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A General Interpretation of Transition in the Czech Republic (1989-1993)

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Abstract: General interpretations of societal transition provide overall pictures of fundamental changes, their basic trends, their time scales, and the clashes between the main players. These interpretations allow both participants and analysts to focus on the important historical facts and the key social processes. The fundamental changes in the Czech Republic since November 1989 are shown here as a transition brought about by the interplay of the drama of the erosion of the old regime with that of the birth of a new order. The old order was partly dismantled and society found itself in transitional anomie, which made it possible to gradually build a new one. This transitological view sees a transition as a provisional state of affairs constructed by many different persons (individuals, groups, communities and organisations). This provisional situation is characterised by a rich dynamic of social problems, together with an unbalanced and changing distribution of gains and losses. The resulting conflicts become – in successful cases – part of the universe of myth. In this universe of myth these conflicts are seen as a series of crises/tests which push the society indirectly from the old order to the new. The originally open transition comes to a close when the participants cease to see the current events as provisional. The main task then becomes the normalisation of the new order, the enforcement of its regime and coping with the formerly provisional arrangements which were in many ways ‘justified’ by the apparent anomie.

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1. Introduction

1.1 How can fundamental changes in society be viewed?

There are two lights in which basic change in a society can be viewed. The first is as a transition, that is, as a series of lasting inter-connected and acted events/turning points unfolding unevenly on all the macro-, mezo- and micro-levels of society [the transitological approach, see, for example, Linz 1974; Dvořáková, Kunc 1994; Kabele 1998b]. The second is as a transformation, that is, as a series of linked changes or processes (upwards or downwards) which are parallel and basically homogeneous in time and space [e.g. Stark 1992]. They can mostly be conceptualised through a combination of strategically significant variables.

The modernisation theory of transformation that is dominant today sees the fundamental change in Eastern European societies as based in the introduction of modern institutions allowing increasing political pluralisation and the introduction of market economy systems in society [e.g. Zapf 1991, 1993; Machonin 1996; Machonin, Tuček et al. 1996]. This implementation comes up against government officials and economists, who under-

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estimate the problem of varying tempos and the interconnectedness of changes in the legal-administrative, political, economic and cultural domains [e.g. Dahrendorf 1991, Srubar 1994, Večerník 1996, Sztompka 1996, Illner 1996].

1.2 Is there good reason to abandon the transitological approach?

The present dominance of the transformatological approach to the changes since 1989 is usually proclaimed as scientific progress since it has displaced the naive, speculative and ideological transitological approach. This dominance also has powerful support from organisationally complex and expensive comparative research organised on the basis of the mass collection of data in several countries at once.

There is an equally clear decline of the transitological perspective in public opinion. At the beginning of the changes everyone was caught up in a 'transitological' vision of a longed-for move to a new order. As the new initial regime should by now be consolidated, there is a growing 'transformatological' scepticism due to the overly simplified view of these changes as a form of 'muddled modernisation'.

1.3 Where does the path to knowledge not lead?

Dramatic and fundamental change in society cannot be seen as a systematic leap into a new order, nor as a planned modernisation of institutions. The basic difference from the point of view of understanding is not so much between the transitological and transformatological approaches as between a closed and an open view of the basic changes in society. The former makes the suggestive but mistaken assumptions that:

- there are strict rules or laws governing fundamental changes;
- the objectives of these changes are determined by the previous development of society and are independent of the choices of involved persons¹ (individuals, groups, communities and organisations);
- the only influence open to those actors is the choice of the right or wrong route to these objectives.

The open view, on the other hand [see, for example, Stark 1996, Illner 1996, Kabele 1998a, Havelka 1997], does not look at the effects of the parallelism of endogenous and exogenous processes or of transitions and the subsequent normalisation on the macro-mezo- and micro-levels of society as fully determinate. They have unclear and unique features and are not completely predetermined by past events either in their origins or in the course they follow.

1.4 What comparative advantages does the open transitological approach offer?

If fundamental changes in society are seen as a unique, piecemeal and stratified discontinuity, the changes can be seen as dependent on circumstances and so on the non-standard choices of all persons involved. This allows us to take into consideration the transaction cost of the choices of the key actors, that is the cost of:

- obtaining reliable information,
- the risk of decisions made on the basis of incomplete information,

¹) The mark of a person is the free and sovereign choice to act. Persons are not only individuals, but, in opportune social conditions can also be social units (groups, organisations, communities) and even whole societies. In the latter case these can be termed collective persons.

- co-ordination of approaches and settling conflicts,
- enforcement of accepted rules and agreements.

These transaction costs influence inevitably the course of extraordinary events, making them frequently seem to be the result of irrational intervention by the corrupted persons involved. For this reason the course of changes has been explained by the moral decline of the general public, by their clinging to outdated ideas and habits, or by the imperfect personalities of the leaders.

2. Socially Constructed Transition – A Theoretical Basis

2.1 *What order do social events belong to?*

The course of social events is not fully determined. This is not due just to a distorted understanding or knowledge of the situation, but the dynamic uncertainty is in fact ontological. Social events are therefore an ongoing source of greater or lesser crises and turning points, rises, transitions and declines. This also means that the social micro- and macro-worlds which are created by individuals, groups, communities and organisations to protect themselves from the crude impulses of uncertain social events and to be able intervene effectively outside their own boundaries, represent orders with two non-transmissible dimensions:

- the first – which is the traditional subject of the social sciences – is based on the foreseeability of regularities or on rules,
- the second is based in verisimilitude of orientations and the tendency of a plot, both corresponding to an understanding of the course of events as a narrative.

The first dimension rests on the predictability of the dynamics of the micro- and macro-worlds, while the second deals with the delicate problem of their unpredictability and uniqueness. In the first case we can speak of a *dynamic regime* in which the uniqueness of events can be understood either as the application of the probable relations and working rules of the game (and there can well be rules of the game for changing the rules) or their abandonment. In the second case the order is seen rather as a *world of narratives* which incorporates and communicates stories, biographies, histories and myths into the all-encompassing constitutive narrative, at one time of the family, at others of the community or the whole society, and refers to their common environment, the world.²

2.2 *What, then, makes the course of social events extraordinary?*

The social order is like both a world of narratives and a dynamic regime made reasonably certain by its actors through its definition, negotiation and enforcement in their efforts to cope with the uncertain course of events. This can be understood in two ways:

- The order lasts because it arises out of non-order, here described as a greater or lesser uncertainty of the course of social events;

²) The theory of dual social construction [Kabele 1997] sees social orders as being constructed through *institutionalisation* (which shape the dynamic regime) and through *narrativisation* (which shapes the world of narratives). This produces an *architecture of game frameworks* which allow both individual and collective persons to understand the course of social events. It makes these participants into actors in the course of events and allows them to co-ordinate their interventions.

- For internal and external, local and global reasons the order finds itself sometimes in an extraordinary situation in which written contracts and unwritten agreements are no longer sustainable and the steps already taken towards negotiating and enforcing of the order are precluded so that new ways of doing so must be found, that is, developed, negotiated and enforced.

The extraordinary course of events represents principally uncertain – but by no means chaotic – events which, even despite great difficulties, are made locally more certain within the limits of its social construction. Such construction happens more or less consciously and spontaneously through the usage of basically identical semiotic capacities, and reserves of acquired experience which are in force within the normal process of making the social order sufficiently certain. On the one hand, the extraordinary course of events is therefore non-order, which is incorporated step by step into the order in a unique way, while on the other it represents a special meta-order of social construction.

2.3 What are the courses of the basic social changes?

Fundamental social changes are described, experienced and shaped by the behaviour of the actors in such a way that two not entirely distinct phases can be distinguished:

- an extraordinary period of dramatic change (the real transition), which tends to be relatively short (it is this period that is the primary focus of our interest),
- a period of normalisation which, on the other hand, tends to be relatively long.

In a *transition* there must be a break with a tradition. The old order is partially dismantled. A society or lower social unit (groups, organisations, communities) moves into a state of transitional anomie, which makes it possible to gradually develop, negotiate and enforce the new order.

In this perspective transitions are constructed by many people as a provisional arrangement. This provisional state shows a rich dynamic of social problems and an unbalanced and unstable distribution of losses and gains. The resulting conflicts become – in successful cases – part of the universe of myth, in which these conflicts are seen as a series of crises/tests that thrust the society indirectly from the old order to the new.

2.4 How can transitions penetrate a society?

The idea of order can be related both to the society as a whole and to the lower social units (groups, organisations, communities) that are part of it, and even to its individual members. Every societal order is basically an order of orders and its continuation normally depends primarily on tradition. The process of transition has the potential to affect all the coexisting and interrelated units in this order of orders. The hierarchical arrangement of individuals and social units and the spread of influence from one ‘storey’ of social events to another is one of the basic forms of both the spread and the normalisation of changes and transitions in the order of orders. On higher levels – in the social units which include the given unit – the dismantling of the order and the transitional changes going on at lower levels are often a normal part of a dynamic regime and of the world of narratives. For example, all groups, organisations and communities to some degree build biographical transitions and the death of individuals into their order.

2.5 *What events make the course of transition anomie?*

Transitional anomie leads to a major weakening of the enforcement of order [normative control, Durkheim 1957] over and above simple crisis situations, because the players must react to the fact that the old regime can ‘apparently’ no longer continue to exist in the same way. On the one hand it may break up spontaneously – in a spreading chain reaction, and on the other hand a disloyal but influential opposition may emerge inside it and effectively present an alternative vision of the regime. Transitional anomie has certain distinguishing marks:

- the old order ceases to be sufficiently well enforced on different levels and there are increasing deviations of all types,
- practices that had in the past been conducted in secret now move into the open,
- on a local basis, the regime breaks down and finds itself in confrontation with shadow practices that have arisen in reaction to it,
- in many cases the old order is protected because it could not be quickly replaced by new arrangements,
- in many spheres the regime finds itself in major conflict with newly emerging rules of the game,
- new working rules are sometimes only added to the game when they act as a front for the continuation of old practices or the spontaneous *ad hoc* emergence of new ones,
- there is an unanticipated misuse of the new rules.

In transition it is not only the dynamic regime that must pass through fundamental changes, but also the world of narratives, which must be narrated anew both in parts and as a whole. Only thus can the temporal rift caused by the end of the old regime be bridged and can the subjective identity of the persons (people, groups, communities and organisations) acting in transition be renewed. Transitional anomie therefore also means the breaking down of the guarantee of the identities of both individual and collective persons by formerly negotiated biographies and histories which unfortunately offered a promising life course only under the old order. The reason for this breakdown is an obvious and far-reaching but unclear change in the estimation of what is and what is not right and important. The typical sign of the destruction of the world of narratives is the overproduction of *ad hoc* composed narratives of the past, present and future, which individual or corporate persons are unable to identify with.

2.6 *What are the outcomes of the basic social changes?*

It should be recalled that the extraordinary is always temporary. In any circumstances it is introduced gradually into the order. At the same time the old order may be renewed in a more or less modified likeness, allowing us to talk about its restoration or modification. Like modifications of the old order, a new order is not clearly determined by the original state of the old order, nor is it generally in accordance with the original transitional vision. Extraordinary courses of events can also become bogged down in a chronic state of crisis: this can of course, from the point of view of this theory, become stabilised, creating a regime and its own world of narratives.

The extraordinary stage of transition concludes when the participants in events cease to see them as provisional. The task in hand then becomes the normalisation

[Kabele 1993b, 1998b or consolidation, Schmitter 1994³] of the new order, the enforcement of its regime and the coping with the formerly provisional arrangements that were in many ways 'justified' by the apparent anomie. The period of normalisation sees both a spontaneous and (at least on the part of the new rulers) intentional de-dramatisation of the life of the group or society and the deconstruction of the mythical aspect of fundamental change. There is a deep-reaching adjustment in the interpretational and interventional framework for the resolution of social problems.⁴ At this point it is no longer enough to rely on either extraordinary measures or the extraordinary willingness of victims. It is instead necessary to 'compel' institutions to take measures in order to fulfil the tasks for which they were established and to induce all players to really respect the new institutional framework.

The climate of normalisation throws the black-and-white mythical view into disrepute and instead reinforces the anti-mythical view of the changes that have already taken place. In the perspective of the established new order, light is thrown onto many dubious customs and events from the transitional period and the groups, organisations, communities or society tends to be destabilised for a second time by the recognition of the costs linked with the transitional anomie and the 'debts' that this has left. In the normalisation climate – at least in the first years (1995-1998 in the Czech Republic), there tend to be incessant crises of social groups, communities, organisations or society, which are generally perceived as the results of insufficiently enforced or poorly conceived changes. According to the critics, institutions have been established and laws amended but these institutions have not changed sufficiently to be able to produce effective solutions, or

³) Schmitter, and indeed the majority of political scientists, see consolidation only in terms of the political regime and in concrete terms of the stabilisation of democracy. The concept here is therefore broader, in that normalisation is taken to encompass all the basic dimensions of the order (i.e. political, economic, legal and ethical, see 3.1) and involves all political regimes. Schmitter's view of the connection between consolidation and the change of a paradigm could be also criticised. It is necessary – according to him – to move from the study of actors' actions and decisions in the highly uncertain conditions typical of transitology, to a study of the institutional structures which are established by the authorities in negotiations with all actors in the stabilisation. Schmitter seems to resign from the basic comparative advantages of a transitological approach, which lie in the fact (see 1.4) that it makes it possible to see the change as a series of events, making it conditional on the non-standard choices of the actors. This makes it possible to take into consideration the unavoidable transaction cost of the choices of key actors. In its starting point, therefore, Schmitter's consolidology is hardly dissimilar to the prevailing transformatology.

⁴) Normalisation is the basic strategy of the party of those who are trying to solve the problems of society [Kabele 1998b] in each time. They attempt to 'deactivate' the dramatic nature of social problems and their moral and political urgency, so that either their institutional solution will become a normal part of a shared social world and satisfy the demands of their complainants, or can be effectively solved or rejected as problems. The preferred strategy is to set up a special organisation to solve each concrete social problem, which can then demonstrate that it has done something to resolve the problem. Such organisations can thus silence the original demands by saying that they have gone some way to satisfying them, but they also often fall prey to the bureaucratic syndrome [Crozier 1964] and they are skilful in dismissing these demands. The popularity of this strategy is shown by Benáček's and Středová's data [Benáček, Středová and Šlaisová 1998]. They show, for example, that employment in the Czech state bureaucracy was 51% higher in 1994 than in 1990 (and in the following three years it rose by a further 24%). Its cost as a percentage of the GDP also rose (as yet figures are available only for the period of 1993-1997).

alternatively, the unintended negative effects come to be seen as more important than the benefits.

2.7 What do all transitions have in common?

They must resolve the ‘unresolvable’ problem of reconciling discontinuity and continuity, for both individuals and the society. In order to cope with the derailment and the return to an order, individual and collective persons use basically identical semiotic capacities which provide the dramatic phase of transition with a mythical framework based on the competition between myths and anti-myths. Myths are the only effective defence against transitional anomie, determining the course of events and the sense of investment and of victims, mirroring the constitutive disposition of consciousness to renew hope.

After the dramatic phase of transition comes a relatively long phase of consolidation or normalisation. In the light of the newly established order’s promises, however, the dramatic aspects of normalisation (continuing collapses and crisis) are already seen as improper.

2.8 Why do transitions become politicised?

Transition brings social upheaval. Both actual and expected losses and gains touch many people and groups, organisations and communities, which are also forced to transform themselves (induced transformations and transitions) and join together into effective coalitions. In such a situation the particular constellation of individual and collective persons forming any social unit can have a marked effect on the course of its transition. In the case of small groups of two, three or four individuals, or big corporations, a very specific course of events can be expected. In larger social units and arrangements, however, different strategic groups take shape and can become transitional ‘movements’. It can be said that transitions expand and change as a result of political conflicts. At the same time they lead spontaneously to the unstable polarisation of society into those who are locally or globally for certain changes and those who are against them.

2.9 Why do transitions in fact need a mythical framework?

The transition of a social unit is always linked with attempts to get around or to change the rules of the game during the process of dismantling old institutions and establishing new ones, usually ‘borrowed’ from outside worlds. These often conflicting attempts throw the course of social events into relative chaos. The mythical framework, however, can provide a common direction for the transition, showing the clashes between its good and bad protagonists and can determine the time frame for the extraordinary existence of social units in the provisional situation [Kabele 1994, 1998b]. By their very obviousness, which rests on common faith, myths endow the transition with legitimacy and help those involved to endure the trials linked with the extraordinary times. In this way they greatly reduce the transaction costs which are inevitable in the co-ordination of choices, and in the negotiation and enforcement of both temporary and permanent measures. Only the increasing transitional normalisation can make the mythical framework relatively dispensable, because the role of reducing transaction costs is shifted to the new constitution, or statutory realm, and to other rules of the game which have been enforced or spontaneously accepted during the changes.

2.10 Why do transitions which affect the whole of society have a particular nature?

Societal transitions differ from transitions of lower social units in that they do not generally take place through the inclusion into the relatively stabilised relations of higher social units, that is, in an environment of well-established communication, morality, justice, law, the market and political competition relatively untouched by anomie. Moreover, a vision of the new order is fundamental to these 'endogenous' societal transitions, as it provides the only way out of the crisis of the old order. Here the above-mentioned myth is not just an instrument of the transition, but also serves as a substitute for the stable environment of some higher social unit.

The transition of Czech society in 1989-1993 was at one and the same time part of the break-up of communist Czechoslovakia, of the collapse of the former communist bloc and, as is now being recognised, of the changes of the entire northern hemisphere. The environment in which it took place was relatively unstable, both in institutional and narrative terms.

3. The Transition of the Czech Republic 1989-1993

"Revolutions are melancholy moments of history. (...) Before they occur, there are many years of repression, of arrogant power and malign neglect of people's needs. A stubborn old regime clings to privilege, and by the time it begins to reform its ways it lacks both credibility and effectiveness. People do not like it. Energies of conflict build up into a state of tense confrontation. It is a powder keg. When a spark is thrown into it (...) an explosion takes place and the old edifice begins to crumble. Suddenly everything seems to give. Yesterday's high treason becomes today's law of the land, and yesterday's law today's treason. To the more excitable, vistas of unheard-of opportunities open up, 'people power', liquefaction of everything hard and fast, utopia. Many are caught by a mood of elation. Not just the abuses of the regime, but the constraints of society itself seem suspended.

However, the honeymoon does not last. (...) Turmoil does not help economic development, and political instability raises fears. Suddenly the mood changes. Sometimes, a foreign power intervenes and thereby leaves utopia intact, though not the revolution. Sometimes, a Jacobin faction within takes over from the impotent majority. Is not 'people power' a contradiction in terms? Quickly, the slogans of better days are perverted to justify a new regime of terror. (...) Many years later, people realise that there have after all been lasting changes. The first day of the revolution is celebrated as a public holiday. But in the meantime a generation of disillusioned men and women have vacillated between sullen submission and vain protest." [Dahrendorf 1988]

Modern societal transition can only be really understood through the ethno-theory of revolution or, in this case, a more precise myth of transition. This ethno-theory constitutes the skeleton of a general interpretation of societal transition, which provides an overview of the fundamental changes in society, its basic trends, its time scale, and the clashes between the main players. Such a framework is used not only by lay persons and politicians, but also scholars [Popper 1950]. Both transitological and transformatological approaches need such a framework, as only such an interpretation can provide the key to both the selection of historical facts and the selection and interpretation of key social processes and adequate indicators and variables.

3.1 Where from, where to and how long?

If a change is viewed as a transition, its direction and duration are already implicit in this view, as both the end of the change and the general course of events are anticipated. However, it is not enough to say, either *ex ante* or *ex post*, that the transition of the Czech

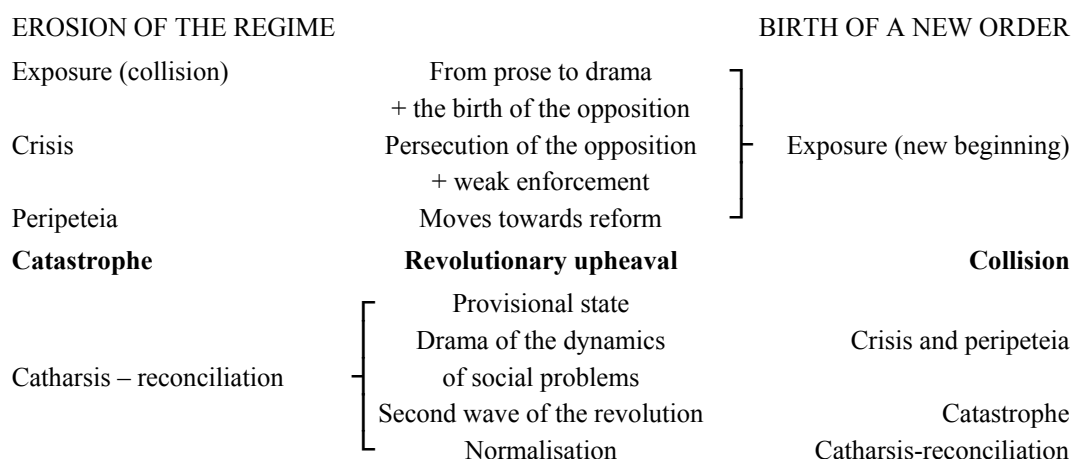
Republic was a move from real socialism to democratic capitalism [see, e.g. Kabele 1992, Przeworski 1992] as both concepts only seem clear at first sight, and there is considerable doubt as to the exact relation between them at any one point of the transition. It must also be said that in a transition they do not even serve as concepts which indicate a certain type of order, but rather of suggestive and mutually dependent images: of an ironic caricature and a dreamy mirror-image vision of this. For Furet [1994] revolution leads to a symbolic inversion of the imaginary of the old regime. In reconstructing the changes in the Czech Republic, both capitalism and real socialism should be seen as orders which encompass all aspects of society, that is, political, economic, legal and ethical. Counterposing them as mental types – in accordance with contemporary views – produces the following basic oppositions:

	Capitalism	Socialism
Economy	Market, with private ownership	Planned, with state ownership
Politics	Parliamentary democracy and constitutionalism	Democratic centralism and the leading role of one party
Law	Division of public and private law	Class approach to rights
Ethics	Individual social responsibility	Social solidarity

From the definition (see 2.3) fundamental change cannot be achieved in the short term but also it cannot be allowed to continue for decades. In the medium term (5 years, perhaps?), the balance of these changes can provide a reasonable compromise in the initial description of them. Dahrendorf's [1991] well-known theoretical *bon mot* of the three speeds of the transformation offers a more sophisticated expression of the room for manoeuvre in such changes, but I do not find it fully convincing. He suggested that lawyers have six months to reform the constitution, politicians six years to reform the economy, and citizens sixty years to recreate a civil society.

3.2 *How was the last Czech transition viewed?*

Dahrendorf's [1988] *a posteriori* description of the revolution (transition) is a sceptical view from a certain distance of both time and space. This robs it of any mobilising force which would allow the 'revolutionaries' to believe in the justice and inevitability of their actions. It does, nonetheless, grasp the basic narrative structure through which the participants perceive the changes, which creates two mythical structures that bare their teeth at each other. They can be described as the drama of the erosion of the old regime and that of the birth of a new order. The point they have in common (either at the beginning or at the end) is the special attention to the most attractive revolutionary upheaval.



The revolutionary upheaval (which may be more or less abrupt, compare, for example, Czechoslovakia with Hungary) therefore concentrates the ‘highest’ symbolic force. For all those involved, historical time is divided into the time before and the time after. All the old tales are either broken off for good or at least set on a completely different course [Kabele 1992].

3.3 How did the structures of myth contribute to the inner view of transition?

The mythical backdrop to the drama of the erosion of the regime is very well described by Greimas [1966]: the initial part of the myth begins with a series of negative functions (the coming together of the unhappy and alienated, the breaking off of dialogue). The turning point is ushered in by a string of trials based on arrangements (usually between the main protagonist and the accomplice holding transcendental power). After these trials comes a series of positive functions (unhappiness is overcome and the main protagonist is rewarded).

The drama of the birth of the new regime has a similar structure, although in this case it is dual: it incorporates both the basic model and its mirror image. The initial stage of the myth starts with a series of positive functions (growing happiness, euphoric individual experiences and a will to reach agreements), which also have another more negative face (the loss of certainty, local and sometimes very unpleasant turning of coats and the polarisation of new and old structures). The turning point (towards good or evil?) follows with a series of trials which break unwritten agreements on the unity of society, but are at the same time heroic, with victims calling for confrontation with the transitional anomie. In Dahrendorf’s scenario this is succeeded by a negative phase of the second revolution (increasing repression and the suffering of the innocent where; in the Czech case at least, the political forces took shape around the anti-myth), whose mirror image is the new regime’s gradual moves to transformed society, leading through a normalisation phase to the practical and symbolic acceptance of the new order. The above duality corresponds to the fundamental equivocation and dual nature of events in the drama of the birth of the new order. This drama is played out in the open competition of myth and anti-myth, which is gradually played out in the political polarisation of society and in transitional conflicts.

3.4 *Why did real socialism seem to last for ages?*

The real socialist regimes remained stable in most countries of the Eastern Bloc, despite the weakness of their inner and outer enforcement. Until it was totally clear that it was inescapable and unreformable, most of those involved – both people and organisations – had a real interest in preserving the socialist regime. There was a general conviction that it was necessary to come to terms with its shortcomings and this was made easier by the wide-ranging shadow sphere created by the regime itself, where the actors could enjoy their characters based more and more on the idea of individualism. This situation postponed the overturning of the regime, but also represented an ‘invisible’ evolutionary change which was already moving in the direction of the later transition [Možný 1991, Bayer, Kabele 1996]. This meant that before and during the transition society had to move from the obviously utopian scenario of liberation to an acceptance of a vision of transition and the new order [a concrete utopia, Srubar 1994], which could become the focus of shared faith and a reason for taking risks. In the opportune conditions this vision could then become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

3.5 *Who cracked the old regime?*

In the course of a transition in any direction the preliminary weakening of the old regime’s mechanisms of enforcing order is of fundamental importance. A disloyal opposition forms in the bosom of the old regime and is visible to the public, and when the ‘revolutionary upheaval’ comes this opposition can offer trustworthy leaders and can found a relatively effective social movement, leading the upheaval and then taking power on a provisional basis [Arendt 1965; Bayer, Kabele 1996; Marada 1997]. In the Czech Republic this role was played by Charter 77 and the Helsinki Committee for the Protection of the Unjustly Accused. In the last two years prior to November 1989 these groups diversified into a whole range of smaller groupings with differing programmes and more limited political aims. The regular demonstrations on particular occasions also helped mobilise the half-loyal background of dissident circles [Šiklová 1990].

A similar process of ‘mobilisation’ could also be seen however among the highly-placed and ambitious functionaries of the regime, who saw a possibility of unseating the old guard in the leadership of the Communist Party. By 1989 the group of the ‘normalisers’ dating back to 1969 were visibly ‘morally exhausted’ with the effort to satisfy the demands of socialist consumerism, and to keep both the *nouveaux riche* of the shadow economy and the ever more daring dissident structures under control. With the changes in Poland and Hungary, the Soviet Union had ceased to be a sure guarantee of the Communist Party’s supremacy and Comecon had begun to fall apart as an international exchange mechanism for goods and raw materials.

3.6 *How did Poles and Hungarians help Czechs in the transition?*

The problem of starting the move from the obviously utopian scenario of liberation to the acceptance of a programme-vision of transition brings us back into the realm of the mysteries of narrative representation and parable [Ricoeur 1986, Kabele 1997]. This semiotic capacity satiated by imagination transformed the fictional forecast-scenario of the regime’s fall into a thinkable ‘reality’ founded on faith, which was already starting to take shape. In this mythical framework it was easy to find signs of the regime’s passing. Thus emerged the captivating dilemma of the crossroads of two irreconcilable trajectories: the slow disintegration of the regime or rapid transition. The above-described ‘historical’

work ending with the choice of fundamental change and followed by visible acts was by and large accomplished in Poland and Hungary.

3.7 How does one do revolutionary upheaval like the Czechs? Velvetly, of course!

In the Czech Republic the actual changeover of power came rapidly and fitted into the framework provided by the traditional (1918, 1948, 1989 and even 1968), non-tragic but still dramatic ritual of transfer of power:

open conflict → mass → symbolic → denouement based on the
with power demonstrations general strike respecting of political will

The apolitical majority became politicised with the drama of preparing for the general strike and began to participate actively by presenting declarations and petitions. The revolutionary situation was characterised by the hypertrophy of historical consciousness aroused by the judgement of history together with the power vacuum which was the precondition for “the emergence of practical and ideological modes of social action” [Furet 1994]. The down side of this hypertrophy of historical consciousness was the fundamental reversal in the concept of the legitimacy of the regime. The ritual of the upheaval was played out both inside and outside society by the convincing election of Václav Havel as president by the communist members of parliament in January 1990.

3.8 So was the changeover of the order in fact a drama or an institutional reconstruction?

The birth of a new order – seen from within – is a drama in which it is important whether the political forces that summon the revolutionary upheaval can offer a successful alternative vision and can manage to preserve some room for manoeuvre. Only thus can these forces be seen by the public as ‘constructive’ and able to realise at least the broad lines of their vision, that is, to take control of the hectic dynamic of social problems thrown up by the transitional anomie without having resort to force or even terror. A successful return from the extraordinary to order – even though we may have considerable doubts when we compare this order with the original vision – is therefore possible when there is a wide-ranging dismantling of the old and the construction of a new regime with a rapid institutionalisation, which is allowed by the freeing of relations in a state of transitional anomie. The drama of the birth of the regime highlights therefore the key problem of transition, the transaction costs linked with the negotiation and enforcement aspects of the dismantling and constructing regimes, which the transformatological view as a rule disregards [with the exception of Stark 1996].

3.9. How did this transition interfere with people’s everyday lives?

In the Czechoslovak transition, the dramatisation of the changes was largely determined by the dynamics of social problems [Kabele 1993b]. Both the public and the strategic groups placed undue significance on some events and processes, while others were suppressed. The transition spread through society, destabilising the grounds for actions by all those involved, from individuals to whole regions. They now faced new opportunities, but also threats to their existence. This mobilised them and forced them to change both their environments and themselves. Actors in the transition could react in many ways and avoid the need for change for a long time. They could work either to suppress the transitional anomie or to intensify it. The resulting transitional expansion must be understood

primarily as a process of interaction transferring changes in both directions between the level of the social macro-world and that of the micro-world in which individuals and families live out their everyday lives.

3.10 What were the obstacles to dismantling the old regime?

Real socialism deprived individuals and all social units of their sovereign persons (entitlements to sovereign choices) or displaced these entitlements into a shadow world, leaving the solution of issues to the quasi-person 'THEY'. THEY allow, force, decide, set the obstacles, and so forth. This THEY consisted of the hierarchical infrastructure of the state police, army, administration and economy, always coupled with the all-invasive Communist Party apparatus in which effective power was based on bureaucratic clientelism, patronage and an effectively monopolised corruption by the Communist Party. To dismantle the quasi-sovereignty of 'THEY', a renewed plurality of sovereign persons, both individuals and institutions, was needed, so this dissolution of THEY was also the uncontrolled and risky construction of persons. More precisely, this dissolution of THEY triggered an actual, anomic flow of events with a multi-faceted narrative significance, which could only produce a new order. Earlier attempts at reform only served to arouse a strong and spontaneous opposition to these chaotic relations.⁵

While it may have seemed during the revolutionary upheaval that the old regime had come to an end and that everything had become spontaneously unstuck in the rising enthusiasm or transitional anomie, the basic problem of the transition was in fact to extend it to the lower organisational levels. If transition does not reach the local levels, where the distribution of strategic interests can affect every person in the country, either positively or negatively, the revolutionary upheaval is necessarily limited to a simple transfer of power and in the worst case degenerate into the emerging reign of the Mafia. The protagonists of any transition must come to terms with local opposition to fundamental changes, and must demonstrate and prove the validity of their power of definition. The first precondition for such success is to convince this majority that the old regime has come to a definitive end and that it is necessary to 'leap' into the flow of history and learn to swim.⁶

3.11 Why was the nature of transition so heavily determined by economic change?

The dominant and manifest idea of the state socialist transition in 1948-1953 was the elimination of private property and with it the market. According to prevailing opinion, 1989 was in fact fundamentally a move in the opposite direction, that is, a capitalist transition, and the natural ground for this to be played out was radical economic transformation, in contrast to Spain or Portugal in the 1970s. It was not difficult for the communist powers to destroy the market but at the beginning of the 1990s there was nobody who really knew how to revive the personal convictions, responsibility and habits, to create the network of institutions and the written and unwritten rules of the game, which had taken shape over hundreds of years in the historical market economies. After about four years of transformation, these economic conundrums could be summed up in a single

⁵) In addition to 1968, there were at least three different attempts at partial economic reform which would introduce some market elements in communist Czechoslovakia.

⁶) The most effective method of convincing people is, of course, terror. In the Czechoslovak case, the repellent decay of the Soviet Union played a major role in its rejection.

sentence: that it was necessary to introduce budget restrictions, liberalise prices, devalue the currency and especially to privatise state property. The steps needed were exactly the reverse of those of building state socialism, which started with nationalisation and price freezes, made the artificially revalued currency unconvertible and introduced a comprehensive system of budgetary measures to redistribute resources.

After nine years however, by which time the new regime could be expected to be visibly normalised, it became paradoxically obvious that:

- some expected basic changes had not in fact taken place, including those in the position of the government and the central institutions (banks) in the economy,
- it was much more difficult than expected for both individual and new collective persons (organisations) to become established in the new democratic and market institutions, and in some cases the way they did so must be seen as a deviation.

Changes in both the new position of the government and in the introduction of suitable institutions only went half way. The construction and especially the normalisation of the new order had run into long and drawn-out problems with the law, opening up a massive shadow area for corruption and less-than-honest practices. The government and the central institutions had passed over a considerable degree of economic power to free economic subjects, including individual citizens, but they had not been equally successful in handing over an adequate degree of responsibility for failure.

3.12 How did myths help the described transition?

Solving the problem of dismantling the old regime and constructing a new one in its place meant a complex manoeuvre of shedding and rebuilding the legal and institutional 'shell'. This was the riskiest but also the most important task of the transitional period. It called for a major collective investment, both intellectual and economic, which had to be underpinned by an optimistic vision, and required a very complex and strategic introduction, negotiation and then enforcement, if the high transaction costs were not to make it impossible. It supposed a complete reversal of the political, legal and economic reasoning and negotiation strategies of the major part of society [Kabele 1993a]. This was only possible if it was linked with sacrifice, but also offered transcendental hopes.

In the period of transitional anomie, market strategies became the driving force of the transformation even in the sphere of spontaneous action, thanks to their establishment in the universe of myth, which offered a convincing juxtaposition of communism and capitalism, of planned and market economies, which could be bridged by travelling a dramatic path full of trials (see also 2.8 or 3.2-3.3). In the Czech capitalist transition the market should not be seen as a purely economic concept, but rather had a fundamental symbolic significance. The market became a mythical figure [an *actant*, the accomplice holding transcendental power, Greimas 1966] which supported the heroic protagonists of transition in their struggle with the old structures and the communist Mafia.

3.13 Why did myths have to resist anti-myths?

Myths inevitably bring forth anti-myths which invert their content and their primary of role of endowing the transition with a sense that can be trusted. The anti-mythical understanding of the upheaval and the events that followed rejected the idea that the new order was attainable. The shocking extraordinary is an irreversible exclusion from order, or events sinking down to total frustration. The irreversibility of the collapse is an essential

element of the anti-myth, and is itself a realisation of the negative transcendence of frustration or the all-embracing evil. The anti-myth is first and foremost of becoming irreversibly bogged down in the extraordinary disorder or of an unsustainable collapse into still worse disorder.

Myths bring concrete competing visions into play [Srubar 1994] and anti-myths destroy these by challenging the sense of trials and risks in the name of such visions. Once the transition has been brought successfully under control it is of course important that myths – it need by no means be only one single myth – prevail over anti-myths, if the extraordinary course of events is not to become bogged down in chronic crisis.

Transitional normalisation, on the other hand, with the progressive unveiling of myths, the exposure of the debts of transition anomie, and the crisis which appears as a result of changes that have only been half carried through, naturally reinforces the anti-mythical view.

3.14 What were the myths and anti-myths fighting in the Czech case?

In the Czech case there were two myths that played a key role in the transition to capitalism, in defining the directions and nature of conflicts: that of the return to Europe, and of belt-tightening during the radical transformation (in the specialised terminology of the social costs of economic transformation). In the first case, the democratic capitalism of Western countries was in direct opposition to the toppling of the real socialism of the countries of Eastern Europe. In the second, the economic myth was an irreconcilable but surpassable juxtaposition of the planned and the market economies. Natural extensions of this were the myth of the dangers of a third way which would combine the advantages of both old and new regimes, and that of the self-made man, which juxtaposed the worn-out state bureaucrat and the free entrepreneur.

The opposition introduced an anti-myth of the betrayal of the revolution, based on the polarisation of the emerging hopes and ideals for the revolution and the new elite's apparent failure and arbitrary use of power. In the Slovak Republic this was relatively successful, as the results of the 1992 elections were significantly influenced by the political myth of a maturing nation, which placed the sovereign nation state in opposition to the still developing and non-sovereign nations in thrall to more powerful nations.

3.15 Why was there a trade-off between adaptability and legal correctness during transition?

Mertlík [1993] described the new institutions as 'empty shells', and indeed the institutions (various types of banks, tax authorities and control institutions, etc.) were built up from nothing along western lines. They appeared to be copies of Western European institutions, but were fundamentally different in the way they worked and often exceeded their authority. In this way the transitional anomie was thrust out into the corridors of the "corridors of power" and took on a less obvious form as a latent "systematic vacuum" [Mertlík 1993] which was complemented by shadow institutionalisation. This is also the reason why Stark [1996] can speak about the path dependence of the fundamental change which is grounded on "rebuilding organisations and institutions not on the ruins but with the ruins of communism as they redeploy available resources in response to their immediate practical dilemmas."

In the state of transitional anomie the government and other central institutions rule primarily through the credibility of external institutional pressure, the mythical frame-

work of transition, more or less effective bureaucracy, and the extent of available resources, which are primarily the income figuring on their budget. In relation to the state, quasi-state and private organisations, the government found itself in the position of a principal trying to exert pressure on an agent [see, for example, Coleman 1990]. This meant that all these 'controlled' organisations could easily make use of their better sources of information and better bargaining position – the state is not able to enforce just and productive working rules during transitional anomie – to appropriate state resources and assets. They could also exert effective pressure on central institutions to ensure a degree of security for their risky business undertakings and 'tolerance' for their less-than-transparent business activities and organisational practices [Stark 1996] in return for their loyalty. In this way a transitional trade-off between adaptability and legal correctness was negotiated, defining the figure of the brand new institutional system. Nevertheless, one condition of successful normalisation was the break with the institutional outcomes of this trade.

3.16 When, according to our hypothesis, did the extraordinary stage of the Czech transition come to an end?

The Velvet Revolution, as a ritual of transition, took Czech society into an extraordinary period marked by transitional anomie and the successes and failures of 'building' a new order. This extraordinary time, however, created its own momentum rooted in the helter-skelter dynamic of social problems, the overall weakness and growing entanglement of the government. The split of Czechoslovakia through a set of concurrent circumstances, at the same time as the last great step in the economic transformation, tax reform, was able to become something of a second ritual of transition, which the public generally already felt the lack of, but one which brought the extraordinary time to a close. It signalled the beginning of the phase of normalisation, the undramatising of social events.

The end of the dramatic transition did not mean that all the changes originally conceived and still important today had been achieved (ranging from the transformation of the railways to a final solution for a state farm somewhere in the Šumava region). Nor can it be seen as the transition from an economic transformation controlled by the government to an economy with its own momentum ruled by the invisible hand of the market. The undramatising of reality immediately revealed that many important changes had been 'strategically' deferred because of high transaction costs. In other cases the reported radical reform of ministries and institutions turned out to be more of a form of mimicry that allowed old practices to survive. So the end of the extraordinary time must be understood primarily as a collective symbolic act which confirms the 'success' of the transformation and at the same time announcing a fundamental change in the rules of the game: the time in which problems could be solved by extraordinary means, since ordinary forms either did not exist or were clearly ineffective, was at an end.

4. Final Questions

4.1 Once more, what advantages does the transitological approach offer?

The view of the changes in Czech society since 1989 as an discontinuous transition offers a hypothetical explanation for the paradox of the 'founding' elections in post-communist countries (Poland 1989, Hungary 1989 and Czechoslovakia 1990, 1992). In these elections those voters who traditionally had a stake in a strong system of state social security

and who had 'social democratic ideas' often voted for right-wing parties instead of for those on the left. Szélényi, Szélényi, and Poster [1996] see the explanation for this paradox in the temporary victory of the conservative forces in the "game of political symbols", which strongly articulated the ideological aspects of events. Later (as with the Hungarian elections in 1994 and with the Czech case in 1996) came the inevitable shift back to political interests.⁷ Right-wing parties were able to play successfully with political symbols because the prevailing mythical framework casting disgrace on the old structures and ascribing miraculous powers to two mythical actors: the market and democracy.

4.2 Why is the sunny transition of five years ago now seen as a muddled modernisation?

There are two virtually inevitable aspects to the change in the lay view. These correspond to the strengthening anti-mythical view due to an increased 'sensitivity' to the disorder of normalisation and the paradoxical effects of the increasing enforcement of the new order, which has 'brought the transitional marasmus into the light of day' and is encouraging people to profit from the disorder 'as long as the opportunities last'. The normalisation is also marked by the fact that both lay and expert publics seek some simplified and closed understanding of the fundamental change as a well thought-out and engineered modernisation (see 1.3).

4.3 Why and when did the Czech government fail?

The generally held ethno-theory of muddled modernisation and the long political crisis places the guilt firmly on the government's shoulders, accusing it of having made bad decisions and directly or indirectly consorting with groups which were misusing the fundamental changes in society for their own ends. Both accusations may be true in some cases. The sweeping generalisation of the events, however, hides the fact of how little space the government had for manoeuvre in the transitional anomie and its overall inability to influence the course of transition in the micro-worlds, particularly when it could not resort to repressive measures.

4.4 Why did the crisis in Czech normalisation come with such a delay?

In retrospect the government came up to scratch in the actual transition but fell down in the normalisation. This questionable balance of accounts is marked by a general underestimation of the legal extent of the changes needed and the choice of 'weak and convenient' ministers of justice (Kalvoda, Novák). It is of course difficult for normalisation to become established in opposition to strategies of interest groups, if it is not underpinned by a consciousness of crisis and the installation of a new government 'with a *tabula rasa*'. These interest groups doggedly defend the advantages they have already gained during the transition (subsidies, convenient forms of ownership, salaries and pensions rising faster than productivity, etc.).

The 'great' and 'velvet' Czech success in transition was therefore rather paradoxically condemned by society, when the government received only a weak mandate at the

⁷) The shift from political symbols based on the mythical framework to 'politics of interests' can probably be seen even better in the Czech transition. The second elections were held early – in 1992, after only two years – when the overall positive mythical framework of the great changes was not yet exhausted. They resulted in the victory of the right-wing parties connected with the Velvet Revolution.

last elections, to wait for stagnation as the impulse to start a more energetic normalisation.

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