Beilharz (b. 1953), argues that depending on your point of view, one can actually identify several more trilogies or triptychs. Next to the already mentioned one, he connects *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), *Life in Fragments* (1995), and *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997), addressing the flaws of postmodern society, and *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998) and *In Search of Politics* (1999), which to him is a more politically inspired set of books (p. ix). How one, thus, reads Bauman's work is determined by one's focus. Writing this dissertation in 2014, Bauman has published several more volumes and it is possible to detect more connecting lines between the books or themes he deems important. My selection of his writings and the connecting lines I draw are defined by my focus on Europe and some books are therefore more important than others; yet, as I will argue, the theme Europe runs through all of his working life, which means I will address his early articles as well as his latest publications.

stay close to the thematic of modernity, the Holocaust, postmodernity, culture, and ethics as provided by Bauman. One finds little reference to Europe.

My approach towards and examination of Zygmunt Bauman

In this chapter, I deem it important to add a new layer or dimension to the writings on the Polish sociologist and depict Zygmunt Bauman's life and work historically.³ The aim is to interpret both Bauman's ideas and background against a European backdrop. That is, Bauman's story is a European story. It is the story of a Pole and a Jew born in the twentieth century, experiencing World War II as a refugee and as a soldier, witnessing the loss of (Janina Bauman's) family members at Auschwitz and Katyn, and ending up living on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain full of hope. It is the biography of a Pole, a Jew, and a European believing in and experiencing an ideology that promised a better world: an ideology that had many followers in Eastern and Western Europe but was never able to close the gap between ideas and every day practice. World history took place on the stage of Europe, destroying an old world order and replacing it with a new one, and Bauman was part of it. His writings witness these experiences and confirm his belief in socialist theory. Finding a new base in 1970 in Leeds after he had no other choice but to leave Poland in 1968, he was to remain true to his Marxist humanist roots with a focus on human culture or activity,

³ The book that comes closest to this proposition is Dennis Smith's *Zygmunt Bauman. Prophet of Postmodernity* (1999). Smith, who is a sociologist himself, has paid much attention to the historical and intellectual context in relation to Bauman's ideas and personal biography. It gives an overview of his work between the 1960s and 1990s, while trying not only to repeat the ideas of those texts, but also to get 'behind' those texts (cf. Smith *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 3). For Smith, however, Bauman as a sociologist and his road to postmodernity is the main focus. I am interested in Zygmunt Bauman who doubtless is a leading sociologist discussing modernity, postmodernity and liquid modernity; but more importantly, he personifies Europe's twentieth century history and it is about time to question Bauman about his idea of Europe.

while criticising the failings of ‘really existing socialism’ even more critically from the outside than from within. Zygmunt Bauman, thus, is a European and the world he encounters is a European world: a European society that he got to know in all its diversity.

In the below analysis, I wish to link biography and ideas when exploring Zygmunt Bauman’s idea of Europe. To put it in stronger terms: I claim that it is not possible to understand Bauman’s idea of Europe without reflecting on his biography. In his inaugural lecture at Leeds in 1972, Bauman himself stated: “[I]n the professional life of a sociologist his most intimate, private biography is inextricably intertwined with the biography of his discipline; one thing the sociologist cannot transcend in his quest for objectivity is his own, intimate and subjective encounter-with-the-world.”⁴ It is his life experience, his active taking part in European history, his position of an in- as well as an outsider regarding the experience of totalitarian rule, of communism, his further intellectual life developing within a liberal democracy, and the impact all this had on his ideas that inspires me to question Bauman about Europe. It is his identity that goes through the stages of being a Polish national as well as a Jewish cosmopolitan, of growing up in Poland and partly in the Soviet Union and of becoming British and feeling European. It is Bauman’s life trajectory in which he gets disenchanted with communism, in which he engages himself in offering a critique of really existing socialism from within and later from without, and in which he too develops a criticism of capitalism. All this enables me to focus on the paradoxes of his intellectual position and on the complexities of his life and work while extrapolating this to the wider European context.

⁴ Bauman ‘Culture, Values and Study of Society’ p. 185

Reception and Interpretation of his Work in the Wider Academic Landscape

Though Bauman himself does not maintain to have established a school of thought, he does have many followers and admirers around the world. While his influence might be greatest in the United Kingdom where he found refuge after being forced to leave Poland, he is highly respected in the rest of Europe, in the United States and in Australia.⁵ As regards the content of Bauman's work and his personal background, most scholars who write on Bauman reflect upon his work while placing it in the wider sociological context. Due to the nature of his writings, authors and themes of philosophy, literature, politics, and history are included, but always with the question in mind 'How does this relate to the discipline of sociology?'. That is, being a sociologist, Bauman is portrayed as an eager, witty, original and highly capable analyst of society. As society develops, he attunes with it, thus seeking to understand, describe, and generalise changes in the world around us. In the various overviews mentioned above, Bauman is depicted as a 'continental' sociologist who finds his inspiration in literature, philosophy, and anthropology.⁶ He stands out in his

⁵ See: Beilharz *Zygmunt Bauman* p. xxiii. Bauman's work has been translated into many languages; yet, Peter Beilharz argues that his reception and influence is greatest in the United Kingdom. In the United States, the response to Bauman's work is more fragmentary and partial. He is known mainly for his work on postmodernism. In Germany, Bauman's ideas regarding the Holocaust and Modernity play a pivotal role in discussions on Bauman and his further reception. There are thus varying responses to writings of the Polish sociologist.

⁶ See: Smith 'How to be a Successful Outsider' p. 41. In this article, Dennis Smith defines his independence as 'outsider-ness': one that is partly due to him being a Polish exile and partly a result of his own choice. In a 2006 article 'Intellectual Immigration and the English Idiom (Or, a Tale of Bustards and Eagles)' Keith Tester, however, argues that Smith uses the notion of an outsider in a positive sense and to a certain extent that is justified; nevertheless, he forgets the normative side behind the story, as being an outsider also means being excluded. This exclusion is not accidental. Analysing the reviews of Bauman's first book *Between Class and Elite* (1972) translated into English, Tester argues that the English academic landscape might actually not have been as welcoming as they pretended to be. The English academic elite was defining the parameters to decide who was in and who was out, positioning Bauman as an outsider in the British intellectual debate and thus depriving him of

methodological approaches and choice of topics. Instead of using tables, empirical and statistical data like many Anglo-American sociologists, he produces highly theoretical works employing ‘metaphors’, ‘dialectics’, and ‘sociological hermeneutics’ to capture real life experiences.⁷ Furthermore, he is described as an authority in discussing modernity, postmodernity, and at present, liquid modernity, in which everything is in a constant state of becoming and nothing (incl. social relations) stays fixed.⁸ Crucial themes that he deals with and keep returning in his work include culture, power, freedom, morality, justice, consumerism, and the suffering of fellow human beings.⁹ In ‘being’ this kind of sociologist, then, most scholars agree that Bauman has proved to be very successful in his academic strategies and choices.¹⁰ To many, he has become a leading and admired sociologist.

It, thus, is in the sociological setting that Bauman’s unique position and the themes he works on are pointed out, not within other disciplines. Wider contexts and historical backgrounds are discussed only with regards to his socialist past and life as a Polish intellectual. Yet, these discussions are few and Bauman in that case is mostly *a* thinker amongst others.¹¹ Debates in Germany might pose one exception. Here, Bauman’s

the possibility to legitimately contribute to the sociological debate (cf. Tester ‘Intellectual Immigration’ p. 290). Yet, both agree, despite or thanks to this position, Bauman is an extremely successful sociologist.

⁷ Jacobsen and Marshman. ‘Metaphorically Speaking’ p. 311. See also: Blackshaw ‘Bauman’s Challenge to Sociology’ p. 80; Beilharz *The Bauman Reader* p. 2

⁸ See: Bauman and Tester *Conversations* p. 5; Bauman *Liquid modernity* p. 120. Here Bauman argues that “[s]olid’ modernity was an era of mutual engagement. ‘Fluid’ modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase.”

⁹ See: Kilminster and Varcoe. *Culture, Modernity and Revolution* p. 215 ff.; Jacobsen and Marshman ‘The Four Faces’ pp. 3-24. Also, Bauman and Tester’s *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* addresses these themes in a very condensed and attractive matter.

¹⁰ See also: Jacobsen and Tester ‘Editors’ Introduction: Being a Sociologist’ p. 265

¹¹ See, for example, the chapter ‘Polish Revisionism: Critical Thinking in Poland from 1953 to 1968’ by James H. Satterwhite in his *Varieties of Marxist Humanism: Philosophical Revision in Postwar Eastern Europe* (1992) or ‘The Social Role of Eastern European Intellectuals Reconsidered’ by Lewis A. Coser. He published his article (pp. 166-185) in the *Festschrift* for Bauman: *Culture, Modernity and*

book on *Modernity and the Holocaust* had a massive impact, as the topic of this book challenged, indeed rejected the German *Sonderweg*-thesis according to which Germany developed differently from other modern Western states. For years, it had been accepted amongst German leftist and liberal historians that the causes for or the origins of Nazism and the Holocaust lay in this special German path to modernisation. In the 1980s, however, this view changed and a heated debate (*Historikerstreit*) broke out. With the publication of Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, this debate was opened up again and as a result, reactions in Germany were highly sensitive.¹² Since then, most of his works have been translated and read, also by historians. Nevertheless, a broad overview admitting him a place in a history of ideas or an intellectual history on Bauman is still missing.

In a recent book titled *Zygmunt Bauman. Why Good People do Bad Things* (2013), the British sociologist Shaun Best seeks to offer a somewhat wider interpretation of Bauman's work. His aim is "to demonstrate that there are links between [four distinct] phases in Bauman's theorising and the circumstances in which he found himself and the decisions he made over the course of his life."¹³ He argues that Bauman's Polish and socialist past had a huge impact on his work and how it developed. He is

Revolution: Essays in Honour of Zygmunt Bauman, edited by Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe (1996). In his monograph on Zygmunt Bauman, *Zygmunt Bauman. Prophet of Postmodernity* (1999), Dennis Smith seeks to include Bauman's historical and intellectual context, yet in the end, the focus lies on Bauman's ideas and his role within the postmodern debate. A recent contribution to Bauman's place in a wider European intellectual context is: Outhwaite 'Bauman's Europe; Europe's Bauman' pp. 1-13. Yet, it is a brief text and mainly points out important trends without further thorough analysis. And in Beilharz' four-volume collections of writings on *Zygmunt Bauman* one can find the debate and reactions of (Jewish) historians to his *Modernity and the Holocaust* book (Vol. II) as well as a wider discussion of Bauman as a postmodern thinker (Vol. II and III).

¹² See: Joas 'Bauman in Germany' p. 49f. Joas' article provides an extensive analysis of Bauman's impact and later influence in Germany. Other German works discussing Zygmunt Bauman and his sociology are: Kastner *Politik und Postmoderne* (2000); Kron *Moralische Individualität* (2001); Junge & Kron *Zygmunt Bauman* (2002).

¹³ Best *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 1

especially critical of the Polish phase in Bauman's life, as during the immediate years after World War II, Bauman followed the orthodox Marxist-Leninist doctrine and worked for the military service until 1948.¹⁴ Moreover, Best is convinced that Bauman's Stalinist and later revisionist Marxist ideas are the red thread of his further career in Eastern and Western Europe. In his view, reflecting upon Bauman's biography, the positive reading of his work has to be revised. Unfortunately, however, Best himself does not live up to his own demands because of his highly suggestive and accusing interpretation of Bauman's life and work. Ultimately, his book can be read as the work of a finger pointing Durkheimian liberal defending his sociological cause against the intrusion of a (ex-)Marxist thinker of the left, who has a problematic past and therefore cannot be trusted for what he says about moral issues of today's society.

Yet, there is something to Best's initial point and critique: Bauman cannot be understood without referring to his past and thus providing a historical account of how his ideas developed within the context of his life. This is most visible in Bauman's ambivalent relationship with his native country. The sociologist does have quite a number of followers and admirers in Poland, but also harsh critics.¹⁵ Since the early 1990s, many of his works were translated into Polish and his star has been rising ever since. He had been a popular professor at the University of Warsaw and one of the intellectual protagonists of Marxist revisionism until the communist government's

¹⁴ See: Musiał 'Im Kampf gegen Banden' p. 35; Urban 'Vom Soziologen, der ein Stalinist war' p. 13; Edemariam 'Professor with a past'

¹⁵ See: Stefan Morawski's article entitled 'Bauman's Ways of Seeing the World' (pp. 29-38) and published in *Theory, Culture and Society* (1998) for a closer examination of Bauman's influence and intellectual history in Poland. In the years after the coming down of the Iron Curtain, he was made an emeritus professor in sociology at his old Polish working base, the University of Warsaw and in 2011, at the European Culture Congress held in Wrocław, Poland, Bauman was one of the key figures.

anti-Semitic purge of 1968¹⁶; he now once again became a public figure in Poland. These days, he is present in various newspapers and journals and is widely read by “the middle and younger generation of scholars” at the Polish universities.¹⁷ Yet, all that glitters is not gold. Little is known about Bauman’s exact position and activities in the military intelligence, since most of the files that could shed light on his actions have been destroyed and Bauman keeps silent on this period of his life. In an interview Bauman dismissed Bogdan Musial’s revelation of his past in the secret service as some “half-truths and 100% lies” that are not worth paying any attention to. Nevertheless, he admits that he was a communist “until 1967” and had joined the secret service writing “political pamphlets for soldiers” and being involved in “counter-espionage”, though he does not remember informing on people.¹⁸ Bauman’s years in the military are a peculiar episode in his life, however, especially since many Jewish survivors of the war serving the secret service took the opportunity to quit already in 1946 and emigrate to the West.¹⁹ Bauman did not. Archival evidence shows he stayed on until 1948 being convinced of the communist cause, and subsequently made a further career in the army until the early 1950s. This has consequences for Bauman’s reception and position in Poland also today, which can be illustrated by his recent renunciation of an honorary doctorate at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, Poland. His Jewish as well as his communist past sparked protest and hate speech and Bauman, thus, decided to turn down the honorary doctorate.²⁰ From these condemning Polish reactions to Bauman as well as from Shaun Best’s book one can

¹⁶ See also: Satterwhite *Marxist Humanism* p. 17

¹⁷ Morawski ‘Bauman’s Ways of Seeing the World’ p. 36

¹⁸ Edemariam ‘Professor with a Past’

¹⁹ See: Urban ‘Vom Soziologen, der ein Stalinist war’ p. 13

²⁰ See: Winograd ‘Leeds professor’; Levitt ‘Jewish Professor’

deduct thereupon that as long as Bauman does not speak about his past, he will stay vulnerable to criticisms regarding his early communist life.

Methodology: Contextualised Biography, Hermeneutical Reading, Jewishness

I do not aim at writing a biography; instead, I use biography as a background to understand ideas. Biography serves as a dimension of historical reflection in my broader history of ideas. In the first half of this chapter, I examine how the social and national environment, how the relationship between society and the individual, and how historical or crucial events in the life of the individual (and here the family plays a role as well) influence the writings of Zygmunt Bauman.²¹ In my analysis, Bauman does not stand by himself, but is an actor in a historical context. I am interested in how he is shaped by his surroundings and relationship to certain social groups and in how his experiences subsequently affect his thinking.²² Europe so will be studied as a lived experience.

In the second half of the chapter, the focus lies on Bauman's ideas of freedom, individuality, and democracy. These are contested terms and are subject to long-lasting philosophical and political debates that have their origins in the very early days of philosophy. Since it is modern society, however, influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment that is Bauman's frame of reference, my discussion on these three notions departs from the ideas of the Enlightenment and the way they influenced

²¹ This follows the developments in debates on the use of biography in historical research as described by Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf in *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science* (2000) as well as by Lässig and Berghahn in *Biography Between Structure and Agency* (2008).

²² See also: Eckel 'Historiography, Biography, and Experience' pp. 86 and pp. 88/9; Rotberg 'Biography and Historiography' p. 307

philosophical thinking. Moreover, these themes follow from my choice of further examining the humanist inspired idea of Europe. In *Imperfect Garden* (2002), the Bulgarian-French philosopher Tsvetan Todorov describes the humanists as a philosophical family and as an anthropocentric doctrine in which the human being is appointed a special role.²³ He summarises the three essential humanist values as follows: (1) the autonomy of the ‘I,’ (2) the finality of the ‘you,’ and (3) the universality of the ‘they.’²⁴ Active humanism, he asserts, requires of the individual to think of the question how his/her acting upon the world affects others. The individual has to be a morally responsible human being, who takes into account the other. Freedom, the autonomy of the individual, and social life are inextricably linked and affect any political decision-making process.²⁵ Hence, the importance of the notions of freedom, individuality and democracy, the latter not being the only outcome of political decision-processes, but at present, the best one available.

To understand Bauman’s Marxist-humanist inspired idea of Europe it is crucial to examine his ideas of freedom, individuality, and democracy. In my interpretation of Bauman’s thinking, I will follow Dominick LaCapra’s hermeneutical approach or ‘dialogic reading’, while looking at the message the Polish sociologist seeks to communicate and my reaction or response to it.²⁶ I will critically read his texts and

²³ Todorov *De Onvoltooide Tuin* p. 50

²⁴ Ibid. p. 51

²⁵ Ibid. p. 55

²⁶ See: LaCapra’s book *History and Reading. Toqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (2000). In the first chapter ‘History, Reading, and Critical Theory’ he outlines various ways of reading and analysing texts. His ‘Dialogic Reading’ (p. 64) is based on an approach, which distinguishes “between accurate reconstruction of an object of study and exchange with that object as well as with other inquires into it” (p. 65). To him, historical research and dialogic exchange are reciprocally related. As LaCapra states: “A combination of accurate reconstruction and dialogic exchange is necessary in that it accords an important place to the ‘voices’ and specific situations of others at the same time as it creates a place for our ‘voices’ in an attempt to come to terms with the past in a manner that has implications for the present and future” (p. 67).

interpret his writings accordingly without claiming sovereignty over interpretation and full objectivity. Through focusing on these notions, my intention is to explore how his works on modernity, postmodernity, and liquid modernity, on freedom, morality, and the art of life, and on love, politics, and identity are related to the idea of Europe. Here again, the rule applies that his writings do not stand by themselves. An informed and dialogic reading of his texts means that his ideas have to be evaluated with regards to socio-economic and political structures and to the historical context – and as I believe, with reference to his personal experiences and life, which connects the first and second part of this chapter.

In the last part of the chapter I will turn explicitly to Bauman's idea of Europe. With reference to the previous two parts, I will focus on the questions what kind of society Bauman prefers, how it is reformulated and when, and what this means with regards to his idea of Europe. Europe takes many shapes and forms. As pointed out in the first chapter, politicians focus on political realities, historians working on the idea of Europe refer to the historical foundations and unity of Europe as a community or culture, and philosophers emphasise the normative, universalist, and voluntaristic side of the idea of Europe. To writers Europe often is a land of longing and a surreal image of identification. Since Bauman is a sociologist it is society that is his main topic of concern. His idea of Europe is closely related to his idea of (a perfect) society. Bauman is an extraordinary sociologist, philosopher and intellectual who transcends the Iron Curtain, has a European-wide or rather worldwide audience and impact, and might be said to embody a pan-European view of society. Bauman's long life spans the twentieth century. He is one of the chief thinkers of his time, simultaneously personifying the position of a stranger and of an insider. Working within and from the

United Kingdom, he is able to offer insights from both vantage points of European post-World War II history. Crucial here, too, is his Jewish, humanist cosmopolitan identity. Though not wishing to explain everything with being Jewish, it is an important facet to reflect upon when dealing with Bauman's idea of Europe. Barbara Breysach who edited several volumes on Jewish literature and Europe, argues that in Jewish memory, in literature and political thought, 'Europeanness' plays an important role.²⁷ Before World War II and the Holocaust destroyed most of Jewish life in Europe, Europe had always been more than a territory for the Jews. It was a possibility beyond religion as well as offering a place for religious Renaissance. Europe was a transnational space of many languages, of cultural diversity. It had been the home of civil society, of Jewish connoted socialism, and of Zionism.²⁸ Europe was an idea, a utopia, and the Jews of Europe played an important role in formulating this idea. As a survivor of World War II and the Holocaust, Bauman stayed in Europe after 1945, but ultimately had to say goodbye to his home country and the socialist utopia. Yet, he took with him the experience of the Jewish people in general and the Jewish intellectual in particular, which to him was a "rich source of sociological insight."²⁹ Hence, Bauman's understanding of "the essential categories of modern culture" and his ultimate critique of this culture are deeply connected to the Jewish experience.³⁰ The European societal alternative and idea he subsequently proposes from his exile in Britain is the subject of the final part of my chapter on Bauman.

²⁷ cf. Breysach 'Einleitung' p. 7

²⁸ cf. Breysach 'Einleitung' p. 8/9. See also: Witte 'Einleitung: Europa – Heimat der Juden?' pp. 11-19

²⁹ Kilminster and Varcoe 'Sociology, postmodernity and exile' p. 227

³⁰ Bauman in: Kilminster and Varcoe 'Sociology, postmodernity and exile' p. 226

II.I The Interdependence of Work and Life

Zygmunt Bauman's Polish Period

Bauman's lifespan coincided with the major events of the European twentieth century. Born in 1925 in Poznań, Poland into a poor, assimilated, non-practising Jewish family, he spent his youth in a 'young' and proud Poland that had returned on the maps of the world at the end of World War I, after having been erased from those maps more than a century earlier. 1926, a year after Bauman was born, the 'First Marshal of Poland', Józef Klemens Piłsudski, would return to power after a brief interlude of non-political activity and seek to increase Poland's power in Europe, continuously trying to defend its sovereignty against German and Russian quests for domination. Yet, with the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and the dangers this posed to the Jewish population, Bauman's family fled to the Soviet Union. In the periphery of northern Russia, Bauman received his further (Soviet ideological) education. Subsequently, at the age of 18, in 1943, he joined the Soviet controlled Polish First Army in Russia and fought for Poland's liberation. Returning to Poland in 1945 and becoming a member of the Polish United Workers' Party in 1946, he served in the army for several more years, ultimately rising to the rank of Major. He was expelled from the army early in 1953 due to an anti-Semitic purge initiated by the so-called 'Doctor's Plot' of 1952.³¹ Like so many other Jews of his generation, Bauman had become a firm believer in the socialist idea hoping that communism would open

³¹ See: Bauman *A Dream of Belonging* p. 105. The 'Doctor's Plot' (see: Chanes *Anti-Semitism: A Reference Handbook* p. 121) in which Stalin accused a group of doctors of plotting to murder the Soviet leadership, was part of an anti-Semitic propaganda campaign in the Soviet Union and was not only confined to the Soviet Union. In the satellite states, many Jews saw themselves subjected to yet another wave of discrimination.

up the possibility of leaving behind the shattering experiences of the war and that it would finally offer them a place in society that held the utopian promise of justice and equality. As “a continuation of the Enlightenment” communism was to bring modernity to a backward country.³² Therefore, the anti-Semitic purge made him feel like he lost everything he fought for.

It is not easy to reconstruct Bauman’s beliefs of the 1940s and his gradual estrangement from the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, as he is rather private regarding his personal life and his books hardly ever contain any personal dedication.³³ Nonetheless, the memories of his wife, Janina Bauman (1926-2009), give an impression of his dedication to Marxism: He was convinced of fighting for the good cause, of proudly rebuilding Poland after the devastations of the war, and of creating a better, more equal, and just society.³⁴ Still in his army years, he tried to ease his wife’s doubts on the Communist Party’s practices saying:

³² Edemariam ‘Professor with a past.’ In his book *The Passing of an Illusion* (1999, orig. 1995), François Furet has done a marvellous job in describing the attraction and persuasiveness of the “idea” of communism. The idea that through the passing of several historical periods in interaction with capitalism one would ultimately find oneself in a perfect – first socialist, then communist – society, in universalist utopia, was extremely alluring to many people not only in Europe, but actually all over the world. At the end of World War II, Russia’s power in Europe had grown enormously (also as a counterforce to Fascism) and the fascination with communism was at its high (see: pp. 361/2).

³³ One of his first books *Between Class and Elite. The evolution of the British labour movement. A sociological study* (1972), the Polish original of which appeared in 1960 entitled *Klasa – ruch – elita*, is dedicated to his parents. The second book that carries a dedication is his famous *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), which is dedicated to his wife, Janina, as the reading of her first book *Winter in the Morning. A young girl’s life in the Warsaw ghetto and beyond* (1986) made him aware of and sensitive to the topic of the Holocaust and all the sufferings of the Jews during World War II. Moreover, in his book *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (2001) Keith Tester argues that instead of his own biography, Janina Bauman’s biography is central to Zygmunt Bauman’s work (p. 4). Bauman himself strictly separates the private person from the public intellectual. He does not want to be the theme of his story, of the message he wants to convey. See also: Bauman ‘Dankrede’ p. 12; Beilharz *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 1. In my analysis, however, I hold on to Bauman’s 1972 remark that the sociologist’s biography and the subject of his research are closely intertwined. This does not only include the life story of his wife, but also his own, even though he might not explicitly refer to it.

³⁴ In an interview of 1993, originally published in *Mittelweg*, Janina Bauman calls her husband the first, honourable communist she met and respected: a person of integrity. See: Bauman ‘Gespräch mit Janina Bauman und Zygmunt Bauman’ p. 39

Unfortunately (...) the Party ranks were still full of untrustworthy individuals, ruthlessly ambitious climbers and ideologically immature members. Yet, despite this transitory weakness, despite the grave mistakes often committed in its name, the Party was the most powerful agent of social justice and had to be implicitly trusted. You cannot make an omelette (...) without breaking eggs. You cannot make a revolution without accidentally hurting some of the innocent.³⁵

Bauman had been a devoted Party member and made an astounding career within the army, having worked for military intelligence until 1948.³⁶ Yet, this firm belief in the Party and its workings was shattered when he was sacked from the army; his belief in the Marxist ideology, however, was not. After a first shock, Zygmunt Bauman started studying full-time again (having obtained his first degree, he kept attending evening classes at university) and in 1957, was allowed to go to the United Kingdom for a year of postdoctoral studies, which at this time was a privilege. On an American grant he was able to study at the London School of Economics (LSE). Back in Poland, he became a faculty member and ever more important lecturer in sociology at the University of Warsaw, obtaining the position of Chair of General Sociology in 1964.³⁷

Since Bauman took up his studies only after high Stalinism was over and Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in academic life lost much of his attraction, there are no texts available that might offer the reader an insight in Bauman's original communist beliefs. Analysing the articles he published during the 1960s in *The Polish Sociological Bulletin*, however, Bauman's affinity to the Marxist ideology is apparent, as is his turn to Marxist revisionism or Marxist humanism. At the start of the decade, his writing concentrated on the actually existing socialism in Poland. This work was based on statistical research and structuralist arguments. For instance, Bauman looked

³⁵ Bauman *A Dream of Belonging* p. 77

³⁶ See for the debate on Bauman's activities within the army: Musial 'Im Kampf gegen Banden' p. 35; Urban 'Vom Soziologen, der ein Stalinist war' p. 13; Edemariam 'Professor with a past.'

³⁷ See also: Tester & Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* p. 17

at the social composition of the Communist Party membership or discussed values and standards of success of the Warsaw youth.³⁸ Yet, in these early writings Bauman's analytical perspective and emphasis on "the role of humanity as the agent of praxis in the world," as Tester and Jacobsen have stated so eloquently, is already evident.³⁹ By 1965, Bauman started writing on the development of a personality or creation of an individual, the importance of a multidimensional society and the possibility of choice, which brings about creativity and innovation and stimulates human beings to actively participate in society. His articles call for the diversification of society and address the fact that there is no such thing as perfect planning. Bauman criticises the political leadership for not adequately taking care of the country's youth and its future, because it does not stimulate it to think critically and develop its own values and personality.⁴⁰

³⁸ See: Bauman 'Social Structure of the Party Organization in Industrial Works' pp. 50-64; Bauman 'Values and Standards of Success of the Warsaw Youth' pp. 77-90

³⁹ Tester and Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* p. 49. The book *Between Class and Elite* (1972), originally published in 1960, dates from this early period in Bauman's life as a sociologist. In the preface to the English edition Bauman, however, states that after 15 years since he started his research, he considers the book worth publishing again because of its approach. "Its contribution was configurational, not substantive: it was the result of applying a new approach and reorganising the known empirical material in a new analytical perspective" (p. ix). This analytical perspective in the world of (British) sociology that is mainly based on empiricism becomes Bauman's trademark and is clear in his early career already as is his emphasis on human agency: "I have tried to look at the labour movement as an active, adaptive and self-regulating system, 'assimilating' its 'outer' environment by trying to impress on it the desired structural changes and 'accommodating' its own structure to the changing requirements of the successful assimilation" (p. xi/xii). Moreover, this view of a human agency engaging in and acting upon the world Bauman also develops in his obituary 'In Memory of Julian Hochfeld' of his former teacher in 1967. "Professor Hochfeld advocated, consistently, both in theoretical writings and in practical activity, a model of activist, militant social science, deeply and sincerely engaged in endless endeavour to make the human world more suitable for human beings. (...) Sociology as a moral task, as a mission to fulfil self-sacrificingly – this is what connected professor Hochfeld's writings and life activity with the great humanistic tradition of the human thought" (p. 204). It is a lesson Bauman has taken to heart and returns also in his inaugural lecture at the university of Leeds. In 1973, then, with the publication of his book *Culture as Praxis*, he will talk about humanity as a project that is more than its mere existence. According to Bauman, the human being transcends "the realm of determinism, subordinating the *is* to the *ought*" (p. 172). Man is a creative being: a view that will return over and over again.

⁴⁰ See: Bauman 'Social Structure and Innovational Personality' pp. 54-59; Bauman 'Three Remarks on Contemporary Educational Problems' pp. 77-89; Bauman 'The Limitations of Perfect Planning' pp. 145-162; Bauman 'Two Notes on Mass Culture' pp. 58-74; Bauman 'Image of Man in Modern Sociology' pp. 15-21. Similar articles or articles that argue along the same lines, but published

Polish sociology at that time had a special character and a peculiar place in socialist society. As a result of the rapid industrialisation of the country in those years, sociology had gained importance “because it became a way in which men and women could relate their personal troubles to the public issues.”⁴¹ Being involved in public life, sociologists were seen as the bearers or personification of moral virtue by the population. The public function of Polish sociology resulted in a close link with the approaching social reform movements. Sociologists used Marxism as a critical theory and made “really existing socialism” their object of research, scrutinising its claim to truth.⁴² As pointed out in the first chapter, together with the intellectual historian Bronisław Baczko, the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, and the sociologist Maria Hirszowicz, Bauman played an important role in revising Marxist theory, emphasising the humanist sides of the ideology.⁴³ Being a public intellectual, he felt in a position to guide others, offer people insights in societal processes and consequently a moral framework to hold on to.⁴⁴ It becomes obvious in reading his publications of that time that in stressing the role of the individual in society, Bauman calls for his fellow citizens to actively take part in building society.

An extensive view of what Marxism meant to Bauman in the late 1960s and a good insight in how he understood Marxist humanism, can be found in an article titled

elsewhere are: Bauman ‘Some Problems in Contemporary Education’ pp. 325-337; Bauman ‘Polish Youth and Politics’ pp. 69-77

⁴¹ Tester and Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* p. 80

⁴² cf. Ibid. pp. 72–74

⁴³ For a well-informed study of Marxist revisionism in Poland, see: Satterwhite *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* pp. 12-70. It was reprinted in: Beilharz *Zygmunt Bauman*, Vol. 1, pp. 288-332

⁴⁴ As the Polish sociologist stated in his inaugural lecture at Leeds in 1972, sociology is a vocation to him, “a testfield of courage, consistency, and loyalty to *human values* [my italics]” (Bauman ‘Culture, Values and Study of Society’ p. 203).

‘Modern Times, Modern Marxism.’⁴⁵ According to Bauman, Marxism does not equal economic determinism. Following an anthropological approach, he asserts that Marxism is a rather fruitful and vital human science.⁴⁶ He criticises the modern scientific positivistic trend in social research in which everything becomes predictable and argues that to truly understand why people do what they do and to value their different personalities and motives, one has to take the individual human being as a point of departure and not society: “What is of primary concern is how to adjust society to individual needs, not the reverse; how to extend the range of freedom of individual choice; how to provide room enough for individual initiative and non-conformity.”⁴⁷ It is individual, human action that constitutes the focal point of critical Marxism: the emancipation of man from nature. Therefore, it does not and cannot provide researchers with any predictable outcome or truth. By and large, Bauman highlights human rather than material forces as agents of social, economic, and political change. He stresses the humanist and the ethical strains in Marxist theory and accords the human being a central position in society. He criticises the state for denying men and women the opportunity to make responsible individual choices and

⁴⁵ This article was first published in 1967, while still in Warsaw. It was republished in 1969 in Peter Berger’s *Marxism and Sociology: Views from Eastern Europe* (I will cite this latter version). By then, Bauman had been forced to leave Poland and had (temporarily) moved to Israel. Another article, in which Bauman examines the value of the Marxian image of the world, is ‘Marx and the contemporary theory of culture’ (1968). Instead of economic determinism, Bauman stresses the importance of human praxis, which comprises both culture and social structure. “A human community becomes a cultural community by employing a specific sign system and by ascribing to each sign a definite, universally accepted, control function. The labelling of reality through the use of signs is particularly important to the social, non-natural, section of that reality” (Bauman ‘Marx’ p. 30). Through culture (which is human made) the world of the individual is both ordered and structured.

⁴⁶ See: Bauman ‘Modern Marxism’ p. 9

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 6/7

claim their freedom and liberty.⁴⁸ These themes will keep returning in his later work and show a continuing line of what Bauman thinks is essential.

By the 1960s, the Stalinist period's strict control over academics forcing them to follow the Marxist-Leninist doctrine was thus over. Władysław Gomułka taking over the Polish leadership in 1956 had meant the commencement of a period of reform. Pluralism and independent thinking returned or, as can be seen in Bauman's writings, were actively promoted by the researchers themselves. To a certain extent, criticism and discussion were possible again. Bauman had been allowed to travel to Western Europe and study in an environment where every book he wanted to use was available and free and open discussion on the topics he addressed were possible. For Bauman, however, the political thaw in his home country meant that without doubt he would return to Poland after his year at the LSE. He was one of the prominent scholars at Warsaw University who tried to change the socialist system from within, supporting human individual and creative activity (*praxis*) in society and democratisation of the system, and calling for more freedom and pluralisation and diversification of society.⁴⁹ Indeed, kindred spirits could be found not only amongst his colleagues in Warsaw, but also in the surrounding satellite states. After years of national isolation they were able to establish contacts and travel internationally.⁵⁰ At the time, Poland was probably the country that allowed most freedom among the Warsaw-pact states.

Yet, it was still dominated by an authoritarian political system that was wary of too much reform activities. Towards the end of the 1960s, Bauman and his family were to

⁴⁸ cf. Bauman 'Social Structure and Innovational Personality' 56

⁴⁹ See also: Bauman *A Dream of Belonging* p. 163

⁵⁰ The Hungarian Jewish philosopher Ágnes Heller (b. 1929) is one of them and it is her work Bauman will keep referring to, up until his recent writings. For other Marxist revisionists, see: Satterwhite's book on *Varieties of Marxist Humanism* (1992).

experience the narrow boundaries of openness and freedom in the communist political system. In the course of the mid-1960s, it was getting more difficult for him to publish and his articles were censored. Besides, with rising prices, food shortages, economic stagnation, and the Polish government's anti-Israel or anti-Zionist campaign that was launched in the course of the Israeli-Arab war in June 1967, anti-Semitism grew stronger once again.⁵¹ As a consequence, both Janina and Zygmunt Bauman resigned their Party membership early 1968. Little later, student protests broke out calling for more freedom. The regime reacted with force and blamed leading intellectuals with a Jewish background. Janina Bauman was dismissed from her post and on 25 March 1968, the sociologist was forced to vacate his university chair.⁵² A couple of months later, having to give up their Polish citizenship, they left the country. In 1970, starting a more quiet life, they settled in Leeds, where Bauman blended his Central European

⁵¹ Anti-Semitism in Poland never disappeared, even led to horrible pogroms in the aftermath of the war, and was capitalised upon by the rulers as soon as their position of power was threatened. In 'Three Appreciations of Zygmunt Bauman', Kilminster and Varcoe state: "The roots of anti-Semitism lie deep in Polish history and society. Tensions have existed for centuries between Jews who are Poles and the ethnic Poles. After 1945, however, these tensions entered another phase as Jews began to make progress in occupations traditionally dominated by the old Polish intelligentsia, such as the media and the universities. There is some evidence to suggest that Jews were also to be found in the Communist Party, particularly its lower ranks, and in the security service, which brought them into contact with the general population and made them highly visible. These people, together with the successful wave of Jewish communist intellectuals of Bauman's generation, were convinced Marxist-Leninists and internationalists" (p. 24). For further reading on the position of the Jews in post-War Poland in particular and Central and Eastern Europe in general, see: Karady *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era* pp. 387-454. Karady's book offers an overview of Jewish life and influence in Europe from the 18th to the 20th century. Another important reference here is: Schatz *The Generation* pp. 199-313. Jaff Schatz offers an overview of a Jewish generation in Poland born mostly in the 1910s. Many of them were important proponents of the Communist movement, but ultimately got disillusioned. Jerzy Holzer offers a brief, but eloquent overview of Polish history and its place within Europe, also devoting one chapter to the Poles and the Jews and their problematic cohabitation: Holzer *Polen und Europa* pp. 115-129. Finally, Joanna Michlic offers some fine insights in how immediately after World War II leading intellectuals perceived the Holocaust and the position of the Jews in post-War society: Michlic 'The Holocaust and Its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals', pp. 206-230

⁵² It did not matter that Bauman had been a lifelong anti-Zionist or that more than anything else, he felt proud to be Polish. To Bauman, then, this was the very first time his Jewish identity was brought to his awareness, as actually Jewishness before had played a very small role in his life. See: Bauman in: Kilminster and Varcoe 'Sociology, postmodernity and exile' p. 226

intellectual roots with Western (European) sociological discourses.⁵³ Only in the 1990s, Bauman would be rehabilitated and made professor emeritus at the University of Warsaw.

To wrap up: Reviewing Jaff Schatz's book *The Generation. The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (1989), Bauman reflects on a generation of Jews born in the 1910s and fully convinced of the communist cause. One senses how well Bauman knows this generation and how close he is to them:

‘The generation’ studied and brought to life by Jaff Schatz are Jewish Communists in Poland; people who, not by their own choice, were cast in a context in which all the ambivalence of the human condition spawned by the self-contradictory and often self-defeating processes of modernity was at its most acute and most creative at the same time. These people, brought into the ranks of revolutionary radicalism by the unbearable pressure to resolve in their personal lives the contradictions produced societally and resolvable (if at all) only by societal means, condensed in their life stories the twisted history of movement as a whole, while embossing on it their own indelible collective stamp.⁵⁴

The review is of 1990 and by then, his views of modernity and of Marxist ideology as a blueprint to design modern society have changed, but asking about the why of his previous beliefs and summarising Bauman's Polish period, one can easily refer to the above citation. Bauman had fully devoted his early adult life to the socialist cause and he was bitterly disappointed that his wish for a more equal and just society was not met by the communist political system as it developed in Poland after World War II. Living the life of an exile from 1968 onwards, he would reflect on what had been and where it went wrong. Yet, new intellectual roads would soon open up.

⁵³ In his article ‘Bauman's Ways of Seeing the World,’ Stefan Morawski argues that Polish humanities were important to Bauman in the sense that they stressed theoretical learning. “[I]n Poland the theoretical bias, the sharp methodological consciousness, inquiring about the foundations of the average and the sophisticated (self-aware) mentality, characterized sociological enquiry to a great extent” (p. 31). Bauman takes this attitude with him when moving to Leeds and finding a place in a different academic tradition.

⁵⁴ Bauman ‘Jaff Schatz’ p. 175

Bauman Embracing Postmodernity

Adapting himself to a new life in Leeds, Zygmunt Bauman would take on new challenges. It is the commencement of a new period of creation influenced by work and life. In the 1970s and early 1980s, much of his work can be read as a logical continuation of what was before.⁵⁵ Finding a place in British academia, he wrote on how he understood sociology, on socialism and Eastern Europe (though without wanting to become a Sovietologist), on culture, praxis and class.⁵⁶ By the end of the 1980s, however, Bauman replaced his modernist view on the world by a postmodernist view in which he abandoned an all-guiding narrative to explain the world.⁵⁷ In his Polish years, Bauman perceived his role as a sociologist as one to

⁵⁵ In 1976, Bauman contributed to a book entitled *Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe. Uniformity & Diversity in One-Party States*. His article 'The Party in the System Management Phase: Change and Continuity' is critically engaged with the societal developments of the communist party. Addressing the changing participation of societal strata (i.e. workers, intellectuals) in the communist party and the way the party ruled the state, he points out the growing role of civil society. The communist state had been hostile to civil society for most of its existence, but now opposition to the party's rule no longer came from outside the party but from within. Civil society was emerging as part of the system, intellectuals bargaining and negotiating with the ruling elites. Bauman is positive as to the outcomes of this process. It is visible here how closely Bauman is still connected to the intellectuals working and living on the 'other' side of the Iron Curtain. He fits perfectly in his time if you examine the writings of Charter 77 members on civil society for example, or analysing the Central European intellectuals' request for more autonomy, human rights, and more freedoms in the personal, religious, economic, and social sphere. See also: Chapter I, from p. 98.

⁵⁶ See also: Tester & Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* pp. 89/90. In their article 'The Four Faces of Human Suffering in the Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman' (2008), Jacobsen and Marshman, while seeking for continuities and changes in Bauman's sociology, detect four phases in Bauman's writing when in Britain: the Marxisant phase (1970s), the Modernist phase (1980s), the Moral phase (1990s), and the Mosaic phase (the new millennium). Focusing on the late 1980s and early 1990s, they note that starting from the late 1980s, the hermeneutical approach or sociological hermeneutics informs Bauman's research, that is: "the lived experience of individuals or groups of people first of all must always be seen and interpreted against the backdrop of more comprehensive and complex structural configurations, and secondly, that his metaphors are reflections or interpretations that are organically related to the world – the lived experience or cognitive capacity – of other human beings" (Jacobsen & Marshman 'Metaphorically Speaking' p. 316). It is during the late 1980s that Bauman starts to define his sociology as an ongoing dialogue with human existence.

⁵⁷ Bauman's modernist view was one in which Marxism as a totalising systematic theory was the cornerstone on which he built his theories. Bauman abandons this view, but remains true to his Marxist humanist roots. The writings of French philosophers were key in Bauman's reformulation of his own

actively participate in shaping society, in rebuilding the country after the war: “The labours of sociology exemplified the resolution of the most thoughtful and conscientious part of Polish intellectuals to cooperate with the new powers in their good deeds, in lifting the country from its centuries-long backwardness, while at the same time watching carefully and vigilantly the hands of the power holders.”⁵⁸ To him, the role of an intellectual was a legislating and designing one, offering proposals or blueprints according to which society could be organised.⁵⁹ With his postmodern turn, however, and observing the changing role of the intellectuals in Central Europe (who distanced themselves from power and depoliticised the discourses or narratives in which they participated), this changed.⁶⁰ Since the postmodern thinkers argued that it is impossible to design one big narrative for the world, Bauman came to understand the role of the intellectual as an interpreter of the world. No more blueprints for the good society, no more modernist ideology with its belief in Reason, Progress, Universality, and Superiority of Western civilisation. Instead, according to Bauman, the intellectual now had to find its way in a plurality of discourses. He had to interpret the world around him and try to make sense of it: “What remains for the intellectuals to do, is to interpret such meanings for the benefit of those who are not of the community which stands behind the meanings; to mediate the communication

intellectual project. Michel Foucault’s and Jean Baudrillard’s work start to feature prominently in his work. Other intellectual figures that strongly influence his work are Ágnes Heller, Jean-Paul Sartre, Richard Rorty, Sigmund Freud, Antonio Gramsci, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino and Milan Kundera.

⁵⁸ Bauman in: Tester & Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* pp. 41/2

⁵⁹ See also: Bauman *Legislators and Interpreters* p. 147

⁶⁰ See also: Bauman ‘Intellectuals in East-Central Europe’ pp. 162-186. In the article, he talks about the East-Central European intellectual’s role in communist society and how the intellectuals are engaged in and compete with political power. With the rise of the trade-union *Solidarity* in Poland, this role partly changes. Together with the workers the intellectuals now try to establish a civil society, but in a new role as advisors whose views can be either accepted or rejected and hence, at the risk of losing their political relevance. They no longer are authorities whose views become laws.

between ‘finite provinces’ or ‘communities of meaning’.”⁶¹

This becomes Bauman’s project from the mid-1980s onwards; yet it does not mean he turns into a relativist in the sense that nothing is of importance anymore and one cannot make any judgements about society. In his view, which is further developed in the following years, there is still a moral background against which to judge certain developments – and it is the role of the intellectual (and thus of Bauman) to make this public. Hence, even though Bauman now described his intellectual activity as an interpreting one, there is still a political side to it. To Bauman, every human being has a primordial moral responsibility towards the ‘Other’ (cf. Levinas) and the intellectual has to point out the places where this threatens to be forgotten. “Moral responsibility is the most personal and inalienable of human possessions, and the most precious of human rights. (...) Moral responsibility is unconditional and infinite, and it manifests itself in the constant anguish of not manifesting itself enough.”⁶²

The trilogy of *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) marks Bauman’s loss of trust in the project of modernity (though he remains true to his Marxist humanist views) and his changing perception of his role as an intellectual. The first publication reflects on the philosophical debates of his time, the following volumes focus on the Holocaust and Jewish sufferings. These books illustrate his rediscovery of his Polish-Jewish identity, which in his previous works and thoughts hardly played a role. It returns to his life through a book his wife publishes on her World War II experiences in the Warsaw

⁶¹ Bauman *Legislators and Interpreters* p. 197

⁶² Bauman *Postmodern Ethics* p. 250

ghetto.⁶³ In a 1993 interview in *Mittelweg* Zygmunt Bauman contends that only after reading her book he gets involved with the Jewish ‘problem’ and the role of the Jews in modern culture. Before that he did not have any affinity with Jewish life. He was a Pole and that was it.⁶⁴ In his intellectual development of the late 1980s, it is thus not only postmodernism that influences his thinking. Personal experience and scholarly work are again closely intertwined and still the European twentieth century is central to it.

The situation of Jews, never able to be fully identified with their native neighbours (not because they are resistant but because they are blocked), becomes under Zygmunt’s pen a paragon of the genuine intellectual attitude. This touches on human vulnerability, uncertainty and a dramatic existence oscillating between the yearning after the absolute and its slipping beyond the horizon.⁶⁵

In his scholarly work, the sociologist now takes up the challenge of unmasking the myth of modern European civilisation, in which the history of the West is represented as a process of emancipation and progress.⁶⁶ Modern society, Bauman says in his famous *Modernity and the Holocaust*, with its hypertrophied technical rationality, its bureaucratised politics, and rationalised economic sphere has contributed to creating a level of inhumanity, cruelty, and destruction that would have been unthinkable in the

⁶³ It is Janina Bauman’s first volume in which she publishes her memories. *Winter in the Morning. A young girl’s life in the Warsaw ghetto and beyond* is published in 1986. As a result, Zygmunt Bauman rediscovers his Polish-Jewish identity and next to the above volumes, it leads to the publication of the articles ‘The War against Forgetfulness’ (1989) and ‘The Homecoming of Unwelcome Strangers: Eastern European Jewry 50 Years After the War’ (1989). In ‘The Social Manipulation of Morality’, Bauman specifically thanks his wife for opening his eyes “to what we normally refuse to look upon. The writing of *Modernity and the Holocaust* became an intellectual compulsion and moral duty, one I read Janina’s summary of the sad wisdom she acquired in the inner circle of the man-made inferno” (p. 137).

⁶⁴ See: Bauman ‘Gespräch mit Janina Bauman and Zygmunt Bauman’ p. 39f.

⁶⁵ Morawski ‘Bauman’s Ways of Seeing the World’ p. 33f.

⁶⁶ The socialist ideology was very much part of this way of understanding the world (emancipation of the workers, story of progress) and one can therefore detect a real break in the thinking of Zygmunt Bauman.

past.⁶⁷ Ever more critical of the guiding principles of the Enlightenment, he asserts that the Holocaust is the ultimate product of Western modernity. In line with his earlier Polish understanding of the public function of sociology, he charges fellow sociologists to bear responsibility for this development and the lasting belief in the Enlightenment project of an ever more rational society by keeping silent on the dangers of modernity. From this moment on, Bauman seeks to live up to his own standards of morality and ethics; the theme of living ‘for the other’ and an Enlightenment critique form a firm basis of his writings.⁶⁸

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman criticises modern, capitalist European society for perpetuating the idea that the Holocaust was an anomaly of modernity, representing a regression to barbarism. According to the sociologist, one should not understand the Holocaust as something that happened to the Jews, as a (single) event in Jewish history, nor should one believe that a renewed engagement in the ideals of the Enlightenment will lead to a better and in the end perfectly civilised society. The sociologists have a task in pointing out that the Holocaust is a general symptom of modernity and that another “disaster on a Holocaust scale” is possible, because the conditions “propitious to the perpetration of the genocide” are present still.⁶⁹ He, thus, clearly opposes Norbert Elias’s analysis of modernity as a civilising process and

⁶⁷ See: Bauman *Modernity and the Holocaust* p. xiii

⁶⁸ See also: Bauman and Tester *Conversations* p. 4/5. Examples of publications featuring these themes are Bauman’s books *Postmodern Ethics* published in 1993 and *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (1995) and his article ‘What Prospects of Morality in Times of Uncertainty?’ published in 1998 in *Theory, Culture and Society*.

⁶⁹ Bauman *Modernity and the Holocaust* pp. 114/5

points out the dangers of modernity as a progressive rationalisation of all spheres of social life, so well described by Max Weber.⁷⁰

Moreover, Bauman's critical view of the Enlightenment transcends the horrific example of the Holocaust. Already in his 1984 article 'Dictatorship Over Needs', Bauman criticised Enlightenment rationalism. He distinguished two different enlightened 'utopias': the Enlightenment and humanistic values on the one hand, and the Enlightenment rationalism on the other, clearly favouring the former. He warns of the Enlightenment's totalising tendency to order, classify, and regulate, because it carries the danger that any difference or form of pluralism is ruled out. Here, then, it is no longer only the Holocaust in relation to modernity and Enlightenment in connection to capitalism that Bauman is critical of, but also the communist project as a continuation of the Enlightenment in the form of social rationalism. He "connects rationalism and the social engineering of the Enlightenment project with capitalism and socialism,"⁷¹ and so departs from socialism and offers a critique of both ideologies that regulate(d) modern society.

It is here, Bauman finally lets go of his East European, Weberian Marxism. He no longer is an "*Ostmarxist*"⁷², but has become a postmodern and postmarxist thinker, living in the United Kingdom.

[T]he postmodern as the postmarxist is not just a conceptual demarcation, for Bauman: it reflects a way of life, or a path through it. Postmodern here is postsoviet, for Bauman: postmodern includes the experience of postsocialist Poland. Postmodern is the *Jetztzeit*. Life in exile in Leeds after 1968 might be mixed modern itself, modern yet traditionalistic, declining industrialism more than postindustrialism in the textbook

⁷⁰ See: Elias *The Civilising Process* pp. 47-52; Collins *Max Weber* pp. 47-59

⁷¹ Beilharz 'Modernity and Communism' p. 91

⁷² Beilharz *Zygmunt Bauman* p. xvii

sense, but life in Leeds after 1989 was postmodern in a different sense, momentarily optimistic at the point of release from the past as future.⁷³

Bauman's Reassessment of Modernity and the Values of the Enlightenment: His Liquid Turn

This is not the last major change in Bauman's thinking and my argument is that the upcoming liquid turn closely relates to the post-1989 transformation of the European landscape, which deeply affected Bauman being a part of that landscape. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of communist rule in the satellite states, Central and Eastern Europe started transforming their societies and building democratic systems. Based on and influenced by Western liberal capitalism the former communist states underwent a process of what the political scientists like to call 'Europeanisation' and 'modernisation of Central and Eastern Europe', i.e. bringing democracy, deregulating the political institutions and public administration, privatising companies and utilities, and reforming the judiciary.⁷⁴ With the successful EU accession of so many Central and Eastern European states in 2004, happiness prevailed. During the 1990s, the various administrations of these countries had done their best to live up to Western European standards and were backed by their citizens. Yet, slowly, different voices were to be heard. Capitalism and the inherent consumerism had not only brought prosperity, but also frustration. There was and still

⁷³ Ibid, p. xvii

⁷⁴ For an early analysis, see: Goetz 'Making sense of post-communist central administration' pp. 1032-1051; Grabbe 'How does Europeanization affect CEE governance?' pp. 1013-1031. For a good overview of the working and impact of Europeanization, see the book edited by Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier: *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*.

is a gap between the mentalities of the people, a lack of understanding between those who grew up in freedom and those who did not. Ideas of democracy of people living in Central and Eastern Europe and the actual existing democracies in their countries increasingly diverged.⁷⁵ Discontent with Europe became stronger taking the forms of a communist nostalgia or the rise of populist parties.⁷⁶

As a capable analyst of society and knowing both life and people (their mentalities) in Eastern and Western Europe, Bauman reacts to these developments. He starts to refer to Europe more explicitly.⁷⁷ Issues of identity, consumer culture, globalisation, and the effects of capitalism are now central to his work, in which he no longer is a sociologist “developing a sociology of postmodernity,” but embraces liquid modernity.⁷⁸ The geographical emphasis in his writings is on Europe and the sociologist further develops his critique of modern society. Still warning of the totalising tendencies of modern society, he criticises postmodern society in which

⁷⁵ See: Ágh ‘East Central Europe’ p. 100; Ekman and Linde ‘Satisfaction with Democracy’ p. 396. The East and Central European experiences with totalitarianism and its milder authoritarian forms and their subsequent attitude towards democracy also were a topic in an interview of the author with Zygmunt Bauman in May 2008. Here he stated that “if there is a specifically ‘central European’ sentiment, it belongs to (...) the category of *hoping* people – convinced that the world can be made *different* and *better* than it is – more hospitable to humans. It so happened, however, that historical fate repeatedly subjected that undying central-European hope to severe practical tests – and to many frustrations. (...) Central Europeans may be suspicious people, wishing a change yet smelling a rat. (...) Today, (...) [f]ears which were believed to have been left behind once [and] for all together with the rapacious, headstrong and untamed capitalism of the early-modern era are coming back – with a vengeance. Only now there are no political forces in sight, whether on the left, the right or in the middle of the political spectrum, who would dare to declare a war on those fears. The East-Europeans with their vivid memory of the communist horrors face the choice between the devil and the deep blue sea... The heads we lose, the tails ‘they’ win...”

⁷⁶ See: Ekman and Linde ‘Communist nostalgia’ p. 367/8; James and Zentai ‘The Decline of the West 2’

⁷⁷ An example is his already mentioned book *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure* (2004) or the article ‘What is “Central” in Central Europe?’ (in: Donskis *Yet Another Europe after 1984*, published in 2012)). Recent articles on Europe can also be found in *Social Europe Journal*. Besides, a documentary that was shot in honour of Zygmunt Bauman is called *Love, Europe, World of Zygmunt Bauman* (2011), clearly indicating the importance of Europe in Bauman’s life and work.

⁷⁸ Bauman *Intimations of Postmodernity* p. 65. See also: Bauman ‘Zygmunt Bauman’ p. 17. “The ‘postmodern’ has done its preliminary, site clearing job: it aroused vigilance and sent the exploration in the right direction. It could not do much more, and so after that it outlived its usefulness; or, rather, it worked itself out of a job.”

there are no boundaries at all. That is, in his view, postmodern society actually is very much connected to modern society, though without its illusions: “Postmodernity is modernity that has admitted the non-feasibility of its original project.”⁷⁹ Yet, to Bauman, the ambiguity and ambivalence this brings along is problematic. He argues that currently there are no ‘totalities’ to secure the autonomy of human society and thus of the morally responsible individual. The power of politics, which preserves an open society where justice prevails and individuals can claim their freedom, has been reduced to a minimum. “In actual fact”, Bauman says, “the dismantling of (state) political constraints and controls, far from making ‘civil society’ free and truly autonomous, opens it to the unabashed rule of market forces which members of that society, now left to their own devices, have no means nor power to resist.”⁸⁰ Society falls apart and the creative individual turns into a consumer. It is this Bauman feels responsible to point out and fight against, though he is very cautious of designing a blueprint that claims to be the one and only true road to what is good for humankind. His experience with Marxist orthodoxy and the heyday of modernity – in his words: “solid modernity”⁸¹ – have taught him that lesson.

To conclude, it is in this ‘phase’ of his career as sociologist and critical observer of society that Bauman’s affinity with Europe is clearest and most explicit.⁸² Yet – and this is what I have been hoping to show looking at Bauman’s biography and his evolving periods of production –, as much as the writings of this period react to current changes in society they have a history and it is impossible to analyse his recent

⁷⁹ Bauman *Thinking Sociologically* p. 98

⁸⁰ Bauman and Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 139

⁸¹ Bauman *Liquid modernity* p. 125

⁸² It is in this period he publishes a book that carries Europe in its title: *Europe. An Unfinished Adventure* (2004). In the book, he defends the European skill to deal with its history and use it for the good as something characteristic to Europe and worth cherishing also in the future.

work without reference to his earlier writings or to leave out his personal experiences. The idea of Europe in the work of Zygmunt Bauman builds on an oeuvre that carries both cosmopolitan and regional aspects⁸³ and covers a period of over 50 years of research and experience. The themes he deemed important in the 1960s are to a certain extent still to be found in his present publications; yet, with the change of time, new ideas have been added, older ones adjusted, and some dismissed. After having gone through different phases, Bauman does no longer share the optimistic and strong belief of the modern thinkers in progress and in the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment. In his current writings, he is more pessimistic about the outcomes of the civilisation process. He believes that the essential social condition for the Holocaust, that is, the rational, impersonal organisation of modern society, still remains intact and unchanged more than fifty years later and holds the possibility of another 'Auschwitz'.⁸⁴ According to the sociologist, therefore, there is a need for a better understanding of 'civilised' society, of the factors and mechanisms that made the Holocaust possible.⁸⁵

Bauman, however, does not only criticise modernity and the Holocaust. In his article *Modernity and Communism: Zygmunt Bauman and the Other Totalitarianism*, Peter Beilharz argues that "[w]here the Frankfurt School were relatively silent on communism, Bauman's work grows out of communism, alongside it, against it."⁸⁶ Based on his personal familiarity with the communist practices, he disapproves of the socialist rationalism and the communist social engineering projects. Yet, even after he

⁸³ See also: Morawski 'Bauman's Ways' p. 31

⁸⁴ See: Bauman *Modernity and the Holocaust* pp. 87/8

⁸⁵ See: Bauman *Modernity and the Holocaust* pp. 85/6; Bauman and Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 87

⁸⁶ Beilharz 'Modernity and Communism' p. 90

was forced to leave Poland in 1968, Bauman has held on to a Polish intellectual tradition in defending the humanist-socialist political alternative, the ethical core of Marxism, thus sticking to a utopian worldview: a utopia that in line with the postmodern critique of metanarratives (but against its cultural relativist arguments) defends “plurality, diversity and human variety and always leave[s] room for difference, dissidence and insubordination.”⁸⁷ This in combination with his critique of ‘civilised’ society accounts for Bauman’s current emphasis on the need for critical reflection of the past, of oneself, of society, and of the place of humanist values within the societal order. He confronts the values of freedom, the autonomy of the individual, universality, and solidarity that were so important to the Central Europeans in their resistance to communism with the political and economic reality of Europe. Coming from Central Europe, being Jewish and having lived on both sides of the Iron Curtain, he explores the possibility of not only imagining and defending humanist-moral politics of hope and ideals, but also of criticising the current political and economic discourse on European society. It is this unique position of embodying Europe as a lived experience that makes it worth further exploring Bauman’s idea of Europe.

⁸⁷ Tester and Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* p. 33

II.II Freedom, Individuality, Democracy

Humanism and European Society in Zygmunt Bauman

In the following, the focus will be on freedom, individuality, and democracy. To Bauman, whose humanist-Marxist intellectual roots I have referred upon, the themes of freedom, individuality, and democracy are closely related. This is implicit in his interest in and focus on individual, human action and the question of how to organise society according to the needs of every human being. Moreover, for Bauman, the constitutive value of European society is freedom. It is one of the most fundamental values: a crucial condition that allows people to develop themselves.⁸⁸ To the sociologist, this freedom is not a passive freedom in the sense of an individual holding civil and human rights of freedom guaranteed by the written law of a modern state; nor does his theory of freedom remain constrained to freedom understood as “liberation or emancipation from old tradition and structures.”⁸⁹ In modern Western society, Bauman asserts, freedom might look as if it were a universal condition to humanity; yet, if at all, this is only of a very recent date.⁹⁰ Bauman adheres to an active idea of freedom, in which every human being is free to act upon society. His sociology is about “human freedom and the ability for all humans to create and shape

⁸⁸ Poul Poder describes him as “a sociologist of freedom,” pointing out Bauman’s unusually big engagement with the conditions of and threats to freedom. See: Poder ‘Bauman on Freedom’ pp. 97-114

⁸⁹ Poder ‘Bauman on Freedom’ p. 97

⁹⁰ Bauman *Freedom* p. 6/7. In the following, Bauman’s book on *Freedom* (1988) will be cited repeatedly. This is not only because it is fully dedicated to the subject of freedom, but also because in the book all Bauman’s basic thoughts on freedom are present. In his earlier writings, starting points can be found that are fully theorised upon in *Freedom*. In addition, in his later work, he makes little adaptations to what he outlines in *Freedom* regarding content and role of freedom in society.

the conditions under which they live their lives.”⁹¹

Following the humanist line of thought, however, freedom to him not only means a freedom to act, a freedom of choice, the autonomy to decide what one wants to do, and, thus, to realise one’s intentions.⁹² Bauman considers freedom to be a social relation too.⁹³ That is, investigating the value of freedom to Bauman means analysing and interpreting society and how it is organised; it means looking at the individual’s place in society and how s/he acts or is able to act upon what is around him or her. Similar to his idea of freedom, Bauman’s idea of the individual is not the idea of an isolated individual and his personal creativity. Instead, Bauman asserts that the individual is a moral subject, a social actor, and the product of specific life strategies.⁹⁴ It is society that turns humans into individuals. Individuals are what they have become in society; each one of them is the result of his choices and pursuits, of his experiences in relation to society which, according to Bauman, “is another name for agreeing and sharing, but also the power which makes what has been agreed and is shared dignified.” Societies are “the nurseries of *meaningful life*.”⁹⁵ The individual, then, is free in his actions, wishes and choices. Yet, while making choices and deciding how to act, one has to take into account the other.⁹⁶ Humanists do not believe that man is either good or bad. They do not adhere to the conservative idea that man has to be guided to achieve the good; they neither agree to the individualist idea that the individual’s feeling of duty will automatically lead to the creation of the good

⁹¹ Campain ‘Bauman on Power’ p. 195

⁹² See: Poder ‘Bauman on Freedom’ pp. 97/8. Following Poder, in this definition, freedom is more than just an individual’s emancipation from certain restricting bounds or structures.

⁹³ cf. Bauman *Freedom* p. 7

⁹⁴ cf. Bauman and Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 99

⁹⁵ Bauman *The Individualized Society* p. 2

⁹⁶ See: Ibid. pp. 129–58. See also: Todorov *De Onvoltooide Tuin* pp. 50/1

society. An individual is an autonomous entity; yet, only in interaction with others. S/he can only make choices and pursue his/her interests while taking into account the other, though s/he will not always know whether these choices were good or bad, especially when society becomes ever more complex: “the *conditions* under which human individuals construct their individual existence and which decide the range and the *consequences* of their choices retreat (or are removed) beyond the limits of their conscious influence.”⁹⁷ This makes life complicated and explains why often individuals search for guiding (moral) frameworks and authorities that help them in their choices or even make choices for them:

The experience of free will is by no means an enjoyable feeling (...). Freedom means choice, and [that is] one agony men dread more than any else. (...) The experience of freedom is, therefore, an inexhaustible source of fear [and] (...) generates an overwhelming urge to escape.⁹⁸

Bauman’s sociology is about the consequences of this urge to escape one’s freedom of choice and individual responsibility and seeks to explain why this desire to hand down this responsibility should be countered and what solutions (in terms of political organisation of society) can be offered. From the early start of his career as a sociologist until his present days, Bauman is convinced of the fact that in order for society to function and to function well, every human being should be able to act upon the world around him/her, to develop him/herself according to his/her abilities, and to take responsibility for him/herself in relation to the others around him/her. This, then, (a) requires freedom; (b) it assigns a role to the human being as individual (notably, as an active, yet morally responsible participator in society); and (c) demands some sort

⁹⁷ Bauman *The Individualized Society* p. 6

⁹⁸ Bauman *Towards a Critical Sociology* p. 29

of (political) organisation of society that secures the previous two provisions. Having all the shifts and changes in Bauman's thinking in mind, it is these three presuppositions that remain a steady component of his work and will be the subject of my further analysis, when asking about his idea of Europe.

In analysing his writings, I will proceed chronologically in order to be able to detect the ruptures and differences as well as the continuities with regards to the three turning points in his life as described above: his Polish period defending modern, Marxisant explanations of the world, his subsequent postmodern inclination rejecting the one and only all explaining narrative for the world, followed by his liquid turn in which there are no longer any 'solid' or steady givens to hold on to and according to which to define oneself. Moreover, in the previous part, I have related his life trajectory to changes in his worldview and will now take a closer look at his scholarly books, articles, and essays regarding the themes freedom, individuality, and democracy.

The Quest for Freedom and the Experience of Unfreedom: Bauman and the Value of Freedom

In his early writings, Bauman welcomes the modern, Enlightened idea of freedom. He subscribes to its basic assumption that individuals should become independent and autonomous personalities and free themselves of any dictates, be it by the Church or State. In line with humanist thought, Bauman contends that man is at the centre of the world and it is man who can creatively act upon society. Consequently, from the mid-1960s, loosing his faith in Marxist-Leninism and reacting to changes in Polish society,

he starts to negatively assess his early belief in Marxist orthodoxy and its historical materialism. To him, material developments do not affect human social relations or social structures; it is man creating and working upon society.⁹⁹ Without individual freedom of choice and the freedom to act, Bauman asserted in 'Two Notes on Mass Culture' (1966), there is no creativity in society and as a consequence, society will come to a standstill.¹⁰⁰ Bauman emphasises the question why in socialist society diversification of society and of culture is a good thing. The "practical possibility of choice", he argues, is in the interest of any society.¹⁰¹ He, thus, stresses the need of freedom to create and propagate new values, as this ultimately safeguards the existence of any culture and its development. It is culture and praxis as well as the more classical sociological themes of production, social class and social stratification and the value of a socialist view on the world that dominate his work up to the 1980s.

Turning away from Marxism and becoming ever more negative towards the idea of modernity (which he thus separates from the idea of freedom) in the following two decades, however, he no longer subscribes to the Enlightenment's similarity thesis, in which man is made in the image of God and subsequently, is able to know the world through Reason. Modernity becomes a topic of critical reflection. Bauman criticises the scientist, deterministic view of society that puts its faith in the power of science

⁹⁹ Bauman articulates this view from the mid-1960s, when he leaves orthodox Marxism for what it is and embraces Marxist humanism. See: Bauman 'Modern Marxism' pp. 6/7; Bauman 'Social Structure and Innovational Personality' p. 56

¹⁰⁰ See also: Bauman 'Social Structure and Innovational Personality' pp. 58/9. In this article, Bauman is a strong advocate of a creative and innovative human personality, as he says: "it can be taken for granted that the greater the number of innovative personalities, the more intensive and unhampered is the dynamics and developmental potential of the society" (p. 59). It is 1965 in Poland and Bauman does not use the word freedom explicitly, but his circumscription is clear: "Thus the human behaviour's inevitable attribute is constant tension between inner culturally determined drives and external structurally determined brakes" (p. 58). What is best for society, he goes on, is when one offers space for the individual 'to become', to let innovation and creativity take over.

¹⁰¹ Bauman 'Two Notes on Mass Culture' p. 73

and expert culture. From the late 1980s onwards, Bauman begins to question the abilities of the human intellect and becomes ever more wary of the rationalisation of modern society, resulting in his equidistant, critical analysis of the communist as well as the capitalist system.¹⁰² Observing developments in Western and Eastern Europe and reflecting upon Europe's twentieth century history, he concludes that both on the right and the left side of the political spectrum the rationalisation of society lead to totalitarian rule. According to Bauman, science and the wish to rationally order society brought about unprecedented violence and repression of man instead of freedom, historical progress, and civilisation.

His volume *Freedom* was published in 1988 before his famous *Modernity and the Holocaust* and is fully dedicated to the value of freedom. This theme and the way he talks about it can hardly be a coincidence. His postmodern turn forces him to rethink key concepts of modern society. In *Freedom*, he argues in a dialectical manner that the freedom of the one always means the unfreedom of the other: "Freedom is one side of the relationship which has heteronomy and the absence of will as its other side."¹⁰³ Therefore, it is not a self-evident value. According to Bauman, freedom is a privilege.¹⁰⁴ It depends on social structures, on the individual's place in society, on – with reference to Foucault – power relations, which become "a tool of racism and extermination."¹⁰⁵ Freedom is based on distinction:¹⁰⁶ distinctions within society, hierarchical structures, and access to certain resources. This holds true to every form

¹⁰² His books *Modernity and the Holocaust* and *Modernity and Ambivalence* harshly criticize the Enlightenment's quest for order and society reigned by reason.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 15

¹⁰⁴ This is a sentence he regularly repeats and exemplifies in his book *Freedom* (1988). It also returns in *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992) and *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997), and it will ultimately be at the basis of his further theories on modernity.

¹⁰⁵ Campaign 'Bauman on Power' p. 197

¹⁰⁶ See also: *Freedom* p. 70

of modern society. The Polish sociologist, further, claims that even though in modern capitalist society and above all, in the postmodern consumer society, the number of people who have gained access to certain resources has increased enormously, there is always a poor few that cannot (actively) participate in the existing system.¹⁰⁷ Life is regulated through a societal structure of dependency and of inequality. There are the winners of consumer society and there are the losers. The first group is free, the latter unfree (as they are not able to ‘normally’ participate in the consumer-led society); yet, the two groups cannot do without each other, they even condition or produce each other. “The radical unfreedom of welfare recipients is but an extreme demonstration of a more general regulatory principle which underlies the vitality of the consumer-led social system.”¹⁰⁸ Through social difference the individual’s identity is confirmed and society is organised (hierarchically). According to Bauman, freedom is the access to resources and these resources are limited or only available to those who function ‘well’ in society, to those who fulfil the role that is expected from them by the market. Moreover, for those who have access to the necessary resources consumer society means unlimited possibilities to shape one’s self or identity, all others are less free or

¹⁰⁷ See also: Bauman *Freedom* pp. 67/8. With his turn to postmodernity, Bauman shifts his focus from the producers in society (i.e. *Between class and elite* (1972) or *Memories of Class* (1982)) to the consumers in society (f.e. *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Freedom* (1988), *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998)). In a producer’s society labour defines or legitimises the individual’s social presence, in consumer society, it is the individual in his role of consumer. Besides, at first, writing in the 1980s (i.e. *Legislators and Interpreters*), market dominated or consumer society to Bauman is the ultimate manifestation of postmodern society. Yet, while the adjective postmodern loses its attractiveness to Bauman circa ten years later and is replaced by the new adjective ‘liquid modern’, consumer society is to stay. It is this society Bauman analyses. The name given to describe the condition of this society depends on how he reads or interprets this society.

¹⁰⁸ Bauman *Freedom* p. 69.

even unfree.¹⁰⁹ Freedom has become a freedom of choice and it is consumer society that answers best to this wish for unlimited choices.

Bauman reaches this conclusion, while referring to his intellectual soul mates Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, and György Markús and their book *Dictatorship over Needs* (1983). In 1984, he publishes an article also titled 'Dictatorship Over Needs' in the journal *Telos*, the volume of which is dedicated to the Budapest school. In line with Heller and co, the sociologist states that what people want is choice: the freedom to choose what they need. In the article, he distinguishes between what socialism proper meant and what socialism became under the Soviet system: "control – an ever increasing, ideally total control."¹¹⁰ Whereas, according to Bauman, socialism proper tried to offer an alternative road to reach the Enlightenment's humanist hopes of a good society advancing the values liberty, equality, and fraternity, the Soviet system neglected or merely sought to limit human freedom and human creativity. In *Modernity and the Holocaust* and *Modernity and Ambivalence*, he expands on this topic and addresses modernity's quest for order, its will to rationally organise society, and its wish to do away with all difference. This partly stands in opposition to "the principle of equality of opportunity, freedom of self-constitution, responsibility of the individual for his own fate," which are central to the project of modernity too, but run counter to the wish to control nature and society.¹¹¹ Both capitalist and communist

¹⁰⁹ As I will show further down this section, this will be a leading observation in his later work, when he starts emphasizing the downsides of this kind of freedom. *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992) is one of the early books in which he addresses this new stratification of society and the problems and responsibilities it brings (see also: *Postmodern Ethics* (1993)), but with his 'Liquid Modern' turn, human suffering becomes an ever more prominent topic. Examples are: *Work, consumerism, and the new poor* (1998), *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003), and *Wasted Lives – Modernity and its Outcasts* (2004).

¹¹⁰ Bauman 'Dictatorship over Needs' p. 173

¹¹¹ Bauman *Modernity and Ambivalence* p. 68

society tried to deal with this problem, but only capitalism found a way out of this dilemma offering freedom of choice through the consumer market. That is, communist society is not able to deliver this freedom of choice as its system is organised around the state determining what the individual needs and not the individual doing this him/herself. This, in turn, means “a persistent lack of personal autonomy and individual freedom.”¹¹²

To Bauman, every modern society – capitalist or communist – confronts the individual with the question between security and freedom. The state has a legislating and controlling or policing capacity and can offer security. Nevertheless, in order to do so, individuals have to yield some of their personal freedom. In every society it needs to be decided how strong the state is. One has to negotiate how much security is offered on the one hand and how much freedom on the other hand. In communist society, there is no way state bureaucracy can be bypassed without jeopardising the state and delegitimizing its power. Ultimately, this situation cannot be maintained. The system will not be able to survive, as every human being in the end will claim its freedom.

If in the capitalist-consumer society the state can view the proliferation of political and social ideas with equanimity – as neither systemic nor social integration depend any longer on the universal acceptance of a specific legitimising formula – the communist state is shaken by every expression of intellectual dissent; offering no exit from politics, it cannot hope that the tendency to resistance-through-voice will dissipate itself.¹¹³

In consumer society, the market offers a way out of political and bureaucratic regulation and so leaves satisfactory space for freedom.

¹¹² Bauman *Freedom* p. 85

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 87

Consumerism puts the highest premium on choice: choosing, that purely formal modality, is a value in its own right, perhaps the sole value of consumerist culture which does not call for, nor allow, justification. Choice is the consumer society's meta-value, the value with which to evaluate and rank all other values. And no wonder, since the 'choosiness' of the consumer is but a reflection of competitiveness, the live-blood of the market. To survive, and even more to thrive, the consumer market must first shape the consumer in its own image: the choice is what competition offers, and discrimination is what makes the offer attractive.¹¹⁴

Yet, the more Bauman is concerned with consumer society and sees how it affects Central and Eastern European society, the more he is convinced that this should not lead to an infinite freedom without boundaries; a theme he starts emphasising ever stronger as the 1990s proceed.¹¹⁵ He was critical of twentieth century modern society and its control over the lives of people, but it dawns to him that postmodern consumer society is not the ultimate Walhalla either. As Bauman analyses in his work, the market has become the all-regulating principle of society (– which he tellingly calls “a society of shoppers”¹¹⁶ –); the balance between freedom and security heavily tends towards freedom in its consumerist, market based form. “[C]onsumers depend on the market not only for coping with the problems they would handle with their own technical and social skills and abilities of forward dreaming if only they possessed them; consumers also need the market as the foundation of their certainty and self-confidence.”¹¹⁷ The market has made itself irreplaceable and, as Bauman points out in his books on liquid modern society, all other human bonds or social networks that might have offered the individual solace or help in the past have become weaker and

¹¹⁴ Bauman *Work, consumerism and the new poor* p. 58. See also: Ibid. p. 31: “Freedom to choose sets the stratification ladder of consumer society and so also the frame in which its members, the consumers, inscribe their life aspirations – a frame that defines the direction of efforts towards self-improvement and encloses the image of a ‘good life’.”

¹¹⁵ The essays ‘Communist: A Postmortem’ and ‘Living without an Alternative’ published in *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992) are examples of Bauman’s growing doubts about absolute market freedom.

¹¹⁶ Bauman *The art of life* p. 15

¹¹⁷ Bauman *Legislators and Interpreters* p. 165

weaker. As a result, the total freedom that is offered by the market and in which the individual is solely responsible to him/herself and does not need to take into account his/her fellow human beings, leads to an ever-greater insecurity – though Bauman rather uses the German word *Unsicherheit*, which in his view combines the feeling of insecurity (material), uncertainty (ethical), and unsafety (emotional) in one word.¹¹⁸ Ulrich Beck's *Risikogesellschaft* (1986) has become an *Unsicherheitsglobalgesellschaft*¹¹⁹ and it is only the very few very rich that can afford buying themselves out of this problem. To all others applies: The price to be paid for freedom in its consumer form is eventually that of 'human sufferings.'¹²⁰

From the 1990s, then, Bauman puts his finger on the knotty sides of consumer society. He understands his role as a public intellectual as one in which he has a moral responsibility (with political implications) to point out the downsides of the particular form of freedom that can be found in current, globalised society.¹²¹ In his liquid modern period of writing, i.e. in the volume entitled *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998) and his book *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998), Bauman develops the theory of a whole world on the move, distinguishing between two groups. On the one hand, there are the winners of the system, those who have the resources (money) and therefore possibilities to travel the world, be 'tourists', and do whatever they want. On the other hand, there are the losers, the 'vagabonds' who move from the one place to the other as well, but out of necessity and without the

¹¹⁸ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 5

¹¹⁹ Bauman 'Conclusion: The Triple Challenge' p. 203

¹²⁰ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 5

¹²¹ See: Smith 'Zygmunt Bauman' 40. "The driving force behind Zygmunt Bauman's work as a sociologist has been two things: first, a sense of intellectual and moral outrage about the extent to which societies are run on the basis of untruth and self-deception; and second, a deep dissatisfaction with the evil and suffering this makes possible."

opportunity to find a home. They are the ‘human waste’ of liquid modernity, moved to the invisible sites of society where nobody cares much about them, because, as is assumed, they are responsible for their own fates.

Freedom to choose does not mean that all choices are right – there are good and bad choices, better and worse choices. The kind of choice eventually made is the evidence of competence or its lack. The ‘underclass’ of the society of consumers, the ‘flawed consumers’, is presumed to be an aggregate composed of the individual victims of wrong individual choices and taken to be a tangible proof of the personal nature of life catastrophes and defeats, always an outcome of incompetent personal choices.¹²²

Consequently, for him, freedom can never only be a passive freedom in the sense of a liberation or emancipation from any traditional bonds, but has to include an active participation in society to make sure not only you as an individual are free, but also your friend, your neighbour, and your fellow men. In his concern with freedom, social relationships and moral responsibility for the ‘Other’ are key. “*Individual liberty*,” Bauman states, “*can be only a product of collective work (can be only collectively secured and guaranteed).*”¹²³ Freedom is a personal freedom, an individual ability to act and create values; however, it also includes a responsibility towards other individuals, towards fellow human beings, towards ‘the Other’.¹²⁴

Winding up, freedom is and remains an important value through all of Bauman’s intellectual life and is present in his early publications as well as in his later writings. In the beginning, he discusses freedom within a Marxist humanist framework, putting special emphasis on the freedom of the human being to act upon society. This freedom

¹²² Bauman ‘Collateral Casualties’ p. 43/4. *Wasted Lives. Modernity and its Outcasts* (2004) will be fully dedicated to this form of inequality (and unfreedom) produced by modern consumer society and other books follow pointing towards the same problem.

¹²³ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 7, original emphasis

¹²⁴ *Postmodern Ethics* is an early example developing this theory.

served the function of creating an ever better society: the ultimate (socialist) state. Up to the early 1980s,

Bauman's objective was a social existence in which rational and emancipated human beings exercised their freedom in a creative fashion. He wanted to encourage a process of dialogue within civil society. His hope was that intellectuals such as himself would encourage ordinary people to take an informed, rational and active part in making society freer, more equal and more just.¹²⁵

With his postmodern turn and intellectually acknowledging the confrontation with Jewish twentieth century suffering, this objective drastically changes. His belief in the rational capabilities of man gives way to scepticism towards the ideals of the Enlightenment. Instead of creating a free and just society, progress, rationality, civilisation are said to have produced totalitarian regimes. From the end of the 1980s, Bauman defines freedom as a freedom of choice and self-expression with every individual capable of designing his/her world according to his/her own wishes. Yet, against the background of consumer society this freedom, which ultimately boils down to consumer freedom and thus, access to limited resources, upholds a society based on inequality and generates human suffering. To the sociologist, this is a major concern and in his third, liquid modern phase he spends his time trying to solve this problem: How can a society be both equal and free? How can it promote justice as well as freedom?¹²⁶ Bauman's ultimate aim might be said to design an ethics for present day society in which both freedom and equality are guaranteed. This actually comes very close to his early ambitions of the 1960s and shows that despite the several breaks one can detect in his intellectual career, there is continuity too; and that,

¹²⁵ Smith *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 46

¹²⁶ In an interview conducted by Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe in 1990, Zygmunt Bauman states that the discourse on inequality and the discourse on freedom should be treated together to understand both problematics (and, thus, to offer an insight in how one can have as much freedom causing minimal inequality). See: Bauman, Kilminster, Varcoe 'Sociology, postmodernity and exile' p. 219

though he has discarded of his modern coat and does not pretend to offer any societal blueprints anymore, he never stops being an intellectual with a mission. I will return to this point at the end of this chapter. First, I will take a closer look at his understanding of the role of the individual in society just referred upon and continue with my analysis of Bauman's idea of democracy. In both examinations, the three phases in the development of the sociologist's thinking will return and it will become ever more palpable how close all three ideas – freedom, individuality, and democracy – are linked.

There is no Individuality without Solidarity: Bauman and the Value of Individuality

In 1966, Bauman publishes the article 'Three Remarks on Contemporary Educational Problems,' in which he refers to the role of the individual in society. In the article, he criticises the orthodox socialist thought of absolute planning and determinist view of life. Referring to the role of education, he argues that there does not exist a single, absolute pattern of behaviour of the human being. There is a freedom of choice and the consequent individual actions or deeds are determined by a heterogeneous and differentiated society as well as by external factors: "for example, the availability of things which are necessary to the actualization of one of the alternative choices, or the system of rewards and punishments attached which is determined by the set of social influences."¹²⁷ Hence, if one seeks to mould an individual's personality through education, one needs to take into account "elements of multiplicity and diversity."¹²⁸ Instead of rote learning, Bauman argues, the emphasis of education should be on "the

¹²⁷ Bauman 'Three Remarks' p. 82

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 88

necessity for a person to have his own “meta-norms” – rules for choosing between different patterns, criteria enabling man to choose between alternatives, and guidance on how to evaluate situations of different types.” The individual should learn that s/he is responsible for the choices s/he makes. S/He will need to make decisions through all of his/her life and the “enlightened teacher” has to teach his pupils, as individuals, “no one and nothing, neither divine providence nor historical necessity, will free him of the responsibility for his deeds.”¹²⁹

Thirty-five years later, publishing *The Individualized Society* (2001), Bauman will still adhere to this idea, although the context has changed and again the postmodern and liquid modern phase of his thinking can be detected. It is no longer determinism or scientism he disapproves of, but shameless individualism outing itself in materialism. Like the value of freedom has become the freedom to consume, the value of individuality is only consumer individuality. To Bauman, both are problematic. In his *In Search for Politics* (1999), he asserts:

To be an individual does not necessarily mean to be free. The form of individuality on offer in late-modern or postmodern society, and indeed most common in this kind of society – *privatized* individuality – means, essentially, *unfreedom*.¹³⁰

According to the sociologist, consumer society has led to a “social deskilling” of the individual. Life problems have become a solitary affair, and the social causes of individual troubles are neglected while social injustice rises.¹³¹ The only choice that the members of that society have is a consumerist one. Moreover, with reference to the social deskilling of the individual, there hardly exist any incentives or impulses to

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 89

¹³⁰ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 63

¹³¹ cf. Bauman ‘Collateral Casualties’ pp. 33/4, 42-44

engage oneself in society, to work together or fight injustice. ‘The external factors’ guiding an individual’s choice or shaping his life, which Bauman referred upon in his 1966 article, or ‘the *conditions* under which individuals construct their individuals existence’ of his *The Individualized Society* are barely visible and thus forgotten.¹³² Where in what the sociologist calls ‘solid modernity’ there were definite certainties on how society was organised and what place the individual had in that society, this has changed in ‘liquid modernity’: human relationships are often only temporary and times in which capital and labour were dependent on each other are long gone. The importance of earlier beliefs or ideologies has been reduced to a minimum. In times of “solid modernity,” the task was to defend “individual freedom and dignity against the rising totalitarian tide flowing from concentrated and condensed social powers.”¹³³ Now, the other extreme must be resisted. The public has given way to the private, and there are no longer “totalities” that secure the autonomy of human society, and by extension the morally responsible individual.¹³⁴ Order has become chaos, any form of dependency gave way to freedom, and morality now has been replaced by indifference.

In his ‘postmodern’ *Modernity and the Holocaust* and *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Bauman criticised a morality that takes the shape of strictly following what is common and unconditionally obeying any command from above (state or church). In his view, this was a reprehensible kind of morality; it was an easy morality, as it freed

¹³² See also: Bauman *The Individualized Society* p. 9

¹³³ Bauman and Tester *Conversations* p. 106

¹³⁴ See also: Bauman ‘Anmerkungen zum Kulturbegriff Freuds’ p. 18

the individual of making choices and facing insecurity.¹³⁵ Following Bauman's argumentation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it leads to and carries the risk of bringing about totalitarianism or milder forms of authoritarianism. In the article 'On Immoral Reason and Illogical Morality', Bauman stated that morality is a matter of personal choice and argued "that obedience and passivity must be countered if evil is not to be successful in conquering the lives and controlling the deaths of people in the future as it did in the past."¹³⁶ Nonetheless, after analysing the first decade of the new millennium and thus having arrived at his liquid modern phase, Bauman opines that indeed, at present, this obedience seems to be gone. What is more, there does not seem to be any morality at all guiding the individuals through life. This is problematic, as it gives rise to a similar indifference or moral insensitivity as in the above situation.¹³⁷ It advances a growing injustice and more suffering in a globalised world.

According to Bauman, as stated previously, individuals currently have too much freedom; there are too many choices and no hierarchies guiding those choices. It is no longer social class, gender or ethnicity defining the identity of an individual, but individuality.¹³⁸ Identities are taken on, changed, or disposed *ad libitum*. This engenders endless possibilities to fulfil one's dreams, but can also cause so much *Unsicherheit* that individuals do not know how to act anymore and become paralyzed. In addition, the protective shield of solidarity of a community has disappeared and the

¹³⁵ See also: Bauman 'What Prospects of Morality' pp. 13/4. In *The Individualized Society* Bauman distinguishes between love and reason. In his view, reason never is moral, love is. "Reason, one may say, prompts loyalty to the *self*. Love, on the other hand, calls for solidarity with the *Other*, and so implies subordination of the self to something endowed with greater importance and value" (p. 167). Reason promises certainty, love cannot. It is ruled by insecurity and therefore, all too human.

¹³⁶ Tester and Jacobsen *Bauman Before Postmodernity* p. 177

¹³⁷ See, for example Bauman and Donskis' recent publication, *Moral Blindness. The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (2013).

¹³⁸ See also: Blackshaw *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 49

family safety net deteriorates.¹³⁹ With individuals retreating to their private lives, solidarity amongst individuals is rarely to be found in today's society. "The resulting decomposition of community finds its correlate in the fragmentation of life of each one of its constituting units."¹⁴⁰ It brings about the disintegration of personality and loss of identity. The individual is left with his own uncertainties and fears unable to share them with others. Ultimately, to Bauman, the rise of the consumer is the downfall of the individual.

Hence, to keep the individual from falling, to respond to the dangers of freedom and loss of personality, and prevent the creation of (social) injustice through freedom, the individual has to become a moral person who always takes responsibility for his/her action, in Bauman's words: one is responsible for one's responsibility.¹⁴¹ This is not something any pressure from outside can regulate, but solely depends on the moral individual's freedom of choice: "Facing up to ethical responsibility, taking on that responsibility, *assuming responsibility for that responsibility*, is a matter of *choice*."¹⁴² Bauman's alternative to the consumer mentality relates to what I have said at the beginning of this subchapter. Grounding himself in the thinking of Knud Løgstrup and Emmanuel Levinas, Bauman argues that being moral is an "*unspoken demand*" as well as "*an unconditional responsibility*."¹⁴³ It is inherent to any human being. As soon as two parties meet there is a moral scene:¹⁴⁴ there is a responsibility of the 'I' towards the 'you', to speak with Todorov's words. This responsibility never stops;

¹³⁹ See: *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997), *In Search of Politics* (1999), *Liquid Modernity* (2000), and *Liquid Fear* (2006). See also: Poder 'Bauman on Freedom' pp. 105/6

¹⁴⁰ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 77

¹⁴¹ See also: Bauman 'What Prospects of Morality' p. 17

¹⁴² Bauman *The art of life* p. 124

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 15

¹⁴⁴ See: Bauman *The Individualized Society* p. 173

neither can it be regulated, as a moral person will never know to where his actions lead. Any moral person, therefore, is characterised by “his or her constant and unrelenting *dissatisfaction* with what he or she has done; by his or her perpetual sorrow that his/her actions were not moral *enough*.”¹⁴⁵ Bauman defends a morality in which the individual faces “a choice between good and evil, (...) know[s] that there is such a choice, and make[s] choices with that knowledge.”¹⁴⁶ The difficulty of this morality lies in the fact that it is impossible for the individual to know whether one’s choice is ultimately a good one. It might be, but not necessarily has to be. As pointed out earlier, the world is too complex to know all of its consequences. The resulting uncertainty and ambivalence (and fear) are core to the modern human condition.¹⁴⁷

When, subsequently, confronted with the question of a moral person functioning in society, it is not only the ‘you’, but also the ‘they’ the ‘I’ encounters. Man lives in a society together with fellow men. Yet, as soon as the ‘Other’ is no longer the ‘you’, but becomes the plural ‘they’, a distance is created and as a result, there is a greater fear, more uncertainty and the risk of growing indifference.¹⁴⁸ Therefore – and here Bauman clearly reveals himself as a thinker of the left –, individuality and personal freedom do not come without solidarity. In a moral society, Bauman asserts, one cannot be indifferent towards the ‘Other’. The individual has to realise that in a world

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 16

¹⁴⁶ Bauman ‘What Prospects of Morality’ p. 13

¹⁴⁷ See: Bauman *Postmodern Ethics* pp. 17-21. In *The art of life* (2008), Bauman further states: “Uncertainty is the natural habitat of human life – though the hope of escaping uncertainty is the engine of human life pursuits” (p. 20). The moment there is no uncertainty anymore would mean happiness and living the perfect life. All man’s life is directed by the hope to reach this final stage of uncertainty.

¹⁴⁸ In *Moral Blindness* (2013), Bauman bemoans the ‘moral insensitivity’ of today’s society: “‘Pure relations’ augur not so much a mutuality of liberation, as a mutuality of moral insensitivity. The Levinasian ‘party of two’ stops being a seedbed of morality. It turns instead into a factor of the *adiaphorization* (that is, exemption from the realm of moral evaluation) of the specifically *liquid* modern variety, complementing while also all too often supplanting the *solid* modern, bureaucratic variety” (p. 15). The ‘Other’ is made irrelevant.

that is characterised by unlimited freedom and choice, his/her freedom exists among the freedom of all others, which, as pointed out in the above, sometimes means that the freedom of the one leads to the unfreedom of the other. In order, then, for this unfreedom not to grow into injustice, as it does now, there is some need for ‘solidity’ that guides the individual in his/her *Unsicherheit* and prevents him/her from retreating to the private and becoming morally insensitive.¹⁴⁹ To Bauman, this guidance is only to be found in the field of politics. Politics – as the site of collective work – is the birthplace and guardian of justice in a society that is otherwise lead by personal freedom and individual autonomy.

In Bauman’s view, in conclusion, the human condition is one of uncertainty, ambivalence, and unpredictability.¹⁵⁰ It is in this situation of never knowing what is to come, freedom is found and the individual is able to develop his/her personality. Yet, as, for Bauman, the human being is a social being, there is neither freedom nor individuality, if that does not come with moral responsibility and solidarity. Moral responsibility in a party of two is something that is pre-ontological; solidarity within a society, however, in which there is a third party as well, is not. Hence, a society consisting of the personal ‘I’ and ‘you’ on the one hand, and the impersonal ‘they’ on the other, a society that is oscillating between the ego and the alter, in which ‘I’ am the source of my acting, ‘you’ are the objective, and ‘they’ all belong to the same species¹⁵¹, demands politics. To Bauman, the essence of politics boils down to the naming of and dealing with ‘the Other’: “Politics, we may say, is about the creation

¹⁴⁹ In *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), the essay ‘Living without an alternative’ (pp. 175-186) refers to the costs of capitalist consumer society and the injustice it brings.

¹⁵⁰ See also: Tester ‘Bauman’s Irony’ p. 91

¹⁵¹ cf. Todorov *De onvoltooide tuin* p. 51

and manipulation of *oppositions* and the drawing of *boundaries* between “inside” and “outside,” and, consequently, differentiation in the way in which each of the two members of the opposition, and so also each one of the two sides of the border, are dealt with.”¹⁵² And this contention brings us to the next and last notion of our examination: democracy.

Can Democracy Conserve Personal Freedom and Individual Autonomy?: Bauman and the Value of Democracy

For a long time, Bauman hoped that socialism would ultimately mature and offer a kind of politics that reflects the above.¹⁵³ Working in England, he kept a close eye on the developments in Central and Eastern Europe, and especially in his native country.¹⁵⁴ In an article dating from 1981, entitled ‘On the Maturation of Socialism’, he analysed the Polish workers’ strikes of 1980 and the role of *Solidarity*.¹⁵⁵ One can easily observe his ongoing affection for the socialist idea, but what is more important here, is to see how Bauman understands politics. He points out how both workers and students have learned from the past and start depoliticising their language in

¹⁵² Bauman ‘What is “Central” in Central Europe?’ p. 1

¹⁵³ See for example his book *Socialism: The Active Utopia* of 1976

¹⁵⁴ In 1971, the Polish sociologist publishes an article called ‘Twenty Years After: The Crisis of Soviet-Type Systems’ in which he addresses the loss of legitimacy of the system, the Soviet-type socialist societies (please note the phrasing!), and certain possible alternatives (creating more freedom in all areas of life), the outcome of which Bauman is not sure. See also: Bauman ‘Social Dissent’ pp. 25-51. Ten years later, in ‘On the Maturation of Socialism’ he is much more positive and dreams of a return of true socialist society, in which it is the people that act and not the state. Another ten years after that, communism is no longer the ruling ideology in Central and Eastern European societies and Bauman seems a bit skeptic as to whether the Western capitalist model is indeed the best alternative to organise society in terms of justice and equality – though, unfortunately, it seems to be the only one. See, for example, his *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992) and *In Search of Politics* (1999).

¹⁵⁵ In 1976, Bauman already addressed civil society in an article entitled: ‘The Party in the System-Management Phase: Change and Continuity.’ See also: footnote 55, p. 149.

articulating “their social identity and action program.”¹⁵⁶ Though *Solidarity*’s quest to be free is indeed political, the language in which it is framed is not. This is how in communist society it gains legitimacy and becomes ever more powerful. “Polish events open up a new possibility [to regain the lost autonomy of civil society]: one of a civil society grounded on autonomy of the public sphere won by the workers.”¹⁵⁷ According to Bauman, this might lead back to the original Marxist vision of socialism: the rule of the proletariat and the creation of a civil society in which the proletariat models the state according to its needs, instead of the state bureaucracy deciding what the proletariat needs.¹⁵⁸ His hopes are that it will lead to an historical creation of a new kind of civil society, one that derives its legitimacy from the people – and thus could offer an alternative to the market in which freedom of choice only is a consumer choice. It would remain a utopian hope. After communism reigned for almost half a century in Central and Eastern Europe, it finally failed to offer society a well-functioning political and economic system.

In the western part of Europe the only ideology that established itself and dominates society ever since is the free market and liberal capitalism. Capitalism organises society and binds politics to its mechanisms. In Bauman’s view, “the present [political] agenda crystallizes as an after-effect or side-effect of market operations”¹⁵⁹, and can therefore hardly be called a *political* agenda. It is the market pressures that shape, mould and (re)frame society. Economic and technological developments in society set the pace and rarely translate into political directives. There are no

¹⁵⁶ Bauman ‘On the Maturation of Socialism’ p. 50

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 53

¹⁵⁸ As he states a few years later in ‘Dictatorship Over Needs’ (1984), people make history, not doctrines (p. 178).

¹⁵⁹ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 75

certainities any more with capital moving freely around the world and politics no longer controlling the economy.¹⁶⁰ In addition, through the relegation of beliefs and ideologies to the background, the power of politics has been reduced to a minimum. The market, reason, bureaucracy, technology and science rule modern European society.

In *Legislators and Interpreters*, the book that announced his postmodern phase, Bauman identified these traits with modernity as it resulted from the Enlightenment. He maintained that instead of truly liberating individuals, paving “the way for progress defined as the passage from darkness to light, [and] ignorance to knowledge,” Enlightenment radicalism legislated, organised, and regulated modern European society.¹⁶¹ It did not free the individual in the sense that it was the human being acting upon society, taking responsibility for his/her acts; it created a bureaucratic state organising the lives of individuals, often with the help of technological means. As the twentieth century demonstrated, this had some very disturbing and destructive consequences. The criticism of “the inhuman potential of modernity”¹⁶² Bauman expressed in his *Modernity and the Holocaust* regarding national-socialist politics and would then also apply to communist society in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, was thus directed towards the state organising society. His current criticism of liquid modernity and consumer society still builds on the same premises, but now stresses the problem of the market organising society. “The pastoral power of the political system is increasingly replaced by the anonymous power of the

¹⁶⁰ See: Bauman *In Search of Politics* pp. 24/5

¹⁶¹ Bauman *Legislators and Interpreters* p. 74

¹⁶² Campaign ‘Bauman on Power’ p. 199

economic system.”¹⁶³ The state has withdrawn itself from private life; yet, the market taking its place is no better. As we have seen in the above, the market allows neither freedom, nor individuality to sprout.

The art of politics, if it happens to be *democratic* politics, is about dismantling the limits to citizens’ freedom; but it is also about self-limitation: about making citizens free in order to enable them to set, individually and collectively, their own, individual and collective, limits. That second point has been all but lost. All limits are off-limits. Any attempt at self-limitation is taken to be the first step on the road leading straight to the gulag, as if there was nothing but the choice between the market’s and the government’s dictatorship over needs – as if there was no room for the citizenship in other form than the consumerist one. It is this form (and only this form) which financial and commodity markets would tolerate. And it is this form which is promoted and cultivated by the governments of the day. The sole grand narrative left in the field is that of (...) the accumulation of junk and more junk.¹⁶⁴

Thus, to Bauman, politics is in crisis.¹⁶⁵ As he emphasises in his liquid modern books, politics no longer is an effective site of collective agency.¹⁶⁶ The liberal consensus and the depoliticised power of capitalism seriously affect politics. Debates in which the ‘Other’ is named and dealt with only take place within existing societal structures: plurality and diversity are deprived of their meaning, as the liberalist tolerance does not allow the ‘Other’ to really be different. Instead of bringing autonomous individuals together through bonds of solidarity, society falls apart and by having lost its capacity to act politically, it is not to be expected society can be re-established easily, if at all. Besides, safety and rights of freedom have been violated since the existing political ‘democratic’ order declared the ‘war on terror’.¹⁶⁷ Hence, if politics is hard to find, democracy (which allows for personal freedom and the autonomous

¹⁶³ Carleheden ‘Bauman on Politics’ p. 181

¹⁶⁴ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 5

¹⁶⁵ See: Bauman and Donskis *Moral Blindness*, chapter on ‘The Crisis of Politics and the Search for a Language of Sensitivity’ pp. 50-93

¹⁶⁶ See also: Bauman ‘Europe is trapped’; Davis ‘Bauman on Globalization’ p. 150

¹⁶⁷ See: Bauman *Liquid Times* p. 11f.

individual to flourish while democratically controlling public or common life)¹⁶⁸ is nowhere to be seen.

What follows is Bauman's search for a solution, his – rather utopian – wish that politics has to go back to its roots, empower discussion and debate again, make citizens actively participate in democracy and allow for critical reflection. To Bauman, “critical reflection is the essence of all genuine *politics*. (...) And democracy is a site of critical reflection, which derives its distinctive identity from that reflection.”¹⁶⁹ Politics is the possibility of communication between what Bauman calls ‘the public’ and ‘the private’.¹⁷⁰ And the ‘*agora*’¹⁷¹ would be the place where this politics can be found. According to Bauman, it is the agora where the public and the private meet and shape society and thus establish true democracy. Yet, the balance in terms on which the public and the private meet, is fragile. In totalitarian regimes the public was far stronger than the private, and in the liberal capitalist age, the private seems to have taken the lead. For democracy this is problematic, as the agora can be seen as an area where ‘negotiation and control’¹⁷² by both the public and the private create democratic society.

In this common ability to reach effective communication without recourse to already shared meanings and agreed interpretation the possibility of universalism is vested. (...) The pursuit of universality does not involve the smothering of cultural polyvalence or the pressure to reach cultural consensus. Universality means no more, yet no less either, than the across-the-species ability to communicate and reach mutual understanding (...). Such universality reaching beyond the confines of sovereign or quasi-sovereign communities is a *conditio sine qua non* of a republic reaching beyond the confines of sovereign or quasi-sovereign states; and the republic

¹⁶⁸ cf. Carleheden ‘Bauman on Politics’ p. 187

¹⁶⁹ Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 84

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 97. See also: Bauman *The Individualized Society* p. 106f.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 87. In Ancient Greece, the agora, literally the market place, was the place where people, where the public and the private met. It was a place where society was shaped.

¹⁷² Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 98

doing just that is the sole alternative to blind, elemental, erratic, uncontrolled, divisive and polarizing forces of globalisation.¹⁷³

In Bauman's view, therefore, politics needs to regain control over society. A civil society needs to be re-established. The public and the private need to meet again on the agora to discuss, shape and establish a common good – “which renders individual autonomy both feasible and worth struggling for.”¹⁷⁴ Democracy is not something that is constituted in a definite form. It can only take shape in a community. It “should primarily neither be understood as negative, that is, as privatized, nor as aiming at happiness and welfare. Democracy is about *positive freedom*, that is to say the individuals’ “ability to influence the conditions of their own lives, to formulate the meaning of ‘common good’ and to make the institutions of society comply with that meaning.””¹⁷⁵ Democracy has to be established on the stage of politics time and again.

To close, freedom, individuality, and democracy are constitutive of Bauman's humanist inspired idea of Europe. To him, these three values are at the core of European society. Bauman believes in the autonomy of the individual to make his own free choices. Simultaneously, he is convinced that every human being has equal, universal rights and that, therefore, there can be no individuality without solidarity (with the ‘you’ as well as the ‘they’). This is the only way to lead a dignified life. His humanist ideas, then, tell him that at present, the best way to organise such a society politically is a democracy based on participation and dialogue. Through democratic rule, politics can become the site of power of the social community again. He

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 202

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 107. See also: Bauman *The Individualized Society* p. 108

¹⁷⁵ Carleheden ‘Bauman on Politics’ p. 187. He, then quotes: Bauman *In Search of Politics* p. 106/7

illustrates this view in the article ‘On Writing; On Writing Sociology’ by quoting his hero Cornelius Castoriadis:

An autonomous society, a truly democratic society, is a society which questions everything that is pre-given and by the same token *liberates the creation of new meanings*. In such a society, all individuals are free to create for their lives the meanings they will (and can).¹⁷⁶

Bauman’s idea of Europe ultimately boils down to a perfect interplay of the specific reading of the values freedom, individuality, and democracy outlined in the above. And returning to his own role as intellectual with a mission¹⁷⁷, he argues that it is the sociologist who has a key role in conveying this knowledge, as it is he who is able to restore “to view the lost link between objective affliction and subjective experience.”¹⁷⁸

The kind of enlightenment which sociology is capable of delivering is addressed to freely choosing individuals and aimed at enhancing and reinforcing their freedom of choice. Its immediate objective is to reopen the allegedly shut case of explanation and so to promote understanding. It is the self-formation and self-assertion of individual men and women, the preliminary condition of their ability to decide whether they want the kind of life that has been presented to them as their fate, that as a result of sociological enlightenment may gain in vigour, effectiveness and rationality. The cause of the autonomous society may profit together with the cause of the autonomous individual; they can only win or lose together.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Castoriadis quoted by Bauman, in: Bauman ‘On Writing: On Writing Sociology’ p. 87

¹⁷⁷ With respect to his life experience and progressive insight, Bauman is very wary of telling people what to do or how to behave; yet, his hermeneutic approach seeks “to offer a perspective, one narrative among many, while inviting the reader to be a hermeneut and to be a part of the ongoing exchange of ideas” (Campaign ‘Bauman on Power’ p. 193).

¹⁷⁸ Bauman ‘On Writing: On Writing Sociology’ p. 86

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 87

II.III Bauman's Europe: The Enlightenment 2.0?

Offering freedom, individuality, and democracy such a central place in his idea of Europe, Bauman positions himself in an older intellectual tradition. Indeed, his view comes very close to what is at the heart of the Enlightenment thought and its idea of Europe. Besides, the sociologist can be argued to belong to the Jewish intellectual tradition as it developed from the end of the eighteenth century, when Europe turned into a spiritual, literary, and artistic place of aspiration.¹⁸⁰ Jewish intellectuals developed an idea of Europe, which was humanist, cosmopolitan, universalist, anti-nationalist, and multilingual.¹⁸¹ It became a cultural utopia. Yet, eighteenth century Europe is not the same as twenty-first century Europe. In between lies the twentieth century, in which Europe lost its innocence. It destroyed its Jewish population and culture and so annihilated the relationship between Jewishness and cultural or spiritual Europe.¹⁸² In addition, Europe can no longer be said to embody the Enlightenment's idea of modernity, progress, and man's power over nature. Reason and knowledge have not led to a perfect society that is free, equal, and just.

¹⁸⁰ See: Witte 'Einleitung: Europa – Heimat der Juden' p. 11-13; Weissberg 'Metropole der Freiheit' p. 17f. In 1783, Moses Mendelssohn published his *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* in Germany, showing that the Enlightenment values of individual freedom and personal responsibility were as much Jewish as Christian values. Concurrently, as a result of the Jewish emancipation in 1791 and Napoleon's Grand Sanhedrin of 1806, the Jews in France were no longer a separate religious group with no status, but became French citizens with equal rights. Other countries would follow suit emancipating their Jewish population. This resulted in a vivid participation of Jewish intellectuals in European cultural life. Hence, modern Europe, Enlightenment values and the Jewish intelligentsia became closely connected.

¹⁸¹ See also: Breysach & Battegay 'Einleitung' p. 10. One cannot deny the counter movement this provoked, notably Zionism as developed by Theodor Herzl and the Eastern European Hasidic Judaism marking a return to Jewish mysticism and orthodoxy.

¹⁸² See also: The book *Abschied von Europa. Jüdisches Schreiben zwischen 1930 and 1950* by Alfred Bodenheimer and Barbara Breysach (2011) offers a good overview of the consequences World War II had for European Jewish intellectual life.

Bauman, however, has found a way to deal with these incongruities. Not by denying Europe's recent past, but through actively using this past, grounding himself upon his own life experiences as a Pole, as a Jew, and as a European living through the twentieth century. Exploring Bauman's idea of Europe, one can detect the changes, breaks, and ruptures that the Enlightenment tradition in thinking about Europe went through and what crucial role the question of the relationship between Jewish identity and Europeanness plays in this. Next, unique to Bauman's position when compared to other, Western European thinkers dealing with the idea of Europe, is his experience of communism as a modern ideology. Bauman's disappointment with real existing socialism in Poland has shaped his views and ideas as much as his (re)discovery of his Jewish identity. Being critical of the communist as well as the capitalist way to organise society, he develops an alternative idea of Europe that has its roots in past cultural and intellectual traditions, but ultimately goes beyond them. To fully understand Bauman's European societal alternative, the last part of this chapter aims at clarifying this alternative by alluding to the various contexts that helped shaping Bauman's final idea of Europe.

The first phase and intellectual context that is to be pointed out is the modern, Marxist context in which Bauman uncritically adopted the Enlightenment tradition in thinking about Europe. During this first phase, Europe as a topic is not very present in Bauman's writings; modernity is. However, this modernity is a European modernity embodying the spirit of the Enlightenment.¹⁸³ Yet, he clearly develops an alternative

¹⁸³ See for a philosophical treatise on the connectedness of European high culture, Enlightenment thinking, and modernity as well as the later critiques of modernity: Pippin, Robert P. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem. On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*. Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999

to the Western capitalist variant of modernity. Different in Bauman's view of modernity is that living in Poland and engaging himself in rebuilding and modernising the country after Germany had left it devastated, he grounds this idea in Marxism. That is, at the start of his career, Bauman was a firm believer in the communist idea of building a just and equal society. Progress, emancipation, and reason were at the heart of his thinking. As a Marxist humanist or revisionist, he sought to counter the dogmatic orthodoxy of the Stalinist years, but never lost trust in the modernist project. He was of the opinion that through his intellectual activities he could be actively involved (and encourage others to get actively involved) in changing and improving society and formulate a legitimate Eastern European socialist alternative to the Western liberal capitalist model of organising society. In 1976, he opened his *Socialism: the active utopia* saying: "Socialism descended upon nineteenth-century Europe as utopia."¹⁸⁴ To him, it was a historical vocation: socialism being "the counter-culture of capitalism" would offer a road to the ultimate salvation of humanity.¹⁸⁵ When he left Poland in 1968, his position remained largely unaltered until the mid-1980s. His idea of Europe was an idealistic, socialist informed idea of Europe uncritical of its recent past.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Bauman *Socialism: the active utopia* p. 9

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 36. Leonidas Donskis has written a challenging book entitled *Forms of Hatred: The Troubled Imagination in Modern Philosophy and Literature* (2003), in which he explores the link between modernity and the politics of hatred. Coming from Lithuania and being of a Jewish, cosmopolitan background he offers some very smart insights in existing normative narratives in literature and philosophy of civilisation, modernity, and discriminating practices, while clarifying the differences between the writings of Central and Eastern European intellectuals and their Western European colleagues. For his discussion on the Central and Eastern European or Russian Marxist understanding of modernity and how it sought to offer an alternative to the Western road to modernity, see: Chapter Three 'Alternative Modernity? Marxism, Modern Ideocracy, and the Secular Church,' pp. 135-200, especially pp. 191ff.

¹⁸⁶ The idealism of Bauman's writings can be found in many writings on Europe as they appeared just after World War II. Historians, artists, politicians, and writers were convinced that after the national movements of the past decades had caused so much destruction Europe was the only answer when

Postmodernity and the (re-)discovery of his Jewish identity heralded Bauman's change of view. His positive evaluation of modernity was replaced by a much more pessimistic and critical reading of the Enlightenment and its values. In his writings, he started deconstructing the Enlightenment connection between freedom, individuality, and democracy on the one hand and modernity on the other.¹⁸⁷ Bauman became very critical of Europe's past and meaning in the world. In 1947, the Frankfurt School philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno had published their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* criticising the positive connotations of the Enlightenment and of modernity, stating that reason and knowledge do not necessarily lead to the good. To them, the Enlightenment was a totalitarian movement, in which human beings are forced into real conformity, in which man loses his/her individuality, and in which subjectivity is destroyed.¹⁸⁸ These ideas would massively impact Bauman's considerations on modernity and the Enlightenment in the 1980s. He came to view modernity as the necessary condition of the Holocaust; the Holocaust was an invention of modernity.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, after the Solidarity movement failed to produce a viable socialist alternative of civil society in the early 1980s and the Iron Curtain came down only a few years later, he opined that the rationality as propagated by the Enlightenment had produced capitalism *as well as* socialism, which in both cases

wishing to create something out of the pile of shards. And thus, many intellectuals all over Europe went looking for its glorious past and binding values in order to build a future that stood on legitimate grounds. Examples are: Chabod, Federico. *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*. Bari: Laterza, 1961; Curcio, Carlo. *Europa. Storia di un'idea*. Firenze: Vallecchi, 1958; Duroselle, Jean-Baptiste. *L'idée de l'Europe dans l'histoire*. Paris: Denoël, 1965; Gollwitzer, Heinz. *Europabild und Europagedanke: Beiträge zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. Und 19. Jahrhunderts*. München, Beck, 1951; Hay, Denys. *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957; Madariaga, Salvador de. *Portrait of Europe*. London, 1952

¹⁸⁷ cf. Carleheden 'Bauman on Politics' p. 175

¹⁸⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment* p. 18. For a more extensive analysis of Adorno and Horkheimer's influence on Bauman, see: Blackshaw *Zygmunt Bauman* pp. 121-126

¹⁸⁹ cf. Bauman *Modernity and the Holocaust* p. 13; Bauman & Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 85f.

resulted in human suffering. Where before communist East European regimes, to Bauman, had been morally superior to their capitalist counterparts, he now started criticising both.¹⁹⁰ In his eyes, modernity failed. He turned to postmodern ideas of Europe. In line with the French postmodern thinkers (and not with the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas who does believe the modern project can be taken further still), he no longer adhered to big meta-narratives (thus also leaving behind the holistic idea of Marxism as the road to salvation); yet, he would not fully disband the ideas of the Enlightenment either.¹⁹¹ He stayed true to its humanist core and started pointing out the individual responsibility of man to make society work.¹⁹² Freedom, justice, individuality were still central to his thinking about Europe. Nevertheless, instead of pointing out *the* best way to organise society, he now stressed difference, ambivalence and the role of the stranger or ‘Other’ in society.¹⁹³ He no longer propagated any ready-made solutions for organising society. His idea of Europe became one without its modern illusions.¹⁹⁴ Following Dennis Smith, Bauman no longer considered himself being a priest of modernity, but he developed into a prophet of postmodernity, seeking to influence and shape our thought and actions.

Prophecy tries to mould our perceptions of ourselves and the world. If it is successful in doing this, it cannot help but also influence how we feel and what we want. It is when

¹⁹⁰ See also: Smith *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 96

¹⁹¹ See also: Smith *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 183. Smith argues that Bauman, contrary to Lyotard, does not consider postmodernism to be entirely positive in its effects. One of the side effects of the increased freedom in postmodern society ruled by subjectivism and relativism is an ever-greater insecurity, which to many is difficult to handle and carries the danger of history repeating.

¹⁹² According to Todorov, this core boils down to the ideas of “autonomy; the human end purpose of our acts; and universality” (Todorov *In Defence of the Enlightenment* p. 5).

¹⁹³ See also: Smith *Zygmunt Bauman* pp. 95-97

¹⁹⁴ In *Postmodern Ethics* Bauman asserts that what characterises ‘the postmodern perspective’ is “the tearing off of the mask of illusions; the recognition of certain pretences as false and certain objectives as neither attainable nor, for that matter, desirable” (p. 3).

we act upon our inclinations and pursue our preferences that we make our own contributions, however limited, to how the future unfolds.¹⁹⁵

In his liquid modern phase, then, Bauman formulates the most subtle and exceptional interpretation of the idea of Europe. It is here both earlier phases in his life and thought meet in a Hegelian dialectical sense and lead to an alternative model of how the heritage of the Enlightenment can still inform our idea of Europe; however, not without consciously including Europe's twentieth century. Bauman is able to combine his Central European, Jewish cosmopolitan background with the values as produced by western, Enlightenment thought.¹⁹⁶ In line with his Marxist informed, humanist worldview, Bauman tries to rethink the role of society. Saying good-bye to his postmodern perspective on society that leaves too much space for relativism and causes mainly insecurity (so carrying the risk of driving back people into the arms of totalising movements), he deems it necessary to have some solidity in a society that is otherwise in flux. According to the sociologist, this solidity is to be found in the normative field of ethics. It is this ethical grounding of society, which in consumer society he bemoans missing.¹⁹⁷ Bauman considers morality to be an inherent part of the human condition of 'being with others' (Levinas): "the individual is an ethical

¹⁹⁵ Smith *Zygmunt Bauman* p. 51f.

¹⁹⁶ The values he refers to here are freedom and justice. It is these values that have informed his thought throughout his intellectual career as sociologist. "These principles stayed with me all the time – if you call them socialist, fine; but I don't think they are particularly socialist, anyway. They are much wider than that. I really believe that communism was just the stupidly condensed and concentrated, naïve effort to push it through; but the values were never invented by the communists. The values were there, much wider; they were western, Enlightenment values. I can't imagine a society which would dispose completely of these two values, ever... Once the ideas of justice and self-assertion were invented, it is impossible to forget them. They will haunt and pester us to the end of the world" (Bauman *Intimations of Postmodernity* p. 225).

¹⁹⁷ Bauman criticises: "It is aesthetics, not ethics that is deployed to integrate the society of consumers, keep it on course and time and again salvage it from crises. If ethics accord supreme value to duty well done, aesthetics put a premium on sublime experience" (Bauman *Work, consumerism and the new poor* p. 31).

subject, a social actor and also the product of specific life strategies.”¹⁹⁸ Every individual is capable of taking a moral responsibility for or towards the ‘Other’.¹⁹⁹

It is this ‘moral responsibility’ that defines Bauman’s alternative, humanist perspective. Namely, to Bauman, being moral is something different from being good. “Being moral means knowing that things may be good or bad. But it does not mean knowing, let alone knowing for sure, *which* things are good and *which* are bad.”²⁰⁰ Instead of drawing up a society based on a set of common or shared beliefs and values, Bauman thus pleads for a reconstitution of European society as the common property and common responsibility of autonomous and free individuals aiming at a dignified life and just society through politics. The collective and the individual should creatively and actively shape a political and moral framework for society, so seeking to avoid both totalising (fascist and communist) and particularising (liberal capitalist) tendencies, yet providing the individual with some sort of guidance.

One should note, however, that there will never be an end to this process: “[T]he ‘project of modernity’ [and by extension, of Europe, M.E.] is not just ‘unfinished’, but *unfinishable*, and (...) this ‘unfinishability’ is the essence of the modern era.”²⁰¹ In Bauman’s view, Europe’s history has been a history of creation, of an ability to critically and reflexively shape, form, and build a ‘civilisation’, and learn and memorise the lessons of the past.²⁰² In the documentary *Love, Europe, World of Zygmunt Bauman*, Bauman argues that Europe achieved the impossible. It outgrew its totalising period. It overcame National Socialism and fascism as well as communism.

¹⁹⁸ Bauman and Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 99

¹⁹⁹ See also: Campain ‘Bauman on Power’ p. 200

²⁰⁰ Bauman and Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 46

²⁰¹ Bauman and Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* p. 75

²⁰² Ibid. p. 38

And even though there might be discrepancies between countries in political culture and expectations, 2000 years of conflict and resentment were left behind and have been exchanged for peace. This is Europe's dowry.²⁰³ Europe can build communities; it can find solutions providing its citizens a free and just society without giving up ambivalence, change, variety, and differences.²⁰⁴ Europe was able to organise itself in a political and economic European Union that has pacified rivalling countries for more than 60 years now and even overcame its inner schism, reuniting East and West. Moreover, characteristic to European society is to Bauman that politics and the individual are in a constant process of creating, defining, and establishing themselves in relation to one another. On the agora the public and the private can share experience, create awareness for common problems, and face common responsibilities and obligations. In his book *Europe. An Unfinished Adventure* (2004) Bauman states: "Europe is a mission – something to be made, created, built."²⁰⁵ It is not something of fixed borders or realities, but a civilisation or culture that is a "product of choice, design and management."²⁰⁶ Thereby it should learn from and not forget its history. Only through constant critique and remedial action it can create and recreate itself.

European identity was a utopia at all moments of its history; perhaps its utopian character, forever not-yet-attained, vexingly elusive and critical of its reality, was the sole steady element that made of European history a consistent and in the end a coherent story. Europe's place was at all times at the site of continuous

²⁰³ Bauman in film *Love, Europe, World of Zygmunt Bauman*. URL: <http://ninateka.pl/film/zygmunt-bauman-milosc-europa-swiat>, last access: 14 April 2014

²⁰⁴ Bauman 'The Past of Central Europe is the Future of Europe.' In *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*, the sociologist states: "We have slowly learnt the difficult art of living with difference peacefully, but we had to learn. It is sometimes said that the inherent 'universalism' of the European spirit consists in its ability to converse with what is foreign to it. But we may say that Europe could be seen as a greenhouse of universal humanity because of its own amazing aptitude for communicating across the cultural (or any other) divides. This is infinitely more important – seminal, promising – than unambiguous 'identity'" (p. 31).

²⁰⁵ Bauman *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure* p. 2

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 7

experimentations and adventure.²⁰⁷

According to Bauman, Europe needs to stay adventurous, which means that Europe has to (again) become “a Europe looking beyond its frontiers, a Europe critical of its own narrow-mindedness and self-referentiality, [and] a Europe struggling to reach out of its territorial confinement, with an urge to transcend its own and by the same token the rest of the world’s condition.”²⁰⁸ Bauman maintains that if Europe wants to play a role in the world, it should remember its history, regain its will for adventure, and formulate long-term visions for the future.

Conclusion: Europe as Forever Not Yet

Bauman is not *merely* a sociologist but more importantly also a morally committed writer with a literary edge. Furthermore, Bauman is not *just* a writer. He is also a concerned and critical social analyst. Bauman wants to encourage men and women to make a world a place that is more fitting for the creativity of humanity.²⁰⁹

The argument of this chapter has been that Bauman’s idea of Europe can only be fully understood when placed into perspective. This not only includes an analysis of his ideas, but also an analysis of how and most notably why these ideas changed. One has to incorporate Bauman’s life experiences as a Pole, a Jew, and a European in the examination of his idea of Europe. Furthermore, focusing on Europe’s twentieth

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 34

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 34

²⁰⁹ Jacobsen, Marshman & Tester *Bauman Beyond Postmodernity* pp. 23f.

century history, three ideologies that organised European society and determined its fate inform Bauman's final idea of Europe: fascism, communism, and liberal capitalism. In his work and formulation of his idea of Europe, Bauman is able to reflect on all ideologies from an inside as well as an outside perspective. While in Poland, he very much believed in the socialist ideology. Arriving to Leeds as a Polish sociologist who was a stranger to British academia, he "knew very well how to deploy both his brilliance and his 'outsider-ness'." He "pushed ahead with two closely related intellectual projects; one was to make sense of culture and sociology; the other was to explain socialism, capitalism and class."²¹⁰ With the 'discovery' of his Jewish identity – which once again can be interpreted as the identity of a stranger –, both projects melted together announcing his postmodern period. Working from and within the United Kingdom, he was able to critically analyse capitalist as well as socialist society and denounce modernity, focusing on ambivalence, difference, and otherness. Yet, with the problems of consumer society becoming ever more visible, Bauman made another intellectual turn. Detecting the insecurity that haunted every individual and made freedom (the freedom of choice) a difficult possession to deal with especially in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, he ultimately developed a pan-European view of society focusing on freedom, individuality, and democracy.

Apart from the breaks and ruptures in his thinking, one can also detect continuity. Aiming for a just society, Bauman never renounces his vision of utopia: the forever not yet.²¹¹ His sociology is characterised by a utopia of hope. In his view, one should always and ever pursue the goal to make society a better place for humanity. Through

²¹⁰ Smith 'How to be a Successful Outsider' p. 40f.

²¹¹ See also: Jacobsen 'Solid modernity, liquid utopia' pp. 217-240

this utopian hope, he might be said to resume or continue the Jewish intellectual tradition, which was declared lost after World War II and the Holocaust.²¹² By taking up the Jewish tradition of perceiving Europe as utopia, one can argue that he is able to overcome the breach in the connection between Jewishness and the idea of Europe after the Holocaust. Yet, this is a utopia with a past. Hence, according to Bauman, perfect society or merely a perfect Europe can never be realised. Having reproached the organising ideologies of modern society on both sides of the Iron Curtain as well as its postmodern alternative of capitalist, consumer society, the sociologist offers his readers an alternative: Europe as a moral political choice.

²¹² See: Witte 'Einleitung: Europa – Heimat der Juden?' p. 19; Bodenheimer & Breysach *Abschied von Europa* pp. 7-16

Chapter III

Auschwitz as the Moral Reservoir of European Culture

Imre Kertész and the Idea of Europe

A Holocaustban én az emberi állapotot ismertem fel, a nagy kaland végállomását, ahová kétezer éves etikai és morális kultúrja után az európai ember eljutott.¹

Introduction:

Reading the Imre Kertész dictionary *Az irodalom gyanúba keveredett* (The literature fell under suspicion) compiled by the Hungarian literary scholar and essayist László F. Földényi, one searches vainly for the word ‘Europe’. There are Auschwitz, *Bildung*, collectivism, freedom, happiness, Holocaust, fate, identity, Jew, language, love, literature, survivor, testimony, totality, and many other words that give a good impression of what is important in and characteristic to the Jewish-Hungarian writer’s work. And even though Földényi states that his choice of words and notions is a

¹ Kertész “Heuréka!” p. 384. This quote is derived from the speech he gave, when he was awarded the Nobel prize in Literature in 2002. The official English translation of this statement in his ‘Nobel Lecture’ is: “What I discovered in Auschwitz is the human condition, the end point of a great adventure, where the European traveler arrived after his two-thousand-year-old moral and cultural history.” URL:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz-lecture-e.html, last access 27 May 2014. In this chapter I will use and quote English translations where they exist. If not, I will translate his texts into English from the Hungarian original.

personal choice, one may doubt whether any other Kertész-dictionary would contain the word ‘Europe’. In Kertész’s novels, Europe never appears as a notion to mesmerise about. However, in his essays, it surely does.² Here, the Nobel Prize winner and Holocaust survivor explicitly addresses European civilisation, its values and culture; he defines Auschwitz as a European universal trauma, but simultaneously as its moral reservoir;³ and he repeatedly reflects on his affinity with or kinship to thinkers and writers belonging to the European cultural heritage, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, and Sándor Márai.⁴ These writers and their books shape and guide Kertész’s literary output, as do the composers Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schönberg, and György Kurtág. They are a source of inspiration in Kertész’s literary compositions, in his search for language (atonality) when writing about Auschwitz or the Holocaust and more broadly about the totalitarian experience in general considering its consequences for Europe and European culture.⁵ In this sense, every novel, essay or (fictional) diary, Kertész has published is about Europe. Europe is *the* frame of reference to Kertész.

² The collection of most of Kertész’s essays published in 2008 even carries the title *Európa nyomasztó öröksége* (Europe’s oppressive legacy).

³ In the case of Imre Kertész, Auschwitz is often used as a metaphor for the Holocaust and will be used as its most visible memorial symbol in this chapter. This is not to say, however, that this usage is without problems. In his article ‘Holocaust: The Ignored Reality’, Timothy Snyder for example criticizes the metaphorical use of Auschwitz, as it excludes the largest group of its victims. He urges every historian to reflect on the actual scope of the German mass killing policies in Europe. And he has a point. Yet, since this chapter takes on Kertész’s writings, it will follow the meaning the author attaches to it.

⁴ See: Kertész’s diaries: *Gályanapló* (Galley boat-Log), *Valaki Más* (I – Another), *Mentés Másként. Feljegyzések 2001-2003* (Salvage in a Different Way. Notes 2001-2003) and *Letzte Einkehr. Tagebücher 2001-2009*.

⁵ For an extensive and well-informed analysis of the influence of music on Kertész and his literary output, see: Ebert, Dietmar (Hg.). *Das Glück des atonalen Erzählens. Studien zu Imre Kertész*. Dresden: Edition AZUR, 2010. Particularly instructive are the chapters: ‘Atonales Erzählen im ROMAN EINES SCHICKSALLOSEN – Vom Finden einer Romanform, um „Auschwitz“ schreibend zu überleben’ (pp. 111-133); ‘Atonales Erzählen in der geschlossenen Gesellschaft – Die Romane FIASKO, KADDISCH FÜR EIN NICHT GEBORENES KIND und die Erzählungen DER SPURENSUCHER, DIE ENGLISCHE FLAGGE, PROTOKOLL und DETEKTIVGESCHICHTE’ (pp. 209-272); and ‘„Die Dichter sind es, die dem Gesetz gehorchen...“ – Vom Suchen und Finden der „atonalen Kreisbewegung“ im essayistischen Werk von Imre Kertész’ (pp. 385-407).

Besides, like Bauman's story, Imre Kertész's story (b. 1929) is a European story. It narrates the life of a man born into a Jewish, petty bourgeois family in Hungary, being deported to Auschwitz at the age of fourteen and returning to Budapest a year later, hardly able to share any of his experiences in the concentration camps with others. It is the story of a Jew trying to survive the aftermath of war, of a Central European citizen seeking to find his place in a communist society, and of an intellectual creating a home in the European cultural heritage, while having to radically alter its departure point after the atrocities of World War II. It is the biography of a man who experienced the collapse of communist society, but as well the difficulties of building a new democratic state. Kertész does not mince his words. His writings of the 1970s and 1980s are as radical as his books published after 1989. Reading Kertész means diving into a critical analysis and review of what Europe means after Auschwitz, of the human condition in a totalitarian as well as a post-totalitarian context, and of individual survival. Ultimately one meets a writer, whose identity is best described not as Jewish or Hungarian, but as European.

My approach towards and examination of Imre Kertész

The aim of this chapter is to explore Kertész's idea of Europe. It grapples with the questions of how he relates to earlier literary and philosophical traditions in thinking about Europe; how, like in the case of Bauman's, his life and ideas intermingle and cross-fertilize each other; and in what way the social, political and historical context, i.e. his life in communist and post-1989 Hungary, are crucial to his writings and idea of Europe.

As a starting point, biography and work will be at the centre of attention. My research will focus on the author's Holocaust experience, his subsequent life in communist Hungary, and his somewhat paradoxical finding of a home in Germany after the Iron Curtain came down. It will analyse the broader cultural, political, and social context in which his work and ideas developed. It will examine the specific Hungarian context and the place and position of the Jews in Hungarian society and it will explore Kertész's position within that society and within the Jewish community. In a second part, I will discuss the themes that are crucial to the author when writing about Europe. In the context of the totalitarian experience, freedom, individuality, and democracy are important themes in Kertész's work. The first two notions figure prominently in his novels; democracy – next to freedom and individuality – is a theme that is mostly addressed in his essays. Yet, Kertész's reflection on the European Enlightenment and modernity and his humanist position when thinking about Europe are less obvious and clear than in the work of Bauman. His experiences in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Zeitz have made it impossible to continue this European cultural tradition without putting it into question. Besides, as a writer, he emphasises aesthetics and culture instead of politics and so differs from Bauman whose active political involvement in communist society has been discussed in the previous chapter. Kertész retreated into an inner exile during the 1950s and did not actively take part in any of the political and antipolitical movements of his time. His response to society is a cultural philosophical one grounded in the existentialism of Albert Camus⁶ and the

⁶ Camus's existentialism differs from Jean-Paul Sartre in that Sartre's existentialism is positive towards political ideology (communism) and stimulates an active involvement in politics, whereas Camus's existentialism and critique of society is of a more aesthetic literary and philosophical nature. Having chosen an inner exile and not wishing to be involved in politics in any way, Camus's existentialism obviously better fits Kertész and his own view of the moral condition of society after World War II.

philosophy of Emmanuel Kant. Hence, reading and interpreting Kertész's treatment of the notions of freedom, individuality, and democracy through the existentialist lens of Camus, I aim at exploring once more how these values – so paramount to the Enlightenment and humanist tradition – can be lived after World War II and the Holocaust and what they mean to Europe and its future.

Moreover, Kertész is a writer, philosopher and political thinker of the 20th century opening up a road to the 21st century by seeking to answer his life-long question of how to live ethically in a world that still carries the possibility of Auschwitz. In 'Kertész's Aesthetics of the Holocaust', Sára Molnár argues that "Kertész's texts are best analyzed in the specific context of Central European history and culture by attention to the region's political, social, and cultural conditions as resulting from several types of totalitarianism and conditions of post-totalitarianism, as well as within the context of European Holocaust literature in toto."⁷ Molnár's approach, probably, is the only way to do justice to the persona and writings of Imre Kertész. That is, one cannot reduce Kertész's work to Holocaust literature, nor is it possible to fully understand the meaning and range of his work if one leaves out the historical, social, political, and intellectual context. In examining Kertész's idea of Europe my analysis, thus, not only focuses on his work as Holocaust literature, but also reflects on his communist period and change of position in post-communist Hungary. Yet, while Molnár studies Kertész's lifework from a literary studies point of view, I will approach his work from a history of ideas angle. Little research has yet tried to interpret the message Kertész seeks to convey to his readers historically and within the context it appeared. This, however, is one of the crucial ways to understand his oeuvre

⁷ Molnár 'Kertész's Aesthetics of the Holocaust' p. 168

and the breaks and continuities in his thought. In addition, it allows me to reflect on the changing perception of Kertész, his discovery, rediscovery, and ‘re-rediscovery’ after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature and the reaction of the writer to his changing position. Linking biography and ideas, text and context, time and place, this chapter explores the implications and range of Kertész’s work with regards to the idea of Europe. The aim is to rethink Europe through Kertész’s aesthetic reflection on the Holocaust and communist society after he withdrew into inner exile, only to slowly taking a more political stance again during the 1990s and 2000s.

Reception and Interpretation of his Work

When Kertész won the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature, heated debates erupted in the Hungarian media about the fact that Kertész was better known abroad than in Hungary.⁸ In countries like Germany, Sweden, and France, Kertész’s novels were discussed in all kinds of media, at conferences, public lectures, etc. Notably in Germany, he had become an intellectual star with the translation of *Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekért* (*Kaddish for an unborn child*) into German in the early 1990s and his success spread to other mostly Western European countries from there. He received several stipends to work and write and present his work. In his famous television programme *Das Literarische Quartett*, Germany’s most influential literary critic, survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, and authority on Holocaust literature, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, praised Kertész’s novels on various occasions. The author received several German book prizes. The cultural television station ARTE made a film portrait

⁸ See also: Varga “Könnte ich je erfahren, wer und was ich bin...” p. 153

of Kertész visiting the concentration camp of Rehmsdorf (Zeitz) in 1997. And newspapers and radio stations frequently asked him for interviews. Kertész rapidly rose in prominence and the German public loved him.⁹

Meanwhile, in his home country a big effort to catch up with the Western European perception of Kertész's work can be detected since 2002.¹⁰ Before, Kertész's work had been perceived only at the margins of the literary scene. In 1973, the publisher turned down the publication of *Sorstalanság*, saying:

We consider that your way of giving artistic expression to the material of your experiences does not come off, whereas the subject itself is horrific and shocking. The fact that it nevertheless fails to become a shattering experience for the reader hinges primarily to the main protagonist's, to put it mildly, odd reactions. (...) We must also say something about your style. For the most part your sentences are clumsy, couched in a tortuous form, and sadly there are all too many phrases like "...on the whole...", "naturally enough," and besides which..."¹¹

⁹ The first mention of Kertész in the German-speaking media can be found already in the late 1970s. Kertész's first novel *Sorstalanság* (*Fatelessness*) was reviewed by the literary critic Éva Haldimann in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ). Originally from Hungary, she was an expert on contemporary novels published in communist Hungary. Between 1960s and 1990s, she continuously wrote about Hungarian literature in the NZZ and reviewed several of Kertész's novels, also offering an insight in the political and cultural context of the country. His final breakthrough, however, came with the end of communism in Hungary and the opening up of the country to Western Europe. Much of the culture produced at the 'other' side of the Iron Curtain was discovered for a wider public only then. Haldimann's contributions to the NZZ can be found in a little book collecting the articles she wrote between 1963 and 1994: Haldimann, Éva. *Momentaufnahmen aus dreißig Jahren ungarischer Literatur*. Budapest, Corvina Verlag, 1997. In *Haldimann-levelek* (2010, transl. *Letters to Éva Haldimann*), which was published on the occasion of Kertész's 80th birthday, one can now too read a correspondence between Imre Kertész and Éva Haldimann that lasted for several decades. It is very informative on what Kertész thinks of his reception in Hungary and the problems he meets writing and publishing his books. It offers a helpful insight in Kertész's early existence as a novelist.

¹⁰ See for example: Scheibner, Tamas & Zoltán Gábor Szücs (eds). *Az értelmezés szükségessége. Tanulmányok Kertész Imréről* (The Necessity of Interpretation: Studies on Imre Kertész). Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2002 (Published in German and with some modifications as Szegedy-Maszá, M. & T. Scheibner, (Hg.). *Der lange, dunkle Schatten. Studien zum Werk von Imre Kertész*. Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2004); Kőbányai, János (ed.). *Az Ember Mélye. Írások Kertész Imréről a Múlt és Jövőben*. (On the Depths of Man. Writings on Imre Kertész in Past and Future). Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2003; Molnár, Sára. *Ugyanegy Téma Variációi. Ironia és megszólítás Kertész Imre prózájában* (Variations on a Theme. Irony and accost in Imre Kertész's prose). Kolozsvár: Koinónia, 2005

¹¹ Kertész *Fiasco* pp. 56/57. Kertész rehearses the publisher's critique in his *Galley Boat-Log*: "I am bringing up 'this subject,' so I am told, too late, it is no longer of topical interest. 'This subject' should have been dealt with much earlier, at least ten years ago, etc. Yet these days I have again had to realize that the Auschwitz myth is the only thing that truly interests me" (Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 36, transl. Wilkinson). See also: Szegedy-Maszá & Scheibner *Der lange, dunkle Schatten* p. 15

On publishing the novel two years later, it was hardly noticed. It did not mirror the Holocaust narratives preferred by the communist regime.¹² There were no accusations fitting the heroic, anti-fascist discourse, there was no outrage towards the assassins, nor were there any clear divisions between good and evil. The novel was even called anti-Semitic because of its display of Jewish stereotypes and little empathy with the Jewish victims.¹³ The novel disappeared into the dark corners of communist society until it was republished in 1985.

Kertész himself was known and appreciated mostly for his translation of German literature and philosophy into Hungarian. Yet, from the late 1980s he was awarded various literary prizes and one can observe an increase of publications on Kertész. Their thrust, however, is quite divided. Zoltán András Bán, one of the most important literary critics of the 1980s and 1990s, is extremely positive. To him, Kertész has been neglected for too long. Indeed, he understands Kertész as a chief representative of Hungarian contemporary literature.¹⁴ Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, conversely, writing the first post-1989 history of Hungarian literature does not deem it necessary to include Kertész in his book. Szabó opines he does not play a noteworthy role in contemporary, West-European oriented, postmodernist Hungarian literature.¹⁵

¹² See also: Spiró 'Nicht jüdisch. Nicht ungarisch. Nicht antideutsch genug' p. 21. "[T]he period of Holocaust was presented as the crime of the fascists and the suffering and resistance of the communists was overemphasized. (...) [T]he Holocaust was regarded as something belonging to the past, an historical event whose representation did not raise any problems; thus it was not permitted to speak about the problems raised by it" (Kisantal 'The Holocaust as a Paradigm for Ethical Thinking and Representation' p. 22).

¹³ See also: Cooper 'Imre Kertész and the Post-Auschwitz Condition' pp. 10-13

¹⁴ See: Bán 'Diadalmas fiaskó' p. 143. See also: Gács 'Was zählt's, wer vor sich hin murmelt?' p. 263

¹⁵ See: Gács 'Was zählt's, wer vor sich hin murmelt?' p. 264; Molnár 'Imre Kertész's Aesthetics of the Holocaust' p. 165. The title of Kulcsár's book: Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő. *A magyar irodalom története 1945-1991* (History of Hungarian Literature, 1945-1991). Budapest: Argumentum, 1993

Basically, many Hungarians had difficulties with his work. His approach to the topic, the renunciation of his own role as contemporary witness, his dispense with moral judgements and his acceptance of the life in a concentration camp as natural were too provocative or irritating.¹⁶ His thematic choices, notably Auschwitz, World War II, and the Jewish question were topics the authorities did not publically speak about then, and they are topics with which Hungarian society has difficulties to this day. Literary scholar Sára Molnár states in a noteworthy essay that Hungary is incapable of confronting “its proto-nazi and fascist history, the role of the Hungarians’ in the genocide of Hungarian Jews in 1944, and the existence and continuous re-occurrence of anti-Semitism.”¹⁷ The way Kertész’s work is approached is an illustration of this inaptitude.

But in the background, there is a more fundamental ideological aspect to the ambiguous reception of the writings of Imre Kertész. When Kertész won the Nobel Prize, people on the centre-left were mainly positive and enthusiastic. They praised the value, importance, and quality of his work and the contribution he had made to Hungarian literature.¹⁸ Others, however, especially on the national-conservative side of the political spectrum, were of the opinion that there were better, ‘more Hungarian’ (i.e. non-Jewish) writers, who deserved the prize more.¹⁹ Many positions and arguments reflect older divisive lines between the populist (traditional, national,

¹⁶ See: Szegedy-Maszák & Scheibner *Der lange, dunkle Schatten* p. 15

¹⁷ Molnár ‘Kertész’s Aesthetics of the Holocaust’ p. 162

¹⁸ See collected essays in Kőbányai *Az ember mélye* (The Depths of Man) and Kőbányai’s *Jób Díja* (2003). Péter Szirák in *Kertész Imre. A pesszimizmus: bátorság* (Imre Kertész. Pessimism: Courage, 2003) and György Vári in *Kertész Imre. Buchenwald fölött az ég* (The Sky above Buchenwald, 2003) both wrote a monograph on Kertész’s novel *Sorstalanság* (Fatelessness), interpreting his novel, focusing on his use of language, and defining the literary genre, and were among the first to publish a monograph on Kertész’s work.

¹⁹ See: Frühling ‘Qui êtes-vous Imre Kertész?’ pp. 231/2; Marsovszky ‘Imre Kertész and Hungary Today’ pp. 153-155; Young ‘The Media and Imre Kertész’s Nobel Prize in Literature’ p. 272

folkloristic, wishing to reform or develop Hungarian society from within) and urbanist (liberal, cosmopolitan, pro-modernist, Europe-oriented) intellectual scenes in Hungary. They hardly share any common ground, and especially those representing the populist intellectual scene are negative towards Kertész.

Two episodes from the early 1990s illustrate the populist group's critique towards the urbanists.²⁰ In 1993, there had been a commotion around a conference organized by the Protestant Academy in Tutzing, Germany. The director of the *Collegium Hungaricum Berlin*, Gyula Kurucz, charged Imre Kertész, Péter Nádas, György Dalos and others as belonging to the "Konrád-Group or Konrád-School" and not properly representing Hungarian culture (i.e. being Jewish). Kertész, furthermore, was described as a writer, who only talked about one theme: the Holocaust. This provoked much reaction from Kertész's German publisher *Rowohlt*, the senate of Berlin, and several Hungarian authors and literary scholars writing to the ministry of education.²¹ Kurucz, however, was allowed to remain at his post. A few years earlier, Sándor Csoóri, who is a distinguished Hungarian lyric and essayist, had expressed similar anti-Semitic notes in the article 'Nappali hold' ('Full-moon') published in the journal *Hitel* in September 1990. It prompted Kertész to hand in his membership of the Hungarian Writers' Association (*Magyar Írószövetség*) via an open letter published in the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Hírlap*. Csoóri had stated that the Hungarian Jewry sought to permeate 'Hungarianness' with the 'Jewishness' in style and thinking. Kertész denounced it as anti-Semitic, absurd and leaving no place for rational

²⁰ See also: Ebert 'Das Romantagebuch GALEERENTAGEBUCH und der Tagebuchroman ICH – EIN ANDERER' p. 326

²¹ See: Kertész, Imre *Briefe an Eva Haldimann* pp. 129-135. In the Hungarian publication of this collection of letters, the letters addressed in the above are missing. See also: Földényi 'Das "Schlachtbeil" der Kunst' p. 19

discussion. Being an individual and having defined himself as an individual (not as particularly Hungarian or Jewish), he did not want to be denied his own feelings, intentions, and beliefs towards either Hungary or Jewishness. Csoóri stood in no position to define what is Hungarian and what is not, who represents it and who not, Kertész asserted. Therefore, he did not wish to be a member of an association whose co-president doubted that those belonging to the Hungarian Jewry could take part in the Hungarian spirit.²² At that time, the chair of the Hungarian Writer's Association, Miklós Mészöly, stepped down sympathising with Kertész, but in 2004 another large group of writers (more than 120) resigned their membership and left the association in reaction to anti-Semitic statements by its executive members.²³ Ideological differences (which mostly find their expression in anti-Semitic statements) between the two groups are becoming ever deeper.

Considering this division, it is not surprising to find most debates and publications on Imre Kertész in media outlets linked to the centre-left and liberal cultural scene. *Élet és Irodalom* (ÉI), a literary newspaper, to which Kertész regularly contributed, published numerous interpretative essays on his work. *Beszélő* ('speaker'), a liberal political and cultural magazine, reflected on his work as did *Múlt és Jövő* ('Past and Future'). Janos Kőbányai, a Hungarian writer, sociologist, and chief editor of *Múlt és*

²² Kertész's letter can be found in: Kertész *Haldimann-levelek* pp. 18-24

²³ Standaert 'Hungarian Writers' Spat Betrays Struggle Between 'Urbanism' and 'Populism.' In the article, Standaert describes that the populists, who understand themselves as Hungarian Christian people, feel marginalized by "the left" – communists, outsiders and Jews. They claim the Holocaust is a topic more accepted by the international audience (books of urbanist thinkers are more widely translated), and sufferings of regular Hungarian people are neglected. This does not have a positive influence on bringing both groups together. Also Marsovszky ('Imre Kertész and Hungary Today') is of the opinion that Hungary is in need of a new and stronger vision of democratic ideals and values that is able to withstand the national-conservative ideology and growing anti-Semitism, as otherwise "the emotional as well as intellectual pitfalls of a society where democratic values have not been adopted and exercised sufficiently" will remain present (p. 157).

Jövő, collected various essays of leading Hungarian writers and thinkers on Kertész and also published a small booklet on the background to and reception of Kertész winning the Nobel Prize.²⁴ Winning the Nobel Prize meant Kertész's final breakthrough in Hungary.

Examining the way Kertész's work was perceived and interpreted in Germany, one can observe that the publications written in the 1990s are mostly literary reviews and analyses. The various authors mainly dealt with the content and the literary quality of his work and of course with the way he writes about the Holocaust, which made a deep impression on German readers. Only after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002, academics started studying Kertész more comprehensively.²⁵ In 2009, Brigitta Elisa Simbürger published her book *Faktizität und Fiktionalität: Autobiographische Schriften zur Shoah*. This book can be placed in the tradition of 'Holocaust-centered fiction', centralising the question of how the atrocities of the Holocaust are represented aesthetically without becoming trivial.²⁶ This has become an academic research category of its own. Many books and essays on Kertész can be placed in this category.²⁷ Bernard Sarin (2010) tried a more philosophical interpretation of Kertész's work, focusing on how Kertész uses his individual experience to write a more general interpretation of human life in a society that

²⁴ See: Kőbányai, János (ed.). *Az Ember Mélye. Írások Kertész Imréről a Múlt és Jövőben*. (The Depths of Man. Writings on Imre Kertész in *Múlt és Jövő*). Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2003

²⁵ The first collection of essays published in German and dealing with the writings of Imre Kertész is *Der lange, dunkle Schatten* (2004), edited by Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and Tamás Scheibner. This, however, is an Austrian-Hungarian cooperation and contains essays that first appeared in Hungarian. In Hungarian, on which the German book is based. His use of language, irony, the role of the 'I', his diaries, the question how he writes about the Holocaust and Auschwitz, and what it means to him as a writer (spiritual form of life) are themes that dominate the book.

²⁶ See: Horowitz *Voicing the Void* pp. 16/17

²⁷ Another example is Magdalena Zolkos's *Reconciling Community and Subjective Life. Trauma Testimony as Political Theorizing in the Work of Jean Améry and Imre Kertész* (2010). It is one of the rare, more extensive English language interpretations of Kertész's work.

produced Auschwitz. The cultural and literary scholar, Dietmar Ebert, finally, edited the first proper German volume interpreting all of his novels and pointing out how his work is anchored in the Central European (including German) literary tradition, philosophy, and music.²⁸

Other Western European countries show similar trajectories in the perception of the Kertész work. Since he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002, an enormous increase of publications on his work can be observed. Moreover, English translations of his work were published for the most part only after 2002. Until the British translator Tim Wilkinson started translating Kertész's work, there existed only two (deplorable) translations of Kertész's books. And even having been awarded the most important prize in literature, his works have found their way to the UK and US market only hesitatingly.²⁹ Stephen Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise Vasvári, then, edited the first two scholarly volumes on Kertész (*Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature* and *Comparative Central European Holocaust Studies*), making his work accessible to English-speaking readers. They collected essays by German, English, Hungarian, French and Croatian literary scholars and translators, offering an insight in the international reception of Kertész's novels. Magdalena Zolkos published her *Reconciling Community and Subjective Life. Trauma Testimony as Political Theorizing in the Work of Jean Améry and Imre Kertész* in 2010, which is a book in

²⁸ cf. Ebert *Das Glück des atonalen Erzählens* p. 12

²⁹ See: Sansom 'Dossier K by Imre Kertész – review.' Basically, for the English-speaking reader, Central Europe and its literary output is far away. This can for example be observed in the English translation of *A nyomkereső* (The Pathseeker). Wilkinson writes an afterword explaining the context in which Kertész is writing, pointing out basic things like: "Hungary (...) was at the time, and right up to the end of 1989, "behind" the Iron Curtain (from the West's perspective, that is). Among the reflexes that most people in the Soviet bloc acquired was not to ask questions, or rather to do so in roundabout ways, with allusions, metaphors, with nods and winks and shakes of the head, and certainly not to expect truthful answers" (Wilkinson in: Kertész *The Pathseeker* p. 127).

the field of Holocaust studies, yet bringing in aspects of trauma studies, literary theory, and history.

The Hungarian literary scholars László F. Földényi and Sára Molnár, however, published the most important one-volume books on Kertész. In the above-mentioned dictionary, Földényi writes numerous brilliant and illuminating brief essays and interpretations of the themes discussed in Kertész's novels. In her *Ugyanegy Téma Variációi* (Variations on a (the same) Theme), Molnár discusses the irony and accost in the works of the Hungarian writer, being very critically of her compatriots for misunderstanding him, his language, and his use of irony. She systematically analyses Kertész's novels *Fatelessness*, *Fiasco*, *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, and *Liquidation*, his longer and shorter stories, *The Pathseeker*, *Detective Story*, *The Union Jack*, and his diary *Galley Boat-Log*, showing how Auschwitz and life under a dictatorial regime found their way into his writings and what meaning he attaches to it. Additionally, she offers an insight into Kertész's posture towards writing as a possibility of dealing with life under totalitarianism (both national-socialism and communism) and of bearing witness of the past in order to avoid something similar to happen in the future: being creative and active as a writer as the only hope to survive and regain his individuality. Molnár and Földényi's insights will prove instrumental to my research.

Methodology: the hermeneutical approach in aestheticised texts

The methodology of this chapter generally follows my approach as described in the Bauman chapter: Europe will be studied as lived experience. Kertész's writings will be analysed in relation to his surroundings and the political, cultural, and social

context. In addition, his experiences – of which Kertész repeatedly says that they are the raw material of his novels – and the way they influence his writings will be an object of study when discussing Kertész's idea of Europe. Special about Kertész, though, is that he writes fiction and deems it necessary to emphasise this point over and over again. The question, thus, is: To what extent can one use his novels as statements of his thinking about Europe?

Kertész is an author who experiments with literature and who finds his own voice when writing about the crucial event in European twentieth century history. Others deemed this to be a barbaric act, but to Kertész, it is a way of finding a narrative that pays tribute to and takes into account the ethical implications of Auschwitz.³⁰ To him, fictionalisation of his life's experiences (using them as raw material) means a greater distance to events as they actually happened, more freedom for the author, and a choice in what to emphasise, leave out, and change. The same is true for the role he ascribes to his protagonists.

I was able to imagine the language, being, and even frame of thinking of the character in a novel as a fiction, but I was no longer able to become one with him; or rather what I mean to say is that while creating the character, I forgot myself, and for that reason I am unable to give an answer to your original question as to the extent to which the novel character resembles the former me. Plainly, it more closely resembles the person who wrote it than the one who experienced it, and from my own point of view it's very lucky that that is the way it worked out.³¹

³⁰ To Theodor W. Adorno, it was a barbaric act to write poetry after Auschwitz (cf. Adorno 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' p. 10). In his footsteps, many writers, thinkers, and historians have asked the question how to speak about the unspeakable? What to do with an event that is so extreme that our language and reason do not seem to suffice to describe it? Ultimately, authors like Améry, Levi, Borowski and Celan have shown that it is very well possible to find a language and style to speak about Auschwitz and the Holocaust.

³¹ Kertész *Dossier K.* p. 67

In *Voicing the Void*, Sara Horowitz addresses the fact why so many “[w]riters of Holocaust-centered fiction (...) speak enigmatically of the fictionality of their work, simultaneously resisting and embracing this generic categorization.”³² In her analysis, autobiography has become problematic after the Holocaust, as autobiography implies a subject that is unbroken, that has a continuous narrative with a proper beginning and an end, and an ‘I’ that is unquestioned. In the case of Holocaust survivors, there is no continuity of such a narrative; the relationship “between self and memory [and] between self and world” has become problematic;³³ there no longer exists an ‘I’. The subject has been reduced to a number, loosing his/her name, his/her dignity, his/her humanity, and ultimately his/her body.³⁴ Aestheticisation of the lived experiences, i.e. fiction, often proved to be the only way out.

This comes close to Kertész’s own relation to the genre of autobiography. Kertész could only testify of his experiences in the form of an aesthetic project: “[H]is description of Nazism and communism conveys the concept of a testimony, in a literary form with both aesthetic and strong ethical connotations.”³⁵ In order to be authentic and subjective, he could do no other than write fiction. To Kertész, it is in fiction that he can narrate life and create an identity, or a self, out of the void. In autobiography, he cannot.³⁶ Wishing to analyse Kertész’s fiction, then, I follow Horowitz, who states: “strategies of narration and transmission (...) do not impinge on

³² Horowitz *Voicing the Void* p. 2

³³ Ibid. p. 12

³⁴ See: Kertész’s novel *Sorstalanság*. It tells the story of the disappearance of the ‘I’ and of the creation of the void. It describes a proper subject becoming a *Muselmann*: a notion referring to inmates of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II, who were on the verge of death. Hunger and starvation had led to their gradual deterioration, both physically and psychologically. They became apathetic and fatalistic.

³⁵ Molnár ‘Imre Kertész’s Aesthetics of the Holocaust’ p. 165

³⁶ See also: Molnár *Ugyanegy téma variációi* pp. 149-153; pp. 184-192

the truthfulness of testimony.”³⁷ Besides, in her book *Die Shoah erzählt*, Elrud Ibsch points out that Auschwitz is both reality and metaphor. Holocaust-literature is characterized by this ‘double bind’, the simultaneous obligation to document reality and the literary suspension of this reality.³⁸ The Holocaust is a historic event; but it also is a story told via the experience, memory, and narration of human beings who survived it. Language, thus, plays a crucial role, as “language is acknowledged and explored not as a transparent medium through which one comes to see reality but as implicated in the reality we see, as shaping our limited and fragile knowledge.”³⁹ The narrative, how it shapes and informs our understanding of the events the novel describes, needs to be reflected upon.

Hence, to be able to analyse Kertész’s fiction, to take seriously his role as a witness, the history of ideas approach is crucial. Via a history of ideas approach that has its roots in hermeneutics, one can study different complex texts. Habermas once said that text and the written erases any concrete relationships to single subjects or situations, but so becomes readable and can be read (and interpreted) over and over again in different contexts.⁴⁰ To understand Kertész’s novels and his ‘Auschwitz’-informed idea of Europe LaCapra’s idea of the ‘worklike’ approach to text is key.⁴¹ Kertész’s texts will be examined on the basis of an informed reading taking into account text and context, i.e. social and private life as well as economic and political structures.

³⁷ Horowitz *Voicing the Void* p. 5

³⁸ cf. Ibsch *Die Shoah erzählt* p. 42. In *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Saul Friedländer maintains in discussing ways that the Holocaust is represented, its aestheticisation, that allegoric elements are used to (re)present the Shoah, but they will never dominate in a problematic way, as too much allegories would create too much distance or even a total disjunction between the ‘real’ events and its representation (p. 17).

³⁹ Ibid. p. 17

⁴⁰ Habermas *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* p. 196

⁴¹ See: Introduction, p. 21

III.I Fiction as the Only Way Possible to Create an Identity

Imre Kertész: On the Superfluosity of a Birth

The cosmic constellation arranged the lucky moment for a single birth. That is how a genius, a great creative figure, sets foot on earth – like a mythical hero. (...) Well then, at the time I came into the world the Sun was standing in the greatest economic crisis the world had ever known; from the Empire State Building to the Turul-hawk statues on the former Franz Josef Bridge (in Budapest), people were diving headlong from every prominence on the face of the earth into water, chasm, onto paving stone – wherever they could; a party leader by the name of Adolf Hitler looked exceedingly inimically upon me from amidst the pages of his book *Mein Kampf*; the first of Hungary's Jewish laws, the so-called *numerus clausus* stood at its culmination before its place was taken by the remainder. Every earthly sign (I have no idea about the heavenly ones) attested to the superfluosity – indeed, the irrationality – of my birth. On top of which, I arrived as a nuisance for my parents: they were on the point of divorcing. I am the material product of the lovemaking of a couple who did not even love one another, perhaps the fruit of one night's indulgence. Hey presto, suddenly there I was, through Nature's bounty, before any of us had had a chance to think it through properly.⁴²

Imre Kertész was born in Budapest in 1929 to parents of Jewish descent, but like the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian Jews (about 95 percent in 1930)⁴³ they were assimilated, non-practising Jews. That is, in Hungary, there lived orthodox, Hasidic Jews as well as assimilated, Reformed Jews. After the so-called *Ausgleich* (Compromise) between Hungary and Austria in 1867, which transformed the Habsburg Empire into the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, the Hungarian government launched a set of Magyarisation policies, which aimed at imposing the dominance of Hungarian language and culture in Hungarian-ruled regions. Large parts of the Jewish population decided to assimilate into Hungarian society and adopt

⁴² Kertész 'Galley Boat-Log' p. 108 (transl. Tim Wilkinson). Orig.: Kertész *Gályanapló* pp. 121/2. Kertész wrote this in 1980, parodying on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, as following the German humanist poet and writer, the poet should have a provenance. Kertész's ironic, sarcastic, but also serious description emphasizes the dissolution of the positive life of an enlightened, humanist *Bildungsbürger*, and with it the myth of a Europe led by ratio, progress, and the good of man.

⁴³ For more statistics on the position of the Jews around 1930 in Hungary, see: Crampton. *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* p. 174 ff.

Magyar culture.⁴⁴ Many *magyarised* their family names and chose to speak the dominant Magyar language. By World War I, they were reasonably well integrated into Hungarian society and many of them served in the Austro-Hungarian army during the War. Yet, after the Treaty of Trianon, in which Hungary lost about 60 percent of its territory, resentment gained ground, and the Jews, who by then constituted the largest minority population in Hungary, became the scapegoat for the country's defeat. Anti-Semitism grew, fuelled by the perception of the Hungarian population that Jews led the Hungarian soviet republic in 1919, headed by Béla Kun.⁴⁵ In those years, Kertész's grandparents on his father side, formerly named Klein, had come to Budapest from a rural village called Pacsá in the south-west of Hungary; the family on his mother's side had fled from Kolozsvár (Cluj) to Budapest at the end of World War I, leaving behind a rather secure existence as bank official.⁴⁶ After Imre Kertész's parents got divorced only a few years after he was born, his mother, having to renounce any rights over her son, lived on the Buda-side and remarried a wealthy man.⁴⁷ His father, with whom Imre would live, would build up a life as a timber merchant.

The young Kertész grew up in a society that witnessed the growing power of a more radical, new right, as opposed to the old, conservative, and aristocratic right that had governed Hungary from the early 1920s onwards.⁴⁸ Starting in the mid-1930s, the new right instigated the implementation of increasingly anti-Semitic and nationalistic policies (i.e. banishment of Jews from government posts, from selling liquor, tobacco,

⁴⁴ cf. Seton-Watson *The "Sick Heart" of Modern Europe* p. 10

⁴⁵ cf. Crampton *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* p. 83

⁴⁶ See: Kertész *Dossier K.* pp. 24/25; pp. 34/38

⁴⁷ See: Kertész *Dossier K.* p. 60

⁴⁸ cf. Crampton *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* p. 91

and pharmaceutical products, and a *numerus clausus* restricting the number of Jews in schools and universities). Yet, until the very end of World War II, the Hungarian new right was not able to completely break the power of the old right, who refused their full commitment to the Nazi war effort, especially its racist policies. This had consequences for the Hungarian Jews: “[U]ntil the German occupation of 1944, the Jews of Hungary did not have to wear the yellow star and they were not subjected to restrictions on the right of domicile.”⁴⁹ The Jewish-Hungarian community of more than 800,000 people stayed more or less intact.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the position of the Jews, especially those living outside Budapest, worsened over the years. In 1944, finally, with the Nazis and the Hungarian radical right in power, more than 400,000 Jews living in Hungary were deported, executed, or forced into death marches.

During the early war years, Kertész was able to attend grammar school in a so-called B-class, the Jewish class, and could lead – apart from having to go into these separate classes and living in so-called Jewish (Yellow Star) houses – a relatively normal life. Yet, in 1944, when Germany occupied Hungary, the school was closed early for summer and Kertész had to start working in the Shell Oil refinery just outside Budapest.⁵¹ A couple of months before his fifteenth birthday, Kertész, while on his way to work, was removed from the bus, detained, and ultimately sent to Auschwitz and subsequently to Buchenwald and Zeitz. He was liberated from Buchenwald by the Americans in 1945 and returned to Budapest. Having lost his youth in the concentration camps, however, Kertész had difficulties finding back to ‘normal’ life. He had survived Auschwitz, yet his experience told him there was no place for him in the world. He was

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 189

⁵⁰ cf. Frühling ‘Qui êtes-vous Imre Kertész?’ p. 223

⁵¹ See: Kertész *Dossier K.* p. 64

not allowed to live. The simple fact of “being a Jew” forbade him to live.⁵² In the early years of his life, everything was directed towards his extermination. To Kertész, the only way to sustain his life and reclaim an identity was to search for its ‘formulability’.⁵³

I don’t know when it first occurred to me that there had to be a terrible mistake, a diabolical irony, at work in the world order that you experience as part of normal ordinary life, and that terrible mistake is culture itself, the belief system, the language and the concepts that conceal from you that you have long been a well-oiled component of the machinery that has been set up for your own destruction. The secret of survival is collaboration, but to admit that is to bring such shame down on you that you prefer to repudiate rather than accept it. (...), [T]he fact remains that when I grasped it, my whole way of looking at things changed. I was able to imagine the language, being, and even frame of thinking of the character in a novel as fiction, but I was no longer able to become one with him; or rather what I mean to say is that while creating the character, I forgot myself.⁵⁴

Upon his return to Budapest in 1945, the political power relations had changed. The Red Army had won victory over the Nazis and gradually took control over society, the economy, and politics. From 1948, the Soviet regime determined Hungary’s internal and external policies and had power over the economy, the agrarian sector, and social movements.⁵⁵ Like many Jewish citizens in Central Europe, Kertész joined the Communist Party in 1946, but left it after a couple of years. By then, Mátyás Rákosi, who called himself “Stalin’s best Hungarian disciple,” ruled the country with an iron fist.⁵⁶ During his reign, many political rivals were eliminated through show trials and political purges.⁵⁷ Kertész writes about the absurdities of this period in his *Az Angol Lobogó* (*The Union Jack*). At that time, he was a journalist and experienced how a

⁵² See: Knigge ‘Gott ist ein schöner Gedanke’ p. 14/15

⁵³ See also: Kertész *The Union Jack* p. 15

⁵⁴ Kertész *Dossier K.* p. 67

⁵⁵ cf. Wandycz *The Price of Freedom* p. 237

⁵⁶ cf. Sugar, Hanák, Frank *A History of Hungary* p. 375

⁵⁷ The show trial against the minister of foreign affairs László Rajk and seven other officials, in which they were sentenced to death, is one of the main examples and was set to become a model for other show trials in other East European countries.

former ‘bigwig’, “who just the day before had been a figure of general terror, general homage, general creeping and crawling,” had to step into a black limousine never to return.⁵⁸ To Kertész, his life had become ever more unformulable, questionable, the situation around him absurd, and the question of morality unanswerable.

Here I must remind you that professionally I was – or ought to have been – pursuing a formulation of life as a journalist. Granted that for a journalist to demand a formulation of life was a falsehood in its very essence: but then, anyone who lies is ipso facto thinking about the truth, and I would only have been able to lie about life if I had been acquainted, at least in part, with its truth, yet I was not acquainted, either in whole or in part, with the truth, this truth, the truth of this life, the life that I too was living.⁵⁹

He no longer was perceived a talented journalist and had to give up his job for the daily newspaper *Világosság* in 1951 for not following the Communist party line. For a short while he worked in the MAVAG factory, a railroads and machine factory, then was summoned to serve in the army to become a prison guard, but managed to get discharged in 1953 simulating some strange illness.⁶⁰ He, then, met Albina Vas, his future wife, with whom he would be married for 42 years until she died of cancer. She would serve as a waitress to make their living, while Kertész started writing and made his contribution to the household translating German authors and philosophers into Hungarian as well as writing theatre plays and librettos together with his friend Ernst Kállai.

As his diary *Gályanapló* (*Galley Boat-Log*) and some of his essays indicate, he had difficulties functioning in a society with an all-encompassing political sphere that

⁵⁸ Kertész *The Union Jack* p. 27

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 31

⁶⁰ See: Kertész *Dossier K.* p. 139: “I had borrowed several medical texts from the library to study, above all, the various species of neurosis with particular regard to fits and the catatonic state. I collapsed and went into a crying fit, which was followed by muscle rigidity and so on. The main thing was to remain consistent.”

dominated and ruled the individual. In 1955, Kertész decided to retreat from society into an inner exile and become a writer and maverick. It felt like being reborn. To him, literature was one of the rare ways of surviving and dealing with the Holocaust.⁶¹ Moreover, Kertész's retreat into inner exile was strengthened during and after the events of 1956. Following Poland's lead, citizens of Budapest and of other cities in Hungary revolted against the communist regime, and at its peak, Imre Nagy, who was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Hungary, expressed Hungary's wish to leave the Warsaw pact and become a neutral country. He appealed to the United Nations for help that never materialised, and in the end, the Soviet Army bloodily crushed the revolution.⁶² Kertész had largely been an outsider in this uprising and was not politically active in the following years. According to Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Kertész considered himself to be a total outsider under the Kádár regime [1956-1988, M.E.], not only politically but also in terms of the intellectual culture, whether it was the official culture or the culture of the 'dissidents'".⁶³ In his opinion, ideologies were given an advantage over cultural values, which resulted in a loss of identity and of language – a central theme in *A kudarc (Fiasco)*. Hence, instead of becoming involved in politics or joining dissident circles, Kertész started writing fiction in which he created his own socio-political commentary of the totalitarian system and the possibility of life outside text and outside the system.⁶⁴

I was able to win intellectual freedom fairly early on, and from the moment I decided to become a writer I was able to treat my cares as the raw material of my art. And even if

⁶¹ cf. De Moor *Schemerland* p. 205; Szilágyi 'Die historische Erbsünde' p. 350

⁶² For a well-written and informative reconstruction of the events of 1956, see: Dalos, György. *1956. Der Aufstand in Ungarn*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2006.

⁶³ Suleiman *Writing and Internal Exile in Eastern Europe* p. 373. János Kádár was the appointed leader by the Soviets after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. He reorganised the communist party and led an attack against the revolutionaries of 1956.

⁶⁴ cf. Vasvári 'The Novelness of Imre Kertész's *Sorstalanság*' p. 267

that raw material looks fairly cheerless, the form is able to transform it and to turn it into pleasure, because writing can only come from an abundance of energies, from pleasure; writing – and this is not my invention – is heightened life.⁶⁵

To Kertész, fictional literature was one of the scarce ways to deal with his experiences in Auschwitz and the experience of living in a communist society, which becomes clear in his later reflections. In his *Galley Boat-Log*, he stated: “The concentration camp is imaginable only and exclusively as literature, never as reality.”⁶⁶ Art is a means to testify of life.⁶⁷ Through his fiction Kertész aimed to pass on a memory of the inner freedom of the human being. He asserted that a totalitarian regime does not have the power to strip the individual of his spiritual freedom:⁶⁸ Not everything in society can be controlled or determined by outer, social-historical factors. As a consciously thinking person, the individual is always stronger than the totalitarian state or mass politics. Kertész met and found his discussion partners in literature (Goethe, Kafka, Thomas Mann, Thomas Bernhard) and philosophy (Kant, Nietzsche, Camus). In 1960, when by coincidence he had gotten hold of *The Stranger* of Albert Camus, the Hungarian writer found an answer to the question how to approach his topic.⁶⁹ Camus’s existentialism gave meaning to his intellectual search as a writer. Kertész, finally, had found a way to start working on his first novel *Sorstalanság*

⁶⁵ Kertész *Dossier K.* p. 58

⁶⁶ From *Gályanapló* [Galley Boat-Log] quoted in: Kertész ‘Who Owns Auschwitz’ p. 268

⁶⁷ See: Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 39: Az igény, hogy *tanúskodni kell*, mégis egyre növekvőben bennem, mintha az utolsó lennék, aki még él és szólni tud, s szavammal mintegy azokhoz fordulok, akik túléltek a vízözönt, a kénesnőt vagy a jégkorszakot bibliai idők, nagy, súlyos katalizmák, az elnémulás ideje. (Transl. Tim Wilkinson: The compulsion to bear witness grows ever stronger within me, all the same, as if I were the last one still alive and able to speak, and I were directing my words, so to say, at those who will survive the flood, acid rain or the Ice Age – biblical times, immense and grave cataclysms, a time of silence (Kertész ‘Galley Boat-Log’ p. 104)).

⁶⁸ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* pp. 51/52

⁶⁹ See also: Radisch ‘Sein geheimnisvolles Glück’

(*Fatelessness*). It took him 13 years to finish it, and the book was finally published in 1975.

As the above indicates, one cannot separate Kertész's experiences in Auschwitz from his experiences under the communist regime in Hungary. Both experiences have proven instrumental to his literature and even 'secured' his survival. In the essay *A száműzött nyelv* (*The Exiled Tongue*), Kertész broached the issue of finding a language for (narrating the experience of) Auschwitz. Paul Celan, Tadeusz Borowski, Jean Améry, and Primo Lévi all became a medium of Auschwitz, he said. Yet, those survivors of Auschwitz who lived in non-communist countries and believed in freedom, liberation, the big catharsis, and a critical change in thinking about European civilisation and progress, soon were to find out that they were mistaken. This disillusionment drove many survivors of Auschwitz, including those mentioned above, *ex post* to suicide.⁷⁰ Kertész argued that contrary to those intellectuals, philosophers, and thinkers living in what he calls "the more fortunate places on earth" he was able to survive in the aftermath of Auschwitz.⁷¹ The imprisoned and isolated life in communist Hungary saved him from the disillusionments about living in a democratic society, as it was impossible to have any mistaken impressions about individuality, freedom, or humanity. This, paradoxically, gave him a sense of freedom. He had no illusions or hopes after Auschwitz, detached himself from 'the system' by retreating into an inner exile (which was a choice as much as it was a

⁷⁰ cf. Kertész 'A száműzött nyelv' p. 327

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 328, my translation

necessity), and stayed on the periphery.⁷² The loneliness of estrangement helped him to find a reality beyond the lie of totalitarian society.

Beyond the reality of Auschwitz it was possible to realise and cultivate the self again. Kertész retreated into inner exile and found a way to survive in literature. He claimed that the only possible way in which to serve witness to the Holocaust, to European civilisation, to cultural values of European civilisation, and to freedom was through fiction. He placed the critical, self-conscious, and reflective individual at the centre of its practice. He sought to demonstrate the strength of the spirit and creativity in a totalitarian society. In fiction, a new reality could be constructed and memory could be rejuvenated. Writing enabled Kertész to regain his identity and to survive, or, to put it more emphatically, to exist after Auschwitz: “The art conveys experience, experience of the world and its ethical consequences. The art conveys existence to existence.”⁷³ In short, Kertész *is* because he writes. Offering a harsh critique of the communist Kádár era in Hungary, the author stated that without communism it would have been far more difficult to ‘understand’ or ‘act upon’ his experiences in the concentration camps. Being refused the profession or title of writer and excluded from the literary circles in his country, the communist dictatorship helped Kertész to find a language in which he had to write to negotiate the phenomenon of Auschwitz, a language in which he could create his literary character: it was the language of the

⁷² cf. Suleiman *Writing and Internal Exile in Eastern Europe* p. 374. One does not find his name in *A History of Hungarian literature*, edited by Tibor Klaniczay in 1983. In 1984, he is mentioned in *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature*, but only in passing. And in the “first history of Hungarian literature published after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, by Ernő Kulcsár Szabó in 1995” there again is not mention of Kertész (Marsovszky ‘Imre Kertész and Hungary Today’ p. 148).

⁷³ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 269, my translation

survivor who no longer belongs to humanity.⁷⁴ His works, then, are shaped by self-criticism, self-reflexivity and (self-)irony: an irony Kertész calls the irony of reality.⁷⁵

From Communism to Democracy: Kertész's Will to Happiness

Kertész's style and choice of topic did not change with the political upheaval of 1989.

Unlike many other Central European countries, Hungary witnessed the establishment of various political parties already before the 1989 revolution.

[B]oth sides [the opposition and the communist party reformers] were impelled to seek dialogue by the fear that, without some kind of pact between the competing political elite groups, another spontaneous, violent social outburst was possible from below, which would once again provoke external intervention to restore order and would ruin the chances of a transition to democracy.⁷⁶

The one-party system could no longer legitimise itself, requiring a reform and liberalisation of both the economy and politics. The communist ideology was dead and socialism bankrupt.⁷⁷ After more than 40 years of communist rule, Hungary turned into a democracy.⁷⁸ The fact that this process of transition was neither easy nor swift can be observed in Kertész's post-1989 publications, in which he grew ever more pessimistic about Hungary's, but ultimately also Europe's ability to take advantage and utilise past experiences in order to create a future for European civilisation.

⁷⁴ cf. Kertész 'A száműzött nyelv' p. 331

⁷⁵ De Moor *Schemerland* p. 214

⁷⁶ Batt *East Central Europe from Reform to Transformation* p. 30

⁷⁷ Ash *De vruchten van de tegenspoed* p. 243.

⁷⁸ One of the crucial events at the time was the reburial and rehabilitation of Imre Nagy to also remember the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Some 200.000 men gathered on Hősök tere (Heroes' Square), demanding free elections and an end to communist rule. See also: Ash *We the People* p. 51

During communism, he had published *Fatelessness* (1975), *The Pathseeker* (*A nyomkereső*, 1977), *Detective Story* (*Detektívtörténet*, 1977), and *Fiasco* (1988). The first two having Auschwitz and the Holocaust (and the question of survival, of the impossibility of reviving or mediating the past, the irretrievability of one's former self and the subsequent necessity of writing fiction)⁷⁹ as its main subject, the second two taking up the theme of dictatorial regimes more in general (*Detective Story* is localised in an imagined Latin-American country) and describing life in a communist society, which is characterised by repetition and failure (*Fiasco*).⁸⁰ The 'diary' *Galley Boat-Log* only appeared in 1992, but had been Kertész's companion from 1961 to 1991, reflecting on the themes touched upon in his novels, European literature, and personal experiences. Living in a free and democratic Hungary seeking to join the European Union, Kertész added one more layer to his writings without abandoning the former two themes: that of living in a free world built on false premises. In other words, just more of the same.

To Kertész, anti-Semitism was still to be found in (Hungarian) society and even publicly displayed. Auschwitz was still present. In *I – Another. Chronicle of a Metamorphosis* (*Valaki más. A Változás kronikája*, 1997), an ingenious blend of essay, fiction and diary, he addressed the resilience of nationalist and anti-Semitic movements in Hungary from the pre-War period to their resurgence after the fall of communism.⁸¹ In addition, Kertész showed fragile European civilisation and the

⁷⁹ In an afterword written for the German Suhrkamp-publication of *The Pathseeker* (*Der Spurensucher*, 2002), Kertész addresses his 1962 visit to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) traveling to Buchenwald and Zeitz, but not recognizing anything and feeling a stranger to those places (p. 126/127). See also: Kertész, Cooper 'A Conversation with Imre Kertész' p. 51

⁸⁰ See also: Ebert 'Atonales Erzählen in der geschlossenen Gesellschaft' pp. 209-212

⁸¹ One of the examples is the Protestant Academy in Tutzing affair described earlier in the chapter. Kertész *Valaki más* pp. 69-71. In his latest and last published diaries, *Mentés Másként* (2011) and *Letzte*

position of culture in Europe were. Indeed, it still was the same civilisation and culture that allowed Auschwitz to happen. A radical turn had not taken place.⁸² The novella *Protocol* (*Jegyzőkönyv*, 1991) is an illustration of how a journey from Budapest to Vienna after the coming down of the Iron Curtain goes totally wrong due to rigid foreign currency regulations. During this journey it dawned to Kertész that his past experiences kept, keep and will keep haunting him.

To the author, totalitarianism and dictatorship was not something of the past, yet. The basic values on which Hungarian and European society rested remained rather similar and so, he would publish *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* (*Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekért*, 1990) and *Liquidation* (*Felszámolás*, 2003) both taking up and crowning the themes (and arguments) developed in *Fatelessness* and *Fiasco*. *Liquidation*, his last big novel, addresses Auschwitz in relation to contemporary European society.

He sought to apprehend Auschwitz in his own life, his own daily life, in the way he lived. He wished to register on himself (...) the destructive forces, the survival urge, the mechanism of accommodation, in the same way as physicians of the past used to inject themselves with a poison in order to experience its effects for themselves.⁸³

In the novel both the theme of the Holocaust and the events of 1989/1990 come together. The despair, disappointment, and disillusionment that living in a communist society were unknown to Kertész now are emotions that dominate the book. It is an illustration of Kertész's encounter with the post-dictatorial, post-communist world and European society, where in his view the 'big catharsis' still has not taken place. His

Einkehr (2013), which is the German version and describes the years 2001 to 2009 whereas the Hungarian version only includes the years 2001 to 2003, he takes up on this point once more, but now on a more European and even global level.

⁸² See also: Ebert 'Das Romantagebuch GALEERENTAGEBUCH und der Tagebuchroman ICH – EIN ANDERER' p. 328

⁸³ Kertész *Liquidation* p. 111

literary character consequently goes the way the person Kertész never went: he commits suicide.

Next to these novels, Kertész published a volume collecting his essays of the 1990s and 2000s, *Europe's Oppressive Legacy* (*Európa nyomasztó öröksége*, 2008). In these essays, he is far more political and direct than in his fiction. He addresses the topics of Auschwitz, life under a dictatorial regime, the consequences of the Holocaust for European culture and civilisation, his thoughts about Hungarian and Jewish identity, language, freedom after the fall of communism, and the Central European (bourgeois) man. Related to his novels one can make out an apt critique of today's European society.

Besides, analysing his essays, diaries, and novels, one can also observe a continued concern of Kertész with the question of identity, Jewish and/or Hungarian, linking it to life in a totalitarian or dictatorial society, but also to questions of race, religion, and nation. Especially after World War II, questions of national identity and the relationship between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population in Hungary had become very problematic. In an article concerning the historian's debate about the Holocaust in Hungary, András Kovács stated that during World War II the Jews of Hungary, "who had considered themselves to be Hungarians, perished "without a fate". Their national identity – which had seemed so uncomplicated until then – was devastated by the brutality of the deportations and by the indifference with which the Hungarian authorities and a significant part of the public watched the process."⁸⁴ Kertész's *Fatelessness* describes this estrangement of the Jewish population from their

⁸⁴ Kovács "The Historians' Debate about the Holocaust in Hungary' p. 139

Hungarian identity in the years of war. In a conversation between the main character, György, and ‘the older sister’ before he is deported to Auschwitz, they discuss the fact that Jews are considered to be strangers in Hungarian society, neglected or avoided by the non-Jewish population, and restricted in their movements. This has not changed upon György’s return from the concentration camps. Still wearing his prisoner’s clothing, thus making him easily recognisable as a survivor of the Holocaust and as a Jew, György steps into the tram, but is asked to disembark again by the tram conductor because he is not able to pay for a ticket. To György, this is a confirmation of the perseverance of old mechanisms and lingering anti-Semitism. This observation is only strengthened by the image of a lady present on the platform of the tram looking away ostentatiously and not wishing to have anything to do with him once György sits in the tram. These experiences, though fictionalised in *Fatelessness*, are crucial in Kertész’s position towards Hungarian identity, from which he distanced himself ever more clearly: Hungary was just not able to deal with its past and right wing extremism and anti-Semitism remained the order of the day.⁸⁵

This distancing or estrangement from his Hungarian identity was strengthened by the ongoing populist criticism of him not properly representing ‘Hungarianness’ or Hungarian literature, as touched upon in the introduction. In *I – Another*, Kertész subsequently asserted that just because he lived in Hungary and wrote in Hungarian, it did not mean that he was a Hungarian writer.⁸⁶ He felt a stranger in the country to which he was attached only linguistically.⁸⁷ In the essay ‘Ich bin der Spuk’ (‘I am the ghost’), published in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (14

⁸⁵ See also: Kunisch ‘Der tägliche Kampf gegen das Schweigen’

⁸⁶ cf. Kertész *Valaki más* pp. 93/94

⁸⁷ cf. Marsovszky ‘Imre Kertész and Hungary Today’ p. 152

March 2002), Kertész argued that the root of identity does not necessarily reside in the mother tongue: “The writer of the Holocaust is indeed, in a difficult situation... that there is no language of the Holocaust and that there cannot be one. The survivor in Europe is able to tell his/her story only in a European language, yet this language is not his/her language nor is it the language from which s/he borrowed it for his/her writing.”⁸⁸ In addition, the fact that his novels and diaries were part of public discussion in Germany and had a greater readership than in Hungary made him feel more respected and better understood than in his country of birth. As a writer he felt adopted by the Germans. Consequently, being in Germany ever more frequently, he started planning his emigration from Budapest to Berlin. To him, Germany was the land of culture, of *Geist*.⁸⁹ Here he could find everything that was important to him. To the author, German culture and *Bildungsliteratur* in particular, was his frame of reference. This culture that in the early twentieth century was spread all over Europe offered Kertész a home in which he could be independent and authentic.

As to me Berlin (...) is also a literary city. Contrary to French or English culture, which are rather content with themselves, the German always also played a role as mediator between eastern and western literatures.⁹⁰

Together with his second wife, Magda, who had returned from the United States to Hungary in the early 1990s after her family fled the country in 1956, he moved to Berlin end of 2001. Germany became his new home – though, for Magda, who did not speak any German, it was more difficult. As her children and family lived in Budapest

⁸⁸ Kertész ‘Ich bin der Spuk’ p. 46, transl. Tötösy de Zepetnek. See also: Kertész ‘A száműzött nyelv’ pp. 318-340

⁸⁹ Radisch “‘Ich war ein Holocaust-Clown’”

⁹⁰ Kertész ‘Miért Berlin?’ p. 431, my translation

both he and Magda would travel to their house in Budapest on a regular basis – much to Kertész's regret.⁹¹

Yet, Kertész distanced himself not only from his Hungarian, but also from his Jewish identity, which according to Maria Renhardt lead to a “double homelessness as a Hungarian and as a Jew.”⁹² Time and again, he refused the label of “Jew”. In his opinion, Jewish identity as such did not exist.

I for one have no “identity problems”. The fact that I am “Hungarian” is no more absurd than the fact that I am a “Jew”; and the fact that I am a “Jew” is no more absurd than the fact that I “am”.⁹³

He encountered his Jewish identity as something negative only, as an external determinant, or constriction.⁹⁴ As a Jew he was never a full member of society, as a Jew he was subject to discrimination, as a Jew he was deported to Auschwitz, and as a Jew he died in Auschwitz. In the concentration camps there was no room for any form of individuality. All forms of identity were destroyed in the camps.

Nevertheless, Kertész refused “to harbour a victim's grudge” and insisted on the fact “that each of us individually holds responsibility for every step we take, even when those steps are taken under constraint.”⁹⁵ According to Kertész, life irresistibly leads through a series of chances, to somewhere. And somewhere on this road, through his deportation to Auschwitz, but actually already earlier, Jewishness became a defining

⁹¹ An extensive description of Kertész's emigration to Berlin, his feelings about it and about leaving behind Hungary, and Magda's problems living in Germany can be found in his diary *Mentés Másként*.

⁹² Renhardt 'Schmerzende Narben', my translation

⁹³ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 286, transl. Ivan Sanders

⁹⁴ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 60

⁹⁵ Wilkinson 'All That Fall' p. 136

factor in Kertész's life, a fate he had to act upon, no matter how strange it was to him.⁹⁶

From this unique perspective alone am I willing to be Jewish, exclusively from this unique perspective do I regard it as fortunate, even especially fortunate, indeed a blessing, to be a Jew, because I don't care a hoot ... what I am, but to have had the opportunity to be in Auschwitz as a branded Jew and yet, through my Jewishness, to have lived through something and confronted something; and I know, once and for all, and I know irrevocably something that I will not relinquish, will never relinquish.⁹⁷

Jews might be victims of the Holocaust, but, according to Kertész, it should not serve as an excuse to not take command of one's own life. Having lived through Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Zeitz, it was impossible for Kertész to deny or forget his Jewishness. His existence in the concentration camps was an (maybe the only) authentic experience. He had to accept his fate and do something with it, do something with Auschwitz.

If I am Jewish, then I say that I am negation, the negation of all human pride, of certainty, of quiet nights and peaceful inner life, of conformism, of free elections, of national glory – in the book of victories I am the black page, where no writing appears; I am negation, not a Jewish but a universal human negation, the writing on the wall of total oppression.⁹⁸

Some of Kertész's (Jewish) critics consider this statement to be anti-Semitic. Ivan Sanders, for example, accuses him of being a "self-hating" Jew after reading the above quote.⁹⁹ Yet, Suleiman reads it as an affirmative statement and as something positive, turning her attention to Kertész's statement of being "the writing on the wall

⁹⁶ See also: Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 149. Jewishness is no symbol, no religion, no history: it is an individual duty.

⁹⁷ Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* pp. 118/9

⁹⁸ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 61, transl. Suleiman

⁹⁹ cf. Sanders 'The Question of Identity' pp. 705/706

of total oppression.”¹⁰⁰ This seems to be the more correct reading. Having survived the concentration camps, Kertész considered it to be his moral duty to do something with his fate, with his identity as a “non-Jewish Jew.”¹⁰¹ It was his moral duty to testify of the concentration camps to the world. In his 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature acceptance speech, Kertész stated:

Being a Jew to me is once again, first and foremost, a moral challenge. If the Holocaust has by now created a culture, as it undeniably has, its aim must be that an irredeemable reality give rise by way of the spirit to restoration - a catharsis. This desire has inspired me in all my creative endeavours.¹⁰²

This position ultimately helped him fulfilling his life motto: Camus’s ‘will to happiness’.¹⁰³ Taking up the moral challenge and acting upon his fate while writing literature that aimed at conveying a more general message to his readers and at finding ways to continue European culture, was his answer to all the devastating experiences in his life. Moreover, Kertész’s idiosyncrasy regarding identity after his experiences during the Holocaust and under the communist regime of Hungary can be understood as an existential project of seeking to live your own fate.¹⁰⁴ That is, the fact that he survived the Nazi concentration camps, which were directed towards death and destruction, and that he still existed after all forms of individuality and personality were destroyed in the camps, required a radical reformulation of the concept of identity, of the notions of Jewish and Hungarian identity, and of the ‘I’.¹⁰⁵ Kertész made strangeness or estrangement part of his identity and did not only take on the

¹⁰⁰ Suleiman *Writing and Internal Exile in Eastern Europe* p. 377

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 376

¹⁰² Kertész ‘Heuréka’ p. 386, official translation website nobelprize.org

¹⁰³ Quoted in Kertész *Valaki más* p. 101; Kertész *Haldimann-levelek* p. 27

¹⁰⁴ cf. Suleiman *Writing and Internal Exile in Eastern Europe* p. 376

¹⁰⁵ See also: Földényi ‘Der Identitätslose und sein Ich’ pp. 42-45

challenge of unravelling the mystery of the ‘I’, but also turned the negative identity of non-Hungarian and of a non-Jewish-Jew into something positive and creative through writing.

Winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002, then, might be considered to be the crown to this writing career and reward for the way he managed to deal with questions so crucial to European culture; yet, to Kertész it also was a curse.¹⁰⁶ His carefully built up identity as a writing individual who only writes to himself, who understands his writing as a private affair and constantly searches for creative loneliness, could no longer be sustained.¹⁰⁷ Over night, he became an internationally known figure who had to give interviews and lectures all over the world and who at times was travelling more than devoting time to his writing – something so crucial to his life and being. *Liquidation*, a novel he had been working on for 13 years (like *Fatelessness*), could be published still, but Kertész was unable to finish his last project *A végső kocsmá* (*The last tavern*), which he imagined as a radical personal book.¹⁰⁸ In 2012, he retreated to his Budapest home, where his wife and family could shepherd him best. A year later, he gave his last interviews.¹⁰⁹ He declared his writing career over. Everything was said. A progressing Parkinson disease made it ever more difficult to write and in fact,

¹⁰⁶ See: Kertész *Mentés Másként*, *Letzte Einkehr* and Radisch “‘Ich war ein Holocaust-Clown’.” The writer Kertész had become the brand Kertész and this was problematic to his feeling of self-respect and treason own inner drive to write and find a language to put the totalitarian experience into words.

¹⁰⁷ See also: Kertész *Mentés Másként* pp. 185-187. In *Valaki más*, he would maintain that he lived his most happy years between 1982-1989. It was in those years, he loved, lived an imprisoned and lonely life and only worked (p. 33). To him, this was a wonderful life, as it was a fruitful life that offered him enough material for his writing creativity. See also: Radisch “‘Ich war ein Holocaust-Clown’”

¹⁰⁸ cf. Kertész *Mentés Másként* p. 225

¹⁰⁹ See: Zielinski ‘Imre Kertész, The Art of Fiction No. 220’, Summer 2013; Radisch “‘Ich war ein Holocaust-Clown’”, 21 Sept. 2013

Kertész was done with being part of what he called ‘Holocaust-Industry’; he no longer wished to be a ‘Holocaust-Clown’.¹¹⁰

And indeed, Kertész is more. Like Zygmunt Bauman he experienced the totalitarian and dictatorial regimes. Kertész never left Hungary in its communist years. Exile was not an option. Actually, his life under communism made him understand what he had experienced in Auschwitz and showed him a way to deal with that experience and give it meaning. He survived the Holocaust and having returned to a country where another oppressive regime had taken control over society, he chose to accept that fate, including the extreme consequences it entailed. With the collapse of communism, there was hope for change, but Kertész soon found out that the past could not be left behind so easily. He had to bear witness of the Holocaust as a trauma of European civilisation. Wishing to turn this trauma into something constructive for European society, in making it part of European culture, his testimonies were still relevant and soon gained a European-wide readership picking up on and debating his themes, questions, and challenges. To conclude, Kertész personalises the European twentieth century and his novels not only permit individual survival, but also set new benchmarks for the retrieval and continuation of European culture.

¹¹⁰ See: Kertész *Letzte Einkehr* p. 411; Radisch “‘Ich war ein Holocaust-Clown’”, 21 Sept. 2013. In *Mentés Másként* and *Letzte Einkehr*, Kertész describes how through the Nobel Prize he is becoming part of what he calls a Holocaust-Industry, a memory culture he detested. This was not his aim as a writer. His message was a different one that detached itself from the Holocaust as such, from being a victim, yet survivor of the Holocaust.

III.II Freedom, Individuality, Democracy

Enlightened 'Bildungshumanism' as Kertész's Point of Reference

In 1973, Imre Kertész noted in his *Galley Boat-Log*:

In contemplating a new novel, I can only think about Auschwitz again. Whatever I think about, I always think about Auschwitz. Even if I may seem to be talking about something quite different, I am still talking about Auschwitz. I am a medium for the spirit of Auschwitz; Auschwitz speaks through me. Everything else strikes me as insane by comparison. And not just for personal reasons either, that is for sure, absolutely sure. Auschwitz and everything bound up with it (but then what does not have something to do with it?) is the greatest trauma for the people of Europe since the Crucifixion, even if it may take decades or centuries until it dawns on them. If it doesn't then it makes no difference anyway. But then why write at all? And for whom?¹¹¹

Kertész considers the Holocaust to be a universal European trauma. To him, Auschwitz is the universal experience of people under totalitarianism.¹¹² As an individual Kertész experienced the Holocaust, but communism was a collective experience of the people on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. In having to go through this form of totalitarianism as well, Kertész found proof for the universality of Auschwitz. The Holocaust was not a unique fate that has befallen the Jews, but a fate that concerned European society as a whole.¹¹³ Hence, Kertész discusses “the problem of the individual versus power, of freedom versus tyranny,” not in isolation but within the context of the Holocaust and totalitarianism and the problems Europe has to deal with in its aftermath.¹¹⁴ According to Kertész, politics in twentieth century Europe

¹¹¹ Kertész *Galley Boat-Log* p. 103, transl. Wilkinson; Orig. Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 36

¹¹² cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 61

¹¹³ See: Kertész 'Heuréka' p. 384. This is Kertész's lecture, when he accepted the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature. The English translation can be found online: Kertész, Imre. 'Imre Kertész - Nobel Lecture'. Nobelprize.org, 2002. URL: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz-lecture.html, last access: 12 Oct 2010

¹¹⁴ Molnár Basa 'Imre Kertész and Hungarian Literature' p. 19

have sidetracked culture. He criticises politics – in early works totalitarian regimes, later more generally – for levelling down, brutalising and damning the world and so digging a grave for human dignity.¹¹⁵ Notions of individuality and personality have lost their meaning. Values like freedom, individuality and moral responsibility disappeared from the scene. To Kertész, the only way to hold on to these values is culture or to be more precise, literature. This not necessarily is Hungarian literature, but rather European literature.

In his literature and critique of European twentieth century society, Kertész takes up the tradition of European Enlightenment and modernity of which, according to the writer, certain parts led directly to Auschwitz, but other parts are worth rejuvenating and thinking through. In his discussion of the themes freedom, individuality, and democracy, one can observe a constant dialectic between what he thinks is problematic in the European enlightened tradition and what is worth fighting for. He repudiates the rationalisation of life, the organisation of society through ideologies, the continuous wish to plan everything, and its thinking in terms of progress (much of which was carried to extremes by Hegel).¹¹⁶ He, however, emphatically advocates the enlightened free and individual thinking, the cultivation of a personality, and the liberation of the individual (i.e. the thought of Kant und Goethe).¹¹⁷ In Kertész's view,

¹¹⁵ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 28

¹¹⁶ According to Kertész, Hegel's thought ultimately led to Marxism and its further ideological offspring. He stated that the thought of Hegel is like "a cheap deal because it leads too quickly to any kind of compromise with evil and it breeds conformity." In this conformism, Kertész found an explanation for the functioning of totalitarian society and the role of human beings in it. Kertész & Rádai 'Mon oeuvre *Etre sans destin* est une métaphore du régime de Kádár' p. 216, my translation. See also: Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* pp. 36/7

¹¹⁷ Important in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant is, to Kertész, that it is impossible to know the world and that therefore, the world and the human being itself will always and for ever remain a mystery (cf. Kertész & Rádai 'Mon oeuvre *Etre sans destin* est une métaphore du régime de Kádár' p. 216). Goethe and his emphasis on the cultivation of a personality and individual thinking were a second source of inspiration, which he took from the German Enlightenment.

the first path leads to conformity; the second dissolves conformity through individual action.

In a sense, Kertész seeks to take up the genre of the humanist *Bildungsroman*, to which the cultivating of a personality, of the human soul is central.¹¹⁸ Yet, he approaches the big questions of the meaning of life and inner cultivation from his experiences during World War II, in the concentration camps, and in communist Hungary. Seeking values and meanings attached to human dignity in a society where this dignity is trampled upon, is extremely difficult. And to Kertész, it is clear that in his search of human dignity he has to question the basic premises of the culture it rests upon: European enlightened ‘*Bildungshumanism*’.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the legacy of enlightened humanism, i.e. individual autonomy and responsibility, self-cultivation, and emphasis of the individual who is free to act and decide upon his fate, is at the core of Kertész’s work; yet, the failure of the Enlightened humanism, the rationalisation of life, the ever more important role of the ideologies, the rule of the masses, and the shift towards conformity, as it manifested itself in the triumph of Nazism/fascism and in Stalinism, is as well.¹²⁰ Following Kertész, the twentieth century robbed European society of its cultural and organising values. Totalitarian society has done away with the humanist values of identity, personality, and individuality, freedom and self-determination. In

¹¹⁸ See also: Földényi ‘Das “Schlachtteil” der Kunst’ p. 27f.; Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* pp. 57-60

¹¹⁹ Kertész turned to literature and in particular to the humanist German-language literature of the Enlightenment, which he considered to be the historical bearer of the freedom of self-definition (i.e. Goethe, Immanuel Kant). See also: Snel *Fictionalized Autobiography and the Idea of Central Europe* p. 118; Frühling ‘Qui êtes-vous Imre Kertész?’ pp. 226/7

¹²⁰ In that sense, he is always critical of humanism and a humanist worldview (as rational-analytical thought) and does not necessarily want to be typified as a humanist (Kerész *Letzte Einkehr* p. 54, p. 365). See also: Simbürger *Faktizität und Fiktionalität* p. 193. She wrote: “Er bezieht seine ideologiekritische Einsicht in die Unfreiheit des Menschen aus einer zweifachen Desillusionierung: dem offenbaren Scheitern eines aufgeklärten Humanismus im Triumph des Faschismus und dem offenbaren Versagen sozialrevolutionären Marxismus in der erdrückenden Bürokratie des Stalinismus. (...) Das Ideal der Humanität wurde durch die Lagergesellschaft und die staatssozialistische ungarische Diktatur als funktionales Leitbild entlarvt.”

the footsteps of the existentialism of Albert Camus, Kertész's question and dilemma, consequently, is: "How can he construct a fate out of his own determinacy. After all, that determinacy can have no continuation; historically it loses its validity and is denied on all sides."¹²¹ Moreover, "[t]he next question, the biggest of all, is therefore: How can one make a portrait from the viewpoint of the totality without adopting the totalitarian viewpoint as one's own?"¹²² Kertész does not wish to become political. His experiences in the early years of communist-Stalinist Hungary made him turn away from any political movement; critical of any ideology organising society, he became an individualist.¹²³ So, contrary to Bauman who tries to hold on to the humanistic core of Marxism and addresses society as a whole, Kertész mainly limits himself to describing the role of the individual in himself and his ability to act on his fate and to develop a personality in whatever circumstances: a personal search for freedom or individuality. His project is a personal project *in extremis*.

Once literature showed, how 'one' lived; today, however, the writer can solely speak about himself: how *he* lives (tries to live), how helpless and lost he is.¹²⁴

As Guido Snel, however, rightly stated in his dissertation *Fictionalized Autobiography and the Idea of Central Europe*, "[w]riting for Kertész is a thoroughly social act."¹²⁵ Through his literature, he interacts with society, reacts to what he sees and experiences, and criticises the way society acts upon and deals with the past, with history. Ultimately, in his novels, essays, and diaries Kertész seeks to demonstrate the

¹²¹ Kertész *Galley Boat-Log* p. 98

¹²² Ibid. p. 99

¹²³ See also: Heidelberger-Leonard 'Imre Kertész im Dialog mit Jean Améry' p. 139

¹²⁴ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 138, my translation

¹²⁵ Snel 'Fictionalized Autobiography and the Idea of Central Europe' p. 118

strength of the spirit and of creativity in a totalitarian society: the possibility of self-definition and emotional and intellectual independence.¹²⁶ He explores the role of the individual in European society, the moral responsibility of the person, and freedom after 1945 and discusses the consequences Auschwitz has not only for Jews, but also for European civilisation. He tries to make sense of a present that after World War II has no legitimate history to fall back on. He deals with the search for an identity without the benefit of referencing a past that legitimises that identity. He shows that it is impossible not to reflect upon and be critical of the past and the cultural tradition he is part of. In the following, I will discuss the themes freedom, individuality – both of which are closely related and can sometimes hardly be analysed separately –, and democracy in the works of Imre Kertész in the light of his critique of the Enlightenment and of *Bildungshumanism*.

The Freedom of Self-Definition: Kertész and the Value of Freedom

Kertész's subject is the freedom of self-definition in a society ruled by totalitarian regimes or dictatorships, to which Kertész counts both Nazism and Stalinism.¹²⁷ His writing career found its origins in the search for intellectual independence in a world that steadily renounced its own values and made its inhabitants conform themselves to the system. It did not allow people to define their identities; these identities were bestowed upon them.¹²⁸ In his country of birth, Kertész was marked a Jew with the external sign of the yellow star put upon him in 1944 as undeniable signifier. In the

¹²⁶ See also: Ibid. p. 118

¹²⁷ Kertész 'Az önmeghatározás szabadságra' pp. 341/2; Kertész 'The language of exile' 19 October 2002

¹²⁸ See: Kertész 'The language of exile' 19 October 2002

decades after World War II, he remained a Jew in a society that could not cope with its own history and national traumata. Nonetheless, having survived the concentration camps and not wishing to experience that same fate again in a society where the same totalitarian logic ruled, Kertész felt the urge and the need to become master of his own self again.

The choice, then, to become a writer was his own free choice and a first free act of self-definition. Creativity opened the road to freedom. In the essay 'The exiled language' he argued that even if it may sound a paradox, the freedom as a writer in communist society (understood as the prolongation of Auschwitz) was unlimited.¹²⁹ There was no use in lying or adhering to certain ordained artistic norms and values, as even then he could never know whether his work would be published or not. So, he did not have to be afraid of censoring himself in any way. The communist dictatorship denied his existence as a writer; yet, in this denial Kertész saw the evidence of his existence. Taking the point further, he stated that his situation might be hopeless, but even in this hopelessness there was some hope. That is, he was not alone in this situation. In the dictatorial system, all were dispossessed of their fate.¹³⁰ The fact, however, that he had no fate offered him the possibility of freedom: "The masters of thought and ideologies have ruined my thought processes. Turn away from history and towards what can be formulated definitely."¹³¹ Distancing himself from the system, its all-encompassing language, its drive for collectivism, Kertész chose to design his own fate, his own identity, and his own individual self – and so become a writer, a Jew, a Hungarian and/or a European again by his own free choice. In *Fiasco*, he wrote:

¹²⁹ Kertész 'A száműzött nyelv' p. 328

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 329

¹³¹ Kertész 'Galley Boat-Log' p. 104

[M]aybe I had started writing in order to gain my revenge on the world. To gain revenge and regain from it what it had robbed me of. (...) Yes, to grab hold, if only in my imagination and by artistic means, of the reality that all too really holds me in its power; to subjectivize my perpetual objectivity, to become the name-giver instead of the named. My novel was no more than a response to the world.¹³²

In a society in which everything was determined, Kertész was able to find spaces of freedom and vitality.¹³³

When analysing Kertész's thoughts on freedom, his views on the conformity of the individual and his/her non-conformity respectively play a crucial role. To Kertész, those who conform to the system, follow the rules of political ideology, and/or believe in the rationality of history are unfree people; those who try – even if the circumstances do not allow for it – to hold on to their personality and individuality and live their life are free. Moreover, in relation to freedom, he employs the notion of fate. As a humanist he opines that the individual has the freedom to shape his/her own destiny or fate. This is a personal fate; it is founded in one's personality (compare Goethe) and it, therefore, is the individual's responsibility to cherish it. It always should be the individual's aim to take his/her fate into his/her own hands. This leads to true freedom. After every choice one can make another one. This sounds much like a classic enlightened humanist view, but Kertész's experiences in the concentration camps, his life under the Kádárist regime of Hungary, his view of the European twentieth century, make him introduce the limits (but also the spaces) of freedom and fate in a world that seems to be fully determined. Kertész's first novel *Fatelessness*, for example, like many of Kertész's other books, it is about surviving 'la réalité concentrationnaire':¹³⁴ the one

¹³² Kertész *Fiasco* p. 93

¹³³ See also: Heidelberger-Leonard 'Imre Kertész im Dialog mit Jean Améry' p. 139

¹³⁴ Mesnard 'Le Destin et ses points de vue' p. 175

thing left to the people in the camps and the totalitarian world. Everything else Auschwitz destroyed: the system of values, God, man, and culture. Kertész claims that the only story that can be told is the factual state of affairs. In the novel, therefore, there is neither place for fear, pain or humiliation, nor for identification of the reader with the main character. He “presents a totalitarian world where nothing remained untouched and stable, not even the human soul.”¹³⁵ Freedom, fate, and personality receive a different content or meaning.

Kertész disapproves of all ideologies of the twentieth century for having sought to direct and determine the individual's life and in most cases, not shying away from using violence in order to achieve their goal. He heavily criticises determined fate in combination with the passivity of man. As he thinks that those who do not make any choices, who fall into passivity, and who do not see any way out of the totalitarian system and therefore conform to totality, are fateless.¹³⁶ They become objects of history. What is worse, they help sustain the totalitarian system, which so has become the dominant society-organising system of the twentieth century.¹³⁷

That is why, incidentally, the experience of state totalitarianism is so all-important for the European form of existence and personality type – one which has, so to speak, traumatically undergone a certain ethical culture and tradition; it has completely demolished not only the myth but almost the very concept of morality.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Molnár ‘Imre Kertész’s Aesthetics of the Holocaust’ p. 167

¹³⁶ Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 307

¹³⁷ See also: Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* p. 71; Kertész ‘Galley Boat-Log’ p. 102: “Yes, indeed, assuming man clings on to life even under conditions of totalitarianism, he is in essence contributing to the sustenance of totalitarianism: that is the simple trick of organization.”

¹³⁸ Kertész ‘Galley Boat-Log’ p. 101

Kertész typifies fateless individuals as functional men who live an illusory life. They live a pseudo truth. Indeed, they do not exist.¹³⁹ In his *Galley Boat-Log*, which at times can be read as an accompanying reflection on the thoughts that he develops in his first novel *Fatelessness* (and later in *Fiasco*), he states in 1968: “In totalitarianism everything takes place in the name of destiny and fate. The whole purpose of these designations is to disguise the nothingness, the absolute Nothingness, which nevertheless produces mountains of corpses, devastation and atrocities.”¹⁴⁰

To Kertész, those who truly exist and who truly are free are the tragic individuals.¹⁴¹ “[It] is our *decision*, our decision to carry out total assimilation, or no to carry out total assimilation.”¹⁴² This view comes close to Camus’s existential humanism and his notion of the tragic individual. In his analysis, he asserted that God was dead and that there was no preordained destiny. There was no longer any hope or future: “In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between a man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.”¹⁴³ Nevertheless: “It might be absurd that war is

¹³⁹ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 10. See also: Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 307

¹⁴⁰ Kertész ‘Galley Boat-Log’ p. 100

¹⁴¹ “Die Tragödie lebt von der Spannung, die menschlichem Handeln zugrunde liegt. In der griechischen Tragödie werden “handelnde Menschen” nachgeahmt, und wer handelt, muss sich stets entscheiden. So erfüllt der Held der Tragödie sein Schicksal, indem er wählt. Obgleich das Fatum seine Entscheidungen immer durchkreuzt, gewinnt er in dieser Situation Subjektivität und tragische Größe. In der Darstellung von Menschen in tragischen Konflikten gelingt es der Tragödie, grundsätzliche Möglichkeiten des Menschseins aufzuzeigen” (Simbürger *Faktizität und Fiktionalität* p. 203).

¹⁴² Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* p. 118

¹⁴³ Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus* p. 6. In *Fiasco*, the Camus’s Sisyphus myth is the ordering principle. In the novel Köves (the main protagonist) “has to [continuously] interpret the same subject – totalitarianism as the absurdity of existence, symbolized by Auschwitz, and the story of being in the state of fatelessness in a state label order labeled totalitarianism – only to fall back into the abyss at the point of catharsis (...), making the completion of the task constant and superfluous. (...) [T]he Sisyphian work entails the incessant creation and recreation of the authentic existential experience:

normal or that the deadly bacillus is a fact of life, but humanity needs to love that which is inevitable in this imperfect life of ours.” Situations might be absurd; there is still a meaning to life. Camus held a positive, optimistic world-view to life and man’s moral responsibility to act upon it. As is the case in the work of Kertész, Camus opined that man is his own teacher, who has to find his own morality and truth, and develop his skill and strength. Kertész’s *Fatelessness* (and later *Fiasco*) is about the absurdity of existence, in which he makes all the events leading to his deportation to the concentration camp and consequently life in the concentration camp seem normal, natural, and ordinary. “Only from a functional point of view, when ‘bracketing existence’ (drawing on Husserl’s phenomenological category) can all this be considered necessary and with no alternative. By evoking the existentialists’ philosophy in *Fatelessness*, Kertész makes Auschwitz the metaphor and myth of universal totalitarianism.”¹⁴⁴ To Kertész, the tragic individual is able to overcome the crisis of humanity, retrieve morality, and his/her subjectivity. The non-conformist tragic individual, who despite all circumstances still believes in that what is not, can truly live freedom.¹⁴⁵ The belief in freedom, irrationality, and coincidence save the tragic individual from the deadening totalitarian state.

Fate is fulfilled continually and this is what makes the writer-protagonist happy” (Koltai ‘Imre Kertész’s *Fatelessness*’ pp. 135/6).

¹⁴⁴ Koltai ‘Imre Kertész’s *Fatelessness* and the Myth about Auschwitz in Hungary’ p. 129

¹⁴⁵ See: Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 308. In *Kaddish for an unborn child*, Kertész exemplifies this through the person of “the Teacher”, who despite probably diminishing his own (perhaps even his sole) chances to survive in the concentration camp held on to human dignity handing the main character of *Kaddish* his food ration (pp. 41-44). This, to Kertész was an irrational and truly free act: “[F]reedom primarily because “Teacher” did not do what he *ought* to have done, that is, what he *ought* to have done according to rational calculations of hunger, the survival instinct and madness, and the blood compact that the dominating power had entered into with hunger, the survival instinct and madness, but instead, repudiating all that, he did something else, something he *ought not* to have done and that no rationally minded person would expect from anybody” (p. 46). See also: Heidelberger-Leonard p. 145: “Zur Erfahrung des Glücks gehört die Erfahrung der Freiheit, zur Erfahrung der Freiheit gehört zum Beispiel die Fähigkeit zur Güte.”

As I am convinced that the reason for the devaluation of life and the rapid *existential decay*, which destroys our age, is a deep despair, which has its roots in the refusal to accept the historical experience of the break and consequently of the *cathartic knowledge*, which originates from there. It seems as if man here on earth would no longer live his/her own fate.¹⁴⁶

Fatelessness, then, tells the story of a 14-year-old boy, György Köves, who is deported to Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Zeitz. Already in the first three chapters, while he is still in Budapest with his family, György is a stranger, driven by the outside and by the conventions of society. Once in Auschwitz, the book documents György's survival in an environment directed towards death and destruction from the perspective of the 14-year-old boy, who participates in a learning process.¹⁴⁷ Curious and naive, György looks around, observes what is happening, and undergoes life in the concentration camps as it develops, step-by-step, day-by-day, at points more dead than alive. In every new situation, he attempts to fathom the events of the present and survive because neither past nor future are known to him. In the camps, György loses his personality, everyday becoming a little more de-individualised, dehumanised, and demeaned, until he loses his will (to survive) reaching the state of a '*Muselman*'.¹⁴⁸ Yet, at the moment when he has almost accepted death, he is miraculously saved and brought to the infirmary.

In the last chapter of the novel, György is liberated from Buchenwald and returns to Budapest. In this chapter, György has lost his naivety:

¹⁴⁶ Kertész 'A boldogtalan 20. század' ('The unhappy 20th century') pp. 150/1, my translation, italics in the original

¹⁴⁷ See also: Szirák 'Die Bewahrung des Unverständlichen' p. 55

¹⁴⁸ *Muselman* is a notion referring to inmates of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II, who were on the verge of death. Hunger and starvation had led to their gradual deterioration, both physically and psychologically. They became apathetic and fatalistic.

In the text, we now meet a narrator, who has lost his former innocence and ignorance. He is characterized by critical thinking and philosophical knowledge and formulates theoretical insights about the conditions of the possibility of the Shoah from an existential philosophical point of view. So, at the end of the novel, the protagonist is on the level of consciousness of the author.¹⁴⁹

Discussing his experiences in the concentration camps with others, the main character reveals an unconventional view about Auschwitz. In a conversation with a journalist¹⁵⁰ who asks him about his experiences in Auschwitz, György explains that in the concentration camps there is no freedom and no possibility to escape determinacy by creating one's own fate. Nonetheless, by following the rules of the game, by following the logic of the camp, one can survive. Ultimately, this means that the victims cooperate in the functioning of the camp to survive.¹⁵¹ And that is his form of *Bildung*: As the old 'I' (shaped by the European humanist narrative) disappears, life and socialisation in the concentration camps has left its marks upon him and taught him the technique of surviving.¹⁵² In a final scene in the home of his former neighbours, he clarifies this point once again. He, György, and with him every other inmate, is not only a victim, he also had an active role in the whole system.¹⁵³ He lived fate: a fate

¹⁴⁹ Simbürger *Faktizität und Fiktionalität* p. 238, my translation

¹⁵⁰ Somewhat disdainfully Kertész calls the journalist an 'occupational humanist', criticising the lamed western humanism and those who still think they can unproblematically return to the (logic and narrative of the) pre-Auschwitz situation. True humanism to author means to act upon Auschwitz, do something with its legacy, and so fulfill the tragic road to freedom. See also: Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 46-51

¹⁵¹ cf. Simbürger *Faktizität und Fiktionalität* p. 243

¹⁵² See also: Ebert 'Atonales Erzählen im ROMAN EINES SCHICKSALLOSEN' p. 116; Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 53-57

¹⁵³ With this assertion Kertész opposes the Holocaust fetishism as well as the sentimentalism that surrounds judeocide (cf. Hemmerijckx Rik and Weyssow Daniel. 'Introduction. Dossier: Imre Kertész.' *Bulletin Trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz*, No. 80-81, juillet-décembre 2003: 159).

that was not his, but which he had to make his fate in order to survive and later to exist.¹⁵⁴

Everyone took steps as long as he was able to take a step; I too took my own steps, and not just in the queue at Birkenau, but even before that, here, at home. (...) [T]here are only given situations and the new givens inherent in them. I too had lived through a given fate. It had not been my own fate, but I had lived through it, and I simply couldn't understand why they couldn't get it into their heads that I now needed to start doing something with that fate, needed to connect it to somewhere or something; after all, I could no longer be satisfied with the notion that it had all been a mistake, blind fortune, some kind of blunder, let alone that it had not even happened. (...) [W]e can never start a new life, only ever carry on the old one. I took the steps, no one else, and I declared that I had been true to my given fate throughout. (...) Why did they not wish to acknowledge that if there is such a thing as fate, then freedom is not possible? If, on the other hand (...), if there is such a thing as freedom, then there is no fate (...), that is to say, then we ourselves are fate.¹⁵⁵

That is one of the most important messages Kertész conveys: man is responsible for his/her own decisions, free in mind, able to live his/her own fate and therefore obliged to develop and cultivate the self. In the end, it is the 'I' and nobody else who is responsible for his fate. He is the one who has to act upon his fate.¹⁵⁶ Only then, the subjective 'I' is able to regain his individuality in an objective history (the system, totalitarianism). In this sense, as Sándor Rádnoti notes, *Fatelessness* is a *Bildungsroman* in which the main character learns how to survive.¹⁵⁷

Yet, the main character's *Bildung* takes shape in a very different setting from the usual *Bildungsroman*. In his essay on the '*Bildungsroman*', the art theorist and literary critic Földényi puts Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* at the beginning of the tradition of the *Bildungsroman* and Kertész's *Fatelessness* at its end. For Goethe, the aim was to

¹⁵⁴ See also: Simbürger *Faktizität und Fiktionalität* p. 245: "Hier meldet sich ein Subjekt zu Wort, das sich für das Leben entschieden hat und nicht bereit ist, sich zum unschuldigen Objekt eines Verhängnisses zu erklären."

¹⁵⁵ Kertész *Fatelessness* pp. 259/60

¹⁵⁶ See also: Simbürger *Faktizität und Fiktionalität* p. 245: "György begreift die Erfahrung Auschwitz als Bestandteil seines Lebens, sie gehört zum Selbstverständnis seiner Person und zu seinem Verständnis von Welt. Damit muss er leben und ebenso damit, dass er sie nicht mitteilen kann."

¹⁵⁷ Rádnoti 'Polyphony in Kertész's *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*' p. 123

construct a consensus within European culture. Through Wilhelm Meister's socialisation with his social and cultural environments (*Umwelt*), there is a continuous, positive advancement of his development. Wilhelm Meister's acceptance of the harmonious relationship of his being with the social (and cultural) world permitted Wilhelm Meister to find his 'self', his identity. Kertész empties this harmonious relationship of its meaning.¹⁵⁸ Instead of developing his self through his socialisation in the world of the concentration camps, the main character loses his name, his body, his 'I', his identity, in sum: his 'self' as it was shaped in the European humanist narrative. For Goethe culture was the home of the self, whereas for Kertész Auschwitz means its end, but also its school. What is left of the 'I' in *Fatelessness* is an empty being without identity. Kertész gradually reduces the 'I' to empty space; the 'I' becomes a hole. There is nothing left for the main character but trying to survive. In just surviving, then, there is no place for individuality or for a personality to develop; the main character loses his 'self'.

In a dialectical twist, however, the loss of the self opens up a space in which he is no longer being part of the camp setting. He finds himself beyond the existing world; he transcends it (in an irrational and miraculous way). It is there – in this transcendent world – the 'I' is able to exist. In the article *Der Identitätslose und sein Ich*, Földényi states: "the 'I' appears again in the cosmic solitude, in the supra-personal."¹⁵⁹ In the most difficult circumstances, in the total estrangement from reality and from his self, the 'I' becomes aware of the possibility of the existence of the mystery, writes

¹⁵⁸ See: Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 57

¹⁵⁹ Földényi 'Der Identitätslose und sein Ich' p. 42. See also: Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 60

Földényi. In the astonishment about the nature of the 'I', about its mystery, the 'I' comes back to life and survives.

And here he strongly relates himself once again to the existential humanism of Camus. In his novels, Kertész cultivates a self-image detached from identity. In *Fatelessness*, Kertész ultimately turns other-directedness into self-determination. His fictional characters are strangers to language, strangers to society, and strangers to themselves. In this estrangement they find their freedom and identity. The strangeness to his environment, to human kind of which he is a natural part plays a crucial role in the work of Kertész. Being an outsider to the world around him he seeks to gain self-awareness and assert humanity by rebelling against the circumstances. In *Liquidation*, of which many state that it is the closing novel of the tetralogy *Fatelessness*, *Fiasco*, *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* and the very *Liquidation*, the character Bee states:

In this big Lager of life / the neither-in-nor-out neither-forward-nor-back / in this wretched world of lives held / in suspended animation where we grow decrepit / without time moving any further forward... / this is where I learned that to rebel is / TO STAY ALIVE / The great insubordination is / for us to live our lives to the end / The sole method of suicide that is worthy / of respect is to live.¹⁶⁰

Kertész's work is dominated by the dialectic between self-consciousness and self-denial.¹⁶¹ Kertész had to embrace estrangement as the only possible condition to survive in a society in which there was little space for individual creativity and self-actualisation. "I had understood that I could only be creative here in the act of self-denial; that the sole creation possible in this world, as it is here, is self-denial as

¹⁶⁰ Kertész *Liquidation* p. 57

¹⁶¹ cf. Spiegel 'Der eiserne Vorhang' p. 44

creation.”¹⁶² In Kertész’s *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* this motto is taken a step further in claiming it is impossible of fathering a child after Auschwitz. His existential statement is saying “no” to new life and instead finding his vocation in work as a means to exist but not to live life. “[A]lready in early childhood I could see clearly that I was incapable of it, incapable of assimilating to the extant, the existing, *to life*, and despite that (...) I am nevertheless extant, I exist and I live.”¹⁶³ The naivety that characterised *Fatelessness* is gone in *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*: “The adult protagonist in *Kaddish* must make meaning of both the world and himself.”¹⁶⁴

During these years I became aware of my life, on the one hand as fact, on the other as a *cerebral mode of existence*, to be more precise, a certain mode of existence that would no longer survive, did not wish to survive, indeed probably was not even capable of surviving survival, a life which nevertheless has its own demand, namely, that it *be formed*, like a rounded, rock-hard object, in order that it should *persist*, after all, no matter why, no matter for whom – *for everybody and nobody*, for whoever it is or isn’t, it’s all the same.¹⁶⁵

Consequently, only outside the totalitarian world can Kertész transcend life as determined by the system. Beyond the reality of Auschwitz, but also beyond the reality of the Kádár regime, it is possible to create the self anew, and find another truth, *his truth*. Moreover, Kertész’s self-banishment and self-estrangement from society lead to a self-image or identity in which he is different from the other, from himself: “*I am different from them, different from others, different from me.*”¹⁶⁶ In this being different, he finds the freedom of self-definition. His estrangement leads to another reality, a reality of fiction and of language through which he was able to bear and understand his life experiences. The worlds of the spirit, the soul, of creative capacity of which

¹⁶² Kertész *Az angol lobogó* pp. 61/62, transl. Tim Wilkinson

¹⁶³ Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* p. 118

¹⁶⁴ Radnóti ‘Polyphony in Kertész’s *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*’ p. 123

¹⁶⁵ Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* p. 119

¹⁶⁶ Kertész in: Renhardt ‘Schmerzende Narben’, my translation

freedom and irrationality are derived were metaphysical answers to a material and deterministic society.

To close, the continuing search for the freedom of self-definition is at the heart of his books. Yet, his freedom differs from the freedom proclaimed by the Enlightenment and is so crucial to the canon of European modernity and *Bildungshumanism*. To Kertész, “[f]reedom is that-, what is not”¹⁶⁷ and therefore, there is no end to this search as long as one lives. It is something one longs for and can be part of, but can never really possess.¹⁶⁸ The soul grants the human being its dignity. Through the spirit ideals can exist and values are created. Kertész seeks to pass on the memory of the inner freedom of man. This freedom transcends everything and has no other goal or motive apart from itself and does not entail any other obligation.¹⁶⁹ Instead of passively performing the tasks given to him/her by society, man has to be active and draw from his creative talents. Through his/her creative skills the individual can exist outside ideology and thus outside society, s/he can turn his attention to his/her inner being, the irrational, the ethical, that which is unreachable by the rational and objective state. The self is able to realise ideals and values against the will of the system and maintain a culture, which in Kertész’s view is the highest good of a civilisation.

[M]y desire for freedom often turned out to be stronger than the so-called reality. And that it ultimately prevailed, is of course largely indicative of fortunate circumstances, yet no less of the nature of reality itself: it appears that those energies, like the desire for freedom, are no less a reality than the opposing actual world.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 48, my translation

¹⁶⁸ See also: Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 110

¹⁶⁹ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* pp.142/3

¹⁷⁰ Kertész *Valaki más* p. 134, my translation

Reclaiming Personality from History: Kertész and the Value of Individuality

Perhaps this will be (if it will be) the first novel, which, dragging along and showing the whole material that is directed against the individual, nevertheless attempts at the breakthrough of the individual.¹⁷¹

Kertész directs his attention to the individual, the personal. Next to freedom, these are two crucial entities in his work. He approaches these entities from his war experiences. These revealed to him how important it is to be an individual and to have or develop a personality. Simultaneously his war experiences made him realise how fragile a personality is and how quickly it can be denied or forgotten. Here too, the influence of the German concept of *Bildung* and the shaping of a personality, the role of Camus's existential humanism as well as Kertész's critique of the rational, progressive and ideological branch of the Enlightenment become evident (and in part are already touched upon in the above).

According to Kertész, 'History' robbed man of his/her personality. As long as that experience (the liquidation of the autonomous personality by the dictatorial regimes) does not become part of human existence upon which one can reflect and from which one can draw the moral and spiritual consequences, man stays an object of history and is unable to retrieve his personality, his 'self'.¹⁷² And by history Kertész refers to modern European history as developed from the French Revolution, including the Central and Eastern European experience of Nazism and communism as well as the Western European experience of capitalism and liberal democracy. That is, in his view, both the totalitarian systems and the pluralist democracies (and at present, the

¹⁷¹ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 169, my translation

¹⁷² See: Kertész 'A boldogtalan 20. század' p. 116/7

nationalist tendencies, which can be observed all over Europe) have sought to do away with personality, placing the ‘we’ above the ‘I’, the collective above the individual. The few who create values on the basis of their idealism are sidetracked. It is the masses that rule the world – or let themselves be ruled by the system.¹⁷³ And those who do not walk in step are marginalised by the system (or – during the totalitarian rule – threatened to death). The intellect is sidelined.

In the totalitarian dictatorships of the twentieth century something is happening with the individual, something for which there haven’t been any examples during previous history: totalitarian language, or, as Orwell calls it, “Newspeak,” with the help of the well-dosed dynamics of violence and fear, penetrates without resistance into the mind of the individual, and slowly removes him from there, removes him from his own inner life. The individual gradually identifies himself with the role that is meant or forced onto him, no matter if that role, this function, offers him the only chance to survive. This is, however, also the way of the total destruction of his personality, and, if he indeed manages to survive, it would probably take a long time for him to be able to – if ever – reconquer for himself the personal and only authentic language in which he can tell his own tragedy; and finally, quite possibly, he might realize that this tragedy cannot be told at all.¹⁷⁴

The writer does not believe in or trust the ‘we’. He does not want to become part of a larger ‘we’ and all of his existential decisions are made with regards to the aim of remaining an individual at all times and in all circumstances. In this sense, his work and literary life is an existentialist project. It is in the search for an individual ‘I’ that a true identity can blossom. Moreover, in his diary *Galley Boat-Log* (written during communism) as well as in *I – Another* (dealing with post-communist times) and in his essays, Kertész calls for man to think for him/herself again. In his view, a freethinking

¹⁷³ In Gályanapló, he states: “The masses and thought were always opposite concepts. But the masses had never before been in *power*, in monopolistic, in total power... the masses, more precisely the power which seeks to legitimize itself through the masses, is a position that it can destroy all higher forms of life; and without that there is no value (and I fear no reason) for life. This is a twentieth century phenomenon” (p. 91). See also: Kertész ‘A boldogtalan 20. század’ pp. 120/1

¹⁷⁴ Kertész ‘A száműzött nyelv’ p. 323. English translation in: Čudić ‘On the Translation of Kertész’s *Sorstalanság* (*Fatelessness*) into Serbian’ p. 99

individual is always stronger than the masses. Neither the totalitarian regime nor the liberal democracy aiming at the rule of the majority can rob the individual of his/her spiritual freedom. Not everything in society is determined by outer, social-historical factors. Ultimately, through his/her spiritual freedom man opposes the Absolute, the totality with his/her personality:¹⁷⁵ ideology is confronted with culture. And that eventually too is the salvation of society (based on values).

Reading Kant, Kertész “learned that the world’s knowledge is not unlimited because according to the structures of our brain, we can only perceive three categories: space, time and relationships of cause and effect; which is a wonderful feeling, sublime and reassuring.”¹⁷⁶ In his view, the world remains an eternal mystery to us. Moreover, every human being is a mystery. Consequently, according to Kertész, every individual is responsible for his or her own life instead of letting themselves led by some great socialist (totalitarian) message of ‘Truth’.¹⁷⁷ There is no objective, independent existing ‘Truth’.¹⁷⁸ He, thus, cherishes inner freedom, the creative possibilities of man, and the mystery of the ‘I’. Human fate knows a mystic and transcendental beginning, so he says. In *Een toespraak over mijn eeuw* (*An address about my century*), Kertész describes the individual as a man who is astonished about creation, wonders about the existence of the world and who respects life and shows devotion, joy, and love.¹⁷⁹ S/He searches for the meaning of life and discovers the depths of his soul, which s/he can never fully know. Existence is full of surprises, just like creation. Life is mysterious. Moreover, to Kertész, the mystery of life means being embedded

¹⁷⁵ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* pp. 48/9

¹⁷⁶ See: Kertész & Rádai ‘Mon oeuvre *Etre sans destin* est une métaphore du régime de Kádár’ p. 216

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 216

¹⁷⁸ cf. Kertész *Mentés másként* p. 66

¹⁷⁹ cf. Kertész ‘Een toespraak over mijn eeuw’ p. 28

in the cosmos, it means cosmic strangeness.¹⁸⁰ Body and soul are part of something bigger, a mystery that one cannot know, but which shows a glimpse of the existence of a bigger metaphysical truth. The inner world/life of man is irrational, as it originates from the soul in which next to ratio intuition plays an important role. This irrationality enables man to create, produce and shape art, or be religious: in short, make life worth living. Man can learn from his experiences and so cultivate his/her personality, which differs from any other personality. Man has an inner freedom: absolute freedom – a whisper, an idea¹⁸¹ – that is shaped by “the will, the elemental force, the sublimated power to create or destroy.”¹⁸² Despite the fact that Auschwitz has marked him for life, the unknown ‘I’ allows Kertész to survive and to keep exploring the meaning of life. He is his biggest adventure.¹⁸³ To the author, writing opens the road to another truth that enables him to understand and make his life experiences his own. In writing, he is able to separate life from the outer circumstances. This leads to a breakthrough:

On a lovely spring day in 1955, [I] suddenly came to the realization that there exists only one reality, and that is me, my own life, this fragile gift bestowed for an uncertain time, which had been seized, expropriated by alien forces, and circumscribed, marked up, branded - and which I had to take back from "History", this dreadful Moloch, because it was mine and mine alone, and I had to manage it accordingly.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ cf. Földényi ‘Der Identitätslose und sein Ich’ p. 45; Földényi *Schicksallosigkeit* p. 77

¹⁸¹ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 48

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 196, my translation

¹⁸³ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 189

¹⁸⁴ Kertész *Heureka!* URL: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2002/kertesz-lecture-e.html. See also: Kertész *Fiasco* p. 125f.: “The task was essentially (...) to write a novel” (p. 126). It was a “Dionysian experience” (Kertész *Heureka!*). In *Dossier K.* he formulates it like this: “Like a sleepwalker I followed an inspiration that lured me further and further from the everyday and about which I could have no idea where it would lead ultimately. I stepped outside my history and was alarmed to notice that I was on my own (p. 147).”

Writing enables him to explore his 'I' and returns his self to him, his individuality. Moreover, in fiction, Kertész is able to create an alternative, transcendental reality, from which he could regain his trust in life. It allows access to an inner world.

For me, fiction is more important than reality. I have been in Auschwitz and in Buchenwald. But as a writer, I created Auschwitz and Buchenwald as a world of the writer, as my world. (...) Despite my solidarity with the victims, I cannot see myself as a victim of Auschwitz anymore. As a writer I stand in a different reality.¹⁸⁵

It is in this different reality that he can not only reclaim his identity, but also exist. According to the writer, it is the creative possibilities of the ethical human being through which man is always, everywhere, and under every circumstance able to take his own life into his own hands and regain his dignity and personality.

To Kertész, in sum, it is the individual's intellectual skills, his inner soul and his ability to create that, if used consciously, critically and reflexively, enable a life after Auschwitz. These values provide the individual with an ethical basis to exist. The Hungarian philosopher and political scientist, Mihály Szilágyi-Gál, wrote about Kertész's dealing with the heritage of the Holocaust:

Kertész dehistoricizes the individual story: he does not present it as Holocaust "memory" or testimonial as one would call it in historical retrospect but as the narrative phenomenology of situations as lived in the nonhistorical experience of the individual. The temporal framework of this presentation is the nonhistorical but personal and fictionalized memory of the narrator; it is not a historical but a fictional narrative, the past of one who had actually lived his own story rather than living the historical event."¹⁸⁶

He, so, reclaims his individuality and personality from 'History' and from the totalitarian determination of life. According to Kertész, the individual is his own fate

¹⁸⁵ Kertész in: De Moor 'De merknaam Kertész' p. 89, my translation

¹⁸⁶ Szilágyi-Gál 'Arendt and Kertész on the Banality of Evil' p. 142

and possesses the inner freedom through which he can cultivate himself and develop a personality. He argues that one has to consider the historical conditions as chance material through which life struggles itself through.¹⁸⁷ Life experiences shape a person and enable the self-realisation of a personality: “that cultural and existential process that the Germans call *Bildung*.”¹⁸⁸ It is this process that brings about values and helps create and uphold civilisation. According to Kertész, the possibility of cultivating (*bilden*) one’s personality is one of the constituting elements of European society and civilisation. Although totalitarianism tries to deny personality¹⁸⁹ and modern capitalist-democratic societies fail to pay adequate attention to it¹⁹⁰, they will never be able to destroy an individual’s personality. Hence, for man to truly be free and develop his/her personality, s/he has to live his fate; to truly exist, s/he has to be creative. Man has to continuously work on and shape his/her self and has to cultivate his/her inner being, his/her personality on the road to individual independence.

¹⁸⁷ cf. Kertész *Gályanapló* pp. 140/1

¹⁸⁸ Kertész ‘Een toespraak over mijn eeuw’ p. 20

¹⁸⁹ cf. Kertész *Galley Boat-Log* p. 101: “That is why, incidentally, the experience of state totalitarianism is so all-important for the European form of existence and personality type – one which has, so to speak, traumatically undergone a certain ethical culture and tradition; it has completely demolished not only the myth but almost the very concept of personality.”

¹⁹⁰ Kertész ‘Európa nyomasztó öröksége’ pp. 419/20

The Civilising Role of Culture: Kertész and the Value of Democracy

[T]otalitarian systems (...) expropriate the autonomous personality[;] (...) human beings become well-adjusted and obedient cogs in the powerful wheels of the state. (...) [W]e are transformed into creatures whom the rational aspect of our being, possessed of an unimpaired civic morality, is subsequently incapable of recognizing and identifying with. Man was once God's creation, a creature tragic of fate and needful of redemption. This lonely being was first kneaded into a mass by ideological totalitarianism, then immured in a state order whose machinery proceeded to degrade it into a lifeless component part. He is no longer in need of salvation, for he no longer bears responsibility for himself. Ideology has deprived him of his cosmos, of its aloneness, of the tragic dimensions of human fate. It has confined him in a deterministic existence wherein his fate is assigned by his origin, his race, or his class.¹⁹¹

Kertész never wished to become political in any sense. He did not want to actively take part in political life, in dictatorial collectivism, and the claim for 'Truth' of totalitarian ideology. His life was that of a writer, a freethinking intellectual and an individualist, which to him also meant staying away from Hungary's literary circles – which he called provincial and which in his view only discussed unimportant problems. He was a "parasite", living in the margins of society.¹⁹² Nonetheless, all of his works contain a political message. *Fatelessness*, for example, is not only about Auschwitz and surviving the Holocaust, but also about surviving a totalitarian regime more broadly. Kertész actually maintained that it is about the Kádár regime and post 1956-Hungarian society. It was meant to confront Hungarian society with its past.¹⁹³ And this is a political motivation one can find in his other novels as well, but which he only makes explicit in his essays and interviews.

Specific references to democracy can only be found in the writings he published from the 1990s onwards and especially in his essays and diaries written during the 2000s. In

¹⁹¹ Kertész 'Europe's Oppressive Legacy' p. x

¹⁹² Kertész & Rádai 'Mon oeuvre *Etre sans destin* est une métaphore du regime de Kádár' p. 211

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 214

those latter publications one can observe a deep disappointment about political developments in Hungary as well as the process of unification in the European Union and the ever more visible differences in political culture between Central and Eastern Europe on the one hand, and Western Europe on the other. In *Die Letzte Einkehr*, a fragment of his unfinished novel, which he started during the mid-2000s and of which one part was published in the *NZZ* in 2009 and another part in the German version of his collected diaries written between 2001 and 2009, he claims that in the West-European countries public authorities are controlled by society and its individuals are protected by the law and against arbitrariness or despotism. The risk of a dictatorship or authoritarian regime is low to non-existent. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, democracy is no necessary condition for a normal existence; there is no such instinct that protects its people against despotism.¹⁹⁴ To him, today's Hungary is led by an authoritarian power and the country is everything but democratic or free. Indeed, it is a pre-fascist state.¹⁹⁵

Yet, travelling around in Western Europe, reading his novels and giving talks, Kertész, too, is not so sure anymore about the state of Western European democracies. Kosovo, 9/11, terrorist attacks, the growing power of extremists: liberal times are over, immigration causes its problems, and everywhere one can observe movements that seek for more control, less tolerance, and stronger national boundaries and rules. In his later essays and diaries, Kertész identifies a wish among large parts of the Western European people to restrict both democracy and freedom. According to the writer, Europe becomes intimidated and looses its attachment to the values that have

¹⁹⁴ cf. Kertész *Letzte Einkehr* p. 216

¹⁹⁵ See also: Kertész 'Hommage à Fetjő' ('Homage to Fetjő') pp. 203-216

characterised it for so long. 40 to 50 years of relative economic and political safety have not taught Europe how to strengthen and defend its cultural values: “Europe capitulates in front of the terror like a cheap prostitute for her beating pimp.”¹⁹⁶ It actually tries to fend itself off from outside problems (including those in Central and Eastern Europe) and falls back to complacent conformity.¹⁹⁷

In order to retrieve a moral life and revalue humanity’s imaginative power, Kertész writes against the main organising principle of the twentieth century and does not stop pointing out the dangers of totalitarian ideology. Our age is “the age of Auschwitz,” he maintains, and it is our task to live with and through that historical experience, make it one’s own and identify with them “in a tragic sense” in order to become a civilisation again.¹⁹⁸ “Only knowledge can elevate man above history.”¹⁹⁹ As it might be the case that in Hungary – and Central and Eastern Europe more general – the political situation is problematic, in Western Europe politics and especially democracy has lost much of its meaning as well. Instead of representing a *res publica*, democracy has become the democracy of a free market.²⁰⁰ This might have brought welfare to the people and a pleasant life; yet, centralisation, the concentration of money and power, carry the danger of a new fascism, of which (biological) discrimination, loss of freedom and a certain, not too bad standard of life are the characteristics.²⁰¹

Kertész, hence, does not promote democracy as a political system – he sees advantages, but also many disadvantages to it (in East *and* West). He prefers referring

¹⁹⁶ Kertész *Mentés másként* p. 133

¹⁹⁷ Kertész ‘Feltámad-e?!...’ (‘Will Europe arise?!...’) p. 223

¹⁹⁸ Kertész ‘Europe’s Oppressive Legacy’ p. ix and xi

¹⁹⁹ Kertész ‘Europe’s Oppressive Legacy’ p. xi

²⁰⁰ See: Kertész *Mentés másként* p. 49

²⁰¹ See: Ibid. pp. 49/50

to democracy as culture: one that has to be taken care of, heeded, and nurtured. Democracy is not just there. Much work needs to be done before democracy becomes a self-evident good and value. Here he praises Western Europe's historical tradition in democratic political culture, which significantly differs from Central and Eastern Europe's political culture. This has become especially visible in the European unification process. Western European societies had a solid democratic base, which grew naturally out of the historical experiences²⁰² and became part of modern society with the Enlightenment and French Revolution playing a crucial role in it. Those were big visions, dreams, and old myths that contributed to its coming into existence. Culture civilised Western European society. The Central and Eastern European societies did not know such a development. When Communism lost its legitimacy and people started fighting for individual freedom and democracy, they had no democratic culture or viable historical experiences to fall back on.²⁰³ In a sense, Kertész opines, democracy (as a political system) was forced upon the East by the West and the process of European unification, which ultimately did not help in befriending the people with the system or make them acquainted to it in an enduring and sustainable way.

And when they stretched out their hands for support to the democracies of Western Europe, they had to content themselves with a brief handshake and an encouraging pat on the back. Western Europe could not decide what to do with its Central and Eastern European neighbours; and, on the part of the latter, this was perceived as arrogance and received with the hurt pride of the poor relative.²⁰⁴

²⁰² "[D]emocracy as a political system burgeoned from the soil of social culture, by way of economic, political, and attitudinal necessities, successful revolutions, or significant social compromise" (Kertész 'Europe's Oppressive Legacy' p. ix).

²⁰³ See: Kertész 'Feltámad-e?!...' p. 229

²⁰⁴ See: Kertész 'Europe's Oppressive Legacy' p. xi. See also: Kertész *Mentés másként* pp. 77/8

One could and can observe a lot of misunderstanding between the Western Europeans on the one hand and the Central and Eastern Europeans on the other. Hence, the writer considers it to be Western Europe's political responsibility to integrate Central and Eastern Europe into Europe, teach it stability, Europeaness, and its (democratic) culture. This is the only way to avoid or battle feelings of *ressentiment*, hatred, nationalist and discriminatory movements, ethnic animosities, or even wars (i.e. ex-Yugoslavia).

Yet, in a strong critique of Western Europe, Kertész holds that instead of taking up its responsibility, current developments in Western Europe show a growing distance between its historical experience of democratic culture and democracy as shaped by liberal capitalism and fear for terror. It is built around an anxiety for safety, security, and welfare, lets money dictate the system, and does not stand up for its own Christian-humanist inspired cultural tradition. Western Europe forgets its own history. Here (the irony of history), Western Europe might take up the lessons of Central and Eastern European history and the terror and horrors that dominated its society for so long: If one does not cherish one's culture and values, they disappear from the scene and ultimately civilisation (cherishing the freedom of the individual, the cultivation of a personality, the openness and democratic tradition) will die.²⁰⁵

And so Kertész concludes that if Europe wants to retrieve its values, its ethics, and proper politics, it needs to live through its historical experiences and work with the heritage of Auschwitz (as metaphor and myth of universal totalitarianism). There is no freedom, no individuality, and no democracy as long as the age of Auschwitz, the

²⁰⁵ See: Kertész 'Europe's Oppressive Legacy' p. xii

catastrophe of the twentieth century, has not become an integral part of European culture and civilisation. Europe as a whole should build its common system of values and create a common culture, spirit, and mentality, working upon and with the experiences of the Western as well as the Central and Eastern Europeans.²⁰⁶ Until then, every European will be and remain a fateless person who does not truly exist.

III.III Kertész's Europe: Auschwitz as a Value Creating Phenomenon

To Kertész, the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment and its idea of Europe are crucial when addressing the themes of freedom, individuality, and democracy. The civilising role of culture and the enlightened humanism of both Goethe and Kant significantly shape his thought. In addition, the Jewish heritage of universalism, cosmopolitanism,²⁰⁷ multilingualism, and anti-nationalism can be found in his work as well:

In reality, I belong to that Jewish literature which came into being in eastern and central Europe. This literature was never written in the language of the immediate national environment and was never part of a national literature. We can trace the development of this literature from Kafka to Celan and to their successors - all we have to do is peruse the various émigré literatures.²⁰⁸

The idea of Europe based on these two pillars, which portends a fundamental position

²⁰⁶ See: Kertész 'Feltámad-e?!...' p. 221

²⁰⁷ In his letters to Éva Haldimann, he wrote: "I am a cosmopolitan, who in the first place attends to his art and not after his so-called home (country)" (Kertész *Briefe an Eva Haldimann* p. 65, 8 Dec. 1993, my translation).

²⁰⁸ Kertész 'The language of exile'; Kertész *Mentés másként* p. 46

of culture and points out the role of the intellect, the spirit, and search for mystery, is at the heart of Kertész's literature. Yet, simultaneously, one can observe a harsh critique of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on progress, rationality, and the power of man over nature. According to Kertész, this directly led to Auschwitz; he understands it as a logical conclusion to Europe's history.²⁰⁹ It is the culmination point of modernity.

The Holocaust is not history's one-time mistake. It belongs to European history, and with it, the European values of the Enlightenment collapsed.²¹⁰

In search of a new ethics and moral basis for Europe, Kertész makes the twentieth century and Auschwitz (and everything that made it happen) a central component of his idea of Europe.

That is, based on his experiences as a Jew in Auschwitz, citizen of Hungary under communist rule, and free-moving and highly acclaimed writer in a unified Europe, Kertész's idea of Europe begins and ends with Auschwitz, not necessarily Auschwitz as an experience (that too), but Auschwitz as a key to understanding European culture. To Kertész, Auschwitz is the bankruptcy of European culture and simultaneously its moral reservoir.²¹¹ In his view, Auschwitz is the zero point of European civilisation.²¹² Auschwitz is a universal European trauma. Anything that was of value to Europe, especially the values of the Enlightenment, has lost its legitimacy and credibility in Auschwitz. Yet, in his view, this does not mean that European culture is dead or that it

²⁰⁹ See: Kertész *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, p. 36; Friedland 'Imre Kertész, Hegel, and the Philosophy of Reconciliation' p. 60

²¹⁰ Kertész qt. in Riding 'Nobel Hero' p. E1

²¹¹ Kertész 'A Holocaust mint kultúra' pp. 82

²¹² cf. Kertész 'A száműzött nyelv' p. 332

has lost its basis for existence. If one is willing to explain and understand European twentieth century history, notably the Holocaust, even if it is ‘un-understandable’ and ‘unexplainable’, European culture can still renew itself. As Bettina von Jagow puts it: “The Holocaust is a value creating phenomenon.”²¹³ Influenced by Camus’s existentialism, his understanding and ideas of the tragic individual, the role of fate, his responsibility to act upon that fate, and being a stranger to the world, Kertész starts to formulate the idea of Europe including its enlightened values anew. The last part of this chapter will be dedicated to this idea Europe, further exploring the intellectual context of his idea of Europe and focusing on the pragmatic and ethical consequences of his writings.

Europe is a theme in the novels, poems, short stories and essays of many European writers. The Enlightenment has produced a literary tradition, emphasising its Christian, humanistic, and rational roots.²¹⁴ Europe is being appealed to by authors, who seek to idealise Europe as the identity-providing whole that can unite all ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences present in the various European countries.²¹⁵ A famous example from the twentieth century is the French poet, philosopher, and essayist Paul Valéry who, reacting to the chaos and sense of rupture left by World War I, reflected in his 1919 essay *La Crise de l’esprit* on the greatness and decline of Europe: a Europe he defined as Roman, Christian and subjected to Greek logos.²¹⁶

²¹³ von Jagow ‘Representing the Holocaust’ p. 86

²¹⁴ See: Varga ‘Europa und Ungarn im Spiegel der Literatur’ p. 126

²¹⁵ In his ‘Europa – ein Apellbegriff’, Paul Richard Blum asserts that when appealing to Europe, writers or thinkers often consciously seek to pass on a (political) message, wishing to change society. Europe is a notion that enables writers to project their ideals and desires upon and offers much space for literary imagination (pp. 573ff.).

²¹⁶ cf. Valéry ‘La Crise de l’esprit’ 1013

According to Valéry, only culture could explain Europe's universal potentials.²¹⁷ In the spirit of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, he pleaded for great thinkers and artists to develop visions for the future, and to defend European values of freedom, tolerance, universality, and beauty against the equalising forces of modern society causing shallowness, spiritual poverty, and loss of identity. In his intellectual construction of Europe and considering the role he attached to the cultivated European mind, he came close to the eighteenth century idea of the *republique des lettres*.²¹⁸

Other intellectuals and writers who sought to find a way out of the destruction the war had left were the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, the German novelist Thomas Mann, and the Hungarian author Sándor Márai as well as Czech intellectuals such as Karel Čapek and František Václav Krejčí. Both liberal- and social-democratic intellectuals stayed mostly true to ideas of Europe as developed since the French Revolution: "The Christendom narrative, often in secularized form and blended with the principles of the Enlightenment, was used by the liberals and democrats to underpin the ideals of tolerance, dialogue and the acceptance of cultural difference."²¹⁹ Despite the war (World War I), all defended European civilisation, its humanism, and its values of freedom, individuality, tolerance, and democracy. In an essay of 1935, *Achtung, Europa!* Thomas Mann called for "a new *militant European humanism*" that would safeguard or bring back to life the "traditional European ideas

²¹⁷ He asked the question whether Europe will "become *what it is in reality* – i.e. a little promontory (*cap*) on the continent of Asia? Or will it remain *what it seems* – that is, the elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of the vast body" (Valéry 'The Crisis of the Mind' 31).

²¹⁸ cf. Ifversen 'The Crisis of European Civilization' p. 155

²¹⁹ Perkins *Christendom and European Identity* p. 317

of truth, freedom and justice.”²²⁰ The trust in Europe and Europe’s potential remained unbroken during the interwar period.

After 1945, the idea of Europe gained new relevance in reaction to the discrediting of nationalism by the war and the general feeling of defeat.²²¹ In fact, Europe was *the* buzzword of the post-World War II years and many writers as well as historians were interested in the spiritual, cultural, and political roots of a common history.

A united Europe is not a modern expedient, be it political or economic, but an ideal, which has been accepted since thousands of years by the best spirits of Europe, namely those who can see into the future. Already Homer described Zeus as ‘*europos*’ – an adjective meaning ‘one who sees very far’.²²²

More reflective and critical positions in literature would follow only from the late 1970s and 1980s, putting into question European culture (its humanist and Christian roots) and the ideals of the Enlightenment.²²³

On both sides of the Iron Curtain, however, survivors of the Holocaust, notably Jewish survivors, lived and sought to deal with their experiences long before the Cultural Turn in Western academia,²²⁴ the increased public attention for the atrocities of World War II in the 1980s and 1990s, and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in

²²⁰ Bugge ‘The nation supreme’ p. 129

²²¹ cf. Waever ‘Europe since 1945’ p. 152

²²² De Rougemont *The Meaning of Europe* p. 8

²²³ Criticisms of Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism, and decolonisation, the rising scepticism towards the uniqueness of the West (Weber), and the negative or pessimistic assessments of modernity contributed heavily to this shift in orientation. The most important book stirring up debates about Eurocentrism is Edward Said’s *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978). Yet, the critique on the naive and non-reflexive nature of the research on Europe was also influenced by the search of the New Left and Western Marxists for more communitarian and less elitist forms of organization in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, then, the origins and evolution of consciousness, culture, and historical contextualization was taken further and the analytical focus of many historians and historical sociologists shifted “from the material to the linguistic and marked a turning away from the sociology of earlier social history toward greater association with anthropology” (Sunny 1481).

²²⁴ In Western Europe and the United States, memory, trauma, forgetting, and the role of the survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust became ever more crucial in several branches of academic research (history, philosophy, psychoanalysis). The cultural scene contributed enormously to making visible the atrocities of World War II. Ever more films and novels created a new consciousness for the destructions, violence, and barbarism of the war and the consequences for European civilisation.

1989.²²⁵ Jean Améry, Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, and Paul Celan are famous for the novels and poems they published as a result of their experience in the concentration camps and their search for a language putting these experiences into words. To them, the personal question of how to live on after such a traumatic experience is crucial.

While Kertész's work fits within the oeuvre created by Borowski, Celan, and Améry, it surpasses it as well. Kertész transcends the boundaries of Holocaust literature and clearly relates himself to the literary tradition in which the idea of Europe plays a crucial role. He does not only seek ways to become an individual (with a dignity and personality) again after Auschwitz, but also addresses the big questions or problems of life and the validity of European values after the Holocaust. In a conversation with Thomas Cooper, professor of American literature and comparative cultural studies, Kertész criticises the use of the term Holocaust novel when referring to his first novel *Fatelessness*:

I would never call *Fatelessness* a Holocaust novel because the Holocaust, or what people mean when they use that word, can't be put in a novel. I was writing about the camps, the experiences of the camps. I was born in 1929, so I was a child when I was

²²⁵ In communist Europe, the growing importance of memory, trauma, and forgetting and a political and academic interest in these issues can only be observed much later. Here, it gained special relevance after the collapse of communism, but politics of memory (and forgetting) is still a difficult issue. An informative article on the difficulties of memory and remembering the past, a crisis of collective memory, in the former communist societies has been written by Gil Eyal 'Identity and Trauma. Two Forms of the Will to Memory' pp. 5-36. Another article dealing with the problems of historical memory is: Jerzy Jedlicki's 'Historical memory as a source of conflicts in Eastern Europe' pp. 225-232. Finally, Lavinia Stan's article 'The vanishing truth? Politics and memory in post-communist Europe' published in the *East European Quarterly* 40:4 (December 2006), pp. 383-40 has to be mentioned. Besides, in 1994, the journal *Daedalus* (Vol. 123, No. 3: 'After Communism: What?') published a whole issue on what the collapse of communism meant to post-communist societies, in how far the heritage of the Enlightenment and reason next to questions of nationalism and national self-identity were playing a role in the newly developed political and scholarly narratives of the former Soviet states and what this ultimately would mean to (the idea of) Europe. Issues and questions posed in this issue are still relevant today and sometimes more problematic than they were in the 1990s. Economic problems, weak democratic traditions, rising insecurity, and communist nostalgia (Joakim Ekman and Jonas Linde, see chapter Bauman) are but a few of the possible explanations.

deported. I began working on *Fatelessness* in the 1960s, and it was partly the Communist system under Kádár that gave me the push to try to understand what I had lived through as a child. I wanted to write about the experiences of the camps, nothing but the events, but I was also interested in the specific way in which the individual is deprived of his or her fate in a dictatorship. This was an aspect of dictatorship that concerned me, and the Kádár regime was a dictatorship. Living in the Kádár regime helped me understand the workings of a dictatorship, and this in turn helped me understand my experiences in the camps.²²⁶

He seeks to reflect on the more general question of what Auschwitz means for Europe and European civilisation. To him, the biggest catastrophe of the twentieth century is the collapse of European culture.²²⁷ In his writings one finds a truly critical discussion and examination of Europe, its Christian, humanist and rational roots after World War II as well as reflections on the older literary traditions of Europeanness. Kertész is not a nihilist; he wants to bear witness to Auschwitz, not only for himself, as writer and individual, but also for others who still believe in truth. Moreover, “although Kertész is not a moralist and he never judges, his description of Nazism and Communism conveys the concept of a testimony, in a literary form with both aesthetic and strong ethical connotations.”²²⁸ He does not seek to point a moral finger. Instead, aesthetics becomes a form of ethics through striving for ideals in art. To him, art, the aesthetic and creating value of his work ensure his existence. His mission is to make the totalitarian past (Nazism and communism) an integral part of European memory. He is convinced that Europe should face the fact that European values are in crisis, that Europe lost its vitality, that decadence currently reigns, and the Europe depends mostly on the United States and its culture based on the individual directed by the market.²²⁹ He directs his books to a wider European public and indicates that

²²⁶ Kertész, Cooper ‘A conversation with Imre Kertész’ pp. 27/28

²²⁷ See: Kertész *Mentés másként* pp. 57/8

²²⁸ Molnár ‘Kertész’s Aesthetics of the Holocaust’ 165

²²⁹ See also: Kertész *Mentés másként* p. 135/6

Europeans have a duty to self-consciously, critically and thoughtfully keep alive and feel responsible for the heritage of the many European writers, thinkers, and artists who defended these values. Auschwitz can fertilise European consciousness:

If the Holocaust has created a culture for today – as undeniably it has happened and is happening – its literature is from here: It takes its inspiration from Holy Scriptures and the Greek tragedies, the two sources of European culture, so that an unredeemed reality can bring forth redemption, the spirit, the catharsis.²³⁰

What is more, explaining and living its own values is vital for European civilisation to survive. Kertész asserts that if a civilisation does not explain or clarify its values, it deteriorates. Other civilisations will take its place, using the same values as an excuse “for unlimited power and unending destruction.”²³¹ This essentially means that Europe needs to know its history. Citizens of Europe have to come to terms with their past, not only focusing on the good sides, but more importantly also on the bad. “In the time of an omnipresent, distressing, totalitarian history that deprives us of all hope, knowledge is the only honourable means of escape, knowledge is the only good.”²³² Only a critical and reflexive knowledge of Europe’s twentieth century history can make people conscious of the destruction and violence s/he is capable of, and secure its survival.

In his project, in sum, Kertész does not only seek to give meaning to his own past, but also to society and culture, which have lost their *raison d’être* and legitimacy during World War II. He takes up the cultural Enlightened and *bildungshumanist* tradition in writing about Europe and slowly unravels his own idea of Europe in light of the

²³⁰ Kertész, quoted in Molnár Basa ‘Imre Kerész and Hungarian Literature’ p. 21

²³¹ Kertész ‘Europe’s Oppressive Legacy’ p. xii. Hungarian original: ‘Európa nyomasztó öröksége’ p. 423

²³² Ibid. p. xi

destructive and life-altering events of the twentieth century. He defends the moral-existential responsibility of the person, who one can cultivate through *Bildung*. He charges European civilisation to recover its moral roots and simultaneously be critical of its own past, so it can legitimise its existence. In addition, Europe should strengthen the role of culture in its political considerations. In culture, in the culture of aesthetics, one can find ethics, the big European spirit and from there, one can build a different society based on ethics that secures personal freedom and existence of the individual as a subject and person who is able to cultivate himself and choose or create his morality. Yet, as s/he is no longer able to derive his orientation from God or any ideology, Auschwitz should serve as his/her guide.

Conclusion: A Self-Assured Europe that Unequivocally Stands for Its Values

Kertész's idea of Europe differs from the idea of Europe as it arose from the tradition of the Enlightenment and *Bildungshumanism*, yet takes up its 'good' parts. Kertész knows very well that it is impossible to unreflectively continue this *bildungshumanist* tradition. Hence, the way Kertész writes about his experiences is a strategy of survival, in the concrete situation of the camps as well as in the concrete experience of writing, of being a writer. In this way, he is able to describe the process of confirmation and acceptance of the truth of terror and make it known to the reader. Kertész's oeuvre searches not for *the* Truth, instead he searches for *his* truth. "And if

it is not *the* Truth? Then a mistake, but my mistake.”²³³ He emphasises the cultural heritage of the Enlightenment as Europe’s proprium, makes freedom and individuality personal values, for which s/he alone is responsible. Even regarding the value of democracy, by emphasising democracy as culture, Kertész bewares of formulating big theories, systems or universal (hi)stories. Absolute truths and all-encompassing ideologies have lost their legitimacy and significance during World War II. Kertész, therefore, never speaks of the ‘we’. Everything becomes personal. This personalism has its origins in a higher ethical and moral reality, which he can appoint to/denominate via aesthetics. Furthermore, aesthetics offers Kertész the possibility of transcendence of the ‘normal’/objective world. In his books, seen as aesthetical works, he can formulate his own reality: a reality past Auschwitz and past communism. And from there, he is able to bring about a moral society – without explicitly mentioning that. As a writer he only points out the way. That is, aesthetical values can be studied and learnt through *Bildung*, but this is always the responsibility of each individual – in this case of the readers of Kertész, not of the writer Kertész.

In a constructive manner, he seeks to make Europe’s twentieth century part of Europe’s history and future. In all its negativity, Auschwitz serves as the moral reservoir for European civilisation to re-establish European culture and is a constituting element for European values and identity in the 21st century. Kertész pleads for a strong and self-assured Europe that unequivocally stands for its own values.

We are, as I say, alone. Guided neither by heaven or earth, we must ourselves forge our own values, each day, every day, with an unstinting, if unseen, ethical endeavour

²³³ Kertész *Gályanapló* p. 42

that will in due course bring these values to the light of day and consecrate them as the new culture of Europe. When I think of the Europe of the future, I think of a strong, self-assured Europe, prepared always to talk but never to compromise.²³⁴

There is one condition, however: In order to rebuild European civilisation one has to be willing to admit that man can also create hell, a brutal reality, originating from violence and destruction. Europeans have to reflect on the past.²³⁵ There is no cure for Auschwitz. The task of European civilisation, Kertész repeats in various books, essays and interviews, is to use the trauma of European civilisation, to use Auschwitz in all its negativity as a moral reservoir to create new values.

²³⁴ Ibid. p. xii

²³⁵ See also: Kertész 'A boldogtalan 20. század' p. 112

Chapter IV

Universality, Democracy, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat Slavoj Žižek and the Idea of Europe

What we need is a retrieval-through-repetition (*Wieder-Holung*): through a critical confrontation with the entire European tradition, one should repeat the question ‘What is Europe?’ or rather, ‘What does it mean for us to be Europeans?’, and thus formulate a new inception.¹

Introduction:

There are few thinkers who reach the status of a pop star. Being referred to as the ‘Elvis of cultural theory’, Slavoj Žižek has stirred up academic debate in many fields.² He is a highly controversial thinker and probably impossible to grab in full. This is partly due to his enormous speed of publishing, but also to the wide range of topics on which he publishes. Entering the fields of film theory, cultural studies or politics, Žižek juggles with Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hegelian (and currently ever stronger Marxist) philosophy, and Schellingian theology. It has led to many volumes trying to introduce Žižek’s thought, only recently giving way to more critical analyses of his

¹ Žižek ‘The Turkish March’ p. 91

² See: Taylor’s documentary film *Žižek!* This quote can now be found in many journal and newspaper articles and reviews on Slavoj Žižek.

work.³ These books vary in content and emphasis on what is important in the Slovenian philosopher's thought. Many single out Lacan, Hegel, and Marx as guides of his work and organise their introductions accordingly;⁴ others focus on distinct aspects of Žižek's thinking, such as politics, cultural or social theory and materialist theology.⁵ Then, there are authors who even further differentiate this picture and deal with his positions on feminist thought, post-structuralism and postmodernism, multiculturalism, German idealism, and subjectivity. Finally, Elisabeth and Edmond Wright's *The Žižek Reader* (1999), as one of the first volumes seeking to offer an insight in his thought (by collecting parts of his books and a couple of essays), organise their collection of articles around the topics culture, woman and philosophy. These topics still can be typified as the main areas of his work, though one would probably add politics and theology.

Europe as a topic remains absent in all of these treatises on the philosopher, even though there are numerous articles and (journalistic) commentaries of his hand dealing with Europe, its politics, values, and future.⁶ Recently, a book was published in which the Croatian author and philosopher Srećko Horvat and Slavoj Žižek ask the question 'What Does Europe Want?' commenting on European democracy, the problems of capitalism, and the way the EU deals with the rising amount of people wanting to

³ See: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 16. Two edited volumes that gather a broad variety on critical articles of Žižek highlighting the different aspects of his work are: Boucher, Geoff, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (eds.). *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005; and Bowman, Paul and Richard Stamp (eds.). *The Truth of Žižek*. London: Continuum, 2007

⁴ See: Kay Žižek. *A Critical Introduction*; Myers Slavoj Žižek; Parker Slavoj Žižek. *A Critical Introduction*

⁵ See: Dean Žižek's *Politics*; Sharpe & Boucher *Žižek and Politics*; Kesel Žižek; Pound Žižek: *a (very) critical introduction*; Johnston Žižek's *Ontology*

⁶ See: Žižek 'A Leftist Plea for "Eurocentrism"' pp. 988-1009; Žižek 'Liberal multiculturalism masks an old barbarism with a human face'; Žižek 'Europe must move beyond mere tolerance'; Žižek 'Save us from the saviours' p. 13; Žižek 'What Europe's Elites Don't Know' pp. 38/9; Žižek 'Only a radicalised left can save Europe'

emigrate to Europe. Indeed, if not mentioned explicitly, Europe – its revolutionary heritage and the European Enlightenment values of freedom, democracy, individuality, and solidarity – always resonates in his books and articles. Yet, up to now, it does not appear as a subject of reflection in the many books and articles on and about his work. Contextualising his persona and ideas, treatises on and introductions to Žižek discuss his Slovenian background and early youth in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and with reference to Lacan, his years of study under Lacan's son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller in France.⁷ The European context and background of his thought, however, is either left implicit or not mentioned at all. Nevertheless, Žižek is a (continental) European thinker *par excellence*, combining his Central European intellectual background with his insights in and knowledge of contemporary Western European academic debates.⁸ In his early years, he came out of and was influenced by the thinking and acting of the *Praxis* group in Titoist Yugoslavia, which defended the Marxist humanist paradigm. Yet, from the early 1980s, he was part of and still maintains close links with the Lacanian School in Slovenia. This School has

⁷ Tony Myers's introduction to Žižek (2003) claims that instead of dealing with ideas as if they are “‘floating in space,’ (...) thinkers and their ideas [are] firmly [placed] back in their contexts” (p. viii). Hence, Myers stresses the question of identity as “one of the fundamental knots which binds Žižek's work together” (p. 6). He includes a first couple of pages on his biography, but does not or hardly relate to the historical and social context, let alone does he provide the reader with an extensive analysis of the intellectual circles to which he belonged in Slovenia and later in Western academia. When diving into Žižek's influences he names philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis, but restricts himself to the ideas of Hegel, Marx and Lacan. More close to including the historical and social context is Ian Parker (2004) in his critical introduction to Slavoj Žižek. He includes a first chapter on Yugoslavia (to Slovenia), seeking to provide a necessary background to where Žižek's ideas come from and how his thinking is shaped. Yet, he unfortunately omits the wider European context, rooting him in the Yugoslavian history as “a history of deadlocks and breaking points, relations of impossibility,” which guide the Slovenian philosopher's ideas and interpretation of other philosophers (Parker *Slavoj Žižek* p. 11). Žižek so remains a thinker from ‘the East’, answering the Western gaze upon Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Žižek himself.

⁸ Sharpe and Boucher (2010) focus on Žižek as a political philosopher, studying and explaining his political ideas and their development and relating them to their intellectual context. They show the influences of the respective thinkers (Hegel, Marx, Lacan, Schelling and others) on Žižek, but also of the intellectual circles in which he was and is at home; yet, they leave aside biography as a way to explain changes in thought.

left behind Marxist humanism and seeks to apply psychoanalytical insights to analyse and discuss politics.⁹ Next, he derives his inspiration from German philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Marx, Schelling, Heidegger, the Frankfurt School), French psychoanalysis (Lacan, Miller, Deleuze), and post-Marxist and radical philosophy (Badiou, Balibar, Mouffe, Rancière, Laclau), often inciting fierce debates with Anglo-Saxon thinkers (i.e. Butler, Crichtley). It is, therefore, high time to highlight the European aspect of Žižek's work as well as his intellectual background in European thought.

What is more, unlike Zygmunt Bauman and Imre Kertész, Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949) is not Jewish. He has no traumatic World War II experiences and is too young to have gone through painful experiences of 1968, when the intellectuals who had sided with communism and had hoped to develop a true Marxist (theoretical) utopia in the post-Stalinist era were disappointed by the violent end to the Prague Spring.¹⁰ There is no emotion reminiscent of the feelings of many humanist Marxists that everything is lost and all hopes, activities and desires to reform from within destroyed. This affects the way the Slovenian psychoanalyst and philosopher discusses themes such as democracy, freedom, and individuality in relation to Europe. He is and can be more radical than both Bauman and Kertész. He belongs to the generation that includes people like the Polish intellectual Adam Michnik and the Hungarian thinker János Kis who can be said to have been the jesters of the communist system and at the same time the priests of the developing second (civil) society.¹¹ Their ideas and

⁹ Thinkers belonging to the Slovenian Lacanian School are Mladen Dolar, Renata Salecl, Rado Riha, Jelica Šumič-Riha, Rastko Močnik, Alenka Zupančič and others.

¹⁰ In 2003, the Slovenian proudly stated that he watched the Soviet tanks roll into Prague while eating strawberry cake on a terrace See: Mead 'The Marx Brother' p. 39

¹¹ I owe the jester-priest comparison to the workshop *Approaches to Postmodernity from the East. The Generation of Zygmunt Bauman and Ágnes Heller* held by the Imre Kertész Kolleg in Jena, 20-22 October 2011. And it, of course, refers to an essay published by Leszek Kołakowski in 1959.

formulations of Europe, their rootedness in the context of Central Europe and their personal experiences make them prominent examples of a younger Central European generation that defends values like freedom, democracy, and universality. Getting actively involved in public life from the end of the 1970s, they did not wish to become part of the conventional political scene by opposing the political elite. Instead, they retreated to the cultural scene, seeking to find alternative ways to express their views while repudiating postmodern scepticism and relativism. It became a new playing field of politics (or ‘antipolitics’ as György Konrád called it) and it witnessed the development of a whole new narrative of truth, helping to change and ultimately put down the communist regime.

Žižek belonged to the radical democratic scene (that has its proponents in Western academia too – Laclau, Mouffe), in which the values of the Enlightenment and modernity, i.e. the autonomy or the notion of self-determination, freedom, and democracy, are crucial. This scene, representing a (humanist) Enlightened perspective on Europe fiercely criticising its rational and progressive elements, was optimistic about the possibility of building an ethical society, inspired by leftist, (post-)Marxist thought. Yet, as Sharpe and Boucher argue in their book *Žižek and Politics*, Žižek made an anti-humanist, anti-pluralistic, pessimistic turn around 1996/97.¹² Altering his position on the Enlightened, modernist thought regarding the idea of Europe at the dawn of the 21st century, he started advocating theologically grounded authoritarianism (Schelling, Carl Schmitt) and revolutionary violence as the new pillars of his political criticism – Sharpe and Boucher call it “ultra-Leftist political

¹² cf. Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 14, p. 165

vanguardism.”¹³ It signifies the beginning of a deeply polemical political theory, alienating many of his former colleagues and intellectual companions.

My approach towards and examination of Slavoj Žižek

This chapter will single out the way Slavoj Žižek – as a political philosopher, thus leaving aside much of his views and ideas on cultural theory – takes up the Enlightenment vision of Europe defending the values of freedom, individuality (the subject), and democracy, while also denouncing the Enlightenment’s rationalism and belief in technological and historical progress. It will focus on the different aspects that led to this final political vanguardist position when talking about Europe. That is, it seeks to avoid denotations (often used by the Slovenian himself) of “Žižek [as] the East-European, straight-talking outsider who can say things forbidden to other perspectives, and who can perceive the communalities between staid opponents in the oft-closed universe of Western academic theory.”¹⁴ Žižek transcends the Iron Curtain. He is Slovenian, Yugoslav, Central European and European. He grew up in Slovenia (as part of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and received his first university education there; yet, he was also shaped by pan-European academic debate (even before 1989). He is at home in the French intellectual discussions on democracy, freedom, individuality, and solidarity and no stranger to German idealism. Spending much time in the West having held university positions in France (before 1989) and the US (from the early 1990s onwards), the UK, Germany, and of course Slovenia, he knows (debates on) Europe from without *and* within. As a political

¹³ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 27

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 61

theorist, he is thus able to criticise both political systems (communism and capitalist liberal democracy) and come up with an alternative. Interesting, then, is the break in his thought. Whereas the modern Enlightened perspective on Europe – seen also in the previous chapters – dominates his ‘early’ thought, he now departs from a position that both Bauman and Kertész would typify as (too) close to the political thought and movements that led to the disasters and traumatic experiences of the twentieth century. How this happened and why Žižek made this intellectual turn, with special regard to his idea of Europe, is the subject matter of this chapter. In his work the 20th century is crucial, but he is also a man of the 21st century working on terror, religious fundamentalism, and the insecurities of a globalised world. In this chapter, I will discuss Žižek and his idea of Europe in relation to the European intellectual, historical, and biographical context and developments in which he formulated his idea. The claim is that his view on Europe and his position on the values of freedom, individuality, and democracy is best understood when life, social, intellectual, and historical context are related to a close analysis of his ideas.

Reception and Interpretation of his Work

Žižek’s fame and star began to rise in the very early 1990s when he published his first English-language book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). He was in his early forties and had been mostly walking a difficult, stony road building up his academic career. Besides the fact that his parents had rather seen him becoming an economist, the Slovenian authorities hampered his career in philosophy. As a student, he had started at a time of liberalisation, relative openness, and freedom. Yet, it was soon

followed by an “authoritarian turn” in the years 1971-72, when the reformist leaders of Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia were removed from office and a period of repression began.¹⁵ In 1973, Žižek’s master’s thesis was judged not to follow Marxist thought and ideology and as a consequence, he lost his (tenure track) university position. For several years, Žižek disappeared from the academic scene only to return with the help of the Heideggerian philosopher Ivan Urbančič, who was a known dissident and a non-Marxist thinker. In 1979, he then became a researcher at the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, where he remains until this day.

In 1980s Slovenia, the philosopher was part of the Lacanian School in Ljubljana. Working within this group of intellectuals, he did not stand out as an individual, nor was he perceived as such.¹⁶ The *Praxis* group, which had defended Marxist humanism, had been fully abolished by 1978, but was followed by an innovative and diverse intellectual scene encompassing New Left civil rights movements, nationalist groups, and Catholic intellectuals. Joining the Lacanians, Žižek became part of a radicalising, non-conformist, and young cultural scene, which was active in music, arts, and theatre and stirred up broader social debate.¹⁷ This scene had its own platforms to express its ideas, one of them being the weekly paper *Mladina* (Youth)

¹⁵ cf. Gow and Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 58

¹⁶ I thank my colleague and friend, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, for sharing with me his thorough knowledge of the Slovenian intellectual scene and offering me his help in analysing and neatly summarising early Slovenian discussions on and reception of Slavoj Žižek. Much of the reception in Slovenia as analysed here I owe to his insights and willingness to help with Slovenian sources.

¹⁷ cf. Luthar *The Land Between* p. 490. According to Carmichael and Gow, the cultural scene “produced an avant-garde and alternative dimension to the national culture” (Gow and Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 96). It became ever more radical.

for which Žižek regularly wrote columns.¹⁸ He and other members of the Lacanian School, being interested in Lacan, Derrida, Althusser, and Foucault, started publishing about and translating these authors in the more academic cultural monthly journal *Problemi* and established the book series *Analecta*.¹⁹ The Slovene ruling classes were rather critical of their work. And also today, their intellectual output meets resistance. According to Žižek, this is one of the reasons there is still no common departmental basis that would enable the members of the Lacanian School to coordinate their work and provide a concrete environment for discussions.²⁰ At present, the School still exists, takes part in public debate, and influences younger generations. Nevertheless, its influence has grown weaker. A more radical, Marxist generation that is involved with questions of economic theory has come to the fore.

The philosopher, who in January 1992 was declared to be one of the 30 most famous or prominent living Slovenes by Slovenia's largest daily newspaper *Delo* (Labour), is increasingly looked at with scepticism in his home country.²¹ Regarding his growing popularity abroad, people (also from the Lacanian School) deem him a too superficial populariser, who actually builds his fame on the theoretical output of what is not his

¹⁸ At the time, *Mladina* was the intellectual forum of the Socialist Youth Organisation of Slovenia, of which Žižek was a member.

¹⁹ See: Wright and Wright *The Žižek Reader* p. 1

²⁰ Ibid. p. 2

²¹ As *Mladina* writes, in 1991, the Slovenian ministry of science had even awarded Žižek the honorary title of Ambassador of science and a diplomatic passport. In the same article, however, in describing Žižek and reflecting on the various stages of his life, one can observe a certain distance towards the philosopher. See: Matos, Urša. 'Slavoj Žižek. Tisti poslednji marksist, ki je iz filozofije naredil pop in iz popa filozofijo.' ('Slavoj Žižek. The last Marxist, who made pop out of philosophy and philosophy out of pop'). *Mladina*, 42 (24.10.2004), URL: <http://www.mladina.si/96679/slavoj-zizek/>, last access: 30 September 2014. Also in *Delo*, writing in 2012, there is no longer any lyric admiration to be found, instead descriptions have become more disparaging. See: 'Žižek: genij ali Borat filozofije.' ('Žižek: Genius or Borat of Philosophy.') *Delo*, 11.06.2012. URL: <http://www.delo.si/druzba/panorama/zizek-genij-ali-borat-filozofije.html>, last access: 30 September 2014.

work alone.²² The urge and will to read him in Slovenia has slowly faded away. Consequently, his intellectual turn of the late 1990s goes hardly noticed. Žižek is present, works at the university, gives lectures to wider audiences, and time and again intervenes in the public sphere, but currently there are few attempts to engage in discussion with him.²³

This is very different in the Anglo-Saxon world.²⁴ Indeed, academic publications appeared with a certain time lag and can only be said to really start considering Žižek seriously from the early 2000s; yet, he became an important and dearly welcomed figure at public events and academic conferences much earlier. From the early 1990s,

²² In 2013, the leftist newspaper *Delo* actually backs the more conservative Catholic Slovenian philosopher Gorazd Kocijančič in his debate with Žižek (‘s theology), casting aspersions against the international fame of Žižek and (implicitly) asserting that Kocijančič is the better author of the two. See: Kolšek, Peter. ‘Kaj imamo od filozofov?’ (What do we get from philosophers?) *Delo*, 09.03.2013, URL: <http://www.delo.si/zgodbe/sobotnapriloga/kaj-imamo-od-filozofov.html>, last access 30 September 2014. Nonetheless, for those coming from outside Slovenia, Žižek is still among the famous Slovenes mentioned. See for example: the website of the ‘Centre for Slovene as a Second/Foreign Language.’ URL: <http://www.slovene.si/sl/slovenija/famous-slovenes.html>, last access: 29 September 2014. Providing some basic facts and history about Slovenia, a primary guide to Slovenia’s geography deems it worth mentioning Žižek as one of the famous Slovenes. See: Verdev *Raziskujem Slovenijo 9* (It explores Slovenia 9) p. 11

²³ One of the few people writing about and fiercely criticising Žižek is the Slovenian Catholic philosopher Gorazd Kocijančič. In 2004, he published an essay collection *Tistim zunaj* (To those Outside), also containing an essay on Žižek and his turn to Christianity, in which he ultimately claimed that Žižek’s fragile absolute would lead to totalitarian prometheanism. In the cultural magazine *Pogledi* (Views), published in 2010 and fully devoted to Žižek, Kocijančič is once again disapproving of the philosopher’s theology. In 2013, he will state in an interview that “Slovenian Lacanianism is not a philosophy, but a sect” and that “they have conquered virtually the entire academic sphere in the capital [Ljubljana], which is a unique phenomenon, unparalleled in any other serious academic community in the world” (Kocijančič, Gorazd and Boštjan Tadel. ‘Antikatolicizem je Slovenska Varianta Antisemitizma.’ (Anti-Catholicism, the Slovenian Variant of Anti-Semitism.’). *Pogledi*, 26.02.2013. URL: <http://www.pogledi.si/ljudje/antikatolicizem-je-slovenska-varianta-antisemitizma>, last access: 30 September 2014). Members of the Lacanian School, though, remain faithful to Žižek’s thinking. A more positive reading and debate on Žižek, for example, can be found in a book collecting the philosopher’s essays written in the 2000s. It is edited by Peter Klepec, one of the members (though less known) of the Lacanian School and taken up positively by the public. See: Klepec *Poskusiti znova – spodleteti bolje*. (Trying Again – Failing Better) Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2011

²⁴ Curious enough, this is contrary to the reception in France. One might expect that since Žižek has spent several years in France at the beginning of his career, published in French, has fierce debates with French thinkers and derives much of his inspiration from French radical political thought (Balibar, Badiou, Rancière), he would be a philosopher of public debate. Yet, he is not. It is only in the 2000s that he starts being perceived by a broader public, gives radio interviews and is the subject of newspaper articles as well as in political and philosophical magazines.

with his first English-language books gaining a wide audience, he was invited to various universities to teach and has held academic positions in the US, UK, France, Switzerland, and Germany. By now, four documentaries or films about Žižek have appeared and a magazine entitled *International Journal of Žižek Studies* is fully dedicated to interpretations and criticisms of his work.²⁵

Analysing the reception and interpretation of his work, it is necessary to distinguish three different basic strands: admiration by his followers, rejection by his adversaries, and the critical engagement with his work that started in the early 2000s. As an extremely controversial thinker Žižek has drawn bitter critique since he came to the international scene of the academic Left. He is the subject of many normative, judging and often non-serious or non-academic articles, accusing him of Stalinist or Maoist tendencies and of anti-Semitism, or in which people, instead of properly engaging with the content of his work, criticise only style and footnoting.²⁶ Others denounce his origins and consequently his works – written by a thinker from the East and thus a stranger to the ‘normal’ and just (Western) academic world – in patronising statements.²⁷ These confrontations often lack the will to earnestly address Žižek’s

²⁵ The films are titled: *Žižek!*, by Astra Taylor, which appeared in 2005, *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* (2006), by Sophie Fiennes, which features Žižek’s psychoanalytical theories and links them to film, followed by *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* in 2012, also by Sophie Fiennes. The other documentary film is *Alien, Marx & Co. Slavoj Žižek im Porträt* (2010), by Susan Chales de Beaulieu and Jean-Baptiste Farkas. There one finds interviews, contributions to conferences and more intimate conversations.

²⁶ See also: Sharpe & Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 16

²⁷ A dubious example is Robert Miklitsch’s article “‘Going through the fantasy’: Screening Slavoj Žižek’ published in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* in 1998, pp. 475-507. He is an American professor and specialist in film, media, and popular-cultural studies and clearly of the opinion that Žižek’s contributions to this field are not leading anywhere and part of the answer to why this is so, lies with his nationality and home country. Another article ‘Žižek and popular culture: Art for Lacan’s sake’, published in the *Journal of Advanced Composition* (2001), is somewhat less personal. Here, he mainly criticizes his form and his style analysing his Lacanian theory and reading of art (film), to which Miklitsch disagrees as to not being the way to understand popular culture and not respecting the “formal integrity of the work of art” (p. 612).

ideas and, thus, have not led to any fruitful discussions of their true meaning and value. Not surprisingly, the best (critical) articles on Žižek are to be found primarily on the academic Left. In the last 15 years, Žižek has had fierce debates with prominent thinkers in a variety of fields ranging from cultural studies and feminist studies²⁸ to film. Since I focus on Žižek's political philosophy, I will limit my discussion to this field. Here, left thinkers have used their own understanding of politics, Lacan, Marxism, ethics, and French radical philosophy, to offer a counterweight to the aphoristic and sometimes confusing, yet entertaining philosophical and political interventions of Slavoj Žižek.

These debates emerge both in collective projects with Žižek himself and in explicit distinction from the philosopher. In 2000, Žižek co-authored *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* with the Argentinean born political theorist Ernesto Laclau and the American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, in which the three thinkers discuss pressing political and philosophical issues and questions of the Left. They do not always agree and in the past few years, Žižek has further drifted away from their common departure points. Today, Žižek criticises Laclau and the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who in the 1990s were intellectual soul mates of the Slovenian philosopher.²⁹ They are radical democrats, but not radical leftists, who

²⁸ For the feminists (i.e. Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Teresa Ebert) the main issue is that of identity politics. They accuse Žižek of not paying enough attention to the needs and interests of specific identities or groups by adhering to orthodox Marxism. It is the economy and the question how it is organized that dominate Žižek's theories and this does not allow for debates on the position of various groups in that organization. In other words, according to the feminists, the issue of inequality and discrimination of groups (women) are not properly addressed by the Slovenian philosopher.

²⁹ In the early 1990s, Laclau and Mouffe's book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985) was imperative to Žižek and in those years, he would also work closely together with both thinkers.

according to the Slovenian are the only representatives of an authentic politics.³⁰ In his view, radical democracy carries the danger of staying within the conventions of (Western) academia – he blames its proponents for not parting radically enough with politically correct postmodern, multiculturalist and deconstructionist thinkers and theories and thus of becoming part of the liberal-democratic capitalist system. In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, Laclau, for his part, criticises Žižek for not offering a proper economico-political alternative.³¹

With this statement Laclau utters a rather common critique of Žižek's thought. For example, literary theorist and philosopher Sean Homer praises Žižek for his critique of ideology, but accuses him of lacking a view that provides his readers with the corner stones of a proper substitute.³² In a later article he argues that Žižek is not clear enough in formulating his own position and stance in orthodox Marxist politics, if it reflects orthodox Marxism at all.³³ This view is taken to the extreme by literary theorist Denise Gigante. In her article 'Toward a Notion of Critical Self-Creation' she accuses Žižek not only of not offering an alternative, but indeed of having no position at all. It is therefore impossible to properly argue with the Slovenian philosopher. She states: "But where Žižek is unique, and where he makes his radical break with other literary theorists who take up a position, any position at all that pretends to some notional content or critical truth, is in the fact that he fundamentally has no

³⁰ Žižek *Pleidooi voor Intolerantie* (Plea for Intolerance) p. 58

³¹ Laclau 'Constructing Universality' p. 289

³² See: Homer 'Psychoanalysis, representation, politics' pp. 97-109

³³ See: Homer 'It's the political economy, stupid!' p. 15. See also, more recently: Homer 'To Begin at the Beginning Again' pp. 708-727. Teresa Ebert calls Žižek's position on of "metacynicism": "a cynicism that protects itself from being known as cynical by theorizing the cynical" (Ebert 'Globalization, internationalism, and the class politics of cynical reason' p. 402).

position.”³⁴ In his defense, Tony Myers argues that Žižek’s focus on the true political act “as the only authentic way to change the world,” the outcomes of which are unclear however, inherently means that he is “less concerned to articulate what is impossible to articulate than he is to maintain the possibility of there being an act at all.”³⁵ And being aware of this critique, Žižek replies that in politics instead of refusing to take sides, he very well takes positions: “for the Morales-Linera government in Bolivia, for the Naxalite rebellion and the dalit movement in India, for the Green Revolution in Iran, for Syriza in Greece.”³⁶ Yet, Žižek’s theory on the political act as the possibility of a fundamental choice that has no content³⁷ remains open to critiques of pragmatism and not defending a proper political choice. Concrete examples of political movements Žižek supports cannot resolve all doubt – especially since they ultimately differ so much in origin, outcome, and aim.

The English philosopher Peter Dews voices a different, much heard form of critique by fundamentally questioning Žižek’s Lacanian and Hegelian theoretical departure points. To Dews, Žižek cannot be said to be a properly Lacanian psychoanalyst nor can he be said to be a Hegelian philosopher. His reading of both thinkers is a distorted one, using them to advance his own political project. “Žižek views the modern individual as caught in the dichotomy between his or her universal status as a member of civil society, and the particularistic attachments of ethnicity, nation and tradition, and this duality is reflected in his own ambiguous political profile – *marxisant* cultural critic on the international stage, member of a neo-liberal and nationalistically inclined

³⁴ Gigante ‘Toward a Notion of Critical Self-Creation’ p. 153. See also: Butler *Slavoj Žižek* p. 123

³⁵ Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 122

³⁶ Žižek ‘Reply’ p. 772

³⁷ cf. Homer ‘To Begin at the Beginning Again’ p. 715

governing party back home.”³⁸ Yet, it is very difficult to claim Žižek being a neo-liberal nationalist. As we will see, setting up and becoming part of the Lacanian School in Ljubljana was a move directed against (right-wing) national groups as well as the ideology of the communist government. Moreover, on the level of Žižek’s engagement in politics, the founding of the Slovenian Liberal Democratic Party of which he is a member was an outcome of the presence of and political and intellectual opposition to these political directions in Slovenian society. As a matter of fact, at present, there is hardly any political group that has more problems with Žižek than the nationalists in Slovenia.³⁹ Nevertheless, reading Žižek one is indeed confronted with a very specific interpretation of Lacan and Hegel and also of Marx and Schelling.⁴⁰ Some critics have already prognosed that due to Žižek’s popularity his interpretation particularly of Lacan will heavily shape any future work on the psychoanalyst as well as the other philosophers. It is crucial, therefore, to be aware of the specificities of Žižek’s work.⁴¹

In addition to direct interventions of critique or confirmation, several introductions into Žižek’s thought have been published since the late 1990s. With *The Žižek Reader* (1999), Elizabeth and Edmond Wright were among the first aiming to present the range of the work of the Slovenian philosopher. Sarah Kay’s *Žižek. A Critical Introduction* of 2003, furthermore, was the first to examine and evaluate all of his publications up to then, singling out important themes and premises. Yet, both books came into existence in close cooperation with Žižek himself. They, therefore, are a

³⁸ See: Dews ‘The tremor of reflection’ p. 26

³⁹ See also: Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 121

⁴⁰ See: Horwitz ‘Contra the Slovenians’ p. 25

⁴¹ See: Gunkel ‘Žižek and the Real Hegel’ pp. 20/1; Parker *Slavoj Žižek*, chapter 5 ‘Culture – Acting Out’ pp. 105-127

good read, but may be less critical than one would expect if the subject of research would not be involved personally. With the publication of volumes of Marc de Kesel, who is a Belgian philosopher and critical admirer of Žižek, Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, Jodi Dean, Ian Parker, and Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, a new crop of acknowledging, yet critical books and introductions on Žižek has seen the light of day in the last decade. These introductions are valuable contributions to the study the Slovenian philosopher, yet – and that is a problem of almost all English-language literature on Žižek – the analysis of his work always starts with his first publication in English in 1989. This means the Slovenian publications of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time that was crucial in shaping Žižek's thought, is usually left out or only touched upon. Yet, for a better understanding of where he comes from publishing his first English-language book and the why of his intellectual turn in 1996/97 (and the direction it takes) one has to include the writings of these decades.

Nevertheless, two of these works try to transcend these limits and therefore merit special attention. Ian Parker's *Slavoj Žižek. A Critical Introduction* (2004) is compelling for his approach of Žižek, since he is one of the few that seek to include and consciously reflect upon the context the Slovenian philosopher is coming from. Accordingly, he describes the specificities of Yugoslavian and later Slovenian history and society as being decisive in shaping Žižek's mind and interest in Hegel, Lacan, and Marx. Consequently, he marks out the fields of Enlightenment (Hegel), Psychoanalysis (Lacan), and Politics (Marx) as the main areas to understand Žižek. His appreciation of the Slovenian philosopher is one that promises some valuable insights to my research. Yet, while Parker specifically presents Žižek as a thinker

from Eastern Europe (which he positively assesses), I aim at placing the Slovenian philosopher in a wider Central European *and* European context.

The second introduction to be picked out is Sharpe and Boucher's *Žižek and Politics. A Critical Introduction* (2010). It competently explains the link between Žižek's psychoanalytic theories and political thinking. They praise him for bringing back in the subject as an actor in the political field, for his defence of the Enlightenment and its values, and for his new theory of democracy. Yet, they criticise the later, post-1996/97 Žižek, whose turn to political theology and advocacy of 'good' violence they do not buy. Boucher and Sharpe, actually, are the first to explicitly proclaim a break in his thought around that time, though they admit that there are elements of 'both' Žižek's in the period before and after 1996/97. Nevertheless, in my view, they have a strong case in highlighting this break and in the further argument of this chapter I will return to their observations more extensively.

Methodology: Political Philosophy, Hermeneutics and Biographical Research

This chapter is neither about Žižek's interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, nor will it engage in philosophical discussions about the correctness of his reading of the German Idealists.⁴² It aims at staying away from such debates and disciplinary focus and regards psychoanalysis and German idealism as tools that help Žižek formulate

⁴² See the article 'Die Wüste des Realen' by Sigrun Bielfeldt, published in 2004 in *Studies in East European Thought*, for a prompt and critical analysis of Žižek's dealing with German Idealism. Peter Dews's 'The Tremor of Reflection' provides a thorough analysis of the problematic sides of Žižek's reading and interpretation of both Lacan and Hegel.

his political philosophy.⁴³ As a political philosopher, Žižek takes up a normative position and is concerned with questions of how to organise good social life, reacting on acute political issues. He emphasises questions of ethics (applied to the social sphere), human nature, and the ideal society.⁴⁴ He believes in the changeability of society. Moreover, in his analysis of issues like freedom, democracy, the subject, economy, nationality, gender, and violence, he criticises the existing liberal-capitalist situation. He deals with multiculturalist, feminist, environmentalist, and postmodern political alternatives in their opposition to currently existing capitalist liberalism, criticises them, and consequently aims at justifying his alternative. His alternative, however, has not been static. He, at first, defended radical democracy and then switched to a certain form of political theology.

By studying Slavoj Žižek as a political philosopher, seeking to understand his change of view, and questioning the viability, validity, and desirability of his position, I use an interdisciplinary approach linking biography, historical, social and intellectual context, and ideas. The chapter will draw on insights from biographical research, political philosophy and anthropology, and a hermeneutic approach to text. It applies a history of ideas approach in which not only an analysis of text, but also of context is imperative to understand the ideas and meaning of the examined author and texts. Yet, breaks in thought do not appear out of the blue. I expect to gain a crucial insight in Žižek's political idea of Europe in examining his life history: Europe as a lived

⁴³ For a neat introduction in the different directions of contemporary political philosophy, see: Goodin, Pettit, Pogge. *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (2007). The introduction to the companion (pp. xvi-xx) offers a brief, but elegant definition of political philosophy and what is its concern. "Primarily, it is a concern to identify the sorts of political institutions that we should have, at least given the background sort of culture or society that we enjoy. (...) Political philosophy (...) is not just interested in the routines that govern politics but also in the various systems which politics may be used to shape" (pp. xvii).

⁴⁴ See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 17-20

experience. In the above, I have already referred to the various identities of the philosopher, his growing up in a communist federal state, and his activities in democratising Slovenia. After 1989, he is able to get a thorough knowledge of the capitalist and liberal democratic West by working and living there. He is part of the Slovenian, French, and Anglo-Saxon intellectual scene and draws on the theories of German philosophers. The claim is that these experiences and social and intellectual background have had a key impact on Žižek's idea of Europe, which cannot fully be understood when only examining his thought. Hence, the organisation of this chapter: (1) a biographical description of the interrelationship between work and life; (2) an analysis of the values freedom, individuality, and democracy as constitutive ideas of Europe; and finally (3), his idea of Europe, linking part one and two.

IV.I Bête Noire or Idol of Political Philosophy?: Life and Work of Slavoj Žižek

Film, Philosophy, Lacan and Life under Communism

Born in 1949 in Ljubljana into a middle class family, Slavoj Žižek grew up in Portorož, a small Slovenian town at the Adriatic coast and in Ljubljana, which then was the capital of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and now is the capital of an independent Central European state. After World War II, Slovenia had been one of the founding members of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, which would soon become the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Žižek thus grew up in an officially Marxist-

Leninist state. Yet, personal and economic freedom and liberties were greater in Yugoslavia than in other communist countries, due to an early split between Stalin and the Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito, who had become head of the new Yugoslavia in 1944.

After World War II, Yugoslavia had a unique position. Whereas the Red Army freed most of the Central and Eastern European countries from German occupation, Tito and his Partisans set the Yugoslav lands free themselves. Tito, consequently, could lay down his own conditions for working with the Soviets. One of the agreements between Stalin and Tito was that the Red Army would not enter Yugoslavia. In addition, due to Tito's independence and his popularity in Yugoslavia, Stalin had little influence on the political course of the state. Yet, at first, Tito pursued a vigorous socialist programme of reforms that was closely related to the policies of the USSR and brought Yugoslavia under communist rule.⁴⁵ The agriculture was collectivised, the state industrialised, class enemies were purged, and all diversity or plurality was banned. Religious institutions came under attack. Many clerics and Catholic thinkers were forced abroad. In the subsequent years, they would function as an oppositional voice from abroad before returning to the political scene in the 1990s. However, in 1948, the cooperation between Stalin and Tito ended and Yugoslavia no longer aligned itself to the USSR. The agricultural collectivisation was abandoned, the economic sphere decentralised and politics were liberalised.⁴⁶ Citizens were allowed to travel freely in the West and living standards were considerably higher than in the

⁴⁵ See also: Luthar e.a. *The Land Between* pp. 443-446/p. 450. In Slovenia, class enemies and the clerical or Church opposition, who in the interwar period were the main advocates of the liberal-democratic and Christian European idea, were executed in show trials in the first year after World War II. Others emigrated, leaving behind a society that was mostly supportive of Tito and socialism.

⁴⁶ cf. Gow & Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* pp. 54/5

rest of the countries of the Eastern bloc. Intellectuals, scholars, and even politicians enjoyed more freedom than their counterparts in the other Central European countries.

Nonetheless, long after Belgrade's breakaway from Moscow, the communists – supported by many intellectuals – still rejected everything Western, German or Central European. This stance is known as Yugoslav non-alignment. Instead of trying to define Yugoslavia's belonging to one side or another, “the idea of Yugoslavia as a mediator between East and West” became “a model for a unique supranational unified culture,” which had its own place in a world that was divided in East and West.⁴⁷ Inside Yugoslavia, the ‘brotherhood and unity’ formula aimed at transcending the national division inside the federal state and dominated the cultural, ideological, and political scene.⁴⁸ A new form of Yugoslavism, of supranational culture was invented and enthusiastically supported by the Yugoslav realist as well as modernist writers.⁴⁹

From his early youth, Žižek despised this cultural and intellectual development. Slovenian literature and poetry as well as film “was, for him, contaminated by either the ideology of the Communist Party or right-wing nationalism,”⁵⁰ the latter of which he disdained for its fascist-inspired and conservative traits. That he was no supporter of the communist ideology led to much tension with his parents who initially were devout communists. Over the years, however, they too grew increasingly disenchanted with the system and its ideology.⁵¹ Being an economist and accountant, his parents had hoped he would become an economist as well and follow in their footsteps. Yet,

⁴⁷ Wachtel *Making a Nation* p. 142

⁴⁸ A more extensive description of the ‘brotherhood and unity’ formula – its problems, aims, and impact on society – can be found in: Wachtel *Making a Nation*, chapter 3.

⁴⁹ See: Wachtel *Making a Nation* p. 148

⁵⁰ Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 7

⁵¹ cf. Boynton ‘Enjoy your Žižek!’

Žižek had other plans. Reading English literature and getting acquainted with European and American film in his early youth, he developed the wish to become a film director.⁵² Soon recognising, however, that his talents probably lay elsewhere, he enrolled as a student to study philosophy and sociology in the late 1960s, where he was introduced to the thinking of the Frankfurt School, German Idealism and to Martin Heidegger, but also to French structuralism and post-structuralism reading authors like “Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Gilles Deleuze.”⁵³ Žižek did not support the communist conventional thought or communist orthodoxy. He read widely in various languages and ultimately specialised himself in French thought, notably the theories of Lacan, but also Derrida, Althusser and Foucault.⁵⁴ These works had little to do with the approved Marxist theory, nor did they live up to the standards of Yugoslav non-alignment.

In the years 1971/72, during – what could be called – the ‘authoritarian turn’, the reformist leaderships of Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia were removed from office and a period of ideological repression began.⁵⁵ In the mid 1970s, many university professors lost their jobs and various journalists and intellectuals were imprisoned. Others were included on ‘blacklists’ for being ideologically suspicious. Žižek’s interest in French thought and his focus on psychoanalysis was not without consequences.⁵⁶ After finishing university, having obtained his Master’s degree with his thesis entitled “The Theoretical and Practical Relevance of French Structuralism,” a commission

⁵² According to the law, film companies had to send a copy of every film they wished to distribute to all local universities, which consequently held a huge archive open to all students. See: Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 7

⁵³ Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 7

⁵⁴ cf. Wright & Wright *The Žižek Reader* p. 1

⁵⁵ cf. Gow & Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 58

⁵⁶ Psychoanalysis was mainly concerned with the self and the individual mind, which from a socialist-collectivist perspective is very problematic.

evaluating his thesis concluded that it was deviating too much from Marxist thought.⁵⁷

An initially promised university job was no longer open to him and he experienced problems finding a job.⁵⁸ To make himself and his family (he was married to a fellow graduate student in philosophy and had a son) a living, he translated German philosophy into Slovenian and had to ask his parents for support.

In 1977, he gave in to the pressure of having no job and very little money and joined the Communist Party.⁵⁹ He, first, served as a clerk at the Marxist Centre of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia, mainly dealing with administrative issues and writing speeches. Here, he met the philosopher and cultural theorist Mladen Dolar (b. 1951) and sociologist and literary theorist Rastko Močnik (b. 1944), who together with Žižek would become the founding members of the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis in Ljubljana or the Ljubljana Lacanian School.⁶⁰ With help of the dissident, non-Marxist philosopher Ivan Urbančič, who was a specialist in phenomenology and Heidegger, he then became a researcher at the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana two years later.⁶¹ This institute functioned as part of the Faculty of Arts and served as a refuge for people involved in alternative and independent projects. It sheltered intellectuals in conflict with the political establishment and opened up the possibility for Žižek to

⁵⁷ See also: Boynton 'Enjoy your Žižek!'

⁵⁸ This was rather unusual, as officially there was no unemployment in the Communist states. Hence, not having a job meant that you were either a hopelessly 'anti-social element' (severe drunkard, reckless drug addict, etc.), or you were being punished for political reasons.

⁵⁹ See also: *Notable Biographies :: Encyclopedia of World Biography Supplement :: Supplement (Sp-Z)* – Slavoj Žižek Biography. URL: <http://www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Sp-Z/Zizek-Slavoj.html>, 28 April 2009

⁶⁰ See also: *Slavoj Žižek Biography*, URL: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/biography/>

⁶¹ Whereas the *Praxis* group was more or less tolerated by the communist leadership during the 1960s and early 1970s (forms of rigid dialectical materialism did hardly exist in Yugoslavia), the Heideggerians and phenomenologists were the dissidents in Yugoslav society. Following Heidegger's search for ontological Truth and a more "genuine community", they sought to develop a "positive, ontic political system" reflecting or representing this truth (Parker *Slavoj Žižek* pp. 50/1).

start publishing on Hegel and Marx from a Lacanian, psychoanalytical perspective. In 1981, he became a Doctor of Arts in philosophy with a dissertation on German Idealism.⁶²

Over the years, the Communists slowly lost their grip on society, especially after two main political characters died: Kardelj in 1979 and Tito in 1980. A period of political relaxation set in. The Slovenian authorities had already tried to alleviate some of the tensions between the political leadership and intellectuals in the previous years by introducing more liberal rules regarding publishing.⁶³ Books, journals, and newspapers were full of controversial issues. In the following years, various political and civil society movements opposing the Communist state grew stronger, among them New Left civil rights movements, nationalist groups and Catholic intellectuals.⁶⁴ The Ljubljana Lacanian School slowly established itself, using the journal *Problemi* – one of the crucial journals in the 1980s and early 1990s shaping intellectual debate in Slovenia – and sometimes the left-wing weekly *Mladina* as their platform, later also setting up the book series *Analecta*. Dolar, Močnik, and Žižek were joined by the younger philosophers and theoreticians Renata Salecl (Žižek’s second wife to be), Jelica Šumič-Riha, Rado Riha, Eva Bahovec, Miran Božovič, Alenka Zupančič and others. They distanced themselves from the older *Praxis* group, as, to a certain extent, the *Praxis* criticism of the system, their ‘humanist’ version of Marxism, had become “supportive of the dominant ideology of the Yugoslavian regime, namely the representation of the Yugoslav social and economic system as a form of ‘self-

⁶² cf. Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 8

⁶³ cf. Luthar *The Land Between* p. 473

⁶⁴ cf. Wright & Wright *The Žižek Reader* p. 2

managing socialism’.”⁶⁵ Contrary to the *Praxis* group, the Ljubljana Lacanian School did not subscribe to Marxist Humanism. Instead, they propagated an anti-humanism advanced by the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Rather than human agency they emphasised the importance of social practices and structure when reinterpreting Marx: they developed “a materialistic theory of ideology.”⁶⁶ In addition, they turned to German Idealism (Hegel, Fichte, Schelling) and an anti-historicist reading of Hegel, emphasising his epistemology and dialectic philosophy.⁶⁷ Opposing the Frankfurt School, Heideggerian hermeneutics and the diverse directions of French poststructuralism, they came up with a new reading and use of Lacan (whom they considered a structuralist thinker) and his theories.⁶⁸ Their aim was not only to read anew the classic philosophical texts, but also to develop a whole new ‘anti-political’ political narrative through an “ideological analysis of high and popular art in the culture of late socialism and postsocialism.”⁶⁹ Lacan offered an opportunity to approach the ideological-political field from a totally different angle.⁷⁰ Using his

⁶⁵ Dews ‘The tremor of reflection’ p. 17

⁶⁶ Djurić and Šuvaković *Impossible Histories* p. xv

⁶⁷ Žižek’s first books on Hegel were published in Slovenia in the early 1980s and were important contributions to the workings and influence of the Ljubljana Lacanian School: *Hegel and the Signifier* (Slovenian: *Hegel in označevalec*) in 1980 and *Hegel and the Object* (Slovenian: *Hegel in objekt*) in 1985. The latter was co-authored by Mladen Dolar and it grounded in lectures given by the two philosophers, in which they advocate an anti-historicist reading of Hegel and clearly link him to politics. In 1988, then, just before publishing his first English-language book, Žižek’s *Le plus sublime des hystériques – Hegel passe* appeared in French.

⁶⁸ cf. Žižek *Gestalten der Autorität* p. 7. In their philosophical and political use of Lacan and his theories, the Ljubljana Lacanian School is unique. It differs decidedly from French readings of Lacan, where he is mainly used in a clinical context and psychoanalytic practice. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, Lacan mostly influenced research in literature, cinema and feminism and is hardly applied to any other context. See: Laclau’s preface to *The Sublime Object of Ideology* by Slavoj Žižek, pp. ix/x.

⁶⁹ Djurić and Šuvaković *Impossible Histories* p. xv. Following Žižek, they worked on: “(1) Lacanian readings of classical and modern philosophy (particularly the German Idealists); (2) endeavours to elaborate Lacanian theories of ideology and power; (3) Lacanian analyses of culture and art (especially the cinema)” (Wright & Wright *The Žižek Reader* p. 1).

⁷⁰ Instead of being an emancipatory movement, Lacan’s theories created the space for an “extreme form of alienation, a totally non-transparent system that nobody, including those in the power structure, could comprehend” (Dews and Osborne ‘Lacan in Slovenia’ p. 26). Through the implementation of self-management, aiming at “total disalienation or pure transparency” and adopting innumerable laws

vocabulary and theories, the Ljubljana Lacanian School approached questions of ideology and its mechanisms, specific traits and forms of ‘totalitarianism’, and the various shapes of the quest for radical democracy and how it should look like in Central and Eastern Europe.⁷¹ In his preface to Žižek’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Ernesto Laclau who in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a close intellectual companion, put it as follows:

The Lacanian notion of the *point de capiton* is conceived as the fundamental ideological operation, ‘fantasy’ becomes an imaginary scenario concealing the fundamental split or ‘antagonism’ around which the social field is structured; ‘identification’ is seen as the process through which the ideological field is constituted; enjoyment, or *jouissance* enables us to understand the logic of exclusion operating in discourses such as racism.⁷²

The Ljubljana Lacanian School, thus, sought for an alternative way of societal critique, not only opposing the dominant system and ideology, but also the other dissident movements present in Slovenia at the time: the *Praxis* group and the Heideggerian dissidents.⁷³

In Slovenia since the beginning of the 1970s the big conflict, the big philosophical struggle, was between some kind of Western Marxism, which was more or less official philosophy, and Heideggerianism and phenomenology as the main form of philosophical dissidence. This was the struggle. And then we, the younger generation,

to communicate the message of Marxism with a human face, the Communist Party bureaucracy had over time managed to take in or adapt to all kinds of criticisms and remain in power (Dews and Osborne ‘Lacan in Slovenia’ p. 26). Criticising the system had to take place in a field that was not theirs.

⁷¹ See: Laclau ‘Preface’ pp. x/xi. These themes can be found in the later English-language publications, but are important themes and contributions to the public discourse at the time. Žižek’s most important Slovenian book taking up the subject of ‘totalitarianism’, that is, of opposing fascism and Stalinism and closely analysing Stalinist discourse, appeared in 1982, entitled *History and the Unconscious* (Slovenian: *Zgodovina in nezavedno*). In the same year, Mladen Dolar published *The Structure of Fascist Domination* (Slovenian: *Struktura fašističnega gospostva. marksistične analize fašizma in problemi teorije ideologije*), examining fascism and the problems of the theory of ideology from a Marxist perspective. Both philosophers were sitting on top of the ‘hot issues’ at the time and remain doing so.

⁷² Laclau ‘Preface’ p. xi

⁷³ See: Parker Slavoj Žižek p. 50

precisely as a third option – to be a dissident but not a Heideggerian – we were a reaction to both of these.⁷⁴

In the choice of setting up and being part of the Ljubljana Lacanian School one can clearly observe Žižek's rejection of both communism and nationalism: The *Praxis* group was too close to the philosophy of the ruling communist elite and the Heideggerian dissidents were too nationalistic. The controversy between the Heideggerian dissidents and the Ljubljana Lacanian School can best be illustrated with the development of the academic journal *Problemi*. Alongside the Lacanians, Heideggerians were first publishing in *Problemi*, but then demanded (and were granted) their own journal *Nova revija* because of fundamental ideological differences. In *Nova revija* the older, more conservative, non-Marxist, Heideggerian cultural elite and Catholic intellectuals published and criticised the socialist system in a political way.⁷⁵ For the *Nova revija* group “political democratization in Slovenia would be inseparably linked to the solution of the Slovenian ‘national question’ – that is, to a redefinition of the position of Slovenia in the Yugoslav federal state and in a changing Europe.”⁷⁶ Market economy, parliamentary democracy and national

⁷⁴ Dews and Osborne ‘Lacan in Slovenia’ p. 25. See also Žižek in: Dews and Osborne ‘Lacan in Slovenia’ p. 26: “What you need to understand, to understand the philosophical background to the different dissidences, is that the split which is now [1991, M.E.] becoming visible in, for example, Poland, between the populist right-wing nationalism of Walesa and the market liberalism of Michnik – this split was present from the very beginning in Slovenia. The opposition movement in Slovenia has two quite distinct origins. On the one hand, you have a nationalist intelligentsia, nationalist poets writing about national roots, etc. Their philosophical reference is Heidegger. On the other hand, you have the remnants of an old New Left connected to new social movements – peace, human rights movements etc., – and, extremely important, a punk movement. (...) It is precisely through punk that the pluralist opposition reached the masses. It was a kind of political mass education, and we supported it.”

⁷⁵ Active in this group were the philosopher Ivan Urbančič (b. 1930), jurist and later politician France Bučar (b. 1923), philosopher and one of the key initiators of *Nova revija* Tine Hribar (b. 1941), author, philosopher and sociologist Spomenka Hirbar (b. 1941), the author Drago Jančar (b. 1948), poet Niko Grafenauer (b. 1940), poet and writer Jože Snoj (b. 1934), teacher and political activist Milan Apih (1906-1992), and literary historian and critic Taras Kermauner (1930-2008). See also: Chapter I, p. 110

⁷⁶ Bernik ‘From Imaged to Actually Existing Democracy’ p. 109

autonomy belonged to their themes as well as Europe. For them, Slovenian independence would open up the road to Europe.⁷⁷ In the *Nova revija* magazine, a manifesto titled ‘Contributions to the Slovenian National Programme’ was published, in which various intellectuals insisted on the creation of a democratic and sovereign Slovenian nation.⁷⁸ Next to various analyses of the state in which Slovenian politics and its economy found itself, they argued that without national independence there could not be any democracy and in the end, no Slovenia. Slovenia, thus, had to give up the Yugoslavian principle of non-alignment, breaking with the federal state and returning to Europe.⁷⁹ To them, Europe provided the new ground in which the country could flourish. And as a result, they did not only proclaim a return to Europe, but also rediscovered their neighbours and the Central European or Alpe-Adria discourses of earlier periods. Though not necessarily agreeing to the nationalist aspirations of the *Nova revija* group, the Slovene Writers’ Association and the Coordination of New Civil Movements proclaimed similar views in 1987, requiring constitutional changes: “greater independence for the republics (confederation), liberalization of private economic activities, abolition of the SKJ’s [League of Communists in Slovenia] monopoly position, and the introduction of political pluralism.”⁸⁰

To Žižek, “the Yugoslav Heideggerians were doing exactly the same thing with respect to the Yugoslav ideology of self-management as Heidegger himself did with respect to Nazism.”⁸¹ Consequently, to Žižek and other member of the Ljubljana

⁷⁷ cf. Bernik ‘Slovenia’ p. 88

⁷⁸ *Nova Revija*, Issue 57 (January 1987). There were sixteen articles in total. Important contributors were Tine and Spomenka Hribar, Ivan Urbančič, Gregor Tomc, France Bučar, Drago Jančar and Niko Grafenauer.

⁷⁹ cf. Bernik ‘Slovenia’ p. 88

⁸⁰ Luthar *The Land Between* p. 497

⁸¹ Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 8

Lacanian School, the Heideggerians, similar to the *Praxis* group, were no credible opposition to the existing system. They were part of the conventional political narrative, which carried the danger of being absorbed by the system. The younger academic and cultural generation, to which the Ljubljana Lacanian School belonged, advocated different issues and collectively conceived themselves as guardians of “an independent civil society.”⁸² They were the New Left and showed close affinity with the ‘antipolitical’ groups developing in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.⁸³ They sought to create a public space in which everyone could develop, express, and discuss his/her ideas freely.⁸⁴ The New Left developed into an important oppositional group trying to distance itself from the regime, as did youth, punk, peace, feminist, and ecological movements.⁸⁵ Through his activities in the Ljubljana Lacanian School, Žižek promoted civil society ideas and combined them with a Lacanian vocabulary.⁸⁶

Ultimately, it was the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (*Obdor za varstvo človekovih pravic*), one of the biggest civil society groups in the country,⁸⁷ that managed to attract wide support and in which Slavoj Žižek, becoming ever more attracted to politics, was also active.⁸⁸ It was founded in 1988 and for the first time

⁸² Skilling *Samizdat and an Independent Society* p. 200. There have been regular contacts between Polish Solidarity activists and Slovenian dissidents and due to their relative freedom could “offer help, for example as couriers between the oppositions in Poland and the GDR” (Kenney ‘The Habsburg Empire (Re)Disintegrates’ p. 334).

⁸³ The term ‘antipolitics’ was coined by the Hungarian dissident intellectual and writer György Konrád. See: Chapter I, p. 93

⁸⁴ See also: Bernik ‘From Imaged to Actually Existing Democracy’ p. 109

⁸⁵ cf. Bernik ‘Slovenia’ 76; See also: Lusa *La Dissoluzione Del Potere* pp. 177-182

⁸⁶ cf. Gow & Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 93

⁸⁷ It grew out of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Janez Janša, which was established after the arrest and trial of three journalists of the critical weekly, *Mladina*. During the trial the committee insisted on the trial to be public, the accused being defended by a civilian lawyer and instead of the Serbo-Croatian, they demanded that Slovene would be the language for the trial to be used. See also: Luthar *The Land Between* pp. 494-496

⁸⁸ An interesting example of the views expressed by the Ljubljana Lacanian School can be found in a small German booklet, edited by Slavoj Žižek. It is entitled *Gestalten der Autorität* (Forms of

was able to coordinate “activities of different oppositional groups,” increasing the pressure on the ruling elite and entering political debate.⁸⁹ It organised many protests and discussions asking for improvement of the human rights situation, rule of law and the introduction of European democratic values and principles, so continuously forcing the regime to listen to its demands.⁹⁰ The 32 collegium members came from the New Left (including Žižek) as well as the *Nova revija* group. Not only questions of personal or cultural freedom, or of independent economic entrepreneurship were on the opposition’s agenda, but other issues like national sovereignty, administrative independence, human rights, and rule of law became central topics as well. Through their demands they slowly initiated a process of democratisation in the country from 1988 onwards.

In the years between, Žižek had off and on lived in Paris, where in 1985 he earned a second doctorate: this time in psychoanalysis. Spending a year in Paris in 1981, he had met Lacan; when he died later that year, Žižek studied with Lacan’s successor and son in law Jacques-Alain Miller. Together with Mladen Dolar he had been invited to an “exclusive thirty-student seminar at the École de la Cause Freudienne in which [Miller] examined the works of Lacan on a page to page basis.”⁹¹ Miller proved a

Authority) and published in 1991. It was meant to introduce the Lacanian School ideas to a German public. Using Lacanian psychoanalytical theories and focusing on philosophers such as Althusser, Rousseau, Hume, and Kant, the various members of the School address issues of ideology, society, the role of the subject, democratic revolution and terror, God, culture, and morality through non-ideological and non-political means. Another book translated into French expressing similar views, but now using film, literature and culture to support their arguments is: *Tout ce que vous avez toujours voulu savoir sur Lacan, sans jamais oser le demander à Hitchcock* (1988).

⁸⁹ Bernik ‘Slovenia’ p. 82. See also: Kenney ‘The Habsburg Empire (Re)Disintegrates’ p. 335

⁹⁰ Luthar *The Land Between* pp. 496-99

⁹¹ Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 9. Mladen Dolar said about their stay in Paris and Miller’s invitation to his seminar: “Miller took enormous interest in us because we came from Yugoslavia. (...) We had been publishing Lacan in *Problemi* and *Analecta* for years, and he was grateful for that. He thinks very strategically and didn’t have anyone else established in Eastern Europe. To him, we were the last stronghold of Western culture on the eastern front” (Dolar quoted in: Boynton ‘Enjoy your Žižek!’).

lasting influence on the philosopher's reading of Lacan, as he emphasised the importance of the later writings of Lacan (his so-called "third period"),⁹² his turn to the real of experience and the central role of "the notion of the *Real* as that which resists symbolization."⁹³ As we will see, it is this *Real* and its definition that is crucial to Žižek's political writings. Yet, also on a personal level Miller was important to Žižek. Žižek was not too happy in Paris, as his first marriage had just ended and he felt mentally unstable. Next to being his teacher and mentor, Miller became his analyst and therapist and for Žižek, the meetings with Miller were divine, as they showed him the workings and depths of Lacanian psychoanalysis and encouraged him – in order to impress Miller – to creatively work with it.⁹⁴ After the successful defence of his dissertation in which he analysed Hegel, Marx and Kripke through a Lacanian lens, Žižek expected his professor to publish it being the head of the main Lacanian publishing house. Miller, however, did not intend to do so and Žižek published it at a rival institution. Utterly disappointed by Miller's refusal to bring out his dissertation and thus to grant him access to the inner circle of Lacanians, he returned to Slovenia and engaged himself in the social and political developments in his home country, giving up his Communist Party membership in 1988.

During his absence, Žižek always remained affiliated with the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, where he had many freedoms as an academic, but also as a person who was interested in politics. Moreover, having returned to Slovenia after his French adventure, he did not mind taking political responsibility aiming at resisting both communism and nationalism. He wrote

⁹² Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 133

⁹³ Laclau 'Preface' p. x. See also: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 133

⁹⁴ See: Boynton 'Enjoy your Žižek!'

politically provoking columns for *Mladina*, got involved with the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and ultimately, co-founded the left-of-centre Liberal Democratic Party (Liberalno demokratska stranka - LDS), which had its origins in a civil rights movement fighting for human rights. To be more precise, the political landscape of Slovenia soon reflected a similar pattern as the dissident landscape – and to a large extent also originated from these dissident circles gathered around *Nova revija* (nationalists) and *Mladina* (the New Left).⁹⁵ The typical opposition between nationalism and totalitarianism (communism) as it was common in the other Yugoslav states was broken by a third political movement – which prompted Žižek to say: “we Slovenians are *Mitteleuropa* while Croatians are already Balkan.”⁹⁶ Opposing communism as well as rejecting all references to the primacy of the organic community of the nation and national-populism and the consequent “provincialism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ideologies about national security, antifeminism, [and] a postsocialist Moral Majority” as put forward by the nationalists, the programme of the LDS accentuated the issues inspired by antipolitics, feminist and ecological issues and the rights of minorities:⁹⁷ “Our aim is to promote pluralism, and an awareness of

⁹⁵ For a thorough analysis of Slovenia’s road to independence and the advantages present in the country compared to the rest of former Yugoslavia see: Ramet ‘Slovenia’s Road to Democracy’ pp. 869-886. She also focuses on the role of the dissident movements and journals representing their views (*Mladina*, *Delo*, *Nova revija*) and the pluralisation of the political landscape when the communist liberal wing takes over from the conservatives and then moves on to the political, governmental and economic developments.

⁹⁶ Žižek ‘Eastern European Liberalism and Its Discontents’ p. 39. See also: Ibid. p. 28/9 and pp. 39/40. Žižek did not actively contribute to the debate on Central Europe as did many intellectuals of his generation in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Yet – as the content of this quote implies as well as the closeness of the oppositional group he was part of to the ‘antipolitics’ of Konrád – he was aware of these debates and defended the values of human rights, pluralism, and democracy.

⁹⁷ See: Ibid. p. 31. A further elaboration of these authoritarian tactics, totalitarianism and the use of right-populist arguments to win people for their cause can be found in Žižek’s Slovenian book *Jezik, ideologija, Slovenci* (*Language, Ideology, Slovenes*) published in 1987, in which he addresses the issue of the Slovenian national character and the ideological construction of Slovenian identity. Moreover, in criticising Yugoslav communism, Žižek argues that “[d]espite its relatively liberal cultural and political policies, (...) Tito’s Yugoslavia produced a more repressive (though subtly so) brand of ideology than

ecological issues, and to defend the rights of minorities. This is the kind of liberal tradition we represent. Not the purely capitalist values of the free market, not Friedrich von Hayek.”⁹⁸ Here the LDS also was critical of capitalism. Following the “tradition of radical democratic liberalism,” the party aimed at pluralising, democratising and liberalising society on the one hand, accentuating liberty for everyone, freedom of choice and freedom of opinion, and opposing populist nationalism on the other.⁹⁹ Championing this programme, the LDS (whose political programme was mainly written by Žižek) showed close affinities with other democratising movements present in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. It defended a society on the basis of social antagonism and civil sovereignty, implementing civic, secular, and progressive values in its programme. Wary of “all great projects such as socialism, nation and democracy,”¹⁰⁰ it sought to “invent forms of political practice that contain a dimension of universality beyond capital.”¹⁰¹ It did not want a centralised state and in contrast to much of the opposition that advocated

the other Eastern-bloc countries. While Czechoslovakian or Polish authorities made no secret of their authoritarian tactics, the more permissive Yugoslavian communists sent out mixed signals about what was and was not permitted, thereby fostering an unusually effective, because at least partially self-regulating system of censorship” (Boynton ‘Enjoy your Žižek!’).

⁹⁸ Žižek in: Dews and Osborne ‘Lacan in Slovenia’ p. 28. See also: Dews ‘The tremor of reflection’ p. 18

⁹⁹ Homer ‘To Begin at the Beginning Again’ p. 710. Reflecting on the philosopher’s political career, Homer criticises Žižek and the LDS for being nationalist as well and laments the fact that Žižek’s emphasis on the liberal democrats’s opposition between totalitarianism and nationalism leaves out any consideration of other oppositional movements. Also, looking at his political activities, he denies Žižek defending the tradition of the European Enlightenment, or to be more precise its legacy of universal emancipation (p. 711). Žižek replies that the facts on which Homer bases his argument are false and the starting positions of the opposition were totally different from what Homer describes (there were indeed the nationalists, the communists, and the New Left which then splitted into several political parties). Furthermore, his take on the role of the LDS in Slovenian politics up until mid-1992 is wrong, as it was part of the opposition and not of the broad ruling platform DEMOS, the Slovene Democratic Opposition, and he very well supports universal emancipation – but tries to frame it differently from the liberal patronizers. See: Žižek ‘Reply’ pp. 771/72.

¹⁰⁰ The Manifest of Liberalism, 1990 in: Lukšič ‘Liberal Traditions on Slovene Territory’ p. 203

¹⁰¹ Žižek ‘Eastern European Liberalism and Its Discontents’ pp. 46/7

national independence, the party promoted a regionalisation of Slovenia,¹⁰² seeking to make it part of a wider Central European region. Regarding Slovenian's quest for independence, then, Žižek rather ironically stated in an article entitled 'Hail Freedonia' and published in *Mladina* just before Slovenia's actual independence: "You want to be independent? Be independent. You'll have more problems, but at least you'll be independent."¹⁰³

Nevertheless, in 1990, in the first free elections in Slovenia and despite his scepticism towards Slovenian independence, Žižek – contender of the LDS – stood as a candidate for the country's joint four-person presidency of the Republic of Slovenia. He ended fifth and therefore just failed being elected. In 1991, having declined an offer to become Minister of Science or Minister of Culture, he became the Ambassador of Science for the Republic of Slovenia. Slovenia had gained its independence from Yugoslavia during a ten days war, the Constitution changed and the country's politics were reshuffled once again. In January 1992, the country was officially recognised by the EC-member states¹⁰⁴ and it became a candidate for accessing the European Union. Besides, the Liberal Democrats came to power and Žižek "found himself in the odd position of being an intellectual who wasn't marginalized."¹⁰⁵ Being part of a successfully established political party and having published his first English language book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989, which was followed by various visiting

¹⁰² cf. Lukšič 'Liberal Traditions on Slovene Territory' p. 204

¹⁰³ Žižek quoted in: Mead 'The Marx Brother' p. 45. In 2011, he will repeat this originally Marx Brothers joke and replace independence with EU, asking whether the EU is worth defending. His ultimate answer is yes, but his conditions will be discussed later this chapter. See: Žižek 'Europe must move beyond mere tolerance'

¹⁰⁴ cf. Bučar 'The International Recognition of Slovenia' p. 37

¹⁰⁵ Boynton 'Enjoy your Žižek!'

professorships in the United States, he had become an influential thinker in his home country and abroad.

Building a Career in Western Academia and Making a Fundamental Turn

Having lost the election for the four-headed presidency of Slovenia in 1990, Žižek started fully focusing on his academic career and savouring the delights of living in a free, independent, and democratic country. Though he still kept close contacts to the Liberal Democrats, the popularity of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* enabled him to travel and teach at internationally well-known universities, such as Columbia, Princeton, New York University, and the New School for Social Research, also in New York. Renata Salecl, now his wife, went with him. She basically was in charge of everything that was not concerning his intellectual and academic output and negotiated their teaching deals.¹⁰⁶ Every year, they taught a semester in the United States, spending the rest of the year in Ljubljana as their home base. This way, Žižek was able to combine his experiences and scholarly input from abroad with the political and intellectual developments in Slovenia and former Yugoslavia. He started writing at incredible speed. In addition to scholarly articles, journalistic contributions, and frequent interviews all over the world, he published almost two books a year.

In the first years after Slovenia reached its independence and was recognised as such by the international community, it started its quest for NATO membership and accession talks with the European Union, to ultimately join both in 2004. From 1993

¹⁰⁶ See: Boynton 'Enjoy your Žižek!'. In April 2005, he will get married a third time; this time to model Analia Hounie, who is daughter of an Argentine Lacanian psychoanalyst and about half of his age. It does not last long. At present, he is together with the Slovene journalist Jela Krečič.

onwards, economic growth picked up and the political system stabilised, particularly when compared to the other ex-Yugoslav states.¹⁰⁷ It was able to keep itself out of the ethnic conflicts and struggles for autonomy dominating former Yugoslavia in the following years. Nevertheless, the bloody conflicts in the area feature prominently in Žižek's works of the early 1990s. Nationality, national-organic populism, and Žižek's aversion of any form of nationalism were still subjects important to the philosopher. In general, there is a clear continuation to be found in his views on issues such as democracy, questions of nationalism, and totalitarianism until the mid-1990s. Lacan, Hegel, and Marx remained his main theoretical references.

With him becoming ever more established in Western academia, however, he added another, previously less prominent dimension of critique. He started attacking philosophical developments and theoretical approaches ruling the scholarly debate of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In her introduction to Slavoj Žižek, Sarah Kay identifies three major "targets of polemic":¹⁰⁸ (1) New Age (or Jungian) obscurantists whom Žižek reproves for their "pre-modern neo-paganism";¹⁰⁹ more importantly, (2) deconstructivism and the consequent tendency towards relativism, the most important proponents of which are Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler; finally Žižek deprecates (3) multiculturalism – later "political correct (PC) multiculturalism" –, or postmodernism and its rejection of Marx. Žižek opposed the view that the world has entered a post-ideological era. He considered cultural studies and identity politics, of which the feminists are the most important proponents, to be part of the "liberal

¹⁰⁷ See: Gow and Carmichael *Slovenia and the Slovenes* p. 172

¹⁰⁸ Kay *Žižek. A Critical Introduction* p. 102

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 102

postmodern consensus in the humanities.”¹¹⁰ Their proponents, which basically include all those representing the New Left in Western academia, are everything but radical (and if so, only in the eyes of cultural conservatives); they are part of the “*liberal democratic imaginary*.”¹¹¹ In their writings, democratic and minority rights have taken the place of what is actually the true problem: the problem of global capitalism.¹¹² Coming from a region where civil activism and critique had just turned upside down a whole political system and having published the English-language book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, the Slovenian political philosopher aspired to a return to economic issues and class struggle (Marx) and a theory of ideology in the academic debate of the Left. His message was that the Western academic Left had to free itself from the liberal democratic imaginary through “*refusing its very terms, (...) flatly rejecting today’s liberal blackmail that courting any prospect of radical change paves the way for totalitarianism*.”¹¹³ He remained true to his defense of modern philosophy and the Enlightenment, bringing back in Kant, Hegel, and ultimately Schelling (and with them freedom, agency, human nature, the subject, universality, and Christianity), all read through a Lacanian lens.

In the early 1990s, he showed a close affiliation with the radical democrats Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Étienne Balibar, and Jacques Rancière who are all post-Marxists; at this time, Žižek was characterised so too. Mouffe and Laclau’s work, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), had a decisive influence on Žižek. In their theory, Mouffe and Laclau did not aim at a

¹¹⁰ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 33. See also: Žižek ‘Holding the Place’ pp. 323/4

¹¹¹ Žižek ‘Holding the Place’ p. 325

¹¹² See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 34

¹¹³ Žižek ‘Holding the Place’ p. 326. Italics in original.

world or politics, built on congenial co-existence of all members of society. Instead they took the existence of irreconcilable antagonisms for granted, in democracy as in any other political system. “This perspective of democracy as an *agon* involves a spirited defence of social movements’ challenging of the reigning ideology and political struggle in various arenas crucial to democratic politics – under no circumstances can democratic politics be reduced to mainstream party processes and electoral campaigns.”¹¹⁴ Žižek subscribed to this position, but contrary to Mouffe and Laclau claimed that only from the left side of the political spectrum true opposition and change can be initiated. The political right dominates the main social, economic and political fields and therefore is in control of the “master signifiers;” it is up to the left to defend the “marginalised universals” and change the existing power coordinates.¹¹⁵

A few years later – Sharpe and Boucher locate this turn in the years 1996/97¹¹⁶ –, Žižek’s critique of the radical democrats became more forceful and ultimately he alleged that the radical democrats are as much part of the ruling liberal democratic imaginary as all the groups he had placed in that camp already.¹¹⁷ Rejecting the possibility of radical democracy, no longer accepting its proponents position towards social antagonism, he started advocating the grounding of a “new political universality by opting for the *impossible* (...) with no taboos, no a priori norms (‘human rights’,

¹¹⁴ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 107/8

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 108

¹¹⁶ See: Ibid. pp. 24/25. They argue: “Schelling’s Romanticism was the catalyst that prompted to change tack (...). The result is the dramatic difference in theoretical, ethical and political conclusions that Žižek reached between 1989 and 1995, compared with those of 1996-2009.” They illustrate this by a brief anecdote saying that after publishing one or two books every year, Žižek closed himself into his office for a year to read Schelling.

¹¹⁷ To defend democracy, one has to be “anti-democratic towards all anti-democratic positions” (Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 174). Hence, neither tolerance nor democracy can be basic political values. There is no neutral place of power. See also: Žižek ‘Class Struggle or Postmodernism?’ p. 100

‘democracy’).”¹¹⁸ Referencing the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou, he returned to Marxist orthodoxy and the dictatorship of the proletariat, not averse of promoting revolutionary terror and violence.¹¹⁹ It was accompanied by an increased interest in Christianity and sometimes called a “religious turn”¹²⁰ (though Žižek holds on to his self-description of being an atheist) or as do Sharpe and Boucher: a turn to “revolutionary vanguardist politics,”¹²¹ in which Žižek’s “subject of desire” becomes a “subject of the drives.”¹²² This turn has caused much debate and provoked many critical reactions.¹²³

It is difficult to discern the factors that explain the why of this shift in thinking and it would surely be problematic to say that the post-1996 Žižek is a totally different man and political philosopher than he was before, but there are some determinants that might clarify his move. As he writes in his biography on the website of *The European Graduate School*: “He tends to be politically incorrect and has therefore caused quite a disruption within intellectual circles.”¹²⁴ It is a position the Slovenian philosopher has cultivated at various stages of his scholarly and intellectual life. It is part of his identity and has proved extremely productive.¹²⁵ In the early 1990s, he stirred up

¹¹⁸ Žižek ‘Holding the Place’ p. 326

¹¹⁹ See: Žižek *In Defence of Lost Causes* p. 412

¹²⁰ Depoortere *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy* p. 96. One just has to look at some of the titles of the books he published: *The Fragile Absolute – Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (2000), *On Belief* (2001), *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), *The Monstrosity of Christ* (2009).

¹²¹ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 20

¹²² Ibid. p. 7

¹²³ See, for example: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 229-233; Pound *Žižek* p. 23; Grant *The Insufficiency of Ground* p. 83

¹²⁴ See: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/biography/>, last access: 20 October 2014

¹²⁵ See also: Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 10: “Žižek’s intellectual development has been marked by a distance or heterogeneity to the official culture within which he works. He has always been a stain or point of opacity within the ruling orthodoxy and is never fully integrated by the social or philosophical conventions against which he operates. (...) [H]e has defined his position only in his resistance to [the established] institutions.”

academic debate, particularly in the West, but became part of a wider academic circle of (radical democratic) thinkers. These thinkers were a minority; nevertheless, a more or less accepted minority and the question is whether Žižek could accept this position over the long run.¹²⁶ This, of course, remains speculative and it would not do as a full explanation in the academic sense of the word; yet, I would argue, that it definitely is part of the answer. Extremely aware of his audience, he is one of the few intellectuals who know how to keep themselves present in the headlines, not only of journalist's writings, but also of academic journals.

A second explanation for his shift in thinking can be detected in his work. In his English-language publications of the early 1990s, Žižek criticised (and played with) the Western gaze of the East.¹²⁷ In 1990, he addressed the Western nostalgia for 'proper' or 'true' democracy, which the West locates in Eastern Europe.¹²⁸ Yet, the actual situation in Eastern Europe was less rosy than Western European observers believed. In his view, Western Europe mirrored its own desire; it projected its own imagined ideal onto Eastern Europe. And Eastern Europe naively stared back, longing for a free and democratic society without formulating its own demands. It led to an uncritical adoption of the Western liberal-democratic, capitalist model, which had problematic consequences in the sense that an opportunity to come up with an innovative and more just political system was missed and reactionary movements had free play.

¹²⁶ See also: Eagleton 'On the contrary' p. 61

¹²⁷ See: Žižek 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead' p. 50. See also: Parker *Slavoj Žižek* pp. 34/5

¹²⁸ This 'gaze', as Žižek calls it, was taken up by the propagators of a Central Europe that distinguished itself from West and East and culturally represented the authentic European ideals (it epitomized Europe) – intellectuals like Milan Kundera, György Konrád, Václav Havel, Jenő Szűcs or Bronisław Geremek.

Moreover, the situation in the former Yugoslav states in the early 1990s called for concrete political proposals, which the West could not provide. Nationalist discourses and movements were undermining these societies trying to become democracies, ultimately leading to war; they had to be decisively countered.¹²⁹ To Žižek, the founding of the centre-left, liberal political party LDS focusing on pluralism and defending minority rights saved Slovenian society from falling into the traps of the nationalist ideologies as the only political alternative to the former communist regimes dominating the rest of the Yugoslav region. Slovenia took the road other Central European countries had gone. By 1995, he claimed that his party, the LDS, following such ideals prevented Slovenia from getting lost in proto-fascist national discourses and becoming involved in the war.

I think it was our party that saved Slovenia from the fate of the other former Yugoslav republics, where they have the one-party model. Either right wing like in Croatia or left wing like in Serbia, which hegemonized in the name of the national interest. With us it's a really diverse, pluralist scene, open towards foreigners (of course there are some critical cases). But the changes of a genuine pluralist society are not yet lost.¹³⁰

A keen political observer, however, Žižek always closely followed the political developments and became ever more disappointed with Slovenian politics, which ultimately led to a change in his philosophy as well as a distancing of and ultimately parting with the LDS. In 2007, the LDS split into political parties the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and Zares, which denotes itself as social-liberal. The Slovenian philosopher followed the latter party supporting its social-democratic and progressive demands and lamenting the compromises LDS made to capitalism and the

¹²⁹ See: Žižek *Tarrying with the Negative* pp. 201-211

¹³⁰ Žižek in: Lovink 'Civil Society, Fanaticism, and Digital Reality.' On-line available: <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=79>, last access: 20 October 2014

rule of the markets and its support of the 'Janša paradigm': the former prime minister of Slovenia's talk of homeland.¹³¹ As could already be observed in the writings of Bauman and Kertész who became increasingly disappointed with the political and social realities of the mid-1990s, Žižek's positive attitude towards society to become a truly open, plural, and universal political community too gave way to a more pessimistic view of society.¹³²

Closely related to Bauman's findings of consumer society, Žižek now claims in his publications that the economy has depoliticised society and capitalism rules the world, creating a post-political society in which the state acts more like a "police agent servicing the (consensually established) needs of the market forces and multiculturalist, tolerant humanitarianism" than like a political actor.¹³³ In his view, this is an undesirable development, as it deprives society in general and the subject in particular of its autonomy, hampers freedom, undermines democracy based on a fundamental antagonism and social conflict, and generates anxiety, which in turn can provoke all kinds of problematic reactions like religious fundamentalism, nationalism, atomisation and loss of solidarity on a societal level. In a depoliticised or post-political society based on capitalist consumerism any identification with some bigger ideal has become extremely difficult.¹³⁴ To the philosopher, solutions restraining the power of capitalism are neither to be found on the side of the nationalists nor on the side of the radical democrats. Indeed, even the radical democrats remain within a national

¹³¹ See an article published on the website of *Zares* 'Žižek in Golobič o prihodnosti skozi preteklost.' (Žižek and Golobič on the future through the past). Available online: <http://www.zares.si/zizek-in-golobic-o-prihodnosti-skozi-preteklost/>, last access: 6 January 2015. See also: Vadén *Heidegger, Žižek and Revolution* p. 11

¹³² See: Žižek 'A Leftist Plea for "Eurocentrism"' p. 988

¹³³ Ibid. p. 997

¹³⁴ See: Ibid. p. 1008; Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* p. 62

framework. In Žižek's view, instead of promoting a universalist politics where a group that does not fall within the coordinates set by the ruling power elite fights for its cause, "the national Thing" rules, even if unconsciously, their – to put it in Lacanian terms – ideological fantasy "insisting naively that civic loyalty to [existing] democratic institutions might be sufficient, when the formalism of these institutions actually prevents subjects' decisive, unconscious attachment to them."¹³⁵ The democratic institutions as they are currently in place are bound too much to politics as organised through the nation state. Present politics has national origins. Yet, whereas Bauman's theory on liquid modernity tries to renew and critically engage in humanist thought and answers to organise society, to Žižek, there is only one far more radical and also violent way to depart from these inherent premises. He demands a 'proper political Act' fully changing the existing power coordinates around which societies are organised. More positive towards the possibilities of a revolution than the older Bauman, Žižek opines that the repoliticisation of the economy (global capitalism) can only be realised if all existing political conventions are turned around and revolutionarised.¹³⁶

Next to remaining true to his self-identity or self-image as a politically incorrect philosopher, Žižek's shift in thinking can, thus, be attributed to the continuation of his life-long political aversion to any kind of nationalism, fundamentalism or (gender) essentialism as well as a wish to change society on the basis of a universalist politics in which those who are not part of the dominant political narrative can make themselves heard and change society. Where previously his political theories were

¹³⁵ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 175

¹³⁶ cf. Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* p. 100. To Kertész, it is the field of culture where new values can and should be created. Any form of violence would undermine the moral base of these values.

directed against totalitarianism as well as nationalism, he, at present, aims at providing a model how to overthrow the power coordinates of today's global capitalism, seeking to combine "Lacan's notion of the subject as a 'pure void' that is 'radically out of joint' with the world, Marx's political economy, and St. Paul's conviction that universal truth is the only force capable of recognizing the needs of the particular."¹³⁷ To Žižek, the only solution is 'good terror' from the individuals who have no place in current society, but can unite in struggling for the same cause (a better, more just and equal society – the concrete universal). In the philosophers view, they can radically change society through a revolutionary political Act.¹³⁸ This "utopian longing for a violent, total transformation of human society", by now, has led to much criticism and there are many scholars not accepting his arguments, arguing he is unable to provide a proper model for a viable political economy.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Boynton 'Enjoy your Žižek!'

¹³⁸ cf. Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* p. 100

¹³⁹ Kirsch 'The Deadly Jester.' See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 177; Boynton 'Enjoy your Žižek!'; Homer 'It's the political economy, stupid!' p. 14f.; Laclau 'Structure, History, and the Political' p. 198

IV.II Freedom, Individuality, Democracy

The Enlightenment Project and its Place in Žižek's Writings

In thinking about Europe and the values freedom, individuality, and democracy, Žižek takes up the Freudian theme of modern civilisation and its discontents, addressing the relation between the individual (his needs, instincts, desires) and society (and its wish for conformity repressing the instincts and desires of the individual).¹⁴⁰ It is his main driving force to uncover and question the discontents of current society and develop a theory that deals with these discontents in a more convincing way than many of the (liberal) postmodernist, multicultural, and cultural theorists of our time. In formulating his alternative, politics and the modern political order are crucial – first in theorising about totalitarianism, later in turning to the revolutionary political act.¹⁴¹ In order to open up new debate about ideology, universality, the question of identity, and the role of the subject, he seeks to rejuvenate Lacan, Hegel, Marx and Schelling in a way that surpasses the traps of relativistic postmodernism.

Grounding himself in the thought of these philosophers, Žižek aims to unravel and overcome the problematic, irrational parts of the Enlightenment project. Criticising both Western European modern and postmodern accounts of the project of the Enlightenment, Žižek asserts first that the Enlightenment is not a project to be finished along the lines of reason and “total scientific self-objectivization.”¹⁴² To him, a capitalist society supported by rational arguments ultimately leads to “irrational anti-

¹⁴⁰ See: Žižek *Living in the End Times* p. ix

¹⁴¹ See also: Kesel *Žižek* p. 8

¹⁴² Žižek *Organs Without Bodies* p. 133

Enlightenment forces,” such as nationalism, fundamentalism, and sexism.¹⁴³ Instead of these movements being a reaction to Western Enlightenment, he maintains, it is Enlightenment itself provoking such reactions.¹⁴⁴ Critiques of the subject and a “‘post-modernist’ anti-Enlightenment *ressentiment*,” however, are not to be taken as an answer to the project of the Enlightenment either.¹⁴⁵ Žižek’s main problem with postmodern thinkers is that they declared the subject dead (Foucault). Yet, Žižek refuses to understand society as a pluralist abundance of identities and co-existing narratives. He values the project of the Enlightenment, which saw the birth of the (Cartesian) subject as an autonomous and free-thinking individual that is nevertheless bound to a framework of a given set of customs and laws that provide a moral guidance.¹⁴⁶ According to the philosopher, this Enlightenment project has not lost its credibility; rather, it remains unfinished. Wishing to take the Enlightenment project further, Žižek puts the Enlightenment ideal of autonomy and self-determination at the heart of his political thought and links this to ideology, which he defines as the relationship of the individual to society or the individual’s understanding of his relation to society.¹⁴⁷ He claims that the Enlightenment tradition can be continued and brought to an end in the process of coming to subjectivity through a political act and defending the ideal of universality.

Unlike the leftist thinkers of the previous generation (born in the 1920s, f.e. Bauman), the political philosopher rejects Marxist humanism early in his career adopting an

¹⁴³ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 41

¹⁴⁴ cf. Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 40/1

¹⁴⁵ Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 79

¹⁴⁶ See: Žižek *The Sublime Object* p. 80

¹⁴⁷ See also: Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 20. In his ‘The Tremor of Reflection’, Peter Dews argues: “Žižek’s thought is strongly coloured by his Althusserian background, and he is therefore rightly sceptical of the anti-Enlightenment sloganizing, and revivals of the ‘end of ideology’, which are the staple of so much cultural commentary today” (Dews ‘The Tremor of Reflection’ p. 17).

Althusserian anti-humanist, materialist reading of ideology.¹⁴⁸ In his view, ideology is everything but dead. It is an illusion to think that postmodern society is postideological.¹⁴⁹ According to the political philosopher, ideology always is at work. Yet, and here lies the originality of Žižek's thought, this is not because the ideological idea and system, its political institutions and state apparatuses function so well, but because people (subjects) believe in (and enjoy believing in) the ideology ruling their lives and so contribute to its durability and survival.¹⁵⁰ Ideology, so to say, is man-made: "our belief as subjects is the only 'substance' these sublime objects of ideology [the Nation, the People, etc.] have."¹⁵¹ Hence, following this line of thought, it is also within powers of man to change its (the ideology's) premises. Reading the work Žižek published from the early 1980s to date, this is the idea (the link between ideology and self-determination) he founds his theories on and which remains largely unaltered: the subject holds the key to the functioning of an ideology and resulting (political)

¹⁴⁸ See: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 45. To Althusser, ideology is not an idea, but institutionalised through 'state apparatuses', which include not only the government, police and judicial courts, but also institutions like universities, media, and schools. Individuals are involved with ideology through interpellation. Furthermore, Žižek's affinity with anti-humanism is not so much a postmodern attack on modern humanistic politics and ideas, as it is an ethical stance of practical anti-humanism borrowed from Lacan. "In contrast to Althusser, Lacan accomplishes the passage from theoretical to *practical anti-humanism*, that is, to an ethics that (...) confronts the inhuman core of humanity. This does not only mean an ethics which no longer denies, but fearlessly takes into account the latent monstrosity of being-human, the diabolical dimension which exploded in phenomena usually covered by the concept-name "Auschwitz" – an ethics that would be still possible after Auschwitz, to paraphrase Adorno. This inhuman dimension is for Lacan, at the same time, the ultimate bedrock of ethics" (Žižek *In Defence of Lost Causes* p. 166).

¹⁴⁹ In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek argues with Peter Sloterdijk that the current "ideology's dominant mode of functioning is cynical" (p. 29). Instead of understanding ideology as 'false consciousness', a certain *naïveté* towards social reality, "the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask" (p. 29). Knowing about the particular interests standing behind an ideological system, one still holds on to it. To Žižek, this has nothing to do with living in a post-ideological world. Indeed, ideology has not disappeared, its workings through society and how it is maintained in society have changed. This makes every common form of critique of ideology problematic, since an ideology that is not even taken seriously by those who are in power but they still continue on its road, asks for a different approach to what ideology is, how it gains support and for what reasons: hence, his Lacanian reading of ideology working with and on Althusser's insights. Cf. Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* pp. 29/30

¹⁵⁰ See: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 36

¹⁵¹ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 74

organisation of society. What does change, however, – having described Žižek’s break in thinking in the mid-1990s in the previous section – is the role Žižek assigns to the subject and the activity that results from this role.

Rethinking the Enlightenment and its ideals, Žižek puts Hegelian universality, negativity, and reflexivity back at the centre of attention.¹⁵² To him, difference and contingency are at the core of Hegel’s work. Disqualifying established dialectics and the consequent Enlightened progressive interpretation of history (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) as a wrong reading of Hegel, he claims that in Hegel the contradiction between thesis and antithesis is that what is inherent to and constitutive of every identity.¹⁵³ ‘Absolute Knowledge’ or truth can only be found in contradiction, in ‘tarrying with the negative’ as Žižek titled one of his books.¹⁵⁴ To further support this thesis, he uses Lacan “as a privileged intellectual tool to reactualize German Idealism [i.e. Kant to Hegel].”¹⁵⁵ He applies the Lacanian terminology of the Imaginary (“the restless seeking after self, a process of amalgamating more and more instances of replications and resemblance in order to bolster up the fable of its unity”), the Symbolic (“the impersonal framework of society, the arena in which we take our place as part of a community of fellow human beings”), and the Real (“those areas in life that cannot be known”) to political questions of how society is organised.¹⁵⁶ He uses

¹⁵² See also: Parker *Slavoj Žižek* p. 36

¹⁵³ Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 6

¹⁵⁴ *Tarrying with the Negative* was published in 1993 and deals both with Kant and Hegel and the question or critique of ideology. It criticizes postmodern relativism and defends the possibility of the existence of a universal truth.

¹⁵⁵ Žižek ‘Preface: Burning the Bridges’ p. ix

¹⁵⁶ Myers *Slavoj Žižek* p. 22 and p. 25. In his *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek argues in explaining his view of the Lacanian Real that the real object (Lacan’s *objet petit a*) is a cause that “in itself does not exist – which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way. If the Real is the impossible, it is precisely this impossibility which is to be grasped through its effects” (Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 163). It thus is possible to get a notion of what the Real is and upon which the subject can act.

these Lacanian ‘Orders’ to reflect on the modern Hegelian subject, define the subject’s place in society, and his/her inherent quest for freedom.

Central to his writings in his early period, then, is the fragile status of democracy in Europe’s twentieth century and his aversion to any totalitarian form of societal organisation. At the time, Žižek defends a pluralist, open, radical democratic and universal politics. Against a societal organisation that leaves no room for the subject, it is Žižek’s aim to revive Hegel’s subject through a Lacanian reading of his texts. Žižek opposes the thought that a subject is socially constructed in every aspect of his ‘being’ (or non-being).¹⁵⁷ To him, there is always something about a subject (the negative) that remains obscure even to the subject him/herself. It is here where freedom is to be found – through which s/he can define his relation to society (ideology) – and the subject can be saved from any totalitarian inclination.

In the last twenty years, however, he has turned from a post-Marxist into an orthodox Marxist thinker developing a pessimistic theory of politics. He no longer champions the possibility of an open and plural, radical democratic society.¹⁵⁸ He starts to formulate a critique of the Enlightenment project as not being able to create a political universality. He leaves behind his view of or wish for a positive pluralist form of politics. Instead of emphasising the democracy-totalitarianism divide, Žižek turns to analysing the risk-society that has arisen from capitalism. He criticises the individual for being a slave of consumption: He is subjected to the power of capitalism and has

¹⁵⁷ See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 68

¹⁵⁸ In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), democracy is commended for being the ultimate critique and antidote of totalitarianism. In a foreword to the second edition of *For They Know Not What They Do* (originally published in 1991, the second edition is from 2002 – so after his radical turn) democracy represents the dangerous residues of bourgeois ideology (see: Žižek *For They Know Not What They Do* p. xviii).

little say over his/her role in a democratic society. According to Žižek, the liberal-democratic political superstructure does not allow for enlightened, reflexive political community.¹⁵⁹ Advocating universality as “the negative condition of all political articulation,”¹⁶⁰ he aims to break away from what he calls a post-political world and to find a new subjectivity in order for the subject to play a role in politics again. This requires a more active role of the subject and consequently, he develops a theory on the subject with societal implications.¹⁶¹ Žižek introduces the notion of a ‘revolutionary political Act’ as a way to change the premises upon which an ideology is built, or stronger: to radically, even violently change the coordinates around which a society is organised.

Having so outlined the main aspects of Žižek’s political thought and the way freedom, the subject (individuality), and democracy figure in his work, the below gives a more detailed analysis of how the philosopher relates himself to the Enlightenment values of freedom, the subject, and democracy. It, then, asks what consequences the turn in his thinking has for his evaluation and appreciation of these values and ultimately of Europe.

¹⁵⁹ cf. Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 175. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek distances himself ever more from notion of democracy. His opening question: “How [are we] to reformulate a left, anti-capitalist, political project in our era of global capitalism and its ideological supplement, liberal-democratic multiculturalism?” (*Žižek The Ticklish subject* p. xxvii)

¹⁶⁰ Butler, Laclau, *Žižek Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* p. 3

¹⁶¹ cf. De Haan ‘Het doorgedraaide subject’ p. 204

From a Critique of Totalitarianism to a Critique of Capitalism: Žižek and the Value of Freedom

The question of freedom is, at its most radical, the question of how this closed circle of fate can be broken. The answer, of course, is that it can be broken not because “it is not truly closed,” because there are cracks in its texture, but, on the contrary, because it is overclosed, that is, because the subject’s very endeavour to break out of it is included in it in advance. That is to say: since our attempts to assert our freedom and escape fate are themselves instruments of fate, the only real way to escape fate is to *renounce* these attempts, to accept fate as inexorable.¹⁶²

Žižek’s theory on freedom is based on his reading of the Lacanian order of the ‘Symbolic,’ the framework of society, and how he defines the subject’s relation to this society as being built on a void. Moreover, freedom does not or rather, cannot stand on its own. Returning to Hegel’s theory of the negative, Žižek maintains, that freedom is always defined against something else, against a symbolic that it is not. According to Žižek, the modern subject has no substance him/herself. S/he relates him/herself to society using his or her fantasy, so defining his/her place in society as well as his/her identity (the order of the ‘Imaginary’).¹⁶³ Yet, this never fully coincides with who or what s/he really is or can be. This is the unknown (the ‘Real’) and void of the subject (Hegel’s negative) on which everything else is built.

This brings us back to the notion of the “Night of the World”: in this momentary suspension of the positive order of reality, we confront the ontological gap on account of which “reality” is never a complete, self-enclosed, positive order of being. It is only this experience of psychotic withdrawal from reality, of absolute self-contraction, which accounts for the mysterious “fact” of transcendental freedom: for a (self-)consciousness which is in effect “spontaneous,” whose spontaneity is not an effect of misrecognition of some “objective” processes.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 207

¹⁶³ See also: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 46

¹⁶⁴ Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 242

In Žižek's work, the void paradoxically becomes "the positive condition of [the subject's] existence."¹⁶⁵ The void of the subject allows for an unending pursuing of his/her desire and search for pleasure (*jouissance*), as in that void s/he is not bound to any set rules, laws or conventions. Freedom, hence, is located in this void.¹⁶⁶ It is to be found where the Symbolic order does not equal or is incompatible with the Real order. In the space and tension that arises between these levels or orders, in the lack of the Symbolic – to keep the Lacanian phraseology –, the freedom of the subject is situated. This lack saves the subject from being fully determined by outer conditions.

In his early period, the main ideological notion against which he defines freedom is totalitarianism. Žižek presents his view on freedom reflecting on the political situation in socialist Yugoslavia and on what happens in the years after the falling apart of the federal state. He maintains that since the subject never fully coincides with him/herself, a totalitarian society can never fully control all parts and pieces it claims to control. That is, totalitarianism claims to possess the truth and thus it claims to know what is good for society and the subjects in it. In this desire for truth, however, the totalitarian ideology denies that it is built on its own void, on a lie, blaming others for its own shortcomings and problems in what it presents as truth. Moreover, it denies that totalitarian society represents a Symbolic order, in which the subjects are bearers of that Symbolic order, but never a full part of it.¹⁶⁷ The subject is the exponent of the world in which he lives, never its author. Yet, as such, the subject is disavowed by the

¹⁶⁵ Wright & Wright *The Žižek Reader* p. 4

¹⁶⁶ cf. Kesel *Žižek* p. 79

¹⁶⁷ cf. Kesel *Žižek* p. 26. The Lacanian way to put this is that the symbolic order is built on a chain of signifiers that have nothing to do with the 'Real.' Being framed as a void and thus having no substance him/herself, the subject is alienated from these signifiers in the symbolic order. It stands outside the symbolic order. Žižek elaborates on this relationship between the subject and the community to which it belongs and the inherent choice of freedom in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, pp. 165-178.

totalitarian system that does not accept such a position of being ‘outside.’ Thus not allowing the bearers of its own order their proper position in that order, totalitarianism is ultimately doomed to fail. It witnesses the birth of its own downfall, as it cannot anticipate and (re)act upon the possibility of freedom open to the subject.

The subject has the possibility to leave the Symbolic order. Following Žižek, the lack present in the Symbolic enables the subject to actively change the Symbolic and move or alter the basis on which it rests. In the eyes of the philosopher, true freedom is something that arises out of the subject’s capacity to act. It is something creative. Instead of the rigidity of a system, he emphasises the available possibilities. With Hegel he argues that true freedom is trying to turn these possibilities into actualities, even if such attempts fail.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, this does not mean that everyone can do everything, s/he likes. Describing the *Leitmotif* of the Enlightenment as ‘Reason autonomously!’, he contends with Kant that one can reason about or question everything and everybody, but has to do this within the limits of the community and the ethical standards or “moral Law” set by that community.¹⁶⁹ There are customs and rules that cannot be disregarded and structure social reality. To determine oneself and act upon one’s inherent possibilities, one needs to take into account the social reality within which one functions.

Repeating this argument in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, the Slovenian philosopher maintains that this is to which the Marxian basis of freedom boils down.¹⁷⁰ It is the framework of rules and customs of a social reality that structures our freedom within a

¹⁶⁸ Žižek *Tarrying with the Negative* pp. 158/9

¹⁶⁹ See: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* pp. 80/1

¹⁷⁰ See: Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes*, pp. 199/200; and the German version (which is different and reads more like a summary of the main arguments present in *In Defense of Lost Causes*): Žižek *Auf verlorenem Posten* pp. 84/5

community of individuals and defines the space and borders within which this freedom can unfold. It organises the way free and independent individuals can relate to and depend on each other. Without this framework, it would be impossible to live together; any form of human solidarity would be missing and freedom would lose its meaning. Yet, where he first believed democratic society would provide such a framework, he is no longer convinced of the capitalist and liberal-democratic society that followed the breakdown of communism. Publishing *In Defense of Lost Causes* in 2008, he maintains that multicultural and liberal society cannot provide the framework in which the subject can realise his/her freedom to the full.¹⁷¹ Instead it epitomises an atomised society with no human solidarity present. Moreover, the only binding factor between all different individuals, groups and subgroups in society is capitalism.¹⁷² Liberal-democratic society's leading philosophy of capitalism wants individuals to consume and fulfill their desires by further consumption. It is lacking any other, moral basis, which consequently makes any 'free' choice reciprocal and devoid of all meaning. According to Žižek, this means that there ultimately is no freedom at all.

This new stance requires an adaptation of his theory of freedom. Towards the end of the 1990s, the Slovenian political philosopher starts emphasising the possibility of the radical free act that fundamentally changes the coordinates of the entire Symbolic order – something already described in his early 1990s work *Enjoy Your Symptom!*:

There is of course something exceptional, excessive even, in such an encounter with the Real, with the abyss of the "abstract freedom": it takes place only in the utmost

¹⁷¹ See: Žižek *Auf verlorenem Posten* pp. 86/7. Žižek's full critique of the Western multicultural, liberal-democratic society can be found in the Dutch booklet *Pleidooi voor Intolerantie* (*Plea for Intolerance* 1998), which was especially published for Žižek's Dutch audience and is an altered version of his *New Left Review* article 'Multiculturalism. Or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism' (1997). This publication will feature more prominently when examining Žižek's view of democracy.

¹⁷² See: Žižek *Pleidooi voor Intolerantie* p. 42

intimacy of what some call the “mystic experience.” The emphasis of Lacan is, however, that such a passage through the “zero point” of symbolic suicide is at work in *every* act worthy of this name. What is namely an act? Why is suicide an act *par excellence*? The act differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I “accomplish” – after an act, I’m literally “not the same as before.” In this sense, we could say that the subject “undergoes” the act (“passes through” it) rather than “accomplishes” it: in it, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject. Which is why every act worthy of this name is “mad” in the sense of radical *unaccountability*: by means of it, I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity; the act is therefore always as “crime,” a “transgression,” namely of the limit of the symbolic community to which I belong. The act is defined by this irreducible *risk*: in its most fundamental dimension, it is always *negative*, i.e., an act of annihilation, of wiping out – we not only don’t know what will come out of it, its final outcome is ultimately even insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the NO! of the pure act.¹⁷³

Yet, where formerly this account of the act was part of his broader theory of freedom of the subject in a totalitarian society and the possibilities offered in democratic society, the act now is granted central place. Building his theory upon the Freudian notion of the ‘death drive’, which he describes as “a drive to sabotage one’s inclination toward pleasure,” he revises his ethics of freedom.¹⁷⁴

A free Self not only integrates disturbances, it *creates* them, it explodes any given form or stasis. This is the zero-level of the “mental” which Freud called the “death drive”: the ultimate traumatic Thing the Self encounters is the Self itself.¹⁷⁵

To Žižek, to be free means to radically break with the outer causes that determine the subject, let go of one’s environs and act autonomously:¹⁷⁶ the subject has to understand him/herself out of his/her own being, out of a freedom that is inherent to his/her being as a modern subject. In modern society man is the subject of the world

¹⁷³ Žižek *Enjoy Your Symptom!* p. 44

¹⁷⁴ Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 202

¹⁷⁵ Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 210

¹⁷⁶ See: Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 231

(not God)¹⁷⁷ and as a subject he is free – since he can act upon the void and lack of the Symbolic order. This, however, also means that man is responsible for himself and that it thus is crucial that he does not give in to the urge to perceive his fantasy and desire, reflected in the Symbolic order, as being the Real order.¹⁷⁸ He needs to critically and responsibly act upon his freedom, not forgetting that he is neither master nor slave of the world.

At its most elementary, freedom is not the freedom to do as you like (that is, to follow your inclinations without any externally imposed constraints), but to do what you do not want to do, to thwart the “spontaneous” realization of an impetus.¹⁷⁹

This ‘death drive’ of obeying an order against a spontaneous inclination and act upon it (“*in the mode of “I cannot do otherwise”*”)¹⁸⁰ enables the subject to create something radically new, break the circle of determinism and retroactively change the past and open up a space for destiny.

¹⁷⁷ In his post-1996 period, Žižek spends much time and energy defining the value of Christianity for present society, arguing that it guarantees not only the freedom of the subject, but also offers a space for the possibility of radically changing a tradition or order that is universally true and subjects individual and autonomous beings to its ethics. That is, in claiming to be created out of nothing and thus embodying the possibility of the creation of something radically new built upon a ‘void,’ Christianity serves as an example for Žižek’s own theory of the possibility of creating a new, but universally valid political world order. See also: Kesel Žižek pp. 82/3

¹⁷⁸ See also: Kesel Žižek p. 71. In *The Parallax View*, Žižek writes: “This is why the Kantian autonomy of the subject is so difficult – its implication is precisely that there is nobody out there, no external agent of “natural authority,” who can do the job for me and set me my limit, that I myself have to pose a limit to my natural “unruliness.” Although Kant famously wrote that man is an animal which needs a master, this should not deceive us: (...) Kant’s true aim, rather, is to point out how *the very need of an external master is a deceptive lure*: man needs a master in order to conceal from himself the deadlock of his own difficult freedom and self-responsibility. In this precise sense, a truly enlightened “mature” human being is a subject who *no longer needs a master*, who can fully assume the heavy burden of defining his own limitations” (Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 90).

¹⁷⁹ Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 202

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 243. Žižek states: “Within our temporal phenomenal existence, this act of choice is experienced as an imposed necessity, which means that the subject, in his phenomenal self-awareness, is not conscious of the free choice which grounds his character (his ethical “nature”) – that is to say, this act is radically unconscious (the conclusion explicitly drawn by Schelling). Here again we encounter the subject as the Void of pure reflectivity, as that X to which we can attribute (as his free decision) what, in our phenomenal self-awareness, we experience as part of our inherited or otherwise imposed nature. The conclusion to be drawn is thus, again, that Self-Consciousness itself is radically unconscious” (Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 246).

“Freedom” is not simply the opposite of causal necessity: as Kant knew, it means a specific mode of causality, the agent’s self-determination. – I am determined by causes (...) and the space of freedom is not a magic gap in this first-level causal chain but my ability retroactively to choose/determine which causes will determine me. “Ethics,” at its most elementary, stands for courage to accept this responsibility.¹⁸¹

Radical about this is that Žižek opines that accepting this responsibility, there basically cannot be talk of “effective freedom without ‘terror’.”¹⁸² In his view, the subject’s urge to follow his/her ‘death drive’ and turn around the Symbolic order through an act of ‘total’ or ‘absolute’ freedom almost automatically implies violence:¹⁸³ a violence directed against the subject him/herself (against the identity as established in the Symbolic order) as well as society (when changing the existing power coordinates through a ‘revolutionary act’). For a full and better understanding of this link between terror and freedom in his current thinking, it is therefore necessary to first discuss Žižek’s ideas of individuality, i.e. the place he allocates to the ‘Other’ when defining the subject and bearer of the Symbolic order and the way he links individual identity in the Symbolic order to Lacan’s *objet petit a*. Second, it requires an analysis of his theory of democracy, which includes an examination of his views on universality, politics and revolution.

¹⁸¹ Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 203

¹⁸² Žižek ‘Preface: Burning the Bridges’ p. ix

¹⁸³ See also: Grigg *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* pp. 120/1

The Subject and the Other: Žižek and the Value of Individuality

The consistency of the Self is purely virtual. A Self is precisely an entity without any substantial density, without any hard kernel that would guarantee its consistency.¹⁸⁴

One of Žižek's core concerns is rejuvenating 'the subject' and its position in modern philosophy. He rejects the postmodern theories, which state that the transcendental subject is over and done with and that henceforth one may only speak about "a divided, finite subject, a subject "thrown" into a non-transparent, contingent life-world."¹⁸⁵ By way of contrast, Žižek aims at rehabilitating modern subjectivity as "elaborated by the great German Idealists from Kant to Hegel," which he considers "the unsurpassable horizon of our philosophical experience."¹⁸⁶ He builds his theory on Hegel's thesis that the subject is substanceless and has an empty core; yet, s/he also is "an agent of belief and possible action(s),"¹⁸⁷ and as such takes up or should take up a key position in political thought.

In his early defense of the Enlightenment ideals of self-determination and universality, Žižek argues that to resurrect the subject, the individual needs to become a rational, addressable civil subject through his/her socialisation in society. Society imposes legal rules on the subject and constitutes his identity. Without the filter of socialisation through politics the individual cannot exist, at least not as a self-conscious actor with rights and duties, as part of a political community. Without what Žižek calls 'the Other', i.e. the social and political life s/he is part of, the subject is unable to obtain

¹⁸⁴ Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 204

¹⁸⁵ Žižek 'Preface: Burning the Bridges' p. ix

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p. ix

¹⁸⁷ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 73

and formulate his identity.¹⁸⁸ To Žižek, a subject cannot constitute his/her identity through self-realisation. Instead, s/he is ‘decentered’ (has no core substance) and can only define him/herself through what it excludes. In the not being able to represent a whole and “know what Thing we are ‘in the Real’,”¹⁸⁹ the void of the subject, and a consequent affirmation of difference and contingency, the subject can constitute an identity. Following Hegel’s view on this double negativity, the Slovenian philosopher thus asserts that a subject attains his/her identity only through what it is not: one can only be a subject if s/he is able to position him/herself against someone or something else’s.¹⁹⁰ One can only become a subject if one is able to formulate him/herself *in relation to* the Other.¹⁹¹ The subject needs the Other to identify with and find a certain ‘self’.¹⁹² This big Other assigns a subject its place and role in “the social-political totality.”¹⁹³

Moreover, what is crucial in the philosopher’s thought is that this Other itself “does not exist as a single, self-consistent, politically innocent whole.”¹⁹⁴ The identity of a subject is constituted by what the subject assumes to be and transfers to the Other. It is an unconscious, imaginary construction: “s/he is the *subjectum* to an unattainable desire, which s/he derives from the Other.”¹⁹⁵ To be more precise, following Lacan Žižek argues that the subject is a bearer of desire. This desire is not a desire to be

¹⁸⁸ Žižek ‘Class Struggle or Postmodernism?’ pp. 119/20

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 75

¹⁹⁰ In an interview with Peter Dews and Peter Osborne, Žižek explains that this understanding of Hegel’s theory was “opened up for me by Lacanian notions of lack in the Other, of how the final moment in analysis is your acknowledgement of your lack as the correlate lack of the Other, etc” (Žižek in: Dews and Osborne ‘Lacan in Slovenia’ p. 27).

¹⁹¹ In Žižek’s political thought, the Other refers to external social ideals, the sublime objects of political ideologies, which can be regimes, the People, the social system, the Jews, etc.. See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 79

¹⁹² cf. Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 50/1

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 52

¹⁹⁴ Sharpe ‘Slavoj Žižek (1949-)’ p. 252

¹⁹⁵ Kesel *Žižek* p. 119 (my translation)

found within the subject him/herself. It is a desire transposed upon the Other, which in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* he summarises posing the question ‘Che vuoi?’: “you demand something of me, but what do you really want, what are you aiming at through this demand?”¹⁹⁶ In the Symbolic order, a subject is what s/he has to be according to the Other; the identity of a subject is given by what you as a subject think you have to be in the eyes of the Other.¹⁹⁷ The subject’s belief in and desire transposed upon the Other, consequently, determines how s/he acts and/or behaves.

Yet, relating to my earlier analysis of Žižek’s idea of freedom this does not mean that in the Symbolic order, the subject is a fully determined being. The void of the subject allows the subject a certain freedom, which s/he can act upon: this “uncanny freedom above all includes the capacity abstractly to reject or ‘traverse’ regimes’ ideological fantasies, which usually conceal how the Other does not exist as the untouchable, sublime systems we often hope and imagine.”¹⁹⁸ Postulating an act, the subject can free him/herself from the world and law of the signifiers. Again building on the theory of Lacan, Žižek maintains that the subject is bound to the Symbolic, to the law of the signifiers through a certain substance, an *objet petit a* (the sublime object-cause of his/her desire), which indeed is not part of this Symbolic, but part of the domain of *jouissance* – “the enjoyment at the core of our way of life.”¹⁹⁹ This substance is divided and as such shows “a minimal incompleteness and openness to future change,”

¹⁹⁶ See: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 111

¹⁹⁷ See: Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 445. See also: Kesel Žižek p. 117

¹⁹⁸ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 79

¹⁹⁹ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 71. See also: Kesel Žižek p. 117

which the subject can act upon.²⁰⁰ The subject can free himself from his *objet petit a* through an act; s/he can give up on his/her object of desire.

What this means is that in order effectively to liberate oneself from the grip of existing social reality, one should first renounce the transgressive fantasmatic supplement that attaches us to it [through a radical gesture]. (...) This act, far from amounting to a case of impotent aggressivity turned against oneself, rather changes the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself: by cutting himself loose from the precious object through whose possession the enemy kept him in check, the subject gains the space of free action.²⁰¹

This way, renouncing or destroying his/her object of desire, which Žižek calls ‘traversing the fantasy’, the act allows the subject to change the coordinates of the Symbolic order, reinvent him/herself, and find a new place in this altered reality.²⁰² So, instead of passively being part of the Symbolic order, the subject actively interferes in that order through the act. This allows him/her a glimpse of the order of the ‘Real’, an access to “the unbearable truth of the subject (his *objet petit a*, the Thing) and of a subject position to which this object is sacrificed – hence, to a new subjectification and a new subject.”²⁰³ This is the truly ethical act that allows the subject to reinvent him/her ‘Self’.

As Sharpe and Boucher, however, sharply detect in their critical introduction to Žižek’s politics, from the mid-1990s this ‘subject of desire’ becomes a ‘subject of the drives’.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 81

²⁰¹ Žižek *The Fragile Absolute* p. 149/50

²⁰² In *The Parallax View* Žižek states: “Hegel made this point long ago, when he described this double movement of, first, radical self-withdrawal into the “Night of the World,” the abyss of pure subjectivity, and then the rise of the new order through the capacity of naming” (Žižek *The Parallax View* p. 210).

²⁰³ Kesel *Žižek* p. 130 (my translation)

²⁰⁴ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 7. In *In Defense of Lost Causes* (“The true aim of the “defense of lost causes” is (...) to render problematic the all-too-easy-liberal-democratic alternative” p.

[W]hile the subject of desire is grounded in the constitutive *lack* (it ex-sists insofar as it is in search of the missing Object-Cause), the subject of drive is grounded in a constitutive *surplus* – that is to say, in the excessive presence of some Thing that is inherently ‘impossible’ and should not be here, in our present reality – the Thing which, of course, is ultimately *the subject itself*.²⁰⁵

The former link between moral autonomy, universalism and democratic politics, all finding their origins in the divided subject, turns into a subject embodying an “authentic” particularistic subjectivism.²⁰⁶ Žižek no longer conceives the subject as being empty, but as having a substance. Instead of the ‘Real’ being unknown or hidden to the subject, he maintains that the subject can know what object s/he is in the ‘Real’.²⁰⁷ Consequently, instead of receiving an identity through the Other as part of a larger community, the subject as “bearer of an uncanny, infinite or even diabolically evil death drive, recalcitrant to all symbolic ideals,” follows his/her own particularistic “ideological fantasies” or “sinthomes.”²⁰⁸ The subject is no longer determined by the Other, nor by his/her *petit objet a*. It has become the gesture or act that “constitutes

6) as well as in *The Parallax View* (“this reappraisal is intended to draw an even stronger line of demarcation from the usual gang of democracy-to-come-deconstructionist-postsecular-Levinasian-respect-for-Otherness suspects” p. 11), Žižek openly renounces parts of his previous positions.

²⁰⁵ Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 371. In *For they know not what they do*, he states: “In the standard Lacanian doxa, desire is linked to active subjectivity, while drive involves “subjective destitution” – that is, the subject’s identification with the *objet petit a*. What, however, if it is the drive which confronts us with the most radical dimension of subjectivity? (...) Drive ... is fundamentally “interpassive” (...). Scopic drive (as opposed to “desire to see” the elusive stain of the Real in the Other) is making oneself visible to the Other’s gaze, which functions here as *objet petit a*. (...) [W]ithin the economy of the drive, I, the subject, am active, in so far as I externalize, posit outside myself, the gaze *qua* object, the impenetrable stain *for which* I am active and which designates my effective place – I “am really” that impassive stain, the point of the gaze which I never see, but for which I nevertheless “make myself seen” by means of what I am doing” (Žižek *For they know not what they do* pp. xxxi/xxxii).

²⁰⁶ Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 253

²⁰⁷ See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 125

²⁰⁸ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 26. See also: Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 332. “The Lacanian *sinthome* is a ‘knot’: a particular innerworldly phenomenon whose existence is experienced as contingent – however, the moment one touches it or approaches it too closely, this ‘knot’ unravels and with it, our entire universe – that is the very place from which we speak and perceive reality disintegrates; we literally lose the ground from beneath our feet....”

[and sustains] the very order of Being,”²⁰⁹ a “full subject ‘in the Real’.”²¹⁰ Following his/her death drive, the subject opens up the possibility of subjectivization: through an act that destroys the subject and hands him/her over to the Thing of the ‘Real’ (the impossible, a ‘nothing’) it can create something totally new.²¹¹

Moreover, the death drive, in Žižek’s (and Lacan’s) view, is not only destructive. It also implies the possibility of creating something new *ex nihilo*.²¹² Through an act, which is not actively ‘willed’ by the subject, but rather unexpectedly crops up and “surprises its agent” who responsibly fulfils it – a passive, “uncanny ‘acephalous’ subject through which the act takes place as that which is ‘in him more than himself’.”²¹³ “*This* is the Lacanian act in which the abyss of absolute freedom, autonomy, and responsibility coincides with an unconditional necessity.”²¹⁴ According to the philosopher, the subject disappears and is taken over or merely eradicated by the act: the proper political act unleashing “the force of negativity that shatters the very foundation of our being.”

The quintessential political act, then, is a revolutionary act. This act no longer serves the goal of changing one’s relationship to the Symbolic order and finding a new place and identity (‘Self’) in it; a political, revolutionary act now is an act of ultimate freedom in which the subject does not shy away from using ‘good’ violence or terror to change the coordinates of a Symbolic order. You choose what you *have* to do (good terror) as opposed you do what the Other tells you to do (bad or evil terror).

²⁰⁹ Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 188

²¹⁰ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 119

²¹¹ See also: Kesel *Žižek* p. 58

²¹² See: Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 460

²¹³ Ibid. pp. 460/1

²¹⁴ Žižek *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* p. 162

Rhetorically Žižek asks: “Is the structure of a true political act of liberation not, by definition, that of a forced choice and, as such, ‘terroristic’?”²¹⁵ Through revolutionary ‘good terror’, in the shape of an act, the subject of the drives is able to free him/herself from the Symbolic order through destroying him/herself as subject and consequently breach the existing order and create something entirely new.²¹⁶ What this means to Žižek’s view of democracy is the question discussed in the next part.

Proper Politics and the Political Act: Žižek and the Value of Democracy

From the 1970s up to the mid-1990s, the link between ideology as a site social interaction and subjectivity is of main importance to the writings of Žižek. He spells out a theory of democracy that emphasises the dynamics between human desire and subjectivity in relation to communal solidarity as a site for ideologies to occur.²¹⁷ Much, then, of what Žižek says and thinks about freedom and the subject, as analysed in the above, is summarised in his theory of democracy. Seeking to oppose communist as well as nationalist political movements, he advocates the Enlightenment ideals of individual autonomy and self-determination and asserts that the best political solution for safeguarding those ideals is democracy as “the purely symbolic, empty place of Power that no ‘real’ subject can ever fill out.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Žižek *The Ticklish Subject* p. 465

²¹⁶ Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* pp. 160-168. In these pages, Žižek reflects on Robespierre’s *Virtue and Terror* and claims that in order to remove liberal-democratic, capitalist society a “divine violence” (or radical emancipatory violence) of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ is needed.

²¹⁷ See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 26; Wright & Wright *The Žižek Reader* p. 6

²¹⁸ Žižek ‘Introduction – The Spectre of Ideology’ p. 29

Moreover, he shows a close affiliation with the theories of the post-Marxist radical democrats and their critique of political ideologies. He adheres to the theory of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau that democracy can be saved only “by *taking into account its own radical impossibility*.”²¹⁹ One has to accept that there is always an element that remains a non-part of democracy. Taking in as many viewpoints as possible while trying to meet the interests of multiple players and thus not allowing a non-element, a dynamics between the ‘Symbolic’ and the ‘Real’ to exist would lead to the end of democracy and even of politics.²²⁰ Žižek rejects and denies any possibility of taking a neutral position in a political society. In his view and that of the radical democrats, democracy is constituted by a fundamental antagonism that cannot be solved, because as soon as you would believe in that possibility you enter totalitarian grounds.

So although ‘in reality’ there are only ‘exceptions’ and ‘deformations’, the universal notion of ‘democracy’ is none the less a ‘necessary fiction’, a symbolic fact in the absence of which effective democracy, in all the plurality of its forms, could not reproduce itself.²²¹

Staying true to his Hegelian departure points, Žižek maintains that democracy is never a complete whole. It is shaped by a dynamics between those who dominate the political game and the excluded, the ‘uncounted’ or the ‘partless’ who can influence or oppose policies from their position outside the Symbolic order. The excluded can force “an expansion and rearticulation of the basic premises of democracy itself.”²²² Hence, this dynamics or struggle, caused by a part that is never really a part, is a

²¹⁹ Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 6. Italics in original.

²²⁰ See: Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* pp. 97-100; Žižek ‘Class Struggle or Postmodernism?’ pp. 93-101

²²¹ See: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 148/9

²²² Butler ‘Restaging the Universal’ p. 11

description of the impossibility of democracy – and the need that it is impossible – to involve everything.²²³

When analysing the position of a subject in democracy, the Slovenian philosopher argues in line with his Hegelian-Lacanian approach that a subject can never fully coincide with existing democratic society. Every democratic project offers only a differential identity, an incomplete version of the political subject – who defines him/herself through what it excludes. In other words, the subject's relation to the Other is a necessary condition of democratic society. Central to democracy is a fantasizing subject or subject of desire that is critical towards society and has formulated or can formulate him/herself in relation to the Other.²²⁴ The political agency of a subject in a democracy, then, rests in the fact that s/he is capable acting upon the Other, and so, manages to change, resist or topple existing power relations, the Symbolic order.

Contrary to what radical democrats like Mouffe and Laclau endorse, however, Žižek opines that this subject and political agency is only to be found on the political Left. In terms of power, it is the Right that “has control over the master signifiers and the way they are interpreted, limiting the accepted scope of what is politically legitimate to consider.”²²⁵ To Žižek, politics takes place in the economic sphere and democratic action originating in political antagonism therefore is based on ‘class struggle’; a struggle in which it is always the Left that has to fight for its voice to be heard.

²²³ See also: Žižek *Looking Awry* p. 163

²²⁴ See: Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* p. 125; Žižek *Looking Awry* pp. 162-165

²²⁵ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p.108

Ultimately, it is here that he starts criticising the radical democrats for staying within the narrative framework of a society that is dominated by liberal democracy and capitalism and takes his own thinking about politics to a different level.²²⁶

Imagine a society which is fully integrated into its ethical substance, the great modern axioms of freedom, equality, democratic rights, the duty of a society to provide for education and basic healthcare of all its members. This society also rendered racism and sexism simply unacceptable and ridiculous, so that there is no need even to argue against, say, racism, since anyone who openly advocates racism is immediately perceived as a weird eccentric who cannot be taken seriously, etc. But then, step by step, although society continues to pay lip service to these axioms, they are de facto deprived of their substance.²²⁷

Towards the end of the 1990s, Žižek is engaged in bringing together politics and ethics, claiming the role of the subject, his/her freedom and his/her active political role being vital to the functioning of society. In his book *On Belief* he opposes a form of politics characterised by “pragmatic considerations and compromises, which always and by definition fall short of the unconditional ethical demand.”²²⁸ Instead, he defends a politics of Truth, based on a “*return to Lenin*.”²²⁹ in realising a political project, political choices have to be made consciously and one has to be aware of the consequences specific political actions could have (pleasant and unpleasant) when being in a position of power. He starts advocating an orthodox Marxist flavoured “dictatorship of the proletariat” as the only “political alternative to global capitalism and immanent ecological catastrophe.”²³⁰ To the political philosopher, capitalism is the plague that pesters humanity and the only cure or remedy lies in a total (violent)

²²⁶ See for an extensive critique of Laclau and Butler and their position towards radical democracy, the possibility of universalism and his subsequent defense of concrete universality and class struggle, Žižek’s essay ‘Class Struggle or Postmodernism’, published in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, pp. 90-135

²²⁷ Žižek ‘The Return of the Christian-Conservative Revolution’ p. 67

²²⁸ Žižek *On Belief* p. 1

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 2

²³⁰ Sharpe ‘Slavoj Žižek (1949–)’ p. 256. See also: Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* pp. 412-419

transcendence of the existing order without knowing what comes after. This, then, might very well entail authoritarian government and the political use of terror. In *The Parallax View*, for example, “he puts in a good word for Stalinism, speaks up for revolutionary violence, defends the idea of the political Leader, and champions US fundamentalism against bien-pensant liberalism (among other reasons because adherents to the former believe in struggle while proponents of the latter believe only in difference).”²³¹ Rejecting the earlier opposition between democracy and totalitarianism as inherently misleading and anti-radical, his current political theory is based on a radical critique of the liberal-democratic hegemony in a capitalist world order.²³² Žižek seeks to open an intellectual space where radical emancipatory politics can emerge. Departing from a Marxist perspective and his consequent critical stance towards ‘globalisation’, ‘the third way’ and/or ‘the new economy’, he aspires to redefine the conditions of a ‘real’, ethical politics of emancipation.²³³ He aims at formulating a leftist alternative to the Western (neo)liberal democracy in order to “effectively break the vicious cycle of democratic corruption and the consequent Rightist campaigns that promise to get rid of it.”²³⁴ Moreover, he does not fully discard the notion of democracy, but seeks to uncouple it from capitalism, democracy being filled with new (yet, archaic) content.²³⁵ The Bulgarian sociologist, Boyan Znepolski summarises:

Instead of a relationship of equality between members of the community as a basis for legitimate political decisions and acts, there is a hierarchical relationship between a

²³¹ Eagleton ‘On the contrary’ p. 61

²³² Žižek *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* pp. 3/4. To Žižek, liberal democracy has become just another fundamentalist faith that is dominated by the logic of capitalism and does not allow any alternatives to take its place.

²³³ Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* p. 25ff..

²³⁴ Žižek ‘Democracy ... and beyond’

²³⁵ See, for example: Žižek ‘The eternal marriage between capitalism and democracy has ended’

leader and the people; formal procedures for forming a common political will are substituted with the violent clash of the oppressed people with the oligarchy, where it is the imposition of class interest that is at stake; the question of whether power is exercised democratically is replaced with the question of who is exercising power.²³⁶

As was the case in his pre-1996 writings, Žižek holds that both politics and the subject are constantly in a process of creating, defining and establishing themselves in relation to one another. Yet, Žižek maintains in his recent political work that at present there exists a discrepancy between the developments in society itself and their political translation. Current political mechanisms are not able to act on (economic) developments in society.²³⁷ Politics is never up to date and sometimes even counter-productive. It has disappeared from the scene. Neo-liberalism has dissolved community bonds. The individual does not play a meaningful role in society anymore. The market economy and capitalism have been shaped by forces outside human (political) values. Everyone has had to adapt him/herself to the logic of capitalism, which slowly has depoliticised society.²³⁸ Capitalism or “the predominant liberal democratic post-ideological consensus” leaves no freedom to really change “the coordinates of the existing power relations.”²³⁹ Accordingly, one is subjected to the power of capitalism and has little say over his/her role in society. The freedom to perform a true political act has faded into the background. Debates only take place within existing societal structures, plurality and diversity are deprived of their meaning as the liberalist tolerance²⁴⁰ and its emphasis on consensus does not allow the

²³⁶ Znepolski ‘Down with democracy! Long live the people!’

²³⁷ Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* pp. 25-28

²³⁸ Ibid. p. 52

²³⁹ Žižek ‘A Plea for Leninist Intolerance’ p. 544/45

²⁴⁰ In his book *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* Žižek argues that the liberalist tolerance truly is an anti-tolerance. Everything is good as long as it fits in the model shaped by liberals and capitalism. The moment one leaves this model, or refuses to become part of it, the reaction is not so tolerant. See: Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* pp. 29-34

Other to really be different. The ‘partless’ or uncounted (i.e. the proletariat)²⁴¹ have no possibility (anymore) to make themselves heard. Hence, Žižek asserts that to (re)gain power over a society that is regulated by capitalism, possibilities need to be created that enable society to break away from the post-political order. It requires the *re*-politicisation of society and, at the same time, the *de*-politicisation of the economic sphere.²⁴² Man has to free himself from the urge to destroy himself by behaving like a slave of consumption.

Žižek, consequently, articulates an appeal for the (re)-emergence of subjects as political agents, which he now labels *the singulier universal*: “a group that, although without any fixed place in the social edifice (...), not only demands to be heard on equal footing with the ruling oligarchy or aristocracy (that power) but, even more, presents itself as the immediate embodiment of *society as such*, in its universality, against the particular power interests of aristocracy or oligarchy.”²⁴³ This group can create – if necessary, through the use of (‘good’) violence – a truly free and political society. To Žižek, the issue is “to reflexively confront and identify with this usually repressed freedom of subjectivity [our own active subjectivity and political desire], which – since it underlies the sustaining ideological fantasies of the ‘big Other’ of any regime – can also always undermine it, engendering new political modes and orders.”²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* p. 413

²⁴² See: Žižek, *Pleidooi voor Intolerantie*, p. 98; Žižek ‘Class Struggle or Postmodernism?’ p. 98

²⁴³ Žižek ‘A Leftist Plea for “Eurocentrism”’ p. 989

²⁴⁴ Sharpe ‘Slavoj Žižek (1949–)’ p. 254

Defending a militant Leninist position, he asserts that the only authentic political communication is that of solidarity in a common conflict.²⁴⁵ To Žižek, proper politics is about struggle and militantly taking sides (innocent positions do not exist) in defending a certain ideological position. Each of these particularist positions, then, embody ‘concrete universalities’ that are incompatible with other universalities:²⁴⁶ “[H]e defends the idea of universality – but universality as a site of antagonism.”²⁴⁷ In his view, those who genuinely embody a universalist position, the “part of no part,”²⁴⁸ are engaged “in a passionate struggle for the assertion of the Truth which compels them.”²⁴⁹

At this point we become aware that the Universal is no longer just an empty neutral container of its subspecies but an entity in tension with each and every one of its species. The universal Notion thus acquires a dynamics of its own. More precisely, the true Universal *is* this very antagonistic dynamics between the Universal and the Particular. It is at this point that we pass from “abstract” to “concrete” Universal – at the point when we acknowledge that every Particular is an “exception,” and, consequently, that the Universal, far from “containing” its particular content, *excludes* it (or is excluded *by* it). This exclusion renders the Universal itself particular (it is not truly universal, since it cannot grasp or contain the particular content), yet this very failure is its strength: the Universal is thus simultaneously posited as the Particular. The supreme political case of such a gesture is the moment of revolutionary “councils” taking over – the moment of “ahistorical” collective freedom, of “eternity in time.”²⁵⁰

The creation of a political universality is the condition for the possibility of an authentic political act: a truly revolutionary Act that traverses ideological fantasies and destroys the existing Symbolic order. A regime change is only to be achieved violently, through terror. When people fight for the same cause, a true political and ethical act can take place. In this common fight, people are able to recognise each

²⁴⁵ Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* p. 54

²⁴⁶ See also: Žižek *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* p. 4

²⁴⁷ Eagleton ‘On the contrary’ p. 62

²⁴⁸ Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* p. 413

²⁴⁹ Žižek ‘Carl Schmitt in the age of post-politics’ p. 35

²⁵⁰ Žižek *Organs without Bodies* pp. 50/1

other and can communicate authentically: Truth appearing in the act. On this level solidarity, a ‘social totality’ can be created.

The only criteria [of the political act] is (...) that of *the enacted utopia*. In a proper revolutionary breakthrough, the utopian future is neither simply fully realized, present, nor simply evoked as a distant promise that justifies present violence. It is rather as if, in a unique suspension of temporality, in the short circuit between the present and the future, we are – as if by Grace – for a brief time allowed to act as if the utopian future were (not yet fully here, but) already at hand, just there to be grabbed. (...) we already are free while fighting for freedom, we already are happy while fighting for happiness, no matter how difficult the circumstances.²⁵¹

Focusing on class struggle Žižek, ultimately, aims at overthrowing the capitalist order and abolishing liberal-democratic regimes.²⁵² His present alternative to the current political organisation of society is a dictatorship of the proletariat through ‘divine violence’: “the heroic assumption of the solitude of a sovereign decision. It is a decision (to kill, to risk or lose one’s own life) made in absolute solitude, with no cover from the big Other” – the subject’s death drive.²⁵³ At the end of the day, terror is the ultimate search for freedom. One should not forget that, following Žižek, this overthrowing of a political organisation of society through revolution does not mean that this is a closed process. Political acts based on concrete universalities can occur

²⁵¹ Žižek ‘A Plea for Leninist Intolerance’ p. 558f.

²⁵² Laclau ‘Constructing Universality’ p. 289

²⁵³ Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* p. 162. In his latest work, he increasingly links this to ‘materialist’ Christianity (its universality), the problem of the Neighbour (the Other), and Christian love to support his political argument and create a new political order. For the purpose of this chapter, however, it would lead too far (nor is it necessary for the logic of my argument) to trace back his theological arguments. Important, however, is his main message that: “What Christianity did, in a religiously mystified version, is give us an idea of rebirth. Against the pagan notion of destiny, Christianity offered the possibility of a radical opening, that we can find a zero point and clear the table. It introduced a new kind of ethics: (...) irrespective of who I am, I have direct access to universality. (...) What interests me is only this dimension” (Žižek, in: Henwood ‘I am a Fighting Atheist’). This is the theoretical background to Žižek’s thinking about concrete universalities being achieved through a radical political act and the possibility of a new beginning.

all the time and a political system, therefore, is and should remain open for such universalities to crop up.²⁵⁴

In conclusion, according to Žižek, politics should be shaped by a conflict between “the structured social body where each part has its place” and the “part with no-part” (the proletariat) that identifies with “the Whole,” “the Universal.”²⁵⁵ From their position of identification with the Universal, they seek to change or unsettle the existing order of society. In this sense, politics, to Žižek, is still synonymous to democracy²⁵⁶ – yet, very different from the common understanding of how democracy is defined today in which liberal democracy and capitalism are closely linked. At present, Žižek pleads for an uncoupling of democracy and capitalism.²⁵⁷ And regarding its democratic political legacy (starting in ancient Greece), the only place where that can be done on an authentic or credible ground is Europe.²⁵⁸

Žižek’s answer, then, to critical voices accusing him of (left) authoritarianism is that coming from the Left his form of politics is a form of authentic politics that is open to change and, therefore, worth defending.²⁵⁹ In his view, the Left should profess and uphold its own terroristic heritage (i.e. the Jacobins, Stalin, Mao) not in the sense of just repeating its terror, but in returning to the vision or utopia that was behind this terror: Žižek’s Act is “about the ability to envision the possibility of qualitative changes in society and to act on this vision.”²⁶⁰ The case of the Left is about class struggle, social positions and the economy. It aims at a more ethical and just society

²⁵⁴ See also: Kesel *Žižek* p. 64

²⁵⁵ Žižek ‘For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy’ p. 64

²⁵⁶ See: Ibid. p. 64

²⁵⁷ See: Žižek ‘The eternal marriage between capitalism and democracy has ended’

²⁵⁸ Žižek ‘For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy’ p. 77

²⁵⁹ See also: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 188

²⁶⁰ Clark ‘Acting up’

instead of, for example, dubious fascist politics that stays within the capitalistic order and seeks to convince the masses believing in its ideology through racist arguments, labelling the Jew as the Other that has to be destroyed. With Lenin Žižek argues that in order to find a form of politics that is truly based on the “communist-egalitarian emancipatory Idea” one has to “begin from the beginning over and over again (...), ‘descend’ to the starting point and follow a *different* path.”²⁶¹ Yet, his argument that (1) “strict *egalitarian justice*”, (2) “terror”, (3) “voluntarism” and (4) “*trust in the people*” (taken from Alain Badiou) are together the sufficient conditions to ensure that the dictatorship of the proletariat does not become authoritarian and offers enough space for politics that is open to change, does not convince everybody, to put it mildly.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Žižek ‘How to Begin From the Beginning’ p. 215 & p. 210

²⁶² Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* p. 461. See also: Marchart ‘Acting and the Act’ p. 109/10; Kesel *Žižek* p. 57; Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 128-131 & pp. 192/3. Sharpe and Boucher are extremely critical of Žižek here and fear him tending progressively towards political irrationalism.

IV.III Žižek's Europe: Ancient Greek Democracy and Christian

Universality

From the sublime heights of Habermas' theory to vulgar market ideologists, we are bombarded by different versions of depoliticization: no longer struggle but dialogic negotiation, regulated competition, etc. If the European Union is to be only this, only a more efficient and multiculturally tolerant centre of power able to compete with the USA and Eastern Asia as the three nodal points of the New World Order, then this goal, although quite legitimate and worthwhile, involves renouncing the fundamental European democratic legacy.²⁶³

Žižek's take on Europe is a political one. His life-long ambition as a political thinker to formulate an alternative model organising society based on the ideals of freedom, individuality and his version of democracy has its roots in his evaluation of the European Enlightenment and its heritage. In analysing Europe's democratic legacy and political future he at first heavily relies on the Enlightenment philosophical tradition combined with a modern political reading of the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Yet, in a society that is dominated by capitalism the Marxist tradition becomes ever more important to the Slovenian philosopher. Conspicuous, here, is that compared to the books he has written from the mid-1990s onwards, the journalistic contributions and articles on Europe often are less radical and more open to interpretation. As has become clear, he does criticise the current functioning of democracy and the problems of capitalism, wishing these two entities to be uncoupled. Yet, he does not renounce the concept of democracy as such. In his latest books, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' figures prominently, which – already by his choice of words – raises many questions about the content of such an understanding of

²⁶³ See: Ibid. p. 77

democracy, especially regarding the revolutionary violence that is to put this dictatorship into power. In his essays on Europe, however, he advocates a “participatory democracy” instigated by a “new figure of the Master,” who pulls “individuals out of the quagmire of their inertia and motivate[s] them towards self-emancipatory struggle for freedom.”²⁶⁴ In this sense, he stays somewhat closer to accepted or known political narratives than in his books. Nevertheless, it would be a step too far to claim that we see a different Žižek contributing to the public debate. Applied to the question how the Slovenian philosopher envisions Europe or European society, one can clearly detect a certain consistency between what he writes in his books and in his journalistic contributions. Besides, when formulating his idea of Europe, Žižek’s break in thinking about the political organisation of society can be found here just as well.

Being part of the Slovenian (and Central European) cultural and intellectual opposition defending human rights, pluralism, and democracy towards the end of the 1980s, he at first criticises communism and nationalism. In his critique of both ideologies, he seldomly uses the notion of Europe and instead emphasises the modern European philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment and the importance of its values in bringing about a change in society. Only from the end of the 1990s, he explicitly links his more abstract political theories to the idea of Europe and his vision of society becomes a vision of European society.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, regarding the philosophical tradition in which he places himself and the references he uses in his early period, his idea of how society should be organised should be understood as

²⁶⁴ Žižek ‘We Need a Margaret Thatcher of the Left’ p. 162 & p. 164

²⁶⁵ See: Žižek *In Defense of Lost Causes* p. 275; Žižek ‘For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy’ pp. 63-78; Žižek ‘A Leftist Plea for “Eurocentrism”’ pp. 988-1009

thoroughly European. His view of Europe or European society, then, clearly opposes any modern society built on a scientific worldview, technology, market-based liberal democracy and a progressive view of history. The thought of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud and Lacan have made him too aware of the problems of modernity and of the modern rational subject à la Descartes. Yet, he does neither share the postmodern critique of modernity, its claim on the death of the subject, the impossibility of big narratives and its tendency to relativism or nihilism. Thus criticising modern rational and postmodern intellectual discourses on politics, he seeks to get ideology and political discourse back on the European political and cultural agenda and aims at a transformation of society and reorganisation of social life adhering to the values of freedom, individuality, and democracy.

His early political idea of Europe is rather positive. Wishing to take further the project of the Enlightenment and modernity and get rid of its irrational components in order to ultimately realise political freedom and a pluralist society, he – as we have seen – returns to German idealism (Kant, Hegel) and its focus on autonomy, rational self-determination and individual responsibility. Fully aware of the dangers an uncritical theory of the role of the subject in society can have, he relates to the traditions of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and partly also Heideggerian ontology in order to evaluate the relationship between society and the individual and the “capacity of subjects to direct freely the course of individual lives.”²⁶⁶ Žižek’s socialisation in Slovenian academia and communist society, then, makes him apply Lacan to a reading of Kant and Hegel through a political lens. Where in the West Lacan is often used in the clinical context or in studies of literature, film and

²⁶⁶ Pippin *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* p. xv

feminism, the Lacanian School of Ljubljana refers to Lacan when dealing with questions of politics and the subject's relation to society.²⁶⁷ This is an original take on Western European tradition in thinking about the heritage of the Enlightenment and the project of modernity. It enables Žižek to place the subject as well as ideology back at the heart of social and political thought and so opens up a space for “an emancipatory political alternative,”²⁶⁸ notably radical democracy based on the thought that this democracy is built on an inherent antagonism and therefore always a process in the making. In relation to society, individuals have the freedom and responsibility to act upon politics and create an open, plural and just society. Before 1989 Žižek's political alternative is mainly directed against the ruling communist elites and the nationalist competitors. In a world after 1989, it increasingly becomes an alternative to liberal-democratic capitalism and its talk of the end of history.

His mid-1990s turn to the Freudian death drive and a Hobbesian, theologically grounded politics of violence when formulating his idea of Europe seems to depart from his earlier project of the Enlightenment and instead proclaim an irrationalist ‘Romanticist’ alternative as Sharpe and Boucher contend.²⁶⁹ What speaks against calling Žižek's current political thought Romanticist, however, is the Romanticist tradition of returning to nature and of understanding one's own society as unique and organically grown.²⁷⁰ This led to many nationalist movements and is something the philosopher has always opposed and still despises. In addition, I would argue that Žižek's turn to the subject of the drives rather involves a stronger emphasis on the

²⁶⁷ Laclau ‘Preface’ p. ix

²⁶⁸ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 1

²⁶⁹ See: Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* pp. 213-218

²⁷⁰ See: Rietbergen *Europe* pp. 316/17

value of universalism and the question what it is and how this relates to freedom, individuality, and democracy when thinking about the Enlightenment project than a turn to Romanticism in which “the bridge between human nature and social freedom is to be crossed using some irrational force.”²⁷¹

In an interview to Doug Henwood of *Bad Subjects*, Žižek states that: “Universalism is a European notion.”²⁷² Even Third World countries struggling against European imperialism, appealing for democracy or more freedom, are always “at a more radical level endorsing the European premise of universalism.”²⁷³ For a story or narrative to really count it must contain a universal dimension that concerns all and in the philosopher’s view, this idea has its origins in Europe and European Christianity. Žižek’s current idea of Europe, therefore, is probably closer to a “Christian version of the Enlightenment” (notably Berkeley, Hume, Lessing, Leibniz, but also Kant) dealing with questions on “the relation between knowable nature and unknowable supernature and (...) the relation between matter and spirit” than to Romanticism.²⁷⁴ Through reading Kierkegaard and Schelling, the questions posed by the Christian Enlightenment have reached centre stage in the philosopher’s current work. Besides, the Christian Enlightenment rejection of a strictly scientific and technological worldview and its tendency to generalise everything is a position present in Žižek from the early beginning. Yet, the ideals proclaimed by the Enlightenment that have become so informative of the modern political idea of Europe cannot be adopted without critical reflection. Living in the 21st century, the philosopher knows his

²⁷¹ Sharpe and Boucher *Žižek and Politics* p. 25

²⁷² Žižek, in: Henwood ‘I am a Fighting Atheist’

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Rietbergen *Europe* p. 315 and p. 312

Nietzsche and 20th century philosophy; he is in no doubt that ‘God is dead’ and man is left to his own resources. It is not for nothing he calls himself “a fighting atheist.”²⁷⁵ To Žižek (with Lacan), man is the subject of the world and cannot make some supranatural God responsible for the world. It is man who has to take and bear that responsibility.

For Žižek an ethics of the Real (or Real ethics) means that we cannot rely on any form of symbolic Other that would endorse our (in)decisions and (in)actions (...). What Žižek affirms is a radical culture of ethical identification for the left in which the alternative forms of militancy must first of all be militant with "themselves". That is to say, they must be militant in the fundamental ethical sense of not relying on any external/higher authority and in the development of a political imagination that, like Žižek's own thought, exhorts us to risk the impossible.²⁷⁶

Important in Christianity, then, is its focus on and belief in the possibility of universality, or to be more precise, of universal equality and “the idea of rebirth,” the possibility of a new beginning out of nothing.²⁷⁷ To the Slovenian, in order to risk the impossible (away from the standard solutions or interventions) and try something revolutionary of which one does not know what consequences it will have, this is the Christian legacy that has to be defended and made part of current political thought. It consequently influences his idea of Europe.

The break in his thought and current idea of Europe is grounded in the failed encounter between Eastern and Western Europe after the “disintegration of Eastern European Socialism.”²⁷⁸ In 1990, the Slovenian philosopher wrote an article on the

²⁷⁵ Žižek in: Henwood ‘I am a Fighting Atheist’. Philosopher Marc de Kesel asserts that Žižek’s atheism is a fighting atheism, because every individual has to constantly beware of the fact not to give in to the desire to hand over responsibility to (an imagined) God. The individual is responsible for his/her acting upon and in the world. See: Kesel *Žižek* p. 71

²⁷⁶ Daly ‘Risking the Impossible’

²⁷⁷ Žižek, in: Henwood ‘I am a Fighting Atheist’

²⁷⁸ Žižek ‘For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy’ p. 71

problematic transition of the Eastern European states from communism to democracy. In 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead', Žižek stressed that in the 1980s the Eastern European democratic opposition movements were so successful in challenging communist power, because "all the 'anti-totalitarian' elements, from the Church to the leftist intellectuals,"²⁷⁹ were fighting for the same cause: (liberal) democracy – the 'concrete universal' of the time. Nevertheless, after the collapse of communism this common cause disappeared and ever since, the many choices, risks, and instability that came in its place, became difficult to handle. Instead of the desired political pluralism and a flourishing market economy, ethnic conflicts and nationalism marked the region.²⁸⁰ Over the years, then, it became clear that (Western) liberal-democratic, capitalist society did not necessarily serve as an antidote to these tendencies.²⁸¹ Capitalism and the tolerance proclaimed by liberal society, the emphasis on consensus, and the resulting elimination of 'the Other' from the political scene, destroyed the basis for politics (as a place of contest).²⁸² To put it in Žižek's psychoanalytical and philosophical terms: With the disappearance of the Other, the ground or motive for common action vanished and left many disoriented.²⁸³ "Really existing capitalism" and liberal democratic society being dominated by "ruthless commercialization and economic colonization" was not what Central and Eastern Europeans had in mind when they took the streets demanding democracy.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ Žižek 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead' p. 61

²⁸⁰ See: Žižek 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead' p. 58.

²⁸¹ In 'Post-Wall', an article published in the *London Review of Books* in 2009, Žižek repeats the argument of 1990, and adds that in recent decades, the market has proven not to be a benign mechanism that works best when left alone. Capitalism and democracy are not necessarily two sides of the same medal (see China). To safeguard democracy, one might look for alternatives to a capitalist society: "socialism with a human face"? See: Žižek 'Post-Wall' p. 10

²⁸² See: Žižek *Pleidooi voor Intolerantie* 29ff.

²⁸³ cf. Žižek *Pleidooi voor intolerantie* p. 74

²⁸⁴ Žižek 'For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy' p. 71

Subsequently, to many, it is difficult to see an alternative different from the nationalist tendencies or communist nostalgia. Or, and this is a third group Žižek identifies, people are led by an anti-Communist paranoia, claiming communists are actually still in a ruling position not giving proper capitalism a chance.²⁸⁵

In addition, what is true for Central and Eastern Europe also holds for Western Europe. Žižek detects a similar disappointment of the Western Europeans in Central and Eastern Europe as the Central and Eastern Europeans in Western Europe: “the West, which began by idolizing the Eastern dissident movement as the reinvention of its own tired democracy, disappointingly dismisses the present post-Socialist regimes as a mixture of the corrupted ex-Communist oligarchy and/or ethnic and religious fundamentalists.”²⁸⁶ Hence, their reaction is either to hold on to the reinforced link of democracy and capitalism or to turn to the political right as offering a solution for their misery. A disappointed Žižek writes: “the only passionate political agent [in Western Europe], more or less, is predominantly the right-wing anti-immigrant populist, who brings the voice of popular discontent and change.”²⁸⁷

Žižek’s current idea of Europe, consequently, does not only originate from the Slovenian and Central European context anymore. It now addresses Europe as a whole – and therefore is made explicit. The insecurity and instability of risk society and the power of capitalism over human lives are not only a problem of Central or Eastern Europe, but of European society as a whole: according to the Slovenian philosopher,

²⁸⁵ Žižek *Living in the End Times* p. viii

²⁸⁶ Žižek ‘For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy’ p. 71

²⁸⁷ Žižek *Demanding the Impossible* p. 96

European politics and democracy are threatened by the logic of Western capitalism and its subsequent depoliticisation of society.

According to the Ancient Greek myth, Europa was a Phoenician princess abducted and then raped by Zeus in the guise of a bull (...). Is this not a true picture of Europe? Did not Europe (as an ideological notion) arise as the outcome of two such abductions of an Eastern pearl by barbarians from the West: first, the Romans abducted and vulgarized Greek thought; then, in the early Middle Ages, the barbarian West abducted and vulgarized Christianity? And is not something similar going on today for the third time? Is not the 'war on terrorism' the abominable conclusion, the 'dotting of the i', of a long, gradual process of American ideological, political and economic colonization of Europe? Was not Europe again kidnapped by the West – by American civilization, which is now setting global standards and, *de facto*, treating Europe as its province?²⁸⁸

In a nutshell this quote summarises (somewhat provocatively) the myths on which many publications on the idea of Europe are built and Žižek spins the story forward, criticising the influence of the United States has on Europe. To Žižek, it is important to return to the utopian impulses that brought the communist system down and try to organise society according to its ideas. Criticising market-based liberal democracy, Žižek states: “Against this ‘end of ideology’ politics, one should insist on the potential of democratic politicization as the true European legacy from ancient Greece onwards,” in which the individual and the universal are linked.²⁸⁹ Žižek asserts that politics proper, being “the struggle for one’s voice to be heard and recognized as the voice of a legitimate partner,” is one of the most important legacies of Europe, and can be observed in all important democratic events in European history from the French Revolution to “the demise of ex-European Socialism (in which the dissident

²⁸⁸ Žižek *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* p. 143

²⁸⁹ Žižek ‘For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy’ p. 77

Forum proclaimed itself representative of the entire society against the Party nomenklatura).”²⁹⁰ Hence:

It is time for us, citizens of Europe, to become aware that we have to make a properly political decision about what we want.²⁹¹

According to Žižek, Europe has to free itself from the shackles that bind it to the global system of capitalism. It has to return to its Enlightenment roots emphasising the “egalitarian universality of thought”²⁹² and defend its democratic system built on the wish of the ‘part of the no-part’ to emancipate itself and define society anew. In other words, being more pessimistic about the possibilities of the subject in defining him/herself against society and (actively) changing this relationship within existing society, he now endorses the view that one has to strive for a total turn-around of society and build it from scratch: the only chance for Europe is for all European citizens to unite for a common cause.

The future of the project of the Enlightenment as Žižek understands it in relation to Europe lies in “a new figure of freedom”²⁹³ that allows for the subject to act even though s/he does not know what consequences this act will have. The political subject – being “reflexive, negative, universal”²⁹⁴ – has to perform a revolutionary act in the name of a universal cause, changing the power coordinates of a given system (ex nihilo), and challenging liberal-capitalist thinking. On this level of ideological

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 64.

²⁹¹ Žižek ‘The constitution is dead’

²⁹² Žižek ‘A Permanent Economic Emergency’ p. 90

²⁹³ Žižek *Organs without Bodies* p. 133. In ‘A Permanent Economic Emergency’ Žižek contends that “we will be forced to live ‘as if we are free’. We will have to risk taking steps into the abyss, in totally inappropriate situations” (Žižek ‘A Permanent Economic Emergency’ p. 95). In his view, this is different from what was common in the 20th century where the left knew what had to be done, but had to wait for the right moment to act.

²⁹⁴ Parker *Slavoj Žižek* p. 54

struggle, solidarity or ‘social totality’ can be created. To wrap it all up, according to Žižek, the concrete universal can only take shape in Europe, as it is here democracy (Greece) was invented and Christianity framed its understanding of universalism. His idea of Europe tells his readers that through commonly fighting for a concrete universal the ‘part of no-part’ is able to emancipate itself, establish a new, properly democratic society (that grounded in antagonism), and save Europe’s political legacy: its inclination to universal emancipation.

Mostly, it (the EU, M.E.) acts as a regulator of global capitalist development; sometimes, it flirts with the conservative defence of its tradition. Both these paths lead to oblivion, to Europe’s marginalisation. The only way out of this debilitating deadlock is for Europe to resuscitate its legacy of radical and universal emancipation. The task is to move beyond mere tolerance of others to a positive emancipatory *Leitkultur* which can sustain authentic co-existence. Don’t just respect others, offer a common struggle, since our problems today are common.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Žižek ‘Europe must move beyond mere tolerance’

Conclusion: Europe as a Shared Emancipatory Project

What Europe do we want? To put it bluntly, do we want to live in a world in which the only choice is between the American civilisation and the emerging Chinese authoritarian-capitalist one? If the answer is no then the only alternative is Europe.²⁹⁶

Žižek has always been a thinker of the Left. He was socialised in communist Slovenia at a time the belief in communism was crumbling and a cultural scene started to develop formulating an alternative to the relationship between the individual and society. This alternative avoided any communality with the existing political system and was footed on a fully different, that is cultural-political narrative to which the philosopher as part of the Lacanian School in Ljubljana contributed. In his theoretical discussions of how this change should be brought about, he relied – like Bauman and Kertész – on the German philosophical heritage of the Enlightenment and wished to offer an alternative to the Western European modern (rationalism and total scientific self-objectivization) and postmodern (the role of the subject) reading and critique of this tradition. When, subsequently, communism was actually brought down and the new political movements or parties that arose from the dissident scene came to power, Žižek was full of hope the democratic system of free and autonomous individuals that were nevertheless bound to ethical and moral laws and rules set by society would bring about a more just, equal and free society. His theorising about democracy and its ultimate impossibility due to its inherent antagonism, which nevertheless offered the subject the possibility to act upon this antagonism and so find its place in society, was filled with optimism.

²⁹⁶ Žižek 'The Constitution is Dead'

Yet, disappointment with capitalist liberal-democracy as it was adopted from Western Europe and the observation that global capitalism depoliticised society made him ever more pessimistic about the political system as it developed from 1989. Withdrawing from active politics he once again sat down to formulate an alternative to societal organisation outside of the existing order. His sources (German Idealism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marx, and 20th century film and literature) remained the same, yet his emphasis on what was important changed. As his experience from the 1989/90 political turn and the consequent political developments told him, the smooth road to change the coordinates of the existing political system was not radical or lasting enough. A new dominant system (capitalism) had taken over, which through its liberal-democratic, post-political tolerance denied the individual any possibility to position him/herself towards the Other. So, Žižek started advocating the view of a radical political Act. He now wished a total turnabout of society.

According to Žižek, it is only in Europe where there is still hope for a radical change and repoliticization of society. Its ancient Greek democratic and Christian universalist legacy and the emancipatory political project of the European Enlightenment allow for such a change to happen. Against claims that the European project is dead, Žižek holds that this only applies to “the post-political Europe of accommodation to the world market, the Europe which was repeatedly rejected at referendums, the Brussels technocratic-expert Europe. The Europe that presents itself as standing for cold European reason against Greek passion and corruption, for mathematics against pathetics.”²⁹⁷ The Europe, however, that has a chance of surviving and should be defended is a different Europe and neatly summarises Žižek as a Central European

²⁹⁷ Žižek ‘A Permanent Economic Emergency’ p. 86

thinker at home in Western European philosophy as well as Central and Eastern European political praxis and ideas of a more just and equal society:

[U]topian as it may appear, the space is still open for another Europe: a re-politicized Europe, founded on a shared emancipatory project; the Europe that gave birth to ancient Greek democracy, to the French and October Revolutions.²⁹⁸

It is clear that contrary to the position of Bauman and Kertész described in the previous chapters (Bauman no longer beliefs in radical politics and Kertész has fully disbanded the idea of being active in politics), Žižek's belief in radical politics is unbroken. Instead of being shaped by the Holocaust or Stalinism (and the powerlessness of the Marxist Humanists to change the system from within), he was formed by the events of 1989 where it was very well possible to revolutionise society and politics. This affects the way he thinks about politics and its possibilities. The radicality with which he pursues his project though, makes him stand out not only in the Central European, but also the Western academic intellectual scene.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion

Europe, Modernity, and the Enlightenment: Central European Idealism

After the death of God and the collapse of utopias, on what intellectual and moral base do we want to build our communal life? If we are to conduct ourselves responsible human beings, then we need a conceptual framework that underpins not only our statements – that is easy – but also our acts.¹

When in 1990 Jürgen Habermas typified the events of 1989 as “nachholende Revolution,” which can be translated as revolution of recuperation or revolution of rectification, he did so from a Western European perspective.² To him, Eastern and Central European societies were catching up with the West and its project of modernity. He, so, closely followed the spirit of the time, epitomised in Francis Fukuyama’s dictum ‘the End of History’. Fukuyama referred the enmity between liberalism and socialism, which had dictated Europe’s (and ultimately the world’s) twentieth century history, to the past: Communism had failed and the only viable society-organising model was that of Western liberal democracy linked with

¹ Todorov *In Defence of the Enlightenment* p. 1

² Habermas *Die nachholende Revolution* p. 180. See also: Kumar 1989 p. 240

capitalism. It was the East now finally taking the road of the West: that of modernised, civilised development. In his *1989. Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (2001), Krishan Kumar even stated that “[i]n removing communism, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe have reaffirmed the faith in the central principles of modernity, at a time perhaps when this faith had weakened in the West. They have modernized modernity, given it a fresh vitality.”³ Yet, one important aspect is obscured by this and all kindred statements: the fact that among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe the belief in modernity, its ideals and influence on the organisation of society was shaped by a different historical experience.

The Central European perception of modernity is anything but straightforward. It can only be understood in light of the twentieth century. Central Europe experienced all the horrors of modernity, taking the forms of nationalism, ideology, mass killing, ethnic cleansing, and enforced industrialisation. That is, in a more generic view, the idea and the practice of social engineering shaped the lives of Central Europeans to an awe-inspiring extent. This lived experience of the dark sides of modernity could have generated a deep disenchantment with the modern project. Yet, this was not the case. In contrast to Western critiques of the Enlightenment and modernity, which were often formulated in the rather comfortable situation of affluent liberal democracies, Central European intellectuals drew other conclusions from their own predicament. Rather than throwing out the baby with the bath water, they aspired to salvage the positive ideas of the Enlightenment and modernity, i.e. autonomy, self-determination,

³ Kumar 1989 p. 240

and freedom, without ever turning a blind eye to the horrific fallout modernity had caused.⁴

This project of rescuing the core of modernity from its hijackers is not only at odds with post-modern critique of modernity that considers exactly this core to be the major problem. Likewise, it is at variance with an unquestioning view of modernity and progress, which is also widespread among liberal Western intellectuals and public servants. Favouring the free market, private property and capitalism, autonomy, self-determination and freedom are often explained along (neo-)liberal lines and put to work in contexts in which the individual is freed from any limiting bonds of either the state, church or family. Following the liberal reasoning, duty and self-discipline of the individual will ultimately bring about good society.⁵ In many ways, the European Union epitomises the unfettered belief in the progress of history and humanity. In constantly referring to the wars of the twentieth century as the *raison d'être* of the European project, politicians and political scientists often establish a mere teleology rather than seriously engage in the critical definition of the European project. In practice, then, Europe is often reduced to the details of economic and political convergence, to the enhancement of institutions, and to the mechanisms of the liberal market. In contrast, the moral project, even if subject to many conferences and meetings mustered under the mellifluous title *A Soul for Europe*, hardly plays a role in

⁴ See also: Pippin *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* pp. 9-13. According to Pippin, the German Idealist tradition (Kant, Hegel) most successfully and comprehensively defined and evaluated modernity, its nature and legitimacy, and put the ideals of autonomy, “absolute freedom” and “true self-determination” at its core (p. 13). Nietzsche and Heidegger, then, had a decisive influence in criticising as well as taking this tradition further. In their evaluation of modernity, Bauman, Kertész, and Žižek all (critically) relate to this tradition.

⁵ See also: Todorov *De onvoltooide tuin* p. 26

everyday political routine.⁶ Yet, reflecting upon their recent past, it is this moral project that is so important to many Central European intellectuals when thinking about Europe and relating to the bigger project of modernity.

My exploration into the ideas of Europe from a Central European perspective has tried to excavate the Central European thinking about Europe linking it to the experiences of Europe's twentieth century, notably fascism/Nazism and communism. In so doing, it has touched upon questions of modernity and the European heritage of the Enlightenment, focusing on the accompanying values of freedom, individuality, and democracy. In the first general chapter, it has described the development of the thinking about Europe from 1918 to the early 1990s, showing the specificities of the Central European debate, but also its links to the Western European discourses. Especially in the years between 1918 and 1948, the Western model of European culture, its belief in modernity and the values of the Enlightenment, in liberal-democracy, freedom, humanism, universalism and also Christianity (in its Catholic form), constituted the core narrative of many Central European cosmopolitan thinkers or, conversely, was the model against which nationalists, populists, and fascists developed their own concepts. From 1948, this changed and one can detect a differentiation of discourses on Europe featuring modernity. The communist model and its version of modernity gained importance in the shape of an *Ersatz*-Europe and later also in the shape of Marxist humanism or Marxist revisionism. From the 1970s, Europe returned in the form of antipolitics, civil society, human rights, and the Enlightenment values of freedom, individuality or autonomy, and democracy. Yet, these were developed in a context that was unfree, dictatorial and based on the

⁶ See: www.asoulforeurope.eu

collective. Hence, the content of these ideas and narratives and the way they inform ideas of Europe markedly differ from Western European understanding.

Writing about Bauman, Kertész and Žižek I have thereupon singled out three discourses on Europe in relation to the question of modernity and the heritage of the Enlightenment present in twentieth century Central Europe. Zygmunt Bauman is a Jew who as a teenager fled to Russia in 1939 and returned to Poland strongly believing in the communist project and later advocating Marxist humanism. Linking his life experiences to developments in his work, I have shown that crucial events in his life led to a change in his thinking and strongly influenced his idea of Europe. Marx, an emblematic figure when theorising modernity, however, remained important to Bauman even when taking in postmodern discourses and later advancing his theory on liquid modernity in which he not only criticised communist society, but also the liberal capitalist consumer society. His idea of Europe is based on a critique of modernity built on the Enlightenment heritage of progress, rationality, science and technology. Yet, opposing the relativism, nihilism and extreme individuality of postmodern, capitalist society, he defends the Enlightenment's humanist core and the moral responsibility of each individual to make society work. To him, Europe is and needs to be defended as the common property and common responsibility of autonomous and free individuals aiming at a dignified life. Europe is a moral choice. Knowing the dangers of totalitarian society, however, this idea of Europe will necessarily remain a utopia: At all times, Europe and its citizens need to stay critical and (self-)reflective, continually working on an ever better organisation of society.

Imre Kertész, also Jewish and born in Hungary, is only four years Bauman's junior. As a teenager he was deported to Auschwitz and only returned to Budapest at the end of the war, where he briefly embraced the communist ideology, but soon chose an inner exile. In his writings Auschwitz and the experience of the concentration camps play a constitutive role in thinking about Europe. Nevertheless, it was communist society that secured his survival and made him 'understand' the consequences of Auschwitz for Europe. Hence, both his experiences of Auschwitz and life under communism inform his idea of Europe. After 1989, another layer was added. Disappointed and disillusioned with Western capitalism and Hungary's first steps of becoming a liberal democracy, Kertész concluded that totalitarianism and dictatorship were anything but history and that he had to bear witness of Europe's twentieth century history opening up a door towards the future. Like Bauman, the writer criticises in his idea of Europe the rationalist, scientific, progressive heritage of the Enlightenment; yet, with Goethe and Kant as well as Camus as his sparing partners he defends the moral-existential responsibility of the person, the values of freedom, individuality, and democracy as the *res publica* of European society. To Kertész, culture leads the way: To oppose totalitarian and authoritarian political systems as well as the rule of the market Europe's twentieth century should become part of the (cultural) memory of European society. In his view, it is Auschwitz that can or rather, should serve as its moral reservoir. This way European civilisation can no longer only associate itself with the positive implications of modernity, but also has to ethically deal with its negative aspects, so creating new values.

Slavoj Žižek is of another generation than Bauman and Kertész and born only after World War II. Too young to be marked by World War II or Stalinism, not exposed to

any anti-Semitic harassment that brand both Bauman and Kertész, and coming of age in the antipolitical spirit of his time with its emphasis on civil society and human rights, his take on Europe and its twentieth century history is a different one. Nonetheless, the experience of life under communism in Slovenia led to similar views on the importance of the heritage of the Enlightenment and the values of freedom, individuality, and democracy to European modern society. Yet, from the mid to late 1990s, Žižek developed a more radical position. Criticising communism, nationalism, and in his later writings liberal-democratic capitalism, he theorises a society based on universalist politics. Hegel, then, is of crucial importance in his idea of Europe as it is in the (Lacanian interpretation of the) works of Hegel and the German idealists he finds footing and inspiration for his own theories on European society. Again, however, it is the disappointment with the West that makes Žižek change his position towards Europe and its ruling (neo-)liberal capitalist ideology. From his writings published after 1996 it follows that radical democracy is no longer the solution to the question how to organise society and bring about equality. In his view, a repoliticisation of society can only take place on the basis of a radical political, revolutionary act, seeking a whole new basis and vocabulary on which to build society and develop a truly (Marxist) emancipatory political alternative. That this is a revolution in the classical sense of the word, which also implies violence, might be interpreted as a logical consequence of his disappointment with the non-violent revolutions of 1989 and their meagre results if judged against the background of post-1989, consumer society. To Žižek, Europe is the scenery where a radical change and repoliticisation of society can take place and where those who are ‘a no part’ can alter or rather revolutionise the coordinates of power. Subsequently, building on its

universalist, Christian and (ancient Greek) democratic legacy, European society can stand as an antipode to the global capitalist society and develop a more equal, just, and dignified society.

These three intellectuals differ in their political outlook, personal experiences, and subjective position towards society and its organisation. Yet, having gone through the experience of living in fascist and communist societies, they share a firm belief in the ideals and heritage of the Enlightenment and its value for and influence on modern society. Building on their past experiences, the values that can be found in any Western European treatise on the modern idea of Europe, but for almost half a century were ideals the Central Europeans had to fight for, are reconsidered. In their reassessment of freedom, individuality and democracy, the apprehension of history, ethics and morality are key as well as the responsibility of the individual to do something with history and to act upon the past. It is striking that in the works of all three political thinkers one can detect a break in thinking and evaluation of the European project at around the same time during the 1990s when Central Europe was in the middle of accession talks with the European Union and its societies rapidly changed following the Western European liberal-democratic model. It is in this period that probably the biggest difference to Western European critical discourses of Europe, modernity, and society can be found. To them, it is not only fascist or communist society that denied individual freedom and the possibility of democratic choice, but also capitalist society. In fact, following their critique, the latter functions as if there is freedom, individuality, and democracy; yet, in reality, one is part of a bigger system based on consumption. Hence, they start to make explicit their disappointment with Western capitalism and liberal democracy by referring to what

they believe Europe is, addressing not only a Central and Eastern European audience but also a Western European. Bauman and Žižek, then, remain true to their Hegelian-Marxist roots explaining the individual in his/her relation to others, ultimately envisioning a society that overcomes inequality and offers full emancipation for all. To Kertész, the answer to Europe's future is culture. In his view, culture is the field where values are created and defined and where answers can be found if/when History can no longer provide them. Yet, its ethical core is not constituted by the 'great' European philosophical, literary or artistic past, but by the Holocaust and all the consequences it entails.

To conclude, in writing about Europe the three intellectuals clearly take up the philosophical model as it was introduced in the first chapter. For them, Europe is defined by a certain set of values. To be European is to adhere to these values, irrespective of geographical or ethnic affiliations. Generally, they do not use nor show any interest in the historic model of thinking about Europe. Neither the historic substantiation of their respective country's belonging to Europe, nor the discourse on Central Europe as a region feature in their work. They do not participate in any of the (revived) Western European and Central European historical modernisation theories in which Central Europe has always belonged to Europe but now finally leaves its peripheral position and catches up with the West. All three transcend the deep-rooted inferiority or outsider complex of Central Europeans that so evidently manifests itself in the discussions on belonging to Europe. Bauman, Kertész and Žižek take this for granted. Rather than concluding with a pan-European existence, they start their own universalist reflection at that point.

In addition, taking modern European society as their frame of reference, they do not share Habermas' belief in society based on communicative ethics and his emphasis on the possibility of an evolutionary rationalism, nor do they follow the Western European, mostly French philosophical turn to postmodernity, including its loss of belief in the individual or Cartesian subject. Especially Bauman and Žižek have referred to these philosophers and built on their theories, yet find them unconvincing when relating to the society they were confronted with once the Iron Curtain was down. These philosophical models no longer do to discuss the character of Europe and devise conceptual frameworks for its future. Nonetheless, to these three Central European thinkers the other known answer, that of cultural pessimism, which proclaims the downfall and end of European civilisation, is not an option either. Bauman, Kertész and Žižek have gone through enough to all of the sudden give up hope. They are and remain politically engaged intellectuals who seek to convey their ethically grounded message of how to organise society and live the European legacy.

In seeking to point out and explain the problematic parts of the Enlightenment and modernity, they believe autonomy, humanity, and universality can be defined anew. With Kant, Hegel (and by extension Marx), and Schelling, Bauman, Kertész and Žižek ground their ideas in the heritage of the German Enlightenment and the German Idealist tradition. Partly, this might be explained as being a logical consequence of the geographic position of Germany and its influence on Central Europe's culture up to World War II; yet, following the argument of philosopher Robert B. Pippin, German Idealism was also the philosophy of modernity as freedom.⁷

⁷ Pippin *Idealism as Modernism* pp. 6/7

The Idealists' case is (...) the absolute reality of such self-determination, or freedom: that (...) reflexive self-grounding could be realized systematically and in practical life. (...) Reality itself, modern social reality, had, in Hegel's famous phrase, become "rational," could only sustain and reproduce itself in a new way, by appeal to rational legitimacy and so to the capacities for free agency presupposed in such appeals. Coming to a final understanding of such a reality, and appreciating its living potential in the emerging modern social and political world, was, for the Classical German tradition, the unimpeachable, irrevocable achievement of modernity.⁸

In my view, this Idealist take on freedom and its realisability in the actual world (human agency, attributable to single subjects) is the founding principle of the thinking of Bauman, Kertész and Žižek. It was the driving force behind their work during communism and again is at the centre of their thought once confronted with the reality of liberal-democratic, capitalist society. In both the communist and capitalist society, they deem missing individual human agency and, therefore, the possibility of freedom. In addition, as human agency is central to their conception of society, they strongly defend its possibility against the postmodern invalidation of the subject. Yet, having been confronted with all the dark sides of modernity during the twentieth century, they criticise and ultimately transcend the purely rational groundings of modern ethical life, as put forward in the works of the German Idealists and further developed in post-World War II philosophy by Jürgen Habermas. Instead, they design – what might be called – a 'Central European Idealism' in which an ethically grounded freedom is the highest good of European society that in view of the twentieth century, at no point can be taken for granted.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 7/8

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