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Ontology, context and chance:
three exit routes from communism*

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Abstract

The ontology of communism is unable to explain the observed diversity of exits from communism. It explains only the implosion as a hypothetical, "logical," end of communism. In order to understand the actual, diverse, historical forms of the end of communism, one has to analyse efforts to rationalize control (or the meta-discourse of control) that were undertaken to prevent implosion. These efforts together with conjunctural phenomena led to the gradual reinterpretation of the concept of control itself and, as a result, to departure from communist structures. The institutional and symbolic reserves that served as building blocks of these efforts were taken from a specific cultural heritage in each country.

In this paper three forms of exit from communism and three specific cultural contexts are analysed, with special attention paid to dilemmas of revolution from above. Methodological auto-reflection is presented at the end, discussing among other problems the relationship between ontology and conjunctural factors and a paradox of evolutionary paradigm of discontinuous change.

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Introduction

How are we to explain the diversity of exit routes from communism, given that the ontology of communism was one and the same in all the cases involved? (The ontology of communism is here construed as the particular mode of existence adopted by that social formation, including the set of constitutive features and resultant contradictions that characterised it, represented in the form of a model¹.) In this regard, I should like to put forward four hypotheses:

1. The ontology of communism is solely capable of explaining this formation's march towards its own implosion, which may then be considered its *logical finale* (since it was foreseeable by deduction, based on a knowledge of the system's contradictions).

In speaking of the implosion of communism, the author is here referring to a process of radical de-institutionalisation (whether sudden or prolonged), where the type of regime in existence becomes of little importance, as government in itself - including the control of physical processes - is in fact no longer possible. The previous "verbotsregel" (systemic prohibitions) are no longer operational, since it is not worthwhile observing them. As the crisis of legitimacy takes hold and the scarcity of resources accentuates, so rewards (or incentives) also become devalued, while the mass violation of prohibitions makes punishment pointless (this would lead to a paralysis of basic functions). At this stage, the latter functions can only be carried out by abandoning the rules of the system in favour of control by exception, regulation by crisis and the parallel economy². The "twofold reality" thus created can provide stopgap stabilisation, yet it also accelerates the process of de-institutionalisation and deepens the crisis of legitimacy³. In a situation of implosion, hierarchical structures collapse, for the conformism that held them together has become eroded. Horizontal cooperation and supply links between economic organisations also cease to function as the result of hyperinflation or concealed forms thereof, such as acute shortages and sectoral disruptions of equilibrium. Change from below becomes both essential and impossible (given the matrix of subjective interests encoded in the structure of incomplete and non-exclusive ownership). Certain theoretical alternatives are not even explicitly formulated, since it lies in no one's interest to do so: an increase or decrease of resources is not considered by anyone to constitute a reflection of their own costs or benefits. Thus, in place of any attempt to perform rational economic adjustment, what we see is a disintegration of the economy into autarkic units, with control becoming "vegetative"⁴ and exchange relations reduced to a minimum, subject to demonetisation and a reversion to natural forms.

However, implosion as the logical finale of communism has occurred in only a few cases. If we are to grasp the reasons for this divergence between the hypothetical ("logical") end of communism and the variety of forms assumed by the actual *historical finale* of this social formation, we must refer to factors other than ontology alone. In other words, the ontology of communism provides insufficient explanation of the diversity of forms characterising the end of communism. As this author shall indicate, the three variants of non-continuity that have been observable in moving away from communism - implosion, revolution from above and change in the content of institutions while formal continuity is preserved - are the product of three differing chain reactions of cause and effect, each probabilistic rather than fully determined from the outset. The tendency towards implosion, while in a way an inherent consequence of the contradictions of communism, was only one of the forces at play here. Moreover, the processes involved in these chains of cause and effect developed in discrete and continuous fashion. This gives rise to a singular paradox: the

¹Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Ontologia socjalizmu*, Krag publishers, Warsaw, 1989; also published as *The Ontology of Socialism*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

²The concept of "regulation by crisis" is introduced in Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, Princeton University Press, 1985.

³Cf. Rychard, A., Sulek, A. (eds), *Legitymizacja* [Legitimisation], materials from a conference of the Polish Sociological Society, Warsaw University, 1988.

⁴The expression used by J. Kornai in *Economics of Shortages*.

three forms of historical non-continuity in exiting communism are explainable only through reference to phenomena of a continuous and evolutionary character.

The above remarks bring us to our next hypotheses.

2. The *tendency to implosion* occurs in each of the three exit routes from communism, and in each comes up against a *countertendency* specific to the given exit route.

These countertendencies are: the use of force combined with attempts at integration through recourse to xenophobia and nationalism; attempts to rationalise the meta-discourse of control; and finally, the use of elements of tradition absorbed by communism to ease tension and additionally reinforce the rules of the system.

Each of these countertendencies developed in an evolutionary manner in order to prevent implosion. Which leads to another paradox, namely, that these countertendencies were inspired by the same *rationality of control*, one that communism was incapable of coping with, despite the premisses it drew on. Subsequently (in two cases out of three, in a way that was no longer fully coordinated and in favourable circumstances of chance events⁵), they resulted in a reinterpretation of the very concept of control and, in consequence, to movement beyond the borders delineated by the "generative grammar" of communism - to its dissolution. Nevertheless, the formula that accompanied the establishment of communism - yet was never put into practice - that of control and modernisation (or more properly: control for the sake of modernisation) was not rejected! Quite the opposite. It was precisely this formula that became the guiding line for reform within communism and then for its transformation. Thus, communism was rejected in the name of the very principle it had been born to serve! However, following the defeat of communism, what was rejected was the primary role of state property (previously intended as a form of ontological protection for the periphery where communism had been established against the penetration of world capital) in favour of an "ontological opening"⁶, a formula of combined development, and also - in several cases - a restoration of politics in the Western sense.

3. The appearance of a particular *countertendency*, responsible in each case for determining the specific way in which communism is left behind, is conditioned by the *historical-cum-cultural context*. The key variable differentiating these contexts in terms of the capacity to generate a particular countertendency (given the common implosive tendency inherent in the contradictions of communism) is the *relationship between communism and the pre-communist situation*.

Two aspects of that pre-communist situation seem particularly significant:

- firstly, the development level of pre- or early capitalist formation, including the influence range of market institutions, also in agriculture;
- secondly, the characteristics of the cultural traditions. A special emphasis should be attached here to the epistemological foundations belonging to a given culture, and specific ontological visions at their background. We can understand the importance of cultural diversity for the methodology of communist revolution and consequently the methodology of exit from communist by comparing - even very roughly and superficially - some aspects of the culture of Russia and China.

In the Russian case we can speak about a special epistemology rooted in the Russian orthodox tradition. Its corner stone is a bi-polar whole where a concept is defined by its opposite and that opposite is seen in a particular way - not so much as a negation but more as its complementary part. The distinctive attribute of this way of thinking is the absence of a 'gray' area of concepts not attached to any axiological judgments. In these conditions conceptual leaps can only occur through the method of *bricolage*

⁵These events were: the development of the formula of political capitalism and the elaboration of a new international paradigm (with the US in the role of guarantor of transformation) as a result of the efforts of the USSR to extricate itself from the diplomatic isolation caused by the overlap in the 1980s of the Reagan/Kissinger strategy and that of the Tripartite Commission.

⁶This concept is introduced in Staniszkis, *The Dynamics of Breakthrough*, California University Press, 1991 (ch. 5).

/caledoscopic reshuffle/ , where significance given to particular symbols undergo a diametrical inversion, or - a transposition takes place in the 'high' - 'low' dimension.

This perception of reality leads to a special, conceptually determined, radicalism and sudden reversals. At the same time all this induces a sensation of cyclical returns to the point of origin because the whole process takes place within the framework of a very limited set of signs and symbols. In this special, 'binary' system of thinking the reasoning of a structural type and the grasping of changing relations is almost impossible.

In the mainstream of China's cultural tradition absolute concepts are, if not absent then at least less prominent: the sense of concepts changes according to structural relations and position in a context including a multitude of different elements.

Above mentioned distinctions defined the difference of the methodology of communist revolution in both countries. In Russia 'communism' was perceived as 'non-capitalism' and the absorption of traditional institutions was rejected - already on the level of the preliminary reasoning of the executives of the bolshevik revolution. In China the opposite took place: the particular epistemology anchored in the cultural tradition made it possible to perceive that the meaning and functions of traditional institutions depends on the context where they are embedded. As a consequence traditional institutions, specially on the local level, could be attacked, suspended, 'frozen' but not fully destroyed. This in turn determined the type of reserves that could be used to prevent the implosion of both systems and thereby the different methodologies to exit from communism.

In Russia we encounter a pronounced discontinuity of institutions, shock therapy and radical concepts which by their nature can be implemented only partially. The way to capitalism is seen as the destruction of state ownership. In China the exit from communism occurs through the change of the meaning of institutions by the change of the context, unfreezing of traditional local markets and an absorption of communist state industry by locating them in the new context of the capitalist system in statu nascendi.

At which point we come to a third paradox. This contextually divergent role of tradition and its fate when confronted by communism can largely be grasped by reference to that tradition itself! For it is that tradition's own generative grammar that defines the limits of its propensity to change, flexibility and adjustment, and also the degree to which it opposes or corresponds to communism and the latter's specific epistemology⁷. To put this somewhat differently, the way in which each tradition functions is an inherent feature of that tradition itself, while the phenomenon termed "culture" exists as an indivisible whole.

Thus, in analysing more closely the three cultural contexts in which the transition from communism is currently taking place, it is worth examining whether the different ways in which various traditions were deformed under communism might not perhaps also be a function of the internal structures of those traditions.

In speaking of the relationship between communism and the pre-communist situation, what the author has in mind are not only the various ways in which previous tradition survived, but also the attitude adopted by the communist system to earlier corporate identities.

In emphasising the existence of three historical-cum-cultural contexts that emerged from the confrontation of communism and pre-communist tradition, the author has three particular situations in mind:

Context no. 1 refers to Albania, certain republics of the ex-USSR and former Yugoslavia, and to North Korea. It is characterised by the systematic *destruction of traditional institutions by communism, paralleled by a consolidation of traditional structures of thought*. This was accompanied by a process whereby the old

⁷The term "generative grammar" is taken from Chomsky's *Reflections on Language* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1975). It is applied to the analysis of culture as a specific totality by Lévi-Strauss in *Problèmes et méthodes d'histoire des religions* (Paris, PUF, 1968). Cultures were previously examined by analogy to linguistic systems by Wittgenstein (*Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Beliefs*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1966). The influence of the particular epistemological perspective inherent in Russian culture on its own history is dealt with in *Semiologia dziejów Rosji* [A Semiology of Russian History], Zylko, B. (ed.), Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódz, 1993.

designata of traditional corporate identities were replaced by new ones, although the language of the original identifiers was retained⁸. This disorganisation (and étatisation) of tradition was in fact already encouraged by its initial character. This confirms the thesis presented above, to the effect that the cultures affected by communism functioned as totalities which determined the limits of their own propensity to change (this including ways of adjusting themselves to traumatic events, one of which was most definitely communism!). Now, the traditions in question here, in this first context, were most commonly imposed from without by foreign conquest, as a result of which they lacked the factor of an indigenous elite. This lack reduced to a minimum the possibility of internal oscillation between different variants of the same tradition; in fully-rounded versions of such tradition, it was precisely this oscillation between the mass variant and its elitist counterpart which facilitated the survival of tradition and its adjustment to changing circumstances⁹. Furthermore, where tradition was imposed from outside and included no component indigenous elite, elements of the traditional local social structure either remained estranged from the new tradition or induced its profound reinterpretation, most frequently in contradiction to its founding premisses, yet in conformity with local conditions. A characteristic example of the historical context involved here is the deformation of a peripheral Islam that had been forcibly imposed, it being lent a nationalist interpretation which stood in contradiction to the universal foundations of Islam emphasised at the centre (the Arab world)¹⁰. This kind of distortion - which, let us add, was already present prior to the arrival of communism - had substantial impact on the sort of countertendency that developed in this context, one involving nationalism, xenophobia and a leadership cult, combined with the use of force.

Context no. 2 involves Central and Eastern Europe, with Russia and Romania lying on the edge, oscillating between implosion (route 1) and revolution from above (route characteristic for the context no.2). In this region communist revolution was imposed by Moscow as a result of the geopolitical situation after the Second World War. The methodology of this revolution (rooted as I have indicated above in the particular epistemology characteristic of the Russian culture and alien to the majority of countries in the region) determined the institutional shape of the imposed regime. This shape in turn determined mentalities and patterns of reasoning on the level of common consciousness. These patterns influenced deeply both the protest articulation and popular visions of revolutions from above.

On the other hand this second context is typified by the survival of certain *pockets* of tradition that allow the preservation of the former pre-communist corporate identities and forms of expression. The social function performed by these elements of tradition has in fact been bolstered, as communism reinforced patterns of thought that refer to myth, and reasoning by way of *bricolage*¹¹. In collectivising property, communism eliminated all possibility of socialisation in terms of "civil society"¹² - the principal mechanism generating social structures became administrative resource reallocation. The "matrix" structure thereby established could be "made sense of" (or even "visualised"¹³) only with the aid of the "surplus value" afforded by myth. These pockets of traditional symbols and institutions became the principal resource utilised by the communist elites in their attempts to rationalise the discourse of control¹⁴, and in several cases (depending on the cultural make-up of these pockets of tradition) subsequently formed the basis for attitudes in opposition to communism, representing an expression of corporate identity. In this context, as in the previous one, the specific features of a given tradition played a decisive role in determining its further development in the new conditions of communism. For it was only

⁸The doctrines of Kim Ir Sen in North Korea transposed the concept of "family" to the socialist society and that of "father" to the national leader, while "self-sacrifice in the interests of the state" was presented as "the path to salvation".

⁹Cf. Ernest Gellner's discussion of Islam in *Islam, Rationalism, Postmodernism*, 1991

¹⁰An analysis of forms of political expression based on Islam can be found in *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, E. Burke III, Ira M. Lapidus (eds.), University of California Press, 1988.

¹¹Lévi-Strauss, C., *La Pensée sauvage*, Paris, Plon, 1962.

¹²The Hegelian interpretation of civil society, as expounded in *Philosophy of Right*.

¹³Cf. *Ontology...*, op. cit., ch. 5.

¹⁴As an example, see the selection of documents entitled *KoEció[] - Pafstwo: 1980-89* [Church and State, 1980-89], Aneks & Polityka, 1993.

in those countries where tradition was relatively homogenous (including religious tradition), and where a similar relationship to its symbolic representation permitted communication between the elites and the masses, that an overall picture of the communist regime - drawing on cultural clichés - could take shape in the popular consciousness. This "visualisation" of communism through the perspective provided by the language of tradition (in Poland - the struggle between "good" and "evil", in the Baltic countries - national captivity) not only permitted an expression of the essence of the conflict between society and the communist state, but also allowed the former to articulate its corporate identity and its project for the future¹⁵. Let us note that while these were attitudes of opposition, they did not represent a substantively alternative approach, owing to the structural similarity of traditional modes of thinking, subsequent communist ones¹⁶, and finally - neotraditional ones (involving a rejection of communism)¹⁷. Each of these patterns of thought appealed to myth and had recourse to a traditional vision of social space based on the principle of non-continuity and conceptualised in terms of status rather than institutional categories. Thus, despite the superficial appearance of duality (with widely differing content imparted to these similar modes of thinking), the striking feature was in fact uniformity and continuity of epistemological perspective. The similarity between the two sides of the conflict appeared even more surreal in view of the fact that, at times of protest, the symbolic rejection of communism was accompanied by direct reference to what were institutional aspects of that same communism, e.g., the redistributive function of the state. The characteristic hiatus between corporate identity (based on the "surplus value" of myth) and individual experience further accentuated the appearance of unreality and the artificiality of public behaviour¹⁸. The above applies to Poland and the Baltic states; the remaining countries that have embarked on this route did not see the reproduction of corporate identity, despite frustration going just as deep. The composition of pockets of tradition in these countries was not sufficiently all-embracing. As we see, it was again the initial character of the tradition involved that proved critical. It was either too heterogeneous (Hungary) or excessively rationalistic (the Czech lands) and self-searching (with elements of self-deprecation). Elsewhere, as in Russia, it was on the one hand overly dependent on the peasantry (with the symbolic content being too meagre and the culture itself understood with little reflection, as a ritual extension of nature). On the other hand, its role within the elite strata consisted simply in forcibly superimposing concepts drawn from another social reality onto the traditional epistemological perspective¹⁹ based on bipolarity mentioned above. Both these factors aggravated the prevailing impotence of articulation in the face of the problems of native social reality. Finally, it was often the case that the state boasted a more comprehensive and universal structure of symbols than society, itself still in the process of consolidating its development from a number of socially and culturally autonomous segments (e.g., Bulgaria). All of these cultural frameworks for the functioning of these societies were different, yet each led to a similar situation of *pre-articulation*. In other words, what was seen was an incapacity to develop a collective formula for protest, or an articulation thereof whose alternative nature was purely superficial (the phenomenon of "inert structures")²⁰.

As in all of the cases involved, the above factors were accompanied by the profound deformation or total eradication by communism of traditional forms of economic activity. Even in those areas where

¹⁵In the case of the fundamentalist wing of the Solidarity movement, this involved the myth of a state which mirrored the same values as society, one free of conflict and the need for politics.

¹⁶For the way in which Leninism took advantage of traditional patterns of thought, see Jowitt, K., *The Leninist Response to National Dependency*, University of California, Berkeley, 1976.

¹⁷The similarity between the patterns of thought characterising communist ideology and neotraditionalism is explored in Staniszkis, *Ontology*, op. cit., and the article "Forms of Reasoning as Ideology", *Telos*, New York, Winter 1985

¹⁸This hiatus led to the "levitation" and impermanence of corporate identities divorced from individual experience.

¹⁹Cf. *Semiologia...*, op. cit.

²⁰The phenomenon of "inert structures" (introduced in *Ontology...*, op. cit.), refers to a formational absence of economic interest in change and a particular expression of protest where communism is rejected (in its symbolic manifestation) while performance is demanded of its institutional arrangements (expressing material interests to be satisfied by administrative redistribution).

elements of private property remained extant, the transformation of the institutional context in which this property was put to use completely changed its rationality and real economic significance²¹.

Context no. 3 is primarily applicable to China and involves *the reciprocal absorption of communism and tradition in their institutional aspects*. Here the structures of the new regime incorporated the traditional institutions, as it were (albeit suspending their dynamic), while the philosophy and rhetoric of the communist authorities underwent modification through the influence of the traditional system of values and the customs governing relations between state and society. This was chiefly true of the institutions in the material sphere, including the institutions of pre-capitalist and early capitalist local markets, which had yet to be fully formalised (this also pertains to the circulation of money within them²²), and also the relationship of these institutions to the local authorities. Moreover, the traditional economic functions of the family, neighbours, the clan and the rural community all survived virtually intact. At the same time, those institutions serving as channels of expression were destroyed or deformed. Nonetheless, elements of traditional epistemology did endure, e.g., the traditional attitude to religious institutions, considered subordinate to the state. This distinction between institutions and the substance they contain²³ was at a certain point in the process of transformation transplanted to the Communist Party, which was subject to ritualisation and "étatisation".

To summarise, the three different cultural contexts outlined above produced three varying countertendencies relative to the tendency towards implosion common to communism everywhere. The differences between these contexts were in each case combined with differing relationships between communism and pre-communist tradition. Thus, the third context presented (the reciprocal absorption of communism and tradition, allowing traditional institutions to survive in "suspended animation") stands in radical contradiction to the first. In this first context, traditional institutions were systematically destroyed, while designata taken from the new communist order were built into traditional structures of thought²⁴. Going further, if we compare the third context with the second (unity with the appearance of duality resulting from the identical structure of traditional, communist and neo-traditionalist epistemology), we find not only a fundamental modification of emphasis, but also a totally disparate mode of functioning (and potential dynamic) on the part of surviving elements of tradition. While the second context is one where traditional corporate identities persisted (albeit not everywhere), in the third context this applies to the traditional institutions of local markets. Moreover, once spurred into activity, the surviving pockets of traditional expression in the second context did not generate modes of thought or standards of rationality that were alternative to those of communism. This refers to both the aforementioned isomorphism of epistemological perspective and substantive similarity of thought (e.g., a similar rejection of "politics" and stress on the substantialist character of justice and legitimacy). Meanwhile, the reawakening of the institutions of local markets at the initiative of the Centre in the third context triggered a dynamic that was alternative to communism as regards capital formation, the creation of power structures from below, and new standards of rationality²⁵.

I should like to emphasise once more that the initial impulse which in each particular case determines the exit route from communism is characterised by a bipolar forcefield (with a tendency to implosion common to all cases and one of three possible countertendencies, specific to the given case). The variable which plays the mediating role here and in each instance determines which

²¹An example here is private farming in Poland.

²²Cf. Nee, V., "Local Corporatism and Informal Privatisation", paper delivered at conference at University of California, San Diego, May 1993.

²³For example, a characteristic feature of traditional China was the practice of performing the rites of various creeds in the same temple.

²⁴While numerous traditional institutions were preserved in China, only their names being changed, in North Korea the institutions were destroyed and old names given to new designata.

²⁵Cf. the paper delivered at the San Diego conference (op. cit.) by Donald C. Clarke, "The Creation of Legal Structures for Market Institutions in China".

countertendency will emerge and develop is the type of historical-cum-cultural context involved. Let us recall that each of these contexts was born of the confrontation between communism and the particular cultural tradition originally present. These pre-communist cultural traditions are considered here as specific totalities: the generative grammar of each largely conditions their reaction to the trauma of communism. The complex causal mechanism described here is deterministic in an exclusively statistical sense. The sharp division into three types of countertendency is performed for analytical purposes; each particular case combines elements of the respective countertendencies in varying proportions, or has seen the type of countertendency involved change with the passage of time. Ultimately, however, it was only one particular countertendency which predominated, the selection mechanism being provided by the cultural context in question.

A reproach could be made here that in my investigations of the different roads from communism I did not take into account a number of seemingly important variables and put together cases that are completely different. For example situations characterized by a dissimilar relation between the army and the party-state or a different level of politization of the church. However that reduction was not accidental. I am convinced that those variables are only relevant at some stages of the transformation: the decided for example the question whether the special version of the revolution from above was 'complete' (in the sense of the reconstruction of social bonds and a full utilisation of reforms possible under communism) or 'uncomplete'. After that, however, the mechanism of leveling through the conscious *simulation* of the missing elements (variables) reduces somehow the initial differences between particular cases. Of course this reduction has its limitations. 'Completeness' or 'uncompleteness' of the revolution from above has its impact on the institution building that follows. But from the historical perspective the difference between 'organic completeness' and 'simulated completeness' appear to be pseudoproblems. Even if they produce some minor differences they are unable to change fundamentally the belonging to the same type of exit from communism. That which really constitutes the variable differentiating the exit type from communism in each concrete case is the historical-cultural context. That context explains the type of countertendency leading to one type of exit or another.

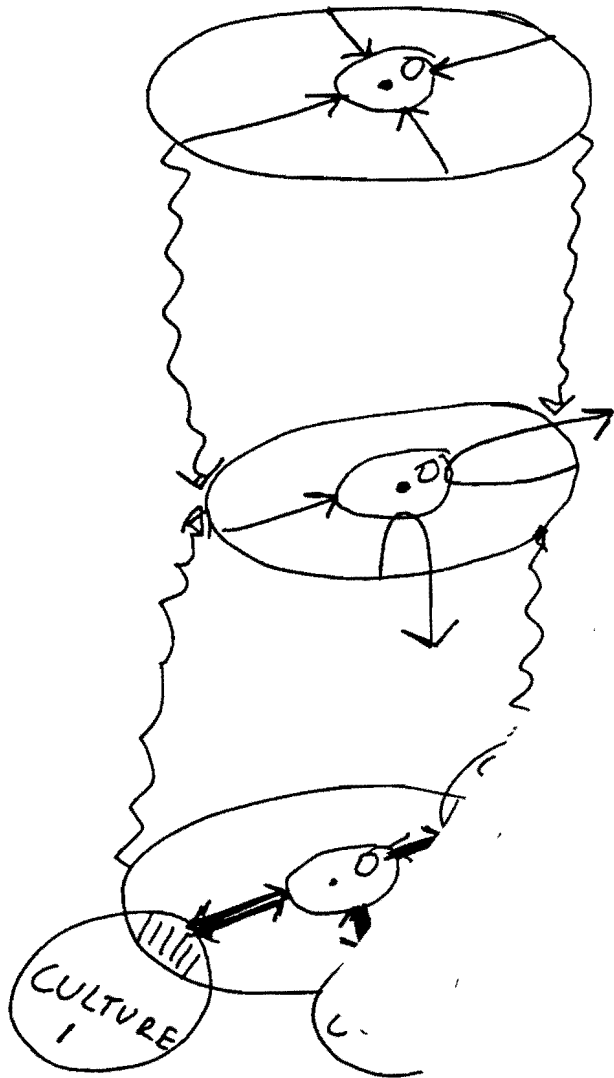
The mechanism outlined may be represented by a model consisting of three analytically distinguished slices "cut out" from the complex forcefield that determines the dynamic of transformation.

The first slice is the ontology of communism; at its central core is point 0, representing implosion. It is this point of de-institutionalisation that marks the destination pursued by communism, which trampled its own institutions and resources underfoot along the way, as its contradictions accumulated. Point zero is contained within a circular perimeter: once the processes of implosion cross this perimeter, they assume their own accelerated and irreversible dynamic.

The second analytical slice is the intersection between the forcefield constituting the Gestalt of communism and three planes representing three separate cultural totalities. The intersection of each of these cultural spaces with the space occupied by communism gives rise to a specific context (one of three) of tradition as deformed by communism. In turn, each of these contexts generates its own kind of countertendency which attempts, each in its own way, to forestall implosion.

The tension between the forcefields of the two slices described above determines the character of the exit route from communism. Two of the countertendencies managed to halt the tendency to implosion in their countries before it crossed the perimeter encircling point zero. In fact, they reversed the dynamic of the system and effected a move beyond the space of communism. These countertendencies are: the attempt to rationalise the meta-discourse of control (in context no. 2) and utilisation of the phenomenon represented by the reciprocal absorption of traditional institutions and those of communism (context no. 3). The countertendency set in motion by the first context proved incapable of averting implosion.

The third slice, located between the preceding two, demonstrates the aforementioned result of these three forms of interaction (involving the tendency to implosion and one of the three countertendencies); in two out of the three cases it changes the direction of the dynamic concerned, thereby leading to transformation. In the respective cases, this entails a revolution from above with elements of institutional non-continuity (exit route two) and a change in the nature of institutions while maintaining their continuity (exit route three).



Slice 1: the ontology of communism.
Point 0: implosion as the logical finale.

Slice 3: the result of the interaction of three pairs of opposing forces - the tendency to implosion and one of the three counter-tendencies. The historical exit routes from communism. (Or put another way - the result of the tension between slices 1 and 2.)

Slice 2: the space occupied by communism intersecting the fields of three cultural totalities; the shaded areas represent the contexts which generate the three different types of counter-tendency opposed to the tendency towards implosion.

countertendencies

the contradictions of communism, source of the tendency to implosion

the exit routes from communism, in each case the product of the relation between the tendency to implosion and the given counter-tendency

the tension between slice 1 and slice 2, giving rise to slice 3

The following constitutes a schematic outline of the three exit routes described.

Route 1

Context: the destruction of traditional institutions allied to a consolidation of traditional patterns of thought, utilised to legitimise the communist regime.

Countertendency: attempts to prevent implosion through the use of force and recourse to nationalism, xenophobia and a leadership cult.

Form of non-continuity: the historical end of communism; implosion. The methods employed generated neither the requisite institutional reserves (as in route 3) nor political reserves (as in route 2) to avert implosion. The historical end of communism is thus identical in this case with the hypothetical "logical finale".

Implications: local wars as a means of reconstituting collectivities following implosion, thereby enabling the reconstruction of social ties and a system of denotation subject to common experience.

Application: certain republics of the ex-USSR and former Yugoslavia, Albania, Mongolia, certain countries of "African socialism", and most probably in the immediate future - Cuba and North Korea.

Route 2

Context: the persistence of autonomous pockets of expression referring to tradition. Depending on the character of the traditional cultural make-up, either an oppositional identity was presented for society as a whole (although this did not constitute a substantive alternative, being located within an epistemological perspective similar to the communist one), or partial (corporate) identities were expressed, these being typified by a lower level of generality than the definition of the situation and network of collective articulation imposed by communism. In both cases, there was unity under the superficial appearance of duality. At the same time, traditional economic structures were destroyed or deformed, albeit sometimes under the legal pretence of continuity. The latter factor eliminated the economic foundations for civil society in the Hegelian sense and further exacerbated the difficulty of expressing corporate identities.

Countertendency: attempts to rationalise the meta-discourse of control. These attempts exploited the symbolic space elaborated and the phenomenon of the "inert structure". In *fully-fledged* versions of this route (seen in Poland and Hungary), this countertendency led to the almost complete utilisation of the ground available for change within the social formation itself; in Poland this had more of a political character, while in Hungary it was economic. This was also accompanied by the gradual reinterpretation of the very concept of control, whereupon, in favourable circumstances of events, it proved possible to effect a revolution from above. In *incomplete* versions of this route (Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, the Baltic states), the space available for reform within the framework of communism was not fully exploited prior to the actual turning point, and certain aspects of the latter were merely simulated. In comparison with the full version, it was these two factors, typical of the incomplete character of the process, which resulted in a profoundly different scenario of institutionalisation following the turning point²⁶. Russia and Romania exhibited elements of both the first and second routes.

Form of non-continuity: *revolution from above* with stress laid on institutional non-continuity, and *communication rituals* that feigned the appearance of a turning point (both for domestic consumption and for consumption by Western public opinion and governments). This involves the "round table" syndrome, enacted in one of three variants²⁷: *hyper-reality*, where a drawn-out process of negotiations that did indeed take place was reproduced in compressed, model form; *simulation*, performed in the incomplete versions of the route, with the "acceleration" and staging of certain aspects (even including the "counterparty"), yet

²⁶The disintegration of Czechoslovakia can be interpreted, for example, as an overreaction to a particular sequence of elections (first at national then at federal level) in a hysterical search for corporate identity following the turning point.

²⁷The distinction between particular forms of communication ritual employed here is one applied by Leon Baudrillard in *L'échange symbolique et le mort*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976.

with reference to a genuinely existing expanse of symbols; and finally, *simulacrum*, whereby the turning point was preceded by a specific kind of political "happening" intended to construct a gallery of symbols that could then serve as a point of reference in the ritual of communication (the latter was evident in Russia and Romania²⁸).

Implications: revolution from above has allowed the negotiated establishment of a new generative grammar based on private ownership and parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, it is incapable of filling the potential space this creates (which therefore exists for the time being in virtual form). In all cases where this route has been followed, this space is being taken up by two mechanisms that are no longer subject to central coordination and are largely spontaneous. These are: "revolution from the past" (i.e., the dynamic of "political capitalism", already initiated by the communist *nomenklatura* prior to the turning point²⁹) and "revolution from the side" (i.e., the impact exerted by the world capitalist system, currently in the throes of recession and readily viewing the former communist bloc as a cushion against its own tensions). The particular processes of consolidating the state and developing social structures now visible (including various forms of corporate state and dual society) constitute the effects of the two mechanisms outlined above (which, let us note, stand in conflict with one another).

Route 3

Context: the reciprocal absorption (interpenetration) of traditional and communist institutional structures. The suspension of the dynamic of traditional institutions in the material sphere (yet preserving their form). The restriction of traditional institutions involved in social expression, yet accompanied by the reinterpretation of communist ideology in the language of traditional values (including the traditional rules governing relations between the state and society).

Countertendency: utilisation of the absorption referred to above as a reserve for stabilisation, and subsequently as the basis for a methodology of change incorporating the maintenance of institutional continuity.

Form of non-continuity: change in the significance of institutions (while formal continuity is retained, with no symbolic "turning point") through a change in the critical mass of the system in which these institutions operate. This involves a change in proportion between the sector operating according to the logic of the market and the étatised sector. The change here is the product of two independent mechanisms triggered from above: the *diffusion* of foreign capital in the special zones and the *reawakening of the dynamic of the traditional institutions of local markets*, both as regards capital formation and consolidation of the state. The above has also been accompanied by two additional factors:

- a new configuration of legitimacy, including the support given from above to the dynamic of the traditional institutions of local markets. What we see here is something typical of _talist systems, namely, the legitimisation of social life by the state (rather than vice-versa!). In other words, legitimisation is performed from above rather than from below.
- a reform of the Centre (again, without any symbolic turning point) and the assumption of power by modernising military technocrats. This was designed to prevent repetition of the past practice of convulsive bureaucratic recentralisation, which could nullify the effects of the dynamic stimulated on local markets. The state sector operates in relative isolation here; this is in fact not so much a mixed economy as a tri-sectoral one (local markets, special zones and the state sector). The state sector is also regarded by the Centre as a safety device easing tension between the other two sectors (e.g., the level of unemployment or income differentials).

²⁸In Russia, this was Yeltsin's defence of the White House (before any attack had occurred, which by this stage was already ruled out by the Afghan generals dissociating themselves from the organisers of the coup). The whole manoeuvre was designed to reformulate symbolic references and transfer the centre of gravity from Gorbachev to Yeltsin.

²⁹An analysis of political capitalism can be found in Staniszkis, *The Dynamics of Breakthrough*, California University Press, 1991, ch. 1, and also in "Political Capitalism in Poland", EEPS, Jan. 1991.

The third exit route from communism presented above is reminiscent of the path once taken by Western Europe. This particularly refers to the dynamic of local pre-capitalist or early capitalist markets: China is the most striking example. Here we can reconstruct a progression involving three steps:

- the absorption by the communist structures of the institutions of local markets, these at the same time being suspended and their dynamic deprived of legitimacy;
- the institution from above of a policy of revitalising these traditional institutions while now suspending (delegitimising and isolating) the economic structures of communism³⁰;
- the operation of the dynamic of local markets (late feudal or early capitalist in character) leading to early capitalist accumulation and allocation of factors of production³¹.

It is worth adding that communism provided newly extended definitions, as it were, for the traditional (feudal) structures it had previously suspended. For example, it supplied an improved formulation of the property rights of local authorities (of "communal" property). It thereby sped up the process of evolution towards capitalism by encouraging the category of the rationality of rent (connected with the self-financing of administrative agencies through local taxes, typical of Chinese tradition) to be abandoned in favour of the rationality of profit.

The above exit route from communism has appeared in China, and also (albeit for other reasons) in Kazakhstan and Vietnam. The first of the latter countries was subject to colonial communism; the local authorities previously concealed part of their resources from Moscow (withdrew them from official circulation) and used them to finance traditional clan and religious structures through the conduit of the parallel economy. Following the disintegration of the USSR and the dissolution of the Communist Party it was these structures (in symbiosis with the local *nomenklatura*) which became the focal point for the crystallisation of property rights and of the new state. By contrast, the reconstruction of the institution of local markets in Vietnam came about as a result of prolonged guerrilla warfare which compelled rural communities to become self-sufficient.

The principal problem encountered on this route (in the initial phase, at least) is the permanent deficit of legitimacy (due to the absence of a symbolic turning point³²) and the strong centrifugal tendencies. The latter are the consequence of a regional differentiation which is further reinforced by reliance on the growth mechanism constituted by local markets, with a negligible role being played by central redistribution of resources.

To conclude this section, let us now examine hypothesis no. 4:

4. The character of the exit route from communism³³ (the type of non-continuity involved) determines the course taken by the institutionalisation of the post-communist system and differentiates the chances for successful transformation. Each of the routes concerned creates its own areas of tension and dilemma, with the dynamic unleashed here aggravating the initial differences.

The remainder of this article shall examine in more detail certain aspects of the hypotheses already formulated. A more systematic presentation of the three exit routes from communism will be undertaken in the book. The present text is solely intended to provide a preliminary outline of the subject matter concerned; the author shall therefore confine herself here to developing the thesis regarding implosion as the logical finale of communism, which requires a presentation - by necessity schematic - of the *four*

³⁰In China this resulted in a characteristic moment of stillness in 1984, when the loudspeaker propaganda that had been extolling collective property without interruption since the days of the "Great Leap Forward" suddenly fell silent.

³¹Illustrative in this regard were the peasant strikes in China in the summer of 1993 against enforced savings, i.e., against the state imposition of compulsory bond purchases at interest rates below the rate of inflation. This constituted an expression of the pro-capitalist dynamic of the newly unfettered traditional institutions of local markets

³²The lack of a symbolic turning point aggravated existing problems of communication related to the communist practice of changing the names of traditional institutions that were preserved. At present, these newly imposed names still remain, despite the logic of the traditional structures having been allowed to reassert itself. This underscores fears that the current official policy will prove temporary.

³³Cf. the concept of "path dependency" introduced by Douglas North in *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

contradictions of communism. Some implications of the second exit route (currently being travelled by Poland, among others) shall also be discussed in slightly greater depth, with particular emphasis given to the problem of *the limits of revolution from above*. In conclusion, reference will be made to certain methodological problems related to the approach outlined.

1. The logical finale of communism: implosion as the effect of formational contradictions

Hypothesis no. 1, presented in the introduction, states that the logical finale of communism should be implosion: this was the direction taken by the development of formational contradictions. In the view of the present author, four such contradictions can be specified, these being encoded in the generative grammar of communism (i.e., in the specific institutional rules constitutive of this formation).

Firstly, we have the contradiction that is inherent in the ideological origins of communism. These origins, creationist in the sense understood by Hayek, led to communism assuming the ontological status of *superficial reality*³⁴: the actual reality of this formation was in fact quite dissimilar from the "premisses of reality" it established for itself. This led to the first contradiction of communism: the maintenance of ideological identity (and the specific description of reality which this entailed) precluded a conceptual grasp of the empirical essence of this formation. On the other hand, a rejection of that identity would not only have laid bare the naked use of force and absurdity it contained, but would also have destroyed its internal rationality, which "made sense", as it were, of the system of institutions³⁵. The epistemological barrier to comprehending the essence of communism that was already encoded at the level of its ideological identity applied not only to the premisses concerning how the formation functioned³⁶, but also to the ideological vision of the origins of communism³⁷.

The status of superficial reality (and communism's corollary inability to grasp its own essence without first negating its own identity) resulted in an inevitable disorganisation right from the level of cognitive processes. This excluded genuine control and exacerbated the tendencies to implosion.

The second contradiction of communism was linked to the systemic predominance of collective property with no distinctly defined shares in ownership, producing ownership that was incomplete and non-exclusive. This form of ownership ruled out real control over the process of material reproduction, for two reasons:

- the absence of markets (i.e., the lack of a structural mechanism for generating ongoing information on the state of the economy). As a result, the regulatory sphere could not establish contact (even by process of thought) with the sphere of material processes, while the semantics utilised in taking decisions that were not given objective substance by the market were unavoidably random and subjective;
- the lack of exclusive ownership rights to resources (or specific parts thereof) meant that only one factor in the process of material reproduction - labour - represented an economic interest that was of immediate concern to anyone. Other factors (the reproduction of capital and fixed assets) constituted a purely "theoretical interest". In consequence, a loss of resources was not treated by anyone as a cost they themselves had incurred, while numerous alternatives for a more economically rational utilisation of these factors of production were not even sought.

³⁴This concept is taken from Hegel's *Science of Logic*; see also its application in *Ontology...*, op. cit.

³⁵An example here is the concept of planning, unworkable as a means of regulating the system, yet effective as a way of evaluating the behaviour of particular economic agents.

³⁶For example, the false premise that state ownership could constitute a functional substitute for private ownership, altering solely the basis on which the social product was distributed.

³⁷An example here is the thesis that it was backwardness which prevented the ideals of communism from being put into practice - yet it was precisely this backwardness which allowed the historical emergence of communism!

As we see, even at the level of epistemology, the communist character of ownership set up barriers to efficiency. It inevitably distorted and constricted the field of perception through its specific, incomplete matrix of interests. The political articulation of these property rights was also very particular, leading to the phenomenon of "inert structures" already mentioned, one that also retains its relevance in terms of the transformation currently under way. Other effects that were unavoidable included waste, mounting disequilibrium, regulation by blind chance and regulation by crisis. All of this contributed towards implosion in the sense indicated in the introduction.

The third contradiction of communism was connected with the formula of the monoparty legitimising itself by its "vanguard" status. The broader justifications for its legitimacy (as in the case, in fact, of traditional authority) made reference to both "history" and "objective" laws (the latter being outside the realm of human volition). This caused the communist elite to reject any formalisation of itself (and thereby also to discount any idea of "legality" and legal liability) and also to negate the principle of representation of interests. The Leninist formula of the party as substitute for society (since it has a better understanding of what is in society's interests) not only precluded politics in the Western sense, but even hampered the elementary regulation of conflict. The authorities propelled themselves into a world of make-believe, while hidden conflict and mounting tension resulted in cyclical crises, whether open or concealed. Each of these depleted the reserves needed to restore equilibrium, including the reserves of symbolism. In these circumstances, the third contradiction of communism (one that became increasingly obvious to the communist elites themselves) consisted in the paradoxical fact that *a regime designed to exercise total control in fact could exercise none.*

The fourth contradiction, one that characterised the communist bloc taken as a whole, was linked to a situation of *two-tier dependence*. This firstly involved the dependence of the entire bloc, as a totality, on the world system. Not just in terms of capital (loans) and technology - but also in a more profound, virtually existential way. This was related to communism's incapacity to develop its own institutional formula (excepting the period of war communism) and its transposition of institutional forms from the Western world (without, of course, the associated ontological foundations represented by private property and the rule of law). In consequence, another superficial appearance of reality was created, superimposed on that inherent in the ideological origins of communism. The second dimension of this two-tier dependence was the dependence within the communist bloc (within COMECON) politically imposed by Moscow, intended to minimise the uncertainty and tension stemming from the dependence of the bloc as a whole on the world system. Forcible transfers of resources and compulsory specialisation in production and capital construction functions were only certain aspects of this internal dependence. Taken as a whole, they transformed what had initially been political dependence into genuine structural economic dependence (with the USSR as the main source of raw materials and the main sales market). The contradiction encapsulated in this dual relation was that *the dependence of the entire bloc on the world system increased, yet the possibility of reducing the uncertainty this generated by means of the structures of COMECON rapidly decreased.*

The dynamic involved in all four contradictions inevitable led to deepening disorganisation, disequilibrium and... implosion. This dynamic can be analysed at what might be termed two levels: that of epistemology and that of institutional processes. Each of the contradictions set out above combined both of these aspects. Implosion also affects both.

The epistemological aspect of the contradictions is linked to the existence of cognitive barriers inherent in the characteristics that define communism as a distinct social formation. Thus, as noted, the ideological origins of communism and the status of "superficial reality" meant that the maintenance of ideological identity prevented comprehension of its formational essence. Moving on, the prevalent property relations not only made it impossible to control the process of material reproduction through mental processes (or even to monitor it), but also removed the capacity to articulate numerous alternative options (or even to conceive of them). The reason for this lay in a specific matrix of interests which brushed aside various decreases and increases in resources that in fact took place, since no one treated them as their own cost or benefit. Similar results were forthcoming in the field of political power, where monocentrism led to the conceptual acceptance of a world of make-believe. Finally, dependence on the world system necessarily

produced areas of uncertainty (controlled from outside), while internal possibilities of limiting this uncertainty rapidly became exhausted.

The institutional aspect of these contradictions was linked to the high cost of transactions that took place in a situation of deepening uncertainty. The aggravation of tension between the communist elite and its executive apparatus escalated this cost even more. Civil service frustration was combined with the risk entailed in operating under conditions of "dual reality". To function at all, the system of institutions had to disregard its own rules. These could not be changed officially, however, since this would have undermined the ideological identity of the system. The above tensions and the crisis of legitimacy within the *nomenklatura* that accompanied them were viewed as a threat just as dangerous as that of social discontent.

The three types of countertendency that were mentioned previously (running contrary to the impetus towards implosion that was common to all cases) constituted three different attempts to halt the collapse of institutions and come to grips with the reigning conceptual chaos. *The choice of a particular countertendency was an expression of the protagonists of the system adjusting themselves to two factors: the formational contradictions on the one hand, and the symbolic and institutional reserves existing in a cultural context reworked by communism on the other.*

2. Is revolution from above possible?

The second exit route from communism discussed earlier leads to revolution from above, with sharp emphasis laid on the aspect of symbolic and institutional non-continuity. The formula behind this was arrived at in negotiations between the elites, to be articulated in the form of a political contract. The latter mapped out new political space; however, at this stage this was still solely a potential space, one that could be deduced from the premisses of the new generative grammar that the negotiations had brought into being (private property, parliamentary democracy). Directly following the turning point, an institution to implement the rules of the new "grammar" is still lacking, and even worse, so are political players with an interest in enforcing these new rules.

This phase already sees the following question being posed: is the construction of capitalism by means of a revolution from above in fact possible? Or, to put it another way - having opened up this new political space and stabilised a series of preliminary conditions³⁸, will this revolution be able to give content to that space? Obviously, the present author is not suggesting that the exit route in question does not involve a revolution. However, perhaps the instigation from above and role of the state are weaker factors than was first thought, and the decisive question in determining the logic of the new system will prove to be the actions of agents that had already developed prior to the turning point (political capitalism) and the impact of the mechanisms of the world system.

In speaking of the limits of revolution from above and its inability to fulfil its own promises, the author should like to draw attention to three factors that underlie this state of affairs:

- firstly, the very essence of the revolution from above, sometimes termed *a revolution in full splendour of the law*, becomes the source of acute tension. This wrecks the initial consensus regarding the changes introduced from above, thereby leading to a rapid erosion of the authority of the state which at this stage is, after all, the main instrument in the revolution from above. It is not just that the internal dilemmas posed by the "legal revolution" cause the former camp of opponents of communism to split in two, with a separation between the partisans of substantialist justice and legitimisation (the advocates of achieving effects) and the partisans of formal justice and legitimisation (the advocates of observing procedures). It should also be remembered that acceptance of the formula of "revolution in the full splendour of the law"

³⁸This includes reinforcing the state through the acquisition of a new source of legitimacy and subsequently shoring up the value of money by the pursuit of a difficult anti-inflation policy.

signifies recognising the legality of the structures and laws of the communist state. Thus, paradoxically, this state achieved with its dying breaths what it had previously been unable to achieve for so long, namely, its own legitimisation - and here this was performed by the political enemies of communism! The above has become a trap for the new elites. The requirement of legal continuity also applies to the stabilisation of the former executive apparatus and the maintenance of various privileges for the communist elites (in line with the principle that legislation cannot be retroactive). This has increased tension and the surrealist conviction that what is involved reflects "continuity" rather than "change";

- secondly, an obstacle to the success of the revolution from above is *the very nature of institutions* as complex social edifices which require more than mere legal approval to begin to function. Just as important are the attitudes of the participants and the character of the given context. During revolution from above, the state only possesses legal instruments and is powerless to control (let alone create) the complex set of variables which go to determine the real meaning of the institutions being established.

This can clearly be seen by reference to the example of the institution of private ownership, a central element in the changes under way in Eastern Europe. The economic significance of the newly-established forms of ownership is contingent not just on the letter of the law (which stipulates the specific combination of exclusivity and completeness in the set of rights attributable to ownership), but also on three additional factors which are not controlled by the state. These are:

- the real way in which these ownership rights are reproduced. This relates to the role played here by the specific sort of "revenue" accruing to the present and former authorities, which allows them to operate on the market in a privileged way, e.g., by circumventing the tight economic discipline of anti-inflation policy. Those with access to such "revenue" enjoy greater financial gain, while having the same formal set of ownership rights, than competitors who are deprived of such "revenue";

- the characteristics of the milieu in which the possessor of a certain set of ownership rights operates. There are two factors involved here, both of them referring to the question of the *institutional completeness of the market*. Now, when the market is not fully institutionalised, certain formally possessed ownership rights cannot in fact be implemented, since there is no relevant organisational path for doing so. An example might be the simple attempt to collect on a debt or enforce a contract. In these circumstances, it is as if certain formal rights did not in fact exist. Furthermore, the gaps in such an institutionally "incomplete" market are filled by personal contacts (friends and connections). Once again, formal title to property becomes irrelevant if it lacks the "support" provided by personal connections (e.g., in applying for a loan). The two factors outlined above create the real hierarchy of economic agents operating on the market, one that usually diverges from that indicated by solely legal considerations. In this situation, the real reproduction and enforcement of ownership rights is quite divorced from formal title, while the economic significance of the institutions created from above develops outside the control (or even influence) of the state - although it is nominally the chief architect of the revolution from above!

- the third factor that remains outside control during the revolution from above and determines the real economic meaning of the ownership rights held by a given agent is the changeability of the relative importance of title to the respective factors involved in the process of production and exchange³⁹. The economic importance (or weight) of these factors (labour, capital, information, energy, etc.) is modified in line with changes in the technology applied and the level of modernisation. In consequence, the importance of title to a given factor also changes. This is well illustrated by the example of agriculture, where a specific process of de-privatisation is observable as the dominance of the market is reinforced. This is because title to land becomes of less significance in the economic effects achieved than ownership of capital. Moreover, the importance of particular sets of ownership rights are altered depending on the opportunity available to exercise control over the whole economic process involved (the "strategic" character of these rights).

³⁹An interesting analysis of the economic significance of ownership rights can be found in the doctoral thesis of W. Misifski, "Prawa własności a efektywność" [Ownership rights and economic efficiency], Wrocław Academy of Economics, 1993.

All three aforementioned features of the context affecting a given set of ownership rights mean that rights which are formally the same may either be "strong" or "weak", depending on a whole series of factors which lie outside the control of the state.

The complexity of the phenomenon of ownership presented above (other institutions of key significance for the process of transformation could be examined in like fashion) indicates that we should view the difference between state and private property as a graduated one, while the real economic meaning of various forms of ownership should be treated as something that is never specified to the very end. Considering the question of ownership rights in terms of a straightforward bipolar structure is a mistake in this situation. An analysis from this perspective of the forms of ownership established during the present revolution from above would probably provide further evidence indicating the negligible possibility of controlling change of a systemic character.

The second factor determining the actual meaning of newly-created institutions is the attitude displayed by those involved with them. Here the revolution from above is again helpless: it is incapable of quickly conjuring up a "contract civilisation" or other elements of socialisation central to democratic capitalism. This author would in fact go so far as to put forward the following very categorical thesis: in Central and Eastern Europe (where, unlike the Meiji Restoration in Japan, there are no elements of culture able to play the same role for nascent capitalism as the Protestant ethic once did in the West⁴⁰), revolution from above may produce attitudes which in fact impede the performance of systemic change. An inevitable effect of this revolution is a deepening of the rationality gap between the elites and the rest of society. Their differing experience of revolution from above produce different epistemological perspectives leading to diametrically opposed assessments of the transformations taking place. The elites, in thinking in terms of the institutions they are involved in establishing, speak of "change". Even when the mechanisms of political capitalism mean that the new market institutions primarily operate to the benefit of representatives of the old communist *nomenklatura*. They know that this is now occurring within the framework of a new structure of roles, one that is no longer communist. The "masses", on the other hand, as passive observers of events, see the situation principally in terms of status. The fact that the same people (from the old structures) currently occupy the topmost hierarchy of privatised enterprises or local markets makes the term "continuity" more appropriate from this perspective of status than the term "change". This difference in assessment has its political consequences, e.g., it affects electoral behaviour.

We might risk the thesis that the dynamic of revolution from above (devoid of the kind of cultural cement it had in Japan, for example, which reduced the rationality gap) prevents the attainment of three standards at the level of popular consciousness, ones which this author suggests referring to as *the standards of minimum rationality*.

The first point involved here is Gadamer's principle of "approaching the horizon"⁴¹. The historical situation in which we find ourselves defines the boundaries of our thinking (the horizon in question). "To be rational" means approaching as close as possible to the horizon we are shown, so that we can make out its stiffening resistance. It is only then that it becomes possible (only for a small few) to "transcend oneself" in a conceptual leap forward that radically redefines one's situation and pushes back the horizon, if only slightly. In the conditions of general revolution, as has already been shown, it is inevitable that the horizons of the elites and the masses diverge. This stems from radically disparate experience and a different perspective of thought (of conceptualising phenomena) accompanying that experience. This substantially reduces the possibility for social communication.

A second vision of minimum rationality is linked to the concept of the "sceptical third party" formulated by Lévi-Strauss⁴². This "third party" would remind us of the structural barriers to our actions. However,

⁴⁰See the article by J. Staniszkis, "Ciągłość w Zmianie" [Continuity in Change], *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* no. 1, 1992.

⁴¹Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd ed.), Seabury, New York, 1975.

⁴²Lévi-Strauss, *Problèmes...*, op. cit.

developing such a voice of reflection within ourselves requires us to first possess a picture of the structure in question. Yet the first phase of revolution from above is destructive in this respect, for two reasons:

- revolution from above destroys the earlier fundamentalist vision of the structure (based on the "surplus value" of myth) while not yet establishing a new vision. This is because the economic foundations of civil society, in the Hegelian sense of the term, are still weak at this point;
- revolution from above considerably erodes the feeling of the individual that he stands at the centre of the surrounding social world. To put it another way - this revolution removes the opportunity of learning the outline of the structure through coming up against it in the course of practice. This negation of the "centrality" of present identities and interests - a feature characteristic of revolution from above - and their treatment by the persons involved as something that is transient, temporary and marginal, has in fact assisted the new elites in introducing socially painful change, yet at the same time it has prevented the masses from "visualising" the structure and their place within it.

The third principle of minimum rationality is connected with Wittgenstein's injunction "not to talk nonsense"⁴³. In his usage, this means two things: not to make statements questioning what is encoded in the rules of a given language and not to utter repetitions of the information (principle) already contained at the level of such rules. In the situation of revolution from above, we encounter a very specific paradox: what is "communicatively rational" (as Habermas would say), in that it enables us to specify the parties to the act of communication and the axes of the opinions that separate them, hinders the expression of the changes taking place. This is rooted in the need to refer to stereotypes that are recognisable at the level of popular consciousness, yet which block representation of the new situation. This "time lag" in language contributes to the ritualisation of social communication, which in turn encourages a retreat into Wittgenstein's "nonsense".

The difficulties of communication between the elites and the masses, produced and reinforced by the character of the revolution as emanating "from the top down" (which, as it so happens, in fact makes the act of communication especially important, which is one of the contradictions of this situation), also prevents reaching agreement on the purpose of the institutions newly created.

The exaggerated appreciation by the state of the motive force of legal instruments only accentuates the superficial character of revolution from above, while its lack of effectiveness is conducive to various versions of the executive coup. In this regard it is worth underlining the different, non-legalistic approach to institutions in China and Japan (where the law is not absolutised). What is primarily considered there is whether the essence of institutions, the real meaning of what is brought into being, corresponds to original intentions, free of the tendency to be content with "legal fact" and without overstating the causative potential of the state (and of politics).

A third factor hindering revolution from above is the mounting *contradiction between stabilisation and transformation*. There are many aspects to this. We should mention the tension that is built up between the practice of thinking in categories of equilibrium, something that is characteristic of the political rationale of the state (which has an interest in stabilisation), and thinking within a perspective oriented towards change. The high costs of transformation (inevitably leading to recession in the initial phase owing to the reduction of demand and pseudo-demand that characterise a producer's market) not only have a destabilising effect, but also erode the capital of legitimacy. The natural reaction of the state to this is to politicise the process of transformation. For example, this includes an approach to newly-established institutions that sees them as a means of purchasing support or preserving the status of privilege, even after the loss of political power. The above is supplemented by the recurring cycle of elections, which also distort the logic of change from above and subordinate it to the ongoing political objectives of the elites. The sacrifice of systemic transformation at the altar of short-term stabilisation is facilitated by the specific vacuum of interests in which revolution from above occurs, with the agents possessing a material interest in change still very few in number. A worrying aspect here is that the change of emphasis during the

⁴³Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Part I - 1945, Part II - 1947-49), Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

revolution from above (with a readiness to sacrifice transformation should it threaten short-term stabilisation) is already visible at the initial phase of change, even before any decisive alteration to the critical mass of the system.

A consciousness of the superficial reality characterising the revolution from above and impotence in filling up the political space established through negotiation do not translate into abandoning reference to this revolution as the mainspring of legitimacy. Nonetheless, this is accompanied by the mounting cynicism of pastiche politics. This further reinforces a Manichean approach to power as a value in itself: ironically enough, this even becomes stronger as the conviction that the state is powerless takes firmer root.

The fact that the construction of capitalism through revolution from above is not possible does not of course imply that the space created by negotiation remains empty. Quite the reverse - revolution is indeed under way, yet this, as has already been indicated, represents "revolution from the past" and "revolution from the side". In other words, this involves, firstly, the dynamic of political capitalism, which can increasingly be seen to be producing groups with a material interest in further transformation, swiftly adapting themselves to the new macroeconomic conditions. Secondly, it involves the logic of "combined development", wherein peripheral economies (and societies) undergo stratification on the basis of whether they are tied in to the world system or not. This applies to both owners of property and to employees and has distinct political implications: this type of growth is conducive to the development of diverse forms of populism and a hankering for authoritarian solutions. At the interface of these two mechanisms we find the development of a corporate state, which concentrates the influences of the forces (and interests) represented by both kinds of "revolution". Local producers born of the *nomenklatura* are intent on preserving markets for themselves, while the main protagonists of the world system would like to conquer these markets to release the tensions they are experiencing as a result of recession. The changing formula of the corporate state ("internationalised" to varying extents, with stress laid on the corporate articulation of society or on corporatism as a style of administration) and changes in the ties linking the periphery to the world system (mercantile or industrial capitalism) are the principal forces that define the dynamic of the phase of transformation under discussion. The hapless Centre responds to this by intensifying authoritarian tendencies: dissolving parliament, clouding the separation of powers by authorising the Government to rule by decree, etc. However, this is a "floundering" authoritarianism (*ad hoc* and *ad homini*), for it is incapable of undermining the logic of the basic mechanisms at work in this phase of transformation.

3. Methodological implications

The method of analysis proposed here rests on three axes:

Firstly, it involves grasping *the relation between the ontology of communism* (with the gravitation towards implosion inherent in the contradictions of the system) *and the present disparate forms assumed by the historical end of communism*. In itself, this ontology is insufficient to explain these divergences. As has been demonstrated, it is essential to identify additional factors, namely, the three types of countertendency which run opposite to the tendency towards implosion, common to all cases. In turn, the emergence of a particular countertendency (one of the three) is contingent on the historical-cum-cultural context, while the latter is constituted by the effect of interaction between communism and pre-communist tradition. In this respect, the original features of this tradition are of no small relevance for its subsequent fate under communism. The above represents a complex mechanism, with causal relationships solely expressing statistical likelihood, rather than possessing a deterministic character. The causative factor here (which in each case determines the exit route from communism with great probability) is a bipolar forcefield containing the tendency towards implosion and one of the three countertendencies. To refer to the schematic diagram depicted on page 11, we can say that the *horizontal profile* of the model (the *slices*) represents the analytically distinguished forces in operation. These are, respectively: the drive towards implosion (slice 1); the countertendencies mediated by the type of cultural context involved, this being formed at the intersection of the pre-communist cultural totality and communism (slice 2); and finally,

slice 3, showing the effect of the tension between the previous slices in the shape of three different exit routes from communism. The aforementioned bipolar forcefield (involving the tendency towards implosion and one of the three countertendencies) is present in the *vertical profile*: this refers to the three planes that connect slices 1 and 2. The character of the exit routes themselves, indicated in slice 3, is a function of these three planes. In two cases out of three, these routes reverse the dynamic of the system before it crosses the perimeter of implosion and lead beyond the space occupied by communism. In the remaining case, the countertendency is too weak and the actual end of communism comes through implosion, corresponding to the logical finale posited hypothetically.

The mechanism presented above combines deductive analysis (the ontology of communism with its internal contradictions and implosion as the logical finale) with elements of inductive taxonomy (the specified types of cultural totalities and contexts, together with the countertendencies they generate). The situation is additionally complicated by the key role played by a series of chance circumstances, particularly in relation to exit route 2⁴⁴. These came about "by chance" in the sense that they did not flow from (or did not necessarily flow from) the perspective of the ontology of communism. Which, quite obviously, does not imply that their appearance would remain the work of chance if viewed from the perspective of some greater whole! What interests us here, however, is solely the connection between the ontology of communism and the processes triggered by these particular circumstances. In this regard, it transpires that the further development of these processes was not totally haphazard. The circumstances that had initially been the work of chance underwent a process of selection (only some of them being reinforced and subsequently surviving). The selection mechanism was in all cases provided by the countertendencies obtaining, which, let us recall, were a function of two forces - the tendency inherent in the ontology of communism and the cultural context. The relation between that ontology and the processes initiated by chance (yet developing further in a way that was by no means random) is thus fully as complex as the mechanisms described earlier.

The second axis of the analysis presented here is the problem of *continuity in change*. There is a particular paradox here that this author finds especially interesting. As has been demonstrated elsewhere⁴⁵, the specific mode of communism's existence (related, among other things, to the systemic absence of key economic interests and thereby also to the phenomenon of "inert structures") removed the possibility of this formation changing by way of evolution. Non-continuity thus became a necessity. On the other hand, the specific way of executing the "leap" involved (i.e., the historical forms of this non-continuity and the variegation of such forms) can only be understood by reference to phenomena of a continuous character. These include the gradual process by which a particular countertendency emerged and the evolutionary dynamic of processes initiated by chance.

An additional aspect of continuity in change involves the consequences resulting from each exit route from communism in terms of the subsequent conduct of institutionalisation in post-communist conditions.

A third question of interest to the present author is the possibility of transposing the concept of *generative grammar*, taken from linguistic theory, to an analysis of the dynamics of social formations in their totality (i.e., as totalities of both an institutional and cultural nature). As has been mentioned, the possibility of employing this concept in the analysis of cultures was explored by Lévi-Strauss. In the present author's proposed usage, the "grammar" of communism would consist in the rules that go to make up the ontology of this formation.

Analogies are self-evident here: of course if one treats communism as an 'universe' in itself. Thus, the ontology of communism defines its dynamic (through its contradictions), just as grammar (through its rules) does for a language. To continue: the ontological identity of a system lays down the boundaries of change and the character of boundary forms. It is precisely this ontology - just like the grammar of a

⁴⁴See footnote 5.

⁴⁵*Ontology...*, op. cit.

language - that determines what can occur (be expressed) within the framework of a given system of rules, and what can be perpetuated. In the case of communism, for example, such a boundary form of political expression is the "inert structure", since there is no formational basis for civil society in the Hegelian sense or for any other form of "the political representation of interests". Finally, albeit in a more roundabout way (through the medium of countertendencies dependent on cultural contexts), ontology influences whether the potential room for change within communism is utilised, and if so - how it is utilised. Similarly, through countertendencies, ontology influences the selection of chance encounters, as does generative grammar.

The approach outlined here highlights the open, non-deterministic character of the processes observed. The only "logical" aspect was implosion (although as we see, this was neither "necessary" nor "inevitable"); all the other phenomena reflected a causality that was no more than a statistical likelihood. This purely statistical (probabilistic) nature of the processes in question, combined with a characteristic "return to the past" (whereby the kind of exit route from communism is linked to the character of pre-communist tradition and its fate under communism) represent two aspects of the transformation under way which receive particular emphasis.

The author is well aware of being open to the accusation that the identification of three countertendencies that explain the course adopted by the historical end of communism constitutes merely an ad hoc hypothesis (in Kuhn's usage) intended to salvage the hypothesis of "implosion" as communism's "logical finale". Her reply can only consist in the power of explanation (and prediction) provided by the construct proposed herein; to be perfectly honest, at this level of generality, all hypotheses are "incontrovertible". Nonetheless, it is difficult to resist the temptation to develop such hypotheses - although perhaps the historians are right in trying to avoid them!

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